

Our Great Heritage

*Dr. Wilhelm W. Petersen
1993 Synod Convention Essay*

We are gathered here at our annual synodical convention to celebrate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the reorganization of our synod. By “celebrate” we mean that we rejoice over and give thanks to our gracious God for the precious heritage which has been handed down to us. It is a time to reflect on the blessings of the past and project into the future as we continue to treasure, defend and spread what we have received.

The heritage which has been bequeathed to us can be summed up in two inscriptions on the tombstone of Dr. U. V. Koren, a theological leader of the Old Norwegian Synod. Those inscriptions are *gegraptai*, a Greek word which means “it is written” and “*alt av naade*” a Norwegian expression which means “all by grace.” These two inscriptions summarize what Dr. Koren wrote in an article in 1890 entitled “What the Norwegian Synod has Wanted and Still Wants” where he writes of the two main pillars of truth, namely the two fundamental principles upon which our teachings are based, the first one being that “Holy Scripture is the only sure and perfect rule of our faith and life” and the second is “the great truth that Jesus Christ is the way to salvation for all believing souls”; in other words, that a man is justified and saved for Christ's sake by faith alone without the works of the Law.” (*F O F*, p. 50)

Koren goes on to say: “These were the truths which founded the Lutheran Reformation, and where the Lutheran Church has remained true to its mission, it was by faithful adherence to these principles. For it is these principles which keep us from becoming as reeds swayed hither and thither by the many changing winds of doctrine. These alone lay the true and firm foundation for a right conversion and a sincere repentance. These alone preserve us from every temptation to labor for the Kingdom of God by new inventions, self-chosen worship and ecclesiastico-political schemes. These truths alone establish the heart and make the conscience clear and at the same time teach a man to work out his own salvation with fear and trembling and to have the assurance of faith regarding eternal salvation. These were the truths which were our light in the days when zeal and activity were most marked in the Norwegian Synod, and it was these truths for which we contended.” (*F O F*, p. 50)

Commenting on these two principles as the mighty pillars of our teaching Dr. S. C. Ylvisaker, a theological leader in the reorganized Synod, in a tribute to Dr. Koren, writes: “Where the Bible is recognized as the inspired Word of God and the sole norm of faith life, there man with his own opinion and logic and reason cannot play the master. There pride must go. There doubtings and questionings and fears must give place to the sure promises of the clear Word” and again “where the second principle of the Reformation, the justification of a sinner before God by grace through faith, is permitted to stand, there, too, pride must go. There all boasting must cease. There fear gives way to peace, despair to hope, and sadness to joy. There the false comfort of a salvation through works or good conduct or prayers or any effort that is of man is banished before the shining brightness of the eternal message from the Cross of the gracious forgiveness of sin, all sins, through the all-sufficient merit of Christ.” (*F O F*, p. 40-41)

This, then, is our great heritage. It is a heritage of “grace and truth,” a heritage whose “truth endures to all generations” (*Ps.* 100:5) A hymn which we cherish in our midst well expresses what this blessed heritage is and what it entails, namely God's Word Is Our Great Heritage. Let us focus on Our Great Heritage pointing out that it is a heritage received, it is a heritage to preserve, and a heritage to share.

I. A Heritage Received **“GOD'S WORD IS OUR GREAT HERITAGE, AND SHALL BE OURS FOREVER”**

October 5, 1853, and June 14, 1918, are two important dates in the history of our Evangelical Lutheran Synod. Our synod was organized on October 5, 1853, at Luther Valley Church in Rock Prairie Settlement near Orfordville, Wisconsin. It was reorganized on June 14, 1918, at Lime Creek Lutheran Church, located about 60 miles southeast of here. The history of our synod is well documented in the following books: *Grace for Grace*, written in commemoration of the 90th anniversary of the old Norwegian Synod and the 25th anniversary of the reorganized Synod; *Faith of Our Fathers*, written in 1953 on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the original Norwegian Synod and the thirty-fifth of the reorganized synod; *A City Set on a Hill*, a history of the reorganized synod from 1918-1968, written by Theodore A. Aaberg; and *Built On The Rock*, commemorating our seventy-fifth anniversary and co-authored by Pastor Herbert Larson and Professor Juul Madson.

Our Outward Roots

We will not appreciate our heritage unless we know something about our history. The outward roots of our synod go back to Norway. A summary of the religious situation in Norway is as follows: Paganism reigned in Norway until Christianity, in the form of Roman Catholicism, came to Norway about 1000 A.D. Lutheranism came to Norway via Denmark in the 1500s. Johannes Bugenhagen brought the Reformation from Wittenberg to Denmark. From there the Reformation spread to “the land of the midnight sun” where in due time it became the state religion.

The connection with Germany brought the following theological movements to Norway. First of all, Orthodoxy, the movement which characterized the church's development in the 17th century. It established the theology of the church of Norway on a solid foundation and built up a reverence for the Word among clergy and laity. Along with it went an emphasis on catechetical instruction. Orthodoxy, however, followed the pattern of German development. Eventually preaching became “stiffly correct in doctrinal content, but devoid of Gospel warmth” as it has been described. Christianity was intellectualized and Christian life became cold and sterile in large sections of the church. This set the stage for Pietism, which was considered by many to be the answer to “dead orthodoxy.” Pietism stressed the importance of personal piety at the expense of orthodox teaching. In all of this emphasis on a “living Christianity” as opposed to the insincerity, the corruption, and dead formalism of clergy and laity in the established State Church, the preaching by lay members came to be regarded more and more as a sign of true spirituality, while the means of grace and the divine office of the ministry were neglected and even despised.

Pietism was followed by Rationalism, where revelation gave way to reason. Rationalism pretty much ruled out the supernatural. Science, culture, and art became the main concern even of the clergy. U. V. Koren who would later become a confessional Lutheran theologian tells about his catechization for confirmation in these words: “At my confirmation I was instructed by an otherwise well-meaning rationalist pastor. I was asked what kind of blood was to be found in a fish. That it was 'red and cold' was to be considered a testimony to the wisdom of God. And then the next boy was called.”

The strongest voice raised against rationalism in Norway was that of John Nordal Brun, Bishop of Bergen. He, in turn, was followed by Hans Nielsen Hauge, a layman who sought to combine Orthodoxy's reverence for the Word with a deep personal piety. Conditions in the State Church were horrible, with a clergy which had departed not only from the plain teachings

of Scripture but from its moral precepts as well. Hauge's denunciation of sin and his call to repentance struck a responsive chord in the hearts of many. His ringing preaching of repentance "set the whole church on fire." In *Grace for Grace* Dr. S. C. Ylvisaker describes the situation in these words: "No one will deny that the deplorable conditions in the State Church of Norway at this time called with a loud voice for a revival of sound preaching and pious living. And we can only admire the layman Hauge, who in burning zeal undertook to do what he could in this emergency for the cause of Christ. He traveled to the far corners of Norway, trudging tirelessly over these vast and difficult miles on foot, to awaken his people to sincere repentance." Ylvisaker goes on to say, though, that "a closer study of Hauge's preaching will show a peculiar unclearness whereby he mixed law and gospel, confused the teaching of justification with that of sanctification, and overemphasized personal piety at the expense of faith in the all-sufficient merit of Christ." (p. 7)

It was out of this theological morass in Norway that by the grace of God there came a new confessional Lutheran awakening led by two professors at the University of Christiania (now Oslo), namely Gisle Johnson and Paul Caspari. Their theology reflected the old healthy orthodoxy with the spiritual warmth of Hauge. Students of theology Herman Amberg Preus, Jacob Aal Otteson, and Ulrik Vilhelm Koren, later to become theological leaders in the New World, received their theological training at the feet of these confessional theologians, and thus by God's grace preserved and perpetuated Our Great Heritage.

Migration To The New World

Norwegian Lutheranism was translated to American soil in the middle of the 19th century when the heavy immigration began. The two streams of religious thought which dominated Norway characterized Norwegian Lutheranism in America. There was the Haugean spirit of personal piety and lay activity on the one hand, and sound Biblical theology on the other hand, which the students of Caspari and Johnson brought to the New World.

The Haugean spirit of personal piety and lay activity was perpetuated by a lay preacher, Elling Eielsen, who came to America in 1839, five years before an ordained pastor arrived from Norway. Eielsen began his work among the immigrants. He pretty much had the field to himself and he made the most of it. Bjug Harstad in his booklet *Pioneer Days* quotes a friend of Elling as saying that "Eielsen knew of no parish boundaries." (p. 13) Harstad also describes Eielsen's ministry as follows: "His singleness of purpose was evidently only to preach revivalism." His theology is also reflected in the second paragraph of his constitution which reads, "According to the order and manner which the Holy Scripture teaches, that nothing common or unclean can enter into the new Jerusalem (Rev. 21:27, etc.). so no one can be received as a member in our denomination (Samfund) without having gone through a sincere conversion, or is on the way to conversion. (emphasis mine) (*Pioneer Days*, p. 10)

President Herman Amberg Preus in his *Syv Foredrag* (Seven Lectures) which he delivered in Norway in 1867 describes the lay preacher as follows: "Eielsen's activities in the first period could have been justified, if he had taught pure, sound Lutheran doctrine. But it is his greatest sin that he never has done this but much rather has opposed and persecuted orthodox teachers and congregations." Instead "it was his desire to form a faction. He tried by errors, slanders to keep his followers away from our Synod, yes, to make the gulf between us greater and greater. He sought continually to gain more followers by forcing himself into our congregations. For a long time he laid claim to an inner call; but later he found that it might be good for his work to have something to rely on. So he asserted that he was ordained. We do not attach much importance to whether Elling was ordained or not; the principal thing to us is that he is a false teacher and the founder of an erroristic sect." (Quoted in *G F G*, p. 137)

Eielsen's activities led to a controversy on Lay Preaching in the Norwegian Synod. This issue was thoroughly discussed at pastoral conferences in which some "Missourians," including Dr. Walther, also took part. It was also discussed at two synodical conventions which resulted in the adoption of seven theses and this marked the end of the controversy on lay-preaching within the Norwegian Synod.

The Norwegian Synod was involved in several other controversies, in fact it had to deal with one doctrinal problem before it was formally organized in 1853, namely the "Grundtvigian error" which had been smuggled into the first draft of the constitution that had been prepared in 1852, one year before its organization. This error was attributed to Nicolai Grundtvig, the Danish hymn-writer, who wrote the hymn upon which our essay is based, "God's Word is Our Great Heritage." He also wrote several other hymns which are included in the *Hymnary* and *Hymnal*. Pastor Larson in *Built On The Rock* observes that "his theology was not always as good as his hymns" and then goes on to describe his theological error as "modern theology which began making inroads into the teachings of the church of Norway early in the 1800s. It included the belief that the Apostle's Creed was of divine origin in the same way that the Holy Scriptures are. Antigrundtvigians in America charged Grundtvig's followers with teaching such things as the possibility of the conversion of the soul after death and with rejecting the infallibility of the Bible, views which Grundtvigian clergy men did not deny having. The doctrinal paragraph, and therefore one of the unalterable articles of that first synod's constitution was Grundtvigian. It placed the word 'in our baptismal covenant' on equal footing with the inspired Scriptures." (*Built On The Rock*, pp. 7-8) It was Herman Amberg Preus who made the motion to strike the words "in our baptismal covenant" from the constitution and since it was one of the unalterable articles the first synod dissolved itself and a new constitution was written which did not include the Grundtvigian error. This constitution was adopted at the constituting convention in 1853.

The fact that this error was detected and subsequently purged from the constitution shows how earnestly our synodical fathers were in upholding the Lutheran, Scriptural principle in making the Scriptures the only source, rule, and guide for faith and life. President Preus, reflecting on this, said that "this strict adherence of the Synod to the Scripture principle soon brought it into conflict with pseudo-Lutheran bodies which, indeed, formally confessed the same principle but did not in practice take the matter of carrying it out seriously. But thereby it also received grace from God to abide by the truth revealed by God, not only in the controversies about Lay Preaching, Slavery, and the Sunday, but especially in the controversy about the Gospel, Absolution, and Justification." (*G F G*, p. 201)

For a summary of these controversies we direct your attention to the anniversary book *Built On The Rock*, pages 29-32. But we would like to comment briefly on the controversies on Absolution, and the Gospel and Justification which get to the very heart of our Christian faith. These controversies can be traced to Pietism, for Pietism with its emphasis on subjectivism explains why controversies arose on these fundamental doctrines. The Synod taught an unconditional absolution, that is, it is not conditioned on man's faith; whereas the opponents taught just the opposite. While both agreed as to the effects of absolution, namely that only believers received the forgiveness of sins by it, yet they disagreed over the essence or nature of absolution. This controversy led to differences over the question: What is the Gospel? The opponents made the Gospel conditioned on man's faith in such a way "that without faith there was in reality no Gospel either — as if without the seeing eye there could be no sun," as our fathers expressed it. (*G F G*, p. 161)

The Synod drew up twelve theses in which it sought to clarify its position on these controverted doctrines. We would share two of these theses with you, namely theses 7 and 11.

Theses 7 reads:

The Gospel is not a mere historical account of the completed work of redemption, but much more a powerful declaration of peace and promise of grace by God to the world redeemed by Christ. Thus it is always a powerful means of grace, in which God on His part brings, offers, distributes, gives and presents the forgiveness of sins and the righteousness earned by Christ, although not all to whom God lets His earnest call of grace go out accept this invitation of the reconciled God and thus do not either become partakers of the benefits following with it. (*G F G*, p. 161)

Theses 11 reads:

The faith of the individual does not by its own power effect this that the Gospel promise of grace, which God expressed in the word of the Gospel or in Absolution, actually becomes valid, powerful and true; but it clings simply to the promise of grace and forgiveness as a divinely true and effective promise, and in that it thus accepts God's promise, it grasps therein also the gift of righteousness and salvation and possesses that which the words say and express." (*Ibid.* p. 163)

In brief, the Gospel is always the same whether a person believes it or not. Luther used this illustration: "A king gives you a castle; if you do not accept it, then it is not the king's fault, nor is he guilty of a lie. But you have deceived yourself and the fault is yours. The king certainly gave it to you." (*LW* 40, p. 367) Similarly God has declared us forgiven, whether we believe it or not. However, this forgiveness does not benefit one unless he believes it.

It is not strange, then, that those who emphasize man's faith at the expense of the objective reality of Christ's Gospel and his words of justification should go astray in the doctrines of Election and Conversion, so as to give man's faith there also an entirely unscriptural importance.

Election-Conversion Controversy

First of all let us briefly explain the doctrine of eternal election or predestination. We will describe it as follows: The life of a Christian begins long before he was born; it goes back to eternity, before time began, when God out of pure grace, chose him to be his child, yes, he elected him unto faith and then in time brought him to faith by the power of the Gospel. The doctrine of election is brought out in passages, such as I Timothy 1:9 where the Apostle Paul writes to Timothy: "Who (God) hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began." Acts 13:48 says, "As many as were ordained to eternal life believed," and Jesus says, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you." (John 15:16) There are many other clear teachings of Scripture which teach the doctrine of election, such as Ephesians 1:37; II Thessalonians 2:13; John 10:27-28; Matthew 24:21-24; and Romans 8:28-30.

About 30 years after its organization a controversy broke out over this doctrine, which also affected the doctrine of conversion. This controversy began as a result of an essay delivered by Dr. C. F. W. Walther to the 1883 convention of the Western District of the Missouri Synod. In this paper Walther emphasized the Scriptural truth that our election unto faith is due to God's grace alone and that man has nothing to do with it. Walther gave all glory to God.

A man by the name of Fredrick August Schmidt who had been raised in the Missouri Synod and had been confirmed by Walther and studied under him, but who was now teaching

at the Norwegian Synod seminary, attacked Walther's essay and went so far as to call him a Calvinist. Schmidt went public with his views in the Synod and stirred up all kinds of trouble, charging Walther and his followers with heresies. Finally, the Church Council of the Norwegian Synod in a pamphlet listed the errors which Schmidt claimed the Missouri Synod and Norwegian Synod sympathizers taught. Schmidt responded by calling upon the people to help him rid the church of "un-Lutheran errorists" that controlled the Norwegian Synod as well as the Missouri Synod. He didn't have much success with the Missouri Synod, but in the Norwegian Synod civil war broke out. Brother was pitted against brother - congregations were divided, one party locking church doors against the other - communities were torn - pastors were deposed and lawsuits filed. Schmidt stirred up the student body at the seminary; his colleagues H. G. Stub and Johannes Ylvisaker answered him in their lectures. Theodore Aaberg summed up the point of controversy as follows: "The Synod's pastors put faith *after* election, bestowed upon the individual as a *result* of his election. Prof. Schmidt put faith *before* election, making it the *cause* of the individual's election." (C S H, p. 27)

The Synod pastors began to discuss the problem at conferences. B. Muus, president of the Minnesota District, in his report to the convention in 1880 went out of his way to attack the doctrine that a man may and shall be certain of his salvation. At the General Pastoral Conference of the Synod in Decorah, Iowa, in January 1881 Dr. Koren responded with an essay, entitled, "Can and Should a Christian be Certain of His Salvation?" Some time later Schmidt responded with a pamphlet in which he stated why he had started this controversy. In December of that year (1881) six pastors of the Synod published a "Declaration" in the church paper repudiating his accusations. In January 1882 Schmidt published a Norwegian paper in which he continued his attacks upon the Missouri Synod and Norwegian Synod sympathizers. At the Synodical Conference in October Schmidt, who had been elected as a delegate from the Minnesota District, was denied a seat because of the false charges against the brethren. The resolution said "that we can no longer recognize Prof. Schmidt as our brother in Christ and grant him a seat and voice in this group, so long as he does not penitently recognize these his sins and make public apology." (C S H, p. 31)

This aroused a storm in the "anti-Missourian Camp," as it was called. Civil war had broken out. Schmidt was even instrumental in deposing President H. A. Preus and his son from their congregation at Norway Grove on Good Friday 1883. Incredible, yet true! The Synod president bodily carried out of his own church! Bjug Harstad describes this sad event in these words: "The world's greatest and saddest tragedy, perpetrated on Good Friday by the enemies of the truth, is here reflected. Norway Grove congregation, too, chose the passion season in which to depose of its spiritual advisors. They were condemned and deposed, after having been given a sham trial." (*Pioneer Days*, p. 45)

In the fall of 1884 the Synod pastors met in Decorah. Here they discussed a thorough statement of the doctrines at issue prepared by Dr. Koren entitled "En Redegjoerelse" which translated means "An Accounting." This was an important document which presented the teachings of the Norwegian Synod clearly and summed up all the arguments on both sides. It rejected both the Calvinizing errors of which the Synod had been falsely accused and the synergistic errors of Schmidt and his followers.

"An Accounting" is found on pages 173-188 in *Grace for Grace* and it is summarized in *A City Set on a Hill* by Theodore Aaberg on pages 33-37. Permit me to share with you the introduction of "An Accounting":

It is well known to you that we now for several years have been attacked and accused of teaching false doctrines regarding election or the election of grace.

Our teaching has been called Calvinistic. The teachings with which we have been charged are of two kinds: some, which we have never believed and never taught; these we have publicly repudiated, but we have continued to be accused of them anyway; others, which we actually have taught, because they are expressly taught in God's Word and confessed by the Lutheran Church in its public confessions. Therefore we cling to these in spite of all attacks. We do not accept as our own a single doctrine which is not clearly based on the Word of God and which cannot be shown to be in the Confessions of the Lutheran Church. We owe our congregations an accounting for what we teach and confess; and although we dare to believe that our hearers both know our testimony and will judge it by what they hear of us and not by what others say, we have still considered it our duty to present to you now this our common complete accounting, in which we hope no essential question that concerned the disputed doctrines has been unanswered. We present this accounting to you, then, in the name of the Lord, for testing by the Word of God. (*G F G*, p. 173)

“An Accounting” was in part directed against Schmidt who taught that “salvation in a certain sense does not depend on God alone.” In answer he stated: “I believe and teach now that it is not synergistic error, but a clear teaching of God's Word and our Lutheran Confessions that 'salvation in a certain sense does not depend on God alone.'” In what sense he claimed that salvation depends on man is brought out in these statements which appeared in his periodical: *Lutherske Vidnesbyrd*

When only one of two ungodly men is converted, there must have been a difference in their resistance; for, if not, they would both have been converted.

Whether a man comes to a determination in the one way or in the other, he always keeps his full freedom and his own power of choice to come to some other determination. All have their free, personal, independent choice between two usable possibilities: either to follow the drawing of grace or to resist it.

It is the called person himself who here must make a certain choice between the two possibilities, whereby it is decided whether he will let himself be helped and saved or he will refuse to let himself be helped. (Quoted in *G F G*, pp. 172-173)

The Synod responded in its church paper *Kirketidende*: “He (Schmidt) does not bring any proof from God's Word or the Lutheran Confessions; on the contrary he applies his customary rationalistic logic and argues that if salvation depends on God alone, then condemnation must also depend on God alone, and so his grace must be irresistible. Since it is truly ungodly to teach an irresistible grace and to give God the blame for the condemnation of the lost, therefore it is said to be an ungodly doctrine also to assert that, when a man is saved, this is the work of God alone. For what do we mean when we say that salvation depends on God alone? We mean that it is God alone who effects a man's salvation and that he who is saved has God alone and not in the slightest respect himself to thank for it. Prof. Schmidt now condemns this as an ungodly doctrine.”

The die was cast. Schmidt's followers held a meeting on October 1885, in Red Wing, Minnesota. At this meeting they passed a resolution stating that all pastors who had signed the “Accounting” should be removed from office. This meant that Bjug Harstad, now president of

the Minnesota District, and Dr. Koren, president of the Iowa District must go, as well as H. G. Stub and Johannes Ylvisaker, professors at the seminary.

The district conventions of the Synod devoted much time to a discussion of the doctrine at issue. In 1887 Dr. Koren delivered an essay entitled "Does the Confession of the Lutheran Church Teach That Any Man before his Conversion has the Ability to Decide in Favor of Grace? Our answer is 'NO.'" The conventions also had to decide what to do about the seminary which the "Anti-Missourians" had opened in Northfield. The answer from them was that as long as the Missourian doctrine of Election and Conversion is taught at the Synod's schools they could not consider closing. This marked the final break between the two factions. In the next year and a half about one-third of the pastors and congregations of the Synod withdrew and formed their own church body named "Anti-Missourian Brotherhood." This group joined hands with two other groups, also opponents of the Synod, namely the Norwegian-Danish Conference and the Norwegian Augustana Synod and formed the United Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church, commonly called the United Church. It was really their common hatred of the Norwegian Synod that brought them together. It is ironic that Schmidt, while he was in the Synod, was a leader in the controversies on Absolution, the Gospel and Justification over against these very church bodies with whom he now joined in a fraternal brotherhood, even though the doctrinal differences remained. Professor Laur Larson in an address to the Synod on its fiftieth anniversary summed it up as follows: "But when the great split came in our Synod, then there came agreement between the others, an agreement to unite in spite of their disagreements, an agreement not to settle the old doctrinal controversies thoroughly and earnestly according to God's Word, but to bury them twenty fathoms deep under the ground." (*G F G*, p. 190) Whoever said that politics and religion make strange bed-fellows certainly described this situation. How often Herod and Pilate become friends in church controversies and personal squabbling!

Now the Norwegian Synod was left with but a minority of the Norwegian Lutherans in America, but it had saved the Gospel of salvation by grace alone, and on our 75th anniversary observance we thank God for this heritage. The whole controversy can be summed up as follows: Schmidt tried to explain the mystery why one is saved and the other lost, though God desires the salvation of all with equal earnestness. He attempted to solve that mystery by claiming that some men manifested a better conduct over towards grace than others in that they ceased to offer willful resistance to it and by ascribing to unconverted man the responsibility for choosing between accepting the grace offered them by God or rejecting it. He said that there is no other solution of the mystery than the Calvinistic one which explains everything by referring both the salvation and damnation of men to God's eternal decree of election. Schmidt never changed his position.

The Synod, on the other hand, rejected both the synergistic and Calvinistic answers to the question why one is saved and the other lost. The Synod simply said with the Bible, that a man's salvation is to be ascribed to God alone, that man has no power at any time to choose salvation, but it is God who chooses. A man's condemnation is the fault of man alone and that God in no way is to be blamed, since he with equal earnestness desires the salvation of all. The attempt to solve this mystery makes one a Calvinist or a synergist.

By the time the Synod celebrated its fiftieth anniversary it had pretty well recouped the numerical losses. Large mission fields opened in Northern Minnesota, North and South Dakota, and the Pacific Coast. Home mission work was also done in some of our larger cities.

An Attempt For Reunion

In 1905 H. G. Stub was elected vice president of the Synod. Koren succeeded H. A. Preus as president in 1894 and now in 1905 Stub was elected vice-president. That same year the Hauge Synod extended an invitation to the Norwegian Synod and the United Church to enter into joint doctrinal discussions. Several meetings of the committees were held but they failed to come to agreement, particularly on the doctrine of election and conversion. Because of illness, President Koren was unable to attend the 1910 district conventions. Vice-President Stub, in reading Koren's presidential message to the convention, omitted a significant paragraph dealing with the union question. In his message Koren reported that he was of the conviction that no progress had been made in the union discussions. The fact that some theses had been drawn up did not assure Koren that there was agreement. What Stub deliberately withheld were these words: "If only insignificant things were at stake, then it would not be right to separate; but when the question is raised whether God alone is our Savior, then we cannot be too careful. Perhaps the necessary antitheses may yet be submitted. If agreement concerning such things could be attained, then there would be real rejoicing." (*G F G*, p. 98) Dr. Koren died later that year. Vice-President Stub now became President Stub. This was a bad omen for the Synod's future.

In 1911 the United Church elected a new committee. The Norwegian Synod followed suit. These committees met in St. Paul of that year. Papers were read which revealed widespread disagreement. Sub-committees of two from each committee were appointed to prepare some theses. The sub-committees reported to the plenary committee in Madison, Wisconsin, in February of 1912. And, lo and behold! agreement was reached. A document known as *Opgjør* which means Settlement was drawn up. Many pastors and lay people objected. President Stub defended it. The Minnesota District accepted it. In 1913 the Synod called a general convention. President Stub promoted the Settlement. A minority group was organized. All efforts to stop the steamroller failed. The report of the Union Committee passed by a vote of 360-170. In 1916 another convention was held. Efforts to forestall the merger failed. By a vote of 520-203 the Synod accepted the proposed constitution of the new merger. All efforts on the part of the minority failed. A committee of the Minority published a pamphlet which for the most part fell on deaf ears. Minority pastors and laity now found the situation to be intolerable. A meeting was held at Austin, Minnesota, where the so-called "Austin Agreement" was drawn up. At that meeting representatives of the majority invited the minority to join on the basis of their own doctrine, that is Synod doctrine, but with the condition that there be "mutual fraternal recognition." A majority of the minority took the bait. They agreed to go into the merger.

The last conventions of the three merging churches were held in 1917. Resolutions were passed to make the legal transfer of property possible. Officers were elected. Members of the newly-merged church marched in jubilant procession to the auditorium where the union exercises were held. This marked the end of the old Norwegian Synod. ICHABOD, which means "its glory is departed."

What was the reason for the objection of the minority that refused to enter the merger? It was their conviction that the union document did not settle the controversies raised by Schmidt in the 1880s. The merger document was a compromise; it allowed both views to stand. One could hold the Synod's view that man's conversion is due entirely to God's grace alone, or to the other view that there is something in man that is partly responsible for his conversion.

Paragraph one of the SETTLEMENT allows for two forms of election and paragraph four ascribes to natural man a sense or feeling of responsibility in relation to the acceptance or rejection of grace. (cf. Wolf, *Documents of Lutheran Unity in America*, pp. 232-234) However, the

Bible teaches that natural man is “dead in trespasses and sins.” (Eph. 2:1) “The Settlement” in paragraph four teaches synergism, Prof. Schmidt's old error, and contradicts the truth taught in the Small Catechism, prepared for children, namely the explanation of the Third Article: “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.” We have also learned to sing:

“All our knowledge, sense and sight
 Lie in deepest darkness shrouded,
 Till Thy Spirit breaks our night
 With the beams of truth unclouded
 Thou alone to God canst win us,
 Thou must work all good within us.
Hymnary 34, v. 2

“The Settlement” is, in brief, a unionistic document, containing both true and false doctrine. The newly-merged church was a heterodox church body, allowing truth and error to co-exist. In obedience to Romans 16:17 which forbids fellowship with those who teach, or allow, false doctrine to be taught and following the Lutheran Confessions which state that “false doctrine cannot be tolerated in the church of God, much less be excused and defended,” (Tappert p. 503) the minority could not, for conscience sake, enter this merger. (For an analysis of “The Settlement” see *C S H* by Aaberg, pp. 49-70)

While the hoopla of the new merger was going on in the St. Paul Auditorium, a small group of pastors and laymen sitting in the Aberdeen Hotel in that same city was left alone to deliberate on the question of what to do in the future. All were agreed that they could not, for conscience sake, join the Merger and so the following declaration was agreed upon:

1. We cannot for conscience sake join the new church body on the present basis.
2. We continue to stand on the old confession and organization, which we as Christians have the liberty to defend and under which we may work from now on as heretofore.

It was resolved to effect a temporary organization, to elect officers, and to arrange for publication of a church paper. The name chosen for the paper was *Lutherske Tidende*. In the issue of that paper dated April 1, 1918, the following announcement was printed:

“Pastors and members of congregations who desire to continue in the old doctrine and practice of the old Norwegian Synod will, God willing, hold their annual meeting in Lime Creek congregation, Pastor H. Ingebritson's charge, June 14 and following days.”

This minority was the true spiritual successor of the old Norwegian Synod and thus possessed the doctrinal heritage which the old Synod had compromised for the sake of external union. The minority was determined to continue in “the old paths where is the good way” for only in those paths could they find rest for their souls (Cf. Jeremiah 6:16)

II. A Heritage to Preserve

“Lord grant, while worlds endure,
We keep its teachings pure
Throughout all generations.”

When the Synod reorganized in 1918 it did not entertain grandiose illusions that from now on there would only be peace and harmony. No, our synodical fathers realized that they were still in the church militant and that Satan was alive and well and that he would continue to attack God's truth and foment unrest and disunity. But for the time being the Lord granted our Synod some time to rebuild and chart its course.

The “little Synod,” as it was commonly referred to, was not alone in the world. It had brethren in the Synodical Conference, consisting of the Missouri, Wisconsin and Slovak synods. The Norwegian Synod was a charter member of the Synodical Conference when it was organized in 1872, but then left it in 1883, not for doctrinal reasons, but because it hoped to settle the Election-Conversion Controversy by itself, without involving the entire Synodical Conference. However, the old Synod remained in fellowship with the Synodical Conference and now after the merger the reorganized Synod rejoined it.

Because of historical ties there was a special bond between the Missouri Synod and the reorganized Synod. The old Norwegian Synod had sent its ministerial students to St. Louis and also supplied a professor until it established its own seminary in 1876. Dr. Walther came to the defense of the old Synod in the Election Controversy. There was also a close bond of fellowship among the leaders of the synods. And now after the Merger, Missouri again opened her schools to the reorganized Synod for the training of its pastors. The Synod continued to enjoy its fellowship with the Missouri Synod, and in our anniversary year we count among our blessings the fellowship that we enjoyed with her those years.

But time moves on. Who would have thought that some years down the road there would be a disruption of the fellowship between the two synods! But that is what happened in the year 1955. What caused this rupture? It didn't happen over night but evolved over a twenty-year span from 1935-1955. We will briefly summarize what transpired those years which led to a severance of fellowship.

The first noticeable rift appeared in the peaceful fraternal relations with Missouri in 1935 when Missouri accepted an invitation from the American Lutheran Church to enter into doctrinal discussions, with a view to establishing fellowship. Our Synod, together with the Wisconsin Synod, declined this invitation and responded with a document entitled *Unity, Union, and Unionism.*, which set forth principles that must guide us in seeking to effect fellowship. Then in 1938, three years later, the St. Louis Articles of Union were drawn up and accepted as the doctrinal basis for union with the A.L.C. The Synod could not approve of these Articles because they contained the old error of the Iowa and Ohio synods on justification, namely “that God purposes to justify those who have come to faith,” and also unscriptural principles on church fellowship by the A.L.C. In 1944 at the Saginaw convention of the Missouri Synod it adopted a resolution which attempted to draw a distinction between “joint prayer” and “prayer fellowship,” something which Missouri had not made in the past. Our Synod protested this resolution on the grounds that this distinction cannot be supported on the basis of Scripture and that it opens the door to further unionistic practices. The answer of the Missouri Synod to such protests was the re-affirmation of its 1944 resolution.

In 1945 the Chicago Statement appeared, signed by forty-four Missouri Synod pastors and professors. This was a document which further weakened the bulwarks against unionism and laid down unscriptural principles of church fellowship. Then came the agreement with the National Lutheran Council, a federation of liberal and heterodox Lutheran synods, by which

Missouri entered into joint work with these erroristic groups. This was contrary to all the principles of the Synodical Conference and the "old" Missouri Synod. To these acts of unionism, as well as other instances, the Synod had protested, but to no avail. Then in 1950 came the Common Confession which was purported to be a settlement of past differences between the Missouri Synod and the A.L.C. Our Synod found it to be a document of compromise which did not settle the differences and therefore was inadequate as a settlement of past doctrinal differences as a basis for union.

Finally, at the convention of the Synodical Conference in 1954 the Synod sent a plea to that body as a court of last appeal, to take some action to remedy these offenses. Briefly the Synod asked the Synodical Conference to vote on five resolutions dealing with Objective Justification, Unionism, Prayer Fellowship, the "1938" Resolutions and the Common Confession. However, this proved fruitless. The Synod, therefore, felt that further negotiations by committees would be fruitless, that an impasse had been reached in our fraternal relations with the Missouri Synod, and that further negotiations would result in indifferentism and in compromise of Scriptural doctrine and practice.

At this point, the Synod said, we can only say that we have testified to the Missouri Synod as best we know how and have tried in many ways for many years to preserve the unity in confession and practice which we enjoyed with her for so many years. In the paragraph leading up to the suspension resolution the Synod said: "The time has come when we must testify by action against the unionism which has become so common in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod in recent years. To continue the arguments by word and pen will be more likely to further aggravate than to resolve our difference." The suspension resolution, then, reads as follows:

THEREFORE WE HEREBY DECLARE with deepest regret that fellowship relations with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod are suspended on the basis of Romans 16:17, and that the exercise of such relations cannot be resumed until the offenses contrary to the doctrine which we have learned have been removed by them in a proper manner.

While the Synod had severed fellowship with Missouri it was still a member of the Synodical Conference. This was an awkward situation in that the Synod had broken fellowship with Missouri, but was still in fellowship with the Wisconsin and Slovak synods. In fact, several pastors and congregations of the ELS and WELS left their respective synods in 1959, charging them with sinful unionism for remaining in the Synodical Conference, and formed the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC). The Wisconsin Synod had also been protesting the errors of Missouri and severed fellowship in 1961. The Slovak Synod, in the meantime, was drawing closer to Missouri. On the basis of the report and recommendation of the ELS Doctrinal Committee and delegates to the 1962 Synodical Conference, the ELS resolved to withdraw its membership from the Synodical Conference at the next meeting in 1963. The Wisconsin Synod also withdrew in 1963.

The report of the ELS Doctrinal Committee leading up to the resolutions of withdrawal of membership from the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America stated that when the Conference was organized in 1872 it was a venture which was unique in the visible church. The organization was closely knit together, not by the merging of different bodies into one organic union, but by a genuine oneness in doctrine and spirit, while the member synods retained their sovereignty and preserved their individual heritage. Loosely knit, though it was, it became a bulwark for conservative Lutheranism that was a marvel

throughout the Christian world. The report went on to speak of the close and warm relationship that existed between Missouri and ELS and that many benefits had been derived from this fellowship. However, a new spirit began to be discernible when Missouri entered into doctrinal discussion with the American Lutheran Church in 1935. At the same time it was noted that doctrinal discipline over against some errant pastors and theological leaders was on the wane...By 1955 it had become clear that there would be no veering from the more liberal course Missouri had embarked upon...Missouri contended for a position on fellowship which was entirely out of harmony with the historic stand of both the Missouri Synod and the Synodical Conference on this doctrine. At the same time it was evident that no disciplinary action was being taken against those in Missouri who spoke and acted in a manner that was contrary to her own clearly expressed principle of an earlier day...Since the Lutheran Synodical Conference was no longer an organization that expressed a unity of spirit, which was its main purpose and glory throughout its history, our Synod and Wisconsin presented separate memorials to the Synodical Conference's 1962 convention asking that said organization dissolve itself.

On the basis of this report from the Doctrine Committee the ELS passed the following resolution at its 1963 synodical convention:

RESOLVED that with the deepest regret, but in obedience to the divine injunction given in I Corinthians 1:10 ("Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment") and Romans 16:17 ("Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned and avoid them.") we solemnly declare the immediate withdrawal of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod from the Lutheran Synodical Conference."

Ironically, it was the Scriptural doctrine of fellowship, namely unity in doctrine and practice, that brought the Synodical Conference into existence and it was a departure from that Scriptural principle that brought about its demise.

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 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.

The Importance of the Doctrine of Church Fellowship

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. Failure to heed what he says can result in the loss of the truth. Our Lutheran fathers have left us an example in the way they dealt with controversies in their day. They did not vacillate or waffle when it came to exposing false doctrine. We read in the Solid Declaration, Rule and Norm: "These controversies are not, as some may think, mere misunderstandings or contentions about words, with one part talking past the other, so that the strife reflects a mere semantic problem of little or no consequence. On the contrary, these controversies deal with weighty and important matters, and they are of such a nature that the opinions of the erring party cannot be tolerated in the church of God, much less be excused and defended." (SD, Rule and Norm, Tappert, p. 503)

Over against the Sacramentarians and Schwarmer of his day who denied the true presence of Christ's body and blood in the Sacrament Luther said, "Whoever, I say, will not believe this, will please leave me alone and expect no fellowship from me. This is final." (Tappert, p. 575) We also recall what Luther says about those who demonstrate that whoever regards his doctrine, faith, and confession as true cannot remain in the same stall with those who teach or adhere to false doctrine.

The Reverend Henry Ingebritson, one-time president of the reorganized Synod, in his message to the reorganized Synod in 1939 emphasized the importance of preserving the truth by quoting from Dr. Pieper's treatise on Unionism which says, "if we grant error a place alongside of the truth, we thereby take back our confession of truth because the truth has this characteristic: it claims exclusive right and shuts 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, an example of how the members of the church suddenly may fall away from confessionalism to indifferentism. In spite of doctrinal differences between the conferring bodies, a forced unnatural union was brought about with Opgjør as its basis. From 1910 and on, 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."

The old Norwegian Synod in entering the merger of 1917 is a tragic example of what happens when error and truth are allowed to exist side by side. The leaven of false doctrine continued to work until eventually the very source of doctrine, Holy Scripture, was affected. In 1930 the Merger church joined the erroristic and unionistic American Lutheran Conference. In 1960 it became a part of The American Lutheran Church (TALC) and in 1988 TALC became a part of ELCA. In the seminaries of this new church body a textbook on Christian Doctrine by Braaten and Jenson is used which clearly shows the doctrinal deterioration in that church body. We submit some samplings:

On Scripture: Today it is impossible to assume the literal historicity of all things recorded. What the Biblical authors report is not accepted a literal

transcript of the factual course of events. Therefore, critical scholars inquire behind the text and attempt to reconstruct the real history that took place. (Vol. I, pp. 76-77)

On Genesis: It is now almost universally held among theologians that the stories and concepts we have of Adam and Eve in paradise are legends and myths. The idea of human living in a blessed primeval stage before the Fall is looked on as poetical speculation, not history. It is sometimes argued that faithfulness requires our belief in a primeval condition of blessedness. Such an argument confuses faithfulness with the imposition of a mythical speculation on a modern historical outlook on human life. To hold to the primeval condition in Eden as a matter of history would be an intellectual impossibility and to misunderstand faith." (Vol. I, p. 238)

On Christ's Death: Jesus himself, though he might have and quite possibly did reckon with a violent death at the hands of his adversaries, seems not to have understood or interpreted his own death as a sacrifice for others or ransom for sin." (Vol. II, p. 12)

On the Trinity: The trinity is simply the Father and the man Jesus and their Spirit as the Spirit of the believing community. (p. 155)

In order to understand this radical departure from historic Lutheranism we need to understand that lurking behind this departure is the use of the Historical Critical Method of Interpretation. This method of interpretation approaches the Bible with the presupposition that it is like any other book, that its writers are fallible, that there are possible errors in it, and that it is up to the trained theologian to determine what is truth and what is error. For example, practitioners of this method regard the Gospels as stories that circulated in the early New Testament community which may or may not be factual, and that it is up to the trained theologian to decide what is the real truth. That kind of interpretation undermines Biblical authority making it difficult to distinguish between true and false doctrine. It is really an assault on the source of doctrine, the Holy Bible. Instead of clearly stating "this we believe, teach, and confess" adherents of this view go their own way doctrinally, and consequently anything goes. The end result is that we have no final determinate of truth. In brief, it is a real danger to Our Great Heritage.

Reformed Influence

Another threat to OUR GREAT HERITAGE is Reformed influence on Lutheran theology. Lutheran theology is rooted and grounded in the doctrine of the means of grace, namely that the benefits of Christ's redemptive work are brought to us through the Word and Sacraments and are made our own. The means of grace are powerful, not only bringing these blessings to us, but also working the faith to accept what God offers.

Reformed theology does not really have a doctrine of the means of grace. It regards the Gospel as an offer of grace rather than an application of grace and that it (the Gospel) has no power of itself but the power is in one's decision or commitment he makes. This is a gross commingling of justification and sanctification. Commitment is not a part of the essence of faith itself; it is rather a result or fruit of faith which belongs in the sphere of sanctification.

Reformed books are flooding the book markets and Lutheran people are buying them and in many cases swallowing Reformed doctrine hook, line, and sinker. As a result there are many Lutheran sheep dressed in Reformed theology. Lutherans have been napping while the Reformed have been reaping and exerting a strong influence. We are therefore grateful for a

recent book entitled *Sanctification: Christ in Action*, written by Harold Senkbeil, which is now on the Lutheran market. This book clearly shows how the theology of today's Evangelicals, which are really Reformed, and the theology of the Lutheran Confessions differ in their approach to theology. It explains how the two theologies answer the question: "Where in the World is God?" Reformed theology answers that he is to be found in the subjective feelings of the heart; whereas Lutheran theology answers that he is to be found in the means of grace. Senkbeil convincingly shows the inseparable connection between justification and sanctification, pointing out that the Christian life is the fruit of faith based on the objective truth of the Gospel. This is a book that should alert us to the pitfalls of Reformed theology and show us what a danger it is to our Lutheran heritage.

Properly Divide Law and Gospel

If we are to preserve Our Great Heritage we must continue to emphasize the importance of properly dividing Law and Gospel in our preaching and teaching. The risen Savior gave the command "that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations." (Luke 24:26) And the apostolic injunction is: "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." (II Tim. 2:15) Our Confessions sum up the importance of Law and Gospel preaching in these words: "We believe and confess that these two doctrines must be urged constantly in the church of God until the end of the world, but with due distinction." (Tappert, p. 562) If the proper distinction between these two doctrines is not maintained, the results are disastrous for the Christian. The Gospel is made into a new Law, the merits of Christ are obscured, and troubled consciences are robbed of the comfort of the Gospel promises.

Real Law and Gospel preaching is becoming more of a rarity in our day. Instead of law preaching we hear much moralizing and tirading against the evils of the day, which fuels the *opinion legis* in a person and make hypocrites out of people. The law is spiritual and it must be preached in such a way that "every mouth is stopped and all the world becomes guilty before God" as Paul says in Romans. Dr. Koren emphasized the importance of law preaching in these words: "If we preached only concerning the forgiveness of sins but not concerning repentance, then that doctrine would neither be understood, nor would it bear fruit. For without repentance there is no faith and consequently no justification by faith." However, law preaching, important as it is, is as our Confessions say, "a foreign work" and its preaching is to lead to Christ's "proper work," which is the preaching of the good news of forgiveness and eternal life in Christ. This is the message that is to predominate in our preaching. Dr. Walther said it well: "So preach the law that it drives the greatest saint to despair; so preach the gospel that it gives the greatest sinner hope." True law and gospel preaching must always be a priority in our preaching if we are to preserve Our Great Heritage.

A Caution

In our zeal for preserving our heritage we need to be careful not to start unnecessary controversies. Our same Confessions that warn "that false doctrine cannot be tolerated in the church of God" also caution against starting unnecessary controversies. The Solid Declaration, Rule and Norm says: "We shall at all times make a sharp distinction between needless and unprofitable contentions (which since they destroy rather than edify, should never be allowed to disturb the Church) and necessary controversy (dissension concerning articles of the Creed or the chief parts of our own Christian doctrine, when the contrary error must be refuted in order to preserve the truth.)" (Tappert, p. 507) And Martin Chemnitz says that a minister of the Word "is not to stir up all kinds of unnecessary disputes and strifes about words...., and arouse his

hearers with untimely clamoring, but only fight against adversaries in necessary conflicts, without which purity of doctrine cannot be retained." (MWS p. 47)

It is incumbent upon us, as we seek to preserve our heritage, that we do not get caught up in unnecessary controversies that "destroy rather than edify" and given our old Adam this is a real danger. And when it comes to necessary controversy where our heritage is at stake, then we are to "speak the truth in love." In the heat of controversy it is so easy to give way to the works of the flesh which include "hate, bickering, jealousy, anger, selfishness, quarreling, divisions." (Gal. 5:20 GWN) Our Confessions also warn that "many heresies have arisen in the church simply from the hatred of the clergy." (Tappert, p. 141) How we need to heed those words in our synodical and intersynodical relations!

A small synod, such as ours, is especially vulnerable. Someone has observed that "the bane of a small synod is envy and gossip." As a small synod we have the potential for self-destruction. Jesus said "that a house divided against itself shall not stand." (Matt. 12:25) No, if we are to preserve our heritage we need to be and remain a "synod," that is, a group of people walking together and working together in peace and harmony. We need to encourage one another and put away all rancor and bitterness. We cannot afford "a synod within a synod," each with its own agenda. Wouldn't it be a tragedy if we who have been blessed with such a precious doctrinal heritage should self-destruct! Nothing would please Satan more and no one is working harder to achieve that end. God forbid that we should assist him. As we seek to preserve our heritage, may we heed the words of these hymns found in our *Hymnary*, the first one by Thomas Kingo, "To be as brothers, and agree to live in peace and unity." The hymn goes on,

Resentment, hate, and cruel jest,
Must not be harbored in the breast
Where love and charity should dwell;
Then think and speak of others well,
Refrain from all that causes strife.
And mars a truly Christian life.

Hymnary 406, v. 3

Another hymnist, C. J. P. Spitta, has written:

Let us shun all vain contention
Touching words and outward things,
Whence, alas! so much dissension
And such bitter rancor springs;

Rather
 Let it be our chief endeavor,
 That we may the Lord obey,
 Then shall envy cease forever,
 And all hate be done away
Hymnary 407,v, 3 & 5

One more word of caution: Let us also remember in our synodical and intersynodical relations that one of the things the Lord hates is “a false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethern.” (Proverbs 6:19) How easy and dangerous it is to get caught up in such mischievous behavior! With high-tech equipment such as Fax machines and copiers a blizzard of letters can be hurriedly sent out that often “destroy rather than edify.” May we heed what one of our synodical fathers said on the occasion of the Commemoration of the Saxon Immigration, when he spoke of the debt which our synod owed to the Missouri Synod, and this at a time when some problems in Missouri were beginning to surface which had caused some tensions between the two synods. He wrote:

We shall be quick to praise, and slow to find fault. We shall not act like little dogs that constantly bark and rant at every shadow. We should look for the bright and not the shady side. Our very position as members of the Synodical Conference and especially the Norwegian Synod makes it so easy to develop the holier-than-thou attitude. We should shun suspicion and carping criticism as the devil himself and ever be mindful also in synodical relations of the Eighth Commandment, which admonishes us to excuse our neighbor, speak well of him, and put the best construction on everything.

This does not mean, of course, that we must never criticize, admonish, and if need be, rebuke. Such spirit is not evidence of true love...God bless the Missouri Synod! May no strange fires ever burn on her sacred altars! (S.R. 1938, p. 57)

We would also be well-advised to heed what Robert Kolb says in his recent book *Confessing the Faith*:

Confessing the faith opposes whatever subverts the faith. It never does so for the sake of defending our own persons but rather for the sake of bringing others to Christ and preserving them in the faith. Confessors thus must listen to themselves through the ears of their hearers to make certain their condemnation is clearly understood as an agent of God's truth, not of the confessor's defensiveness or private agenda...In the 20th-century West, condemnation almost always will have to be more gentle and respectful than it frequently was in the 16th century. It dare not be less clear and direct, but must be motivated more obviously by love for the confused or erring. For only when it sounds a loving call for repentance will our condemnation please God. Only when it is not done as our own good work, to make us look good in His sight, but to win the erring brother or sister, will it fulfill God's purposes. (p. 137)

May God give us the grace to preserve Our Great Heritage with wholesome and salutary words, to His glory and the welfare of precious, blood-bought souls!

III. A Heritage to Share

To spread its light from age to age
 Shall be our chief endeavor

Our history has shown that our Synod has been a doctrine-minded synod from day one and it demonstrated that by contending for the truth whenever necessary. But our synod has also been a mission-minded synod. Both the old Synod and the reorganized Synod took the Lord's Great Commission seriously and sought to carry it out as best they could; they understood that this calls for mission-mindedness as well as doctrine-mindedness. As they carried out the Great Commission they used the sword and the trowel, on the one hand defending the truth against error and, on the other hand, building the Kingdom by spreading the truth.

When our Synod was organized in 1853 there were thirty-eight congregations, consisting of approximately 11,400 souls, and served by six pastors. At its first convention in 1885 the matter of home missions was the chief topic of discussion. The Synod regarded it as a duty to reach out as far as possible, and its leaders set the example by starting many congregations among the immigrants. As a result the Synod enjoyed a healthy growth. In 1886, just before the rupture occasioned by the Election Controversy, there were 193 pastors serving 723 congregations with 143,885 souls. In 1869, after the division, the number had decreased to 138 pastors, 512 congregations and 93,891 souls. When the Synod observed its 50th anniversary in 1903 the membership was estimated at 280 pastors, 900 congregations and 140,000 souls. At the time of the Merger in 1917 the reports for the Synod show a total of 351 pastors, 986 congregations, and 150,552 souls.

On the 50th anniversary of the old Norwegian Synod, the author of *Festskrift* (the Jubilee Book) expressed the Synod's attitude toward missions.

And just as the newly organized Synod at that time was united for the sole purpose of promoting the glory of God and the salvation of souls, so there is today in the larger Synod a unity of purpose to carry out this same program. It is our hope and prayer that the Lord God Who in His unmerited grace has preserved the Synod despite all human weaknesses through all its conflicts and tribulations from deserting the sure and unfailing rule of God's Word, will also in the future hold His protecting hand over our church body, help and preserve it, so that in the days to come it may in a small way continue to be an instrument in His hands to comfort and save, and to bring rest and refreshment to "the fowls of heaven" who still want to "build their nests in the branches of this tree." God grant it for Jesus' sake! (*G F G*, p. 53)

And in his last synodical address to the convention of the Norwegian Synod in 1893, President H. A. Preus began by saying,

"A true witness delivereth souls," says the Holy Spirit (Prov. 14,25...When our orthodox Lutheran congregations in this country joined together forty years ago in a Synod, the chief purpose of this church organization was to "deliver souls," to the glory of God. By all its teachings and practice, by its resolutions, measures and institutions, it was to have the salvation of souls in mind and thus to be a "true witness." (Emphasis mine)

At the reorganization of the Synod in 1918 there were 13 pastors and a few laymen gathered at Lime Creek for the purpose of making plans for the future. In reading the reports we note a wholesome interest in missions. At its second convention, held at Albert Lea, Minnesota, the first order of the day was home missions. It should also be noted that the Synod took part in foreign mission work through the Synodical Conference. The Synod therefore demonstrated that it not only wanted to preserve its heritage, but also to spread it and share it.

We should also mention at this point that in 1927 the Synod resolved to purchase Bethany Lutheran College (which was no small undertaking) and on June 14, 1928, the reorganized Norwegian Synod gathered for the first time in its own "spacious and commodious quarters at Bethany Lutheran College." And what a blessing Bethany has been to our Synod! ONE THING NEEDFUL has been its motto over the years. Just think of all the students who have received a Christian liberal arts education from Christian instructors. And the physical blessings! Consider the many improvements over the years: a library, gymnasium, dormitory and of late the new fine arts center. If someone had prophesied to the faithful few at Lime Creek when the decision was made to purchase Bethany College that 66 years later there would be these physical improvements and that we would now be planning a thirteen million expansion program that includes a new chapel, a student union, expansion of the gymnasium facilities plus a large scholarship and endowment funds they would have questioned that person's sanity! On the other hand, maybe they wouldn't be too surprised! They had faith in the Lord's grace to do humanly impossible things too, as is evidenced by President Christian Anderson's message to the 1927 Convention when he made a stirring appeal on behalf of the Synod's acceptance of the school and explaining the great need of a synodical school, he exhorted the Synod: "Let us not be afraid to 'draw large drafts on Our Father,' when they are needed to solve the problems which He in His grace entrusts to us, and to whose solution He has promised to donate His rich blessings." (S.R. 1927, pp. 30-31.

On this 75th anniversary, as we thank our gracious God for these blessings on our school and the financial support from our Synod and alumni we also thank him for opening the heart of an alumnus (recently deceased) to make such generous contributions to his alma mater which has helped to make all of this possible. Certainly this should be a motivation to all of us to see to it that this ambitious program is carried through to completion.

In 1946 Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary was opened. For almost thirty years the seminary classes were held at the college. In 1977 a new seminary building was erected which continues to serve our needs. The seminary has played a vital role in the life of our synod, in training men for the office of the public ministry. Graduates of the seminary are serving established congregations, home mission congregations, and foreign missions. Certainly, it is fair to say - and with gratitude to God - that both Bethany Lutheran College and Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary have been instrumental in helping us to preserve Our Great Heritage and to "spread its light from age to age."

As we consider how the Lord has blessed our home and foreign mission programs so that today we have congregations in eighteen states - and with plans to start more home missions - and a foreign mission program that includes work in Peru, Chile, Czech Republic, Ukraine, and Australia, how our hearts should be filled with gratitude to our gracious Lord for blessing the work which we are doing in his name! May this inspire us to continue "to spread its light from age to age."

There is much emphasis in our day on church growth due, in part, to what is known as the Church Growth Movement. This Movement boasts great numbers. However, our examination of its theology shows that it is basically Reformed. From a document Brief Notes on the Church Growth Movement, put out by our Evangelism Committee, it is described as

“characteristically Reformed from its roots in decision theology, its failure to give prominence to the Means of Grace, and its substitution of an appeal to sociological concerns for the centrality of Law and Gospel.” For this reason we cannot take part in that kind of mission outreach. However, our opposition to the Church Growth Movement must not be an excuse for our doing nothing. No, as Christians we should indeed be interested in the right kind of church growth, namely the growth that comes from the proclamation of the Gospel and the right administration of the Sacraments. It is only through these means of grace that the Holy Ghost builds Christ's Church here on earth, creating and sustaining true faith. As we have been brought to faith by the power of the Gospel, so our concern should be that many others also be brought to a saving faith in Christ.

Secondly, we should be interested in church growth because God is concerned about church growth. His Word says that he “desires all men to be saved and come unto the knowledge of the truth.” (I Tim. 2:14) He has given us the Great Commission which bids us to go into the world “and make disciples of all nations.” He has given us the command “to preach the Gospel to every creature.” (Mark 16:15) Our Saviour has taught us to pray “Thy Kingdom Come” and we pray in our General Prayer, “Send forth laborers into thy harvest, and open the door of faith unto all the heathen and unto the people of Israel.” The saving of souls is the most important work there is and from God's perspective this is where the real action is in the world “There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repents.” (Luke 15:10) We also learn from Scripture that God permits the world to stand for the sake of the Gospel. Cf. Matthew 24:14. Certainly this should impress upon us the importance of church growth and inspire us to be participants in it.

We conclude this section with the reminder that mission-mindedness and doctrine-mindedness go hand in hand. The Great Commission demands that we be faithful with the Word and faithful to the Word. Both are important and we cannot pit the one against the other and say that the one is more important. There is the danger, though, of being so concerned about winning souls that we overlook, or underestimate, the importance of purity of doctrine. Not only does that dishonor Christ, but it also endangers the loss of the Gospel. On the other hand, we can be so concerned about doctrinal purity that we hide our light under a bushel instead of putting it on a lamp stand “where it gives light to everyone in the house.”

May we, then, continue to be a mission-minded and a doctrine-minded Synod. Then we will truly glorify God and carry out the Great Commission in accordance with his will. The same Savior who gave the command to preach the Gospel to every creature, will some day return in glory accompanied by his holy angels. In the meantime, we have his marching orders and he has given us the means whereby he will accomplish what he has commanded. Let us be about his work with dedication and zeal, realizing that the time is short and the task is great, but that his Word is powerful and will accomplish whatever he pleases.

The Inestimable Value of Our Great Heritage

In conclusion we want to call attention to the inestimable value of Our Great Heritage. It is one thing to talk about our heritage and to guard and preserve it, but it is another thing to see and treasure its inestimable, personal value. The hymn verse which has served as an outline for our essay expresses that value in these words, “Through life it guides our way, in death it is our stay.”

The psalmist says, “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.” (Psalm 119:105) That Word is a sure and reliable guide. It will not deceive, mislead or destroy. George Morris in his poem *My Mother's Bible* gives expression to this value when he writes: “In teaching me the way to live, It taught me how to die.” To learn how to live and to die is worth

more than all the wealth in the world. St. Paul puts it in clear perspective when he writes, "For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's." (Rom. 14:8)

In perusing some Synod Reports I came across an essay entitled *Sola Scriptura* by the sainted Justin A. Petersen, on the occasion of the 90th anniversary of the old Norwegian Synod. He writes about the importance of the Word in our lives as follows: "Our greatest danger is not this that the Word shall be falsified among us - though that danger is indeed great and ever-present, but rather that we shall grow negligent in our use of the Word. In either case Satan is well pleased. For he cares little that we have the pure Word, if he can keep us from using it." And commenting on the practical value of using the Word he says, "With the Word the weakest Christian is strong, but without the Word the strongest is as a feather before the hurricane. It is the Word alone in Word and Sacrament that can give the alarmed sinner certainty of his state of grace." (S.R. 1943, p. 24)

The inestimable value of the Word is also expressed in these words: "In death it is our stay." When the time comes for us to leave this world - as it most certainly will - the important thing will not be how successful or knowledgeable or wealthy we have become - as important as those blessings may be - but whether we are in possession of a saving faith in the Savior who died for us in order that we might live eternally with him. Then we can confidently say with the psalmist, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." (Psalm 23:4)

In closing we call attention to the concluding words of *Grace for Grace* which are as applicable today as when they were written:

The Norwegian Synod (now ELS) regards with concern the inroads of indifferentism, of unionism, and of error in the Lutheran churches generally; and it finds its sole justification for existence as a separate synod in the confident assurance, based on clear passages of Scripture, that it still owns the blessed heritage of the Reformation, the Gospel message of pure grace, to be acknowledged with thanksgiving, professed with sincerity, believing with confidence, preached with zeal and faithfulness, and delivered to succeeding generations without spot or blemish, the Gospel of a Christ Who is able to save to the uttermost and a hope that maketh not ashamed. (p. 211)

Let us give expression to the joy of Our Great Heritage by rising and singing the time-honored hymn which has served as the theme of our anniversary celebration

God's word is our great heritage,
And shall be ours for ever;
To spread its light from age to age
Shall be our chief endeavor;
Through life it guides our way,
In death it is our stay;
Lord grant, while worlds endure,
We keep its teachings pure,
Throughout all generations.

Hymnary 137

SOLI DEO GLORIA