

# Grace Before, In, and For All Time: The Election Controversy with Application to Inter-church Dialogue

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Two years ago, May of 2011, the Emmaus Conference initiated this free conference arrangement for the three presidents of the synods that once held membership in the old Synodical Conference (SC). The dialogue has proven beneficial. Some might say, long overdue. Will the WELS/ELS and the LCMS ever be back in fellowship? That may not occur in our lifetimes, but exploring carefully the existing obstacles and promoting free conferencing opportunities like this can assist church bodies conscientiously pledging themselves to Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions. We look to the future while not overlooking meaningful past differences that, God willing, can be addressed in due time and in a God-pleasing manner.

Taking note of the previous Emmaus topics, one could wonder where we are headed this time around. Are we stuck in the past or are we focused more on the present and the years to come? Pres. Schroeder's church fellowship essay dealt with the period of time (mid-1900s) that resulted in the dissolution of the SC in 1962. Pres. Harrison's essay last year took us back to the days of the early free conferences sponsored by C. F. W. Walther, 1856-1859. And now – well, we're going back further – not just a century or two, but beyond Bible times, leaping back *before time began!* But, really, it's also about the future. That's where election or predestination takes us.<sup>1</sup> So, with a feeble attempt to sanctify a phrase, *we're going back to the future!* (Hold on to your chairs and buckle up!)

We can say with deep gratitude that each of the previous Emmaus presentations centered on what was at the heart of the *real* Emmaus meeting that first Easter evening. Our prayer is that this modest offering does the same: open our eyes to see Jesus! That's what the topic drives. That's why this subject matter comforts. That's why this deep, humanly impenetrable topic "makes sense." "For he chose us **in him** before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons **through Jesus Christ**, in accordance with his pleasure and will – to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us **in the One he loves**" (Ephesians 1:4-6).<sup>2</sup> "This grace was given us **in Christ Jesus** before the beginning of time" (2 Timothy 1:9).

Why delve into predestination for our purposes *here*? As many of you here in the audience know, the election doctrine played a significant role in the origination of the ELS. It served as the reason for beginning worship services at this very location, Parkland Lutheran Church, Tacoma, Washington, under the leadership of Pastor Bjug A. Harstad. But this doctrine and the ensuing controversy also exerted considerable influence on inter-church relations within the old Synodical Conference. Some regarded the dispute as purely theoretical, holding little significance for church fellowship purposes. In fact, that's how the merger church of 1917 (NLCA) treated the matter. When a church fails to see or fully appreciate the connecting link

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<sup>1</sup> Some Lutheran theologians have distinguished between the terms. D. Hollaz maintained that "election" relates more to the objects elected, whereas "predestination" more to the end and order of means within election (cf. H. Schmid's *Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 286). Others have contended that "predestination" is not preferable since it carries a Calvinistic connotation (cf. A. Suelflow's *Servant of the Word*, 168).

<sup>2</sup> The NIV 1984 edition is used throughout the essay, unless passages are found in quotations from others.

between any given teaching of Holy Writ and that of the Hauptartikel (Justification), it is in grave peril of losing both the *material* principle of the Lutheran Reformation and its *formal* principle.<sup>3</sup> In today's theological clime, can the same thing occur with a doctrine like church fellowship, the point of demarcation in the dissolution of the old SC? Turning our sights to God's saving grace in Christ poured out on us *before time, in time, and for all time*, giving no little attention to a bitter controversy that especially affected Norwegian Lutherans, we hope to find a paradigmatic legacy for the inter-church relations before us today.<sup>4</sup> But first, a brief overview of the doctrine itself.

### Grace Before Time

Last summer national news outlets showed a number of amazing photos of the Northern Lights. In that same month of July, young people from the ELS visited the Creation Museum in Petersburg, Kentucky. The Milky Way was on display in the museum's planetarium. This presenter had a chance to be there with them. Who of us is not impressed as we look to the skies? We begin to realize what a vast creation our loving God has put together and how small each of us really is in terms of occupied space. The theme for the national convention held at a neighboring university in Cincinnati was fitting: "From Beginning to End You are Mine."

As much as we fellow Christians marvel at the intricacies of our universe and praise our magnificent Creator, something more amazing involves us that "predates" the *beginning*. Long before you and I were born—even before creation—God chose us to be his believers! "In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will" (Ephesians 1:4-5). "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.... Who shall bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? ...For I am convinced that neither death nor life...nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:28-39). "You did not choose me, but I chose you" (John 15:16). "But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14). "...God, who has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Timothy 1:9-10). Other verses in Scripture also could be cited: e.g., Matthew 22:14, John 10:27-30, and, of course, the entire first chapter of Ephesians.

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<sup>3</sup> The material principle is justification. The formal principle is the source of all doctrine, holy Scripture.

<sup>4</sup> A 2012 dissertation by John M. Brenner, presented at Marquette U., "The Election Controversy Among Lutherans in the Twentieth Century: An Examination of the Underlying Problems," contends: "The Lutheran doctrine of church fellowship is intimately involved in the failures to resolve the Election Controversy in the twentieth century. These differences continue to divide Lutheranism in America and the divisions will not be mended without a resolution of these differences." Brenner's doctoral thesis appears to be the most comprehensive treatment of the Election Controversy from the vantage point of involving the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. Access is available at: <[http://epublications.marquette.edu/dissertations\\_mu/204/](http://epublications.marquette.edu/dissertations_mu/204/)>.

Our Lutheran confessors link God's eternal decree of election with the way he in time has individuals apprehend his grace: "In this his eternal counsel, purpose and ordinance God has not only prepared salvation in general, but he has also graciously considered and elected to salvation each and every individual among the elect who are to be saved through Christ, and also ordained that in the manner just recounted he wills by his grace, gifts, and effective working to bring them to salvation and to help, further, strengthen, and preserve them to this end" (FC XI:23, Tappert, 619).

Checking the Epitome to the Formula of Concord, we can summarize Article XI this way: *Election* -is to be distinguished from God's foreknowledge; -pertains only to believers; -is only to be found in the Word and not men's speculations; -is always "in Christ" who is "the book of life"; -is not to be judged on the basis of man's reason or on God's law; -is to be taught as gospel and as comfort; -is set forth according to the order that St. Paul gives in his letter to the Romans; -does not pertain to those who will perish in unbelief and go to their destruction by their own fault; -is not to be investigated outside of what is revealed in the Word of God; -has us "put forth every effort to live according to the will of God"; -is a teaching that gives God the glory entirely and completely, without any merit in us.

### *A mysterious but comforting doctrine*

So, from where comes the *reason* for this mysterious but gracious decree? It's not inside us. How can it be? By nature we not only are bad apples externally but sinners to the core, so that the expected, deteriorating course for us all would not simply be that of rotting in a basket under some garden tree but rotting for eternity in the never-ending casket of hell! The effects of original sin go beyond the grave in this life. Yes, "death came to all men, because all sinned" (Romans 5:12) and "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). Yet the deadly pall cast over each sinner by nature is even that of a lasting variety: damnation! "The result of one trespass was condemnation for all men" (Romans 5:18). No, the reason for this gracious election is all found in his Son: Jesus Christ, the Savior. God wants us so much to know and believe this that he tells us he even chose his Son to be sacrificed at the cross *before* any of his acts in creating the universe. Jesus is "the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world" (Revelation 13:8). The inspired Pentecost sermon referenced the same: "This man," said Peter, "was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge..." (Acts 2:23).

Can you and I know we personally are chosen for heaven? The ELS catechism answers this question with emphasis: "Yes! Whenever a person hears the Gospel and trusts in Christ alone for the forgiveness of sins, that person can be confident he is one of the elect" (#231). Romans 8:28-30 is listed as proof. The election teaching is ditto or double assurance that we are saved fully by God's undeserved love freely given in his Son. Not only did salvation come by the incarnation and the life and death and resurrection of Jesus; not only did it come by the Holy Spirit working faith in us; not only did it come through the washing of water with the Word at the font; not only did it come by God preserving us in the truth until life everlasting through Word and Sacrament; no, it even came by a Trinitarian act of mercy in predestining our souls! Commenting on Paul's powerful election discussion in the eighth chapter of Romans, Luther remarks, "This doctrine is not so incomprehensible as many think, but is rather full of sweet comfort for the elect and for all who have the Holy Spirit."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Martin Luther, *Commentary on Romans*, tr. J. T. Mueller (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1976), 128. For a similar translation see LW 25:371.

*For personal comfort and joy*

FC XI contains this important sentence: “Accordingly, if any one presents the doctrine concerning the gracious election of God in such a manner that troubled Christians cannot derive comfort from it, but are thereby incited to despair, or that the impenitent are confirmed in their wantonness, it is undoubtedly sure and true that such a doctrine is taught, not according to the Word and will of God, but according to [the blind judgment of human] reason and the instigation of the devil.”<sup>6</sup> The pastoral nature of the Lutheran confessors comes through. The treatment of this scriptural doctrine is to occur in the context of consolation.

Believers in Christ are invited to view the entire subject of predestination as pure gospel.<sup>7</sup> Contrary to Calvin’s theology, there is no consideration here of the reprobate (double predestination<sup>8</sup>). The doctrine is all in the realm of God’s grace and is meant to give added strength for those looking to the merits of Christ for every ounce of spiritual goodness. If for some reason—as for Luther in his early years—doubts arise from within the heart of a Christian because sin still lurks in its corners, this does not mean abandoning the election doctrine for comfort. It does mean, however, going where election itself directs: God’s grace and the merits of Christ.<sup>9</sup> Advice provided young Martin from Johann Staupitz is well-known as the father-confessor countered the idle speculation toying with Luther’s mind: “Look at the wounds of Christ and at the blood that was shed for you. From these predestination will shine. Consequently, one must listen to the Son of God, who was sent into the flesh and appeared to destroy the work of the devil (1 John 3:8) and to make you sure about predestination.”<sup>10</sup>

Pastorally, a mature Luther dealt similarly with others. Writing to a man troubled with uncertainty about his election, he once provided this excellent counsel:

God has given us his Son, Jesus Christ, whom we should remember every day and to whom we should look as in a mirror. For outside of Christ there is only danger, death and devil, but in him everything is peace and joy. Whosoever is constantly tormented by the predestination wins nothing else than fear. Therefore avoid and flee these thoughts that look like Satan’s temptation in paradise and, instead of that, look at Christ.<sup>11</sup>

In a conversation where Luther had just mentioned his book, *De Servo Arbitrio* (*Bondage of the Will*, 1525), Luther warned of attempts to investigate what is hidden. John Mathesius in 1540 records in *Table Talk* the Reformer comparing the mystery of election to that of the incarnation:

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<sup>6</sup> FC XI:91 (*Triglotta* version, 1093).

<sup>7</sup> A comforting devotion on election is included in **Appendix A**. The devotion by J. Gerhard concludes with this evangelical invitation: “Seek your election and your writing in the book of life in Christ alone.”

<sup>8</sup> Often known also as unconditional or absolute election, John Calvin (1509-1564) taught that not only some people but also some angels have been predestined to eternal death. A clear summation of Calvinism can be found in the Westminster Confession (1647) of the Presbyterians; cf. Schaff’s *The Creeds of Christendom*, vol. III, 608-609.

The handy acronym TULIP shows “logical consistency” for Calvin in his approach: T-total depravity, U-unconditional election, L-limited atonement, I-irresistible grace, P-perseverance of the saints (once saved, always saved).

<sup>9</sup> Sometimes we speak of these as the two causes of our election. In reality, these are really one and the same.

<sup>10</sup> LW 5:47.

<sup>11</sup> For this citation, see W. Kreiss, “The Lutheran Theology of Certitude,” *Lutheran Synod Quarterly*, vol. XX, no. 1 (March 1980), 58, [W<sup>2</sup> X, 1748 s.].

I was troubled by the thought of what God would do with me, but at length I repudiated such a thought and threw myself entirely on his revealed will. We can't do anything better than that. The hidden will of God can't be searched out by man. God hides it on account of that very clever spirit, the devil, in order that he may be deceived.... We have enough to learn about the humanity of Christ, in whom the Father revealed himself. But we are fools who neglect the revealed Word and the will of the Father in Christ and, instead, investigate mysteries which ought only be worshiped. As a result many break their necks.<sup>12</sup>

The same admonition appears in this citation from his comments on Genesis:

Accordingly, you who are listening to me now should remember that I have taught that one should not inquire into the predestination of the hidden God but should be satisfied with what is revealed through the calling and through the ministry of the Word. For then you can be sure about your faith and salvation and say, "I believe in the Son of God, who said (John 3:36): 'He who believes in the Son has eternal life.'" Hence no condemnation or wrath rests on him, but he enjoys the good pleasure of God the Father.<sup>13</sup>

Note also a gem from a sermon by Cyriakus Spangenburg, a former student of Luther at Wittenberg (1542) who served as pastor in Eisleben and Mansfeld. He preached a seven-part sermon series on predestination in 1565. He holds out solid comfort and certitude for believers as they ponder their election:

God is reliable; he is neither vacillating nor capricious. What he has planned happens irrevocably. He has predestined us to be his children, apart from any human merit or worthiness, so nothing can prevent our salvation.... God has planned to save many thousands times thousands human creatures and to lift them out of the crushing condemnation in which they were struck by nature to eternal glory. Before the world began, he made his choice on the basis of pure mercy and sheer goodness.<sup>14</sup>

Hymnwriter Paul Gerhardt (1607-1676), a man who suffered many personal losses (at a young age four of his five children died, also his wife; his superiors at his church demanded he compromise his doctrine, which he did not), wrote this about his own election:

Thy love, O Lord, before my birth  
Thou didst elect to show me,  
And for my sake didst come to earth  
Before I e'er did know Thee.  
Yea, long before Thy gracious hand  
Created me, Thy grace had planned  
To make Thee mine forever. (ELH #129:2)

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<sup>12</sup> LW 54:385.

<sup>13</sup> LW 5:50.

<sup>14</sup> Spangenburg captured well Luther's concept of the bondage of the will and its corollary doctrine of election, emphasizing both grace and certainty in the realm of the sinner's salvation. This citation is found in lectures given by Robert Kolb at Bethany Lutheran College in Mankato, MN, in 1993. We refer the reader to the *Lutheran Synod Quarterly*, March 1994, 44-45.

*In relation to objective justification*

Universal redemption<sup>15</sup> and its corollary, objective justification,<sup>16</sup> not only are essential in the proper understanding and presentation of election; here any false assumptions are dispelled. This unfortunately was never grasped or embraced by John Calvin. Calvin saw as the center of theology God's *sovereignty* and not, as did Luther, God's work of *salvation* in Christ. The test of a true exegete and expositor of God's holy Word is that he accepts universal redemption/objective justification and simultaneously a particular election. For this reason, a faithful Lutheran instructor will not presume to present predestination<sup>17</sup> without first laying the groundwork of the comforting assurance that comes through the universal effects of the atonement.<sup>18</sup> That is offered freely to the individual in the holy means of grace.

In this regard, is there reason for concern in some Lutheran circles? Can it be said unmistakably today that all pastors and teachers from the former SC synods uphold and proclaim what was a hallmark doctrine of the former glory days for the old Conference (est. 1872<sup>19</sup>)? *Why* are rumblings raised in some corners to objective justification? Is there a fear

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<sup>15</sup> Universal redemption refers to how Christ was the full ransom or payment for all sin. This payment for sin was made to the heavenly Father, not to the devil. "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men" (1 Timothy 2:5, 6). "He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:2). At the cross of Calvary the redemption was accomplished, the sacrifice completed for all people of all time.

<sup>16</sup> The forensic/judicial aspect is emphasized with this term. On the basis of Christ's sacrifice and his perfect obedience of God's law in our place (Romans 5:18-19), God the Father, who is appeased and sees the world differently as a result, does not impute (count or reckon) sin but declares the whole world righteous or innocent (2 Corinthians 5:19, Romans 4:5, Romans 5:18, Romans 3:23-24). The resurrection of Christ serves as a powerful confirmation and declaration by God that sinners have been forgiven as a result of the redemptive work at Calvary; Romans 4:25. In the Greek of this verse the preposition is διὰ with the accusative: "...because of our justification."

<sup>17</sup> Paul E. Kretzmann in his *Popular Commentary of the Bible*, vol. II (St. Louis: Concordia, 1923) gives this all-encompassing definition of election: "The eternal election of grace means that God has chosen each and every person of the elect, those that are now Christians and love God, and therefore us also, before the foundation of the world, unto Himself, for His own, and destined them for eternal glory; this decree being carried out in time, when God called these people and transmitted to them the full blessing of justification through the merits of Jesus. And this purpose of God will surely be carried out. Thus the election of God is the cause not only of our salvation, but also of our being called, converted, justified. Faith is the result of the election of God, and gives the believer the guarantee that he belongs to the elect and will finally obtain eternal glory" (p. 47).

<sup>18</sup> For an in-depth study of Paul's paradigm in setting forth election, esp. in Romans 8 and 9, see the *Lutheran Synod Quarterly*, vol. 42, nos. 2 & 3.

<sup>19</sup> The very first meeting of the Synodical Conference (July, 1872) gave answer to questions pertinent to "universal absolution" or "objective justification." The main presenter on this is of special note: Fredrich A. Schmidt, who later would become the focal point in the Election Controversy. The SC Proceedings, translated from the German, include this clarification from a definitive essay delivered for the occasion: "This doctrine (of universal justification) is expressly stated in Rom. 5:18; and it is, therefore, not only a biblical doctrine, but also a biblical expression, that 'justification of life has come upon all men' (Luther's translation). Only a Calvinistic interpretation could explain the passage so as to make out that only the elect have been justified. Those who say that God has *made* the whole world righteous, but deny that he has *declared* the world righteous, deny thereby in reality the whole of justification; for this that the Father has declared the world righteous must not be separated from this that the Son made the world righteous, when the Father raised Christ from the dead" (cf. *ELS Synod Report 1954*, p. 40). This citation from 1872 was used for a critical review of the Declaration of 1938 and the Common Confession of 1950. The ALC persistently had maintained that one could not speak of justification as *pronounced* upon all men, or that in the resurrection of Jesus it could be said that God *proclaimed* all sinners justified in him. Specifically, the ALC never had denied that the redemption of Christ covers all people, but the denial was found in the discussion of what is justification.

Historian E. C. Frederich, referencing discussions on objective/universal justification in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, makes an interesting observation: "How closely this was related to the sharp election-conversion

universalism will preside? Is it merely a dispute over semantics? Is it a concern about careless speech<sup>20</sup> or is it deeper in nature, impinging on the validity, efficacy and objective nature of the means of grace? What is truly offered in absolution and in the sacraments: a *potential* forgiveness or a *genuine* forgiveness? Does not faith itself need what is genuine? Is there not in the means of grace a real impartation of the remission of sins?

The doctrine of universal redemption states that on the cross Jesus Christ paid the full penalty for the sins of *everyone* in the world. Concerning the Messiah, Isaiah prophesied that “the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:6). John the Baptist pointed to Jesus as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). Therefore God has declared the *whole world* forgiven because of what Christ accomplished on the cross. The resurrection of the Savior is proof of this forensic/judicial act of God (fn 14). This divine act is called justification (that is, to declare one not guilty) and is an objective, universal, true-for-all fact. God’s act of justification exists apart from faith. Paul wrote, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:23–24). The personal faith needed to save an individual takes hold of this objective truth and this faith is frequently called *subjective* or *personal* justification. The apostle Paul shows the relationship between objective and subjective justification: “However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness” (Romans 4:5). Although the whole world has been justified once for all through Christ’s atoning sacrifice, many do not come to faith and therefore will not enter heaven. The use of the terms “objective” and “subjective” to describe justification is not found in Scripture or the Confessions. For this reason, some within Lutheranism contend we should speak only about *objective reconciliation* and *justification by faith*. But if one denies the Bible ever speaks of the sins of the entire world being forgiven and holds only sins of believers are forgiven, this is not just quibbling about terms. It involves God’s own doctrine as set forth in His holy Word. Objective justification is clearly taught in a key passage: “God was reconciling **the world** to himself in Christ, **not counting men’s sins against them**” (2 Corinthians 5:19). While Paul uses the word “reconciling” (καταλλάσσω) here, he clearly means that forgiveness of sins is really imputed (μὴ λογζόμενος αὐτοῖς τὰ παραπτώματα αὐτῶν) to “the world.” Elsewhere, Paul writes that Christ died for sinners (Romans 5:8) and that through Jesus’ righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life (Romans 5:18).

Our Lutheran Confessions likewise say of Christ, “He was given for us to make satisfaction for the sins of the world and has been appointed as the mediator and propitiator” (Ap IV, 40). Referring to the work of the God-Man in effecting forgiveness, the Formula states: “[T]herefore it is a perfect satisfaction and reconciliation of the human race, since it satisfied the eternal and immutable righteousness of God revealed in the law. This obedience is our righteousness which avails before God and is revealed in the Gospel, upon which faith depends...” (FC, SD, III, 57). In the Epitome we read this affirmation: “But the Gospel, strictly speaking, is the kind of doctrine that teaches what a man who has not kept the law and is condemned by it should believe, namely, that Christ has satisfied and paid for all guilt...” (Ep V, 4). In discussing the Fifth Petition, the Large Catechism comments: “Not that he does not

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debate is not easy to determine, but it is striking that the same theological camp that could not bear an election without faith at the same time raised objections to a justification without faith.” *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1992), 113.

<sup>20</sup> The “saints in hell” expression of Kokomo (Indiana) can scarcely be defended. “Saint” is a term reserved only for a believer.

forgive sin even without and before our prayer; and he gave us the Gospel, in which there is nothing but forgiveness, before we prayed or even thought of it" (LC, Fifth Petition, 88).

Essentially the question is: What actually happened at the cross of Calvary? Did Christ accomplish in reality the forgiveness of sins for the whole world? Most assuredly He did! "He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:2). It is this objective fact which is held out to the world. Our faith or unbelief does not change this objective fact. Of what else would faith take hold?

Dr. Luther wrote in his Galatians commentary: "...Christ has taken away not only the sins of some men but your sins and those of the whole world. The offering was for the sins of the whole world, even though the whole world does not believe."<sup>21</sup> This quintessential teaching of Scripture comforts the believer. Since Jesus Christ paid for all sins and God declares everyone's sins forgiven, the person who now hears the message and is moved by the Spirit's power to grab on to it can know Jesus has excluded no one from salvation and that God "wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4). And if for *all*, this has to include *me*!

Again, we refer to a famous citation from Luther:

Even he who does not believe that he is free and his sins forgiven shall also learn, in due time, how assuredly his sins were forgiven, even though he did not believe it. St. Paul says in Rom. 3[:3]: "Their faithlessness [does not] nullify the faithfulness of God." We are not talking here either about people's belief or disbelief regarding the efficacy of the keys. We realize that few believe. We are speaking of what the keys accomplish and give. He who does not accept what the keys give receives, of course, nothing. But this is not the key's fault. Many do not believe the gospel, but this does not mean that the gospel is not true or effective. 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.<sup>22</sup>

In 1533 Luther and Melancthon were asked to weigh in on a controversy in Nürnberg. The question revolved around private confession and absolution. The city council was firm in maintaining that the clergy practice public confession and absolution. Osiander preached against the use of public confession and absolution. Luther and Melancthon issued an opinion that *both* public and private confession and absolution should occur, since the preaching of the gospel is the same as proclaiming forgiveness of sin in any specific location. They said:

The preaching of the holy gospel itself is principally and actually an absolution in which forgiveness of sins is proclaimed in general and in public to many persons, or publicly or privately to one person alone. Therefore absolution may be used in public and in general, and in special cases also in private, just as the sermon may take place publicly or privately, and as one might comfort many people in public or someone individually in private. Even if not all believe [the word of absolution], that is no reason to reject [public] absolution, for each absolution, whether administered publicly or privately, has to be understood as demanding faith and as being an aid to those who believe in it, just as the gospel

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<sup>21</sup> LW 26:38.

<sup>22</sup> LW 40:366, 367.



itself also proclaims forgiveness to all men in the whole world and exempts no one from this universal context. Nevertheless the gospel certainly demands our faith and does not aid those who do not believe it; and yet the universal context of the gospel has to remain [valid].<sup>23</sup>

The trouble with *any* questioning of objective justification, according to Robert Preus, is the tragedy where “one begins to look for assurance of salvation and grace, not in the objective atonement and righteousness of Christ, but in the quality of strength of one’s faith, as if justifying faith is something other than pure trust and receptivity.... Walther points out that to make justification depend upon faith ultimately robs a poor sinner of comfort, for then his faith becomes, not a result of the Gospel’s powerful working, but a part of the Gospel itself.”<sup>24</sup>

Preus gives a good illustration of how this plays out pastorally. Suppose you and a church friend had opportunity to share the gospel with an old unchurched man who, for all practical purposes, shows himself to be unconverted. Your friend tells him of the grace of God toward all sinners as it has been carried out in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Your friend lets him know that it is God’s grace that all sinners now have full forgiveness and that through the work of Jesus sinners are saved. Now, Preus proposes this for consideration:

The man responds with utter joy. “What a wonderful message,” he says, “what a wonderful, comforting message for a poor old sinner.” But you interject, “Wait a minute, sir, you have to believe this message! Everything my friend here has said is of no value to you unless you believe it.” How do you react to this little scenario? Do you think your interjection helped the old man? Is not what you did rather foolish and dangerous? It is like taking in a beautiful sunset on my front porch and being told that somehow my appreciation of this conditioned it.... But we Lutherans, following Apology IV, the most significant treatise ever written on the subject of justification by faith, are realists, and our faith rests on the realities of the Gospel of justification.<sup>25</sup>

S.C. Ylvisaker, a former president of Bethany Lutheran College, once put it memorably: “The Bible doctrine is simply that when Christ died for our sins, God declared the whole world forgiven and now God wants us to believe this. Others say: ‘Believe, and thou shalt be justified.’ God says: ‘Believe that thou hast been justified.’ And the thing is as simple as that—but what a difference when death stares a person in the face.”<sup>26</sup>

### Grace In Time

As we think of God’s *grace before time* (his election decree), we must not assume, however, that loving warnings are not necessary as we now deal with his *grace in time*. While election is speaking to our dominant new man, we are aware that the old man still lurks around. The Christian in this life is still *simul iustus et peccator*.

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<sup>23</sup> LW 50:76–77.

<sup>24</sup> Robert Preus (“Perennial Problems in the Doctrine of Justification,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, July 1981, 163ff.) refers to chapter 25 in Walther’s *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

<sup>26</sup> *Sigurd Christian Ylvisaker 1884–1959*, ed. P. Harstad (Bethany Lutheran College, Mankato, MN: 1984), 53.

*For holy living*

Election assurance, based for us now in time on objective justification as offered personally to our souls in Word and sacrament, does not mean adopting a careless attitude toward the gospel (e.g., what Bonhoeffer called “cheap grace”). False or carnal security cannot be associated with the biblical teaching of predestination. Lutheranism does not promote the “once saved always saved” pre-determinism of John Calvin. Just as we pray the petition our Lord taught us, “Lead us not into temptation,” so too we heed Peter’s reminder: “Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure” (2 Peter 1:10). The *in time* usage of God’s Word and the wonderful meal of our Lord’s Table is essential. Peter goes on to say, “We have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well [Greek says: you *are* doing well] to pay attention to it” (2 Peter 1:19). In 2 Thessalonians 2:13 we read, “God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit.” The term “sanctifying” (ἐν ἁγιασμῷ πνεύματος) here is used in a broad sense to encompass all that the Holy Spirit does in bringing us to faith and preserving us in that faith until life everlasting.

A carpenter counts on his hammers, nails, and tools to bring about the building of a sturdy house. God uses spiritual tools too to bring about his spiritual house: the elect for eternity. God, of course, transcends any earthly builder. He would not need tools to do his work. Except, he said so (Romans 10:17). The plan of God in using his means of grace to bring people to faith *in time* and to preserve his elected remnant for everlasting bliss suffers sharp ridicule. That’s expected. “If God wants people for heaven, can’t he just zap them?—Why all the fuss about baptism and church?” Like Naaman the Syrian scoffing at Elisha’s insistence he wash himself in the Jordan to remove his leprosy, people treat baptism as too simplistic and unimpressive. But here comes the resounding response: “God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe” (1 Corinthians 1:21), and “...baptism doth also now save us” (1 Peter 3:21; KJV).

As crazy as it would be to suggest a builder bring about a house without lifting a tool, so it is a Scripture-revealed absurdity to suggest the house of God’s elect be erected without any use of the very tools he has put into action. Therefore, since election to heaven includes faith in Christ as the Savior, and since this is worked only by the regenerative power of the Holy Spirit, and since the Spirit uses only the tools of Word and Sacrament for this to happen; therefore, also a proper understanding of the means of grace is imperative for a proper view of predestination. So, we love to gather at the font,<sup>27</sup> at the Table, and around the pulpit.

The proper relationship between justification and sanctification (*nexus indivulsis*) always needs to be maintained. Pietists often complain of too much justification. They say it discourages the sanctified life. They express a similar fear about election, which is pure Gospel. But, as H. Schmid states, “The doctrine of justification must always form the center of a sermon.... Christians must not begin to think that the doctrine of justification to which they cling is not enough, nor must they look at their faith to know whether they have the right claim to the comfort of the forgiveness of sins as their own and thus build their confidence on their

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<sup>27</sup> The certitude Dr. Luther attributes to baptism is an indication of how any questions of one’s election should be directed to this powerful washing of water with the Word. Luther’s statement in the Large Catechism is memorable: “To appreciate and use Baptism aright, we must draw strength and comfort from it when our sins or conscience oppress us, and we must retort, ‘But I am baptized! [Ego tamen baptizatus sum!’] And if I am baptized, I have the promise that I shall be saved and have eternal life, both in soul and body” (LC IV, 44; Tappert, 442).

faith.”<sup>28</sup> The doctrine of sanctification, of course, needs presentation (Romans 6:19, 22; 1 Thessalonians 4:1-7), but never at the expense of the one motivating force: the *grace* of God in Christ Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:14-15). This grace includes election.

### **Grace For All Time**

The heart of this paper is yet to come. If election is all grace, all Gospel, the church throughout the ages seeks to present it as such and fights every attempt to insert the poisonous infiltration of *aliquid in homine* (something in man, making him meritorious for God’s choosing). “When the Church, then, preaches that grace and that truth which are revealed in this Word of God, it may preach with all boldness and confidence, and sinners may place their trust on this message as on a rock that cannot be moved.”<sup>29</sup>

### *For careful interpretation*

Heresy in connection with the doctrine of election has by no means been limited to denominations with a bent toward Calvinism. We list some examples. It should not surprise us how the Roman Church forbids an individual from being certain he/she is numbered among the elect, for the papal system is predicated on doubt and work-righteousness.<sup>30</sup> Within the established church of Luther’s youth there appears to have been at least three views floating around: a) God elected those who would make right use of the free will; b) double predestination (probably carried over from Augustine, who at least *allowed* for it); and c) apparently, as evidenced by Staupitz, even a correct view in a rather rudimentary manner. Barthian neo-orthodoxy tried to stave off the charge of universalism, but has had a difficult time doing so, since—in the estimation of some—Karl Barth (1886-1968) “made absolutely clear that Jesus Christ is the only truly rejected person and that all humans are elect in him.”<sup>31</sup> While at one time in our land among churches with historical ties to the Reformed the supralapsarian view of Calvin held sway, most today are either infralapsarian<sup>32</sup> or tend toward an Arminian view. For the most part, as you might expect, Arminian-based churches (Methodists, Pentecostals, etc.) teach an election always conditioned on man’s faith (*intuitu fidei*).<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Heinrich Schmid, *The History of Pietism*, trans. J. Langbartels (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2007), 310-311.

<sup>29</sup> *Grace for Grace*, ed. S. C. Ylvisaker (Mankato: Lutheran Synod Book Co., 1943), 3.

<sup>30</sup> The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent in January of 1547 declared: “No one...so long as he lives this mortal life, ought in regard to the sacred mystery of divine predestination, so far presume as to state with certainty that he is among the number of the predestined.... For except by special revelation, it cannot be known whom God has chosen to Himself.” Sixth Session, Chapter XII; cf. H. Schroeder’s edition, 38.

<sup>31</sup> S. Grenz and R. Olson, *20<sup>th</sup> Century Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992), 74. Grenz makes this observation in reference to Barth’s comment on God and election in his *Church Dogmatics* II, 2, 319-320. Barth failed to identify the Bible as the Word of God, but said it is a witness to the same.

<sup>32</sup> Supralapsarian refers to “before the fall” where God is purported to have made a double decree; i.e., to eternal life and to eternal fire. Infralapsarian refers to “after the fall or in the fall” where God is said to have decided simply to let some people lapse, i.e., not to try as hard for their conversion.

<sup>33</sup> These churches, as a result of adhering to some cooperative effort on the part of man in the way of conversion and faith preservation, teach that no one can be absolutely *certain* of his salvation or election. The official website for the Assemblies of God states: “The Assemblies of God leans toward Arminianism, though it accepts scriptural truth found in both positions. We agree with the Calvinist emphasis on God’s sovereignty or supreme power and authority. But we also firmly believe the Arminian emphasis on mankind’s free will and responsibility for his actions and choices. We believe the Bible teaches both truths.” <[http://ag.org/top/Beliefs/topics/gendoct\\_09\\_security.cfm](http://ag.org/top/Beliefs/topics/gendoct_09_security.cfm)>.

What about Lutherans? Has there been consistency in interpretation, whether *pre-* or *post-*FC XI? Did Luther himself always profess the election doctrine in the way the orthodox Lutheran church presents it today? Reformed theologians like to cite Luther's 1525 *De Servo Arbitrio* (*Bondage of the Will*) as alleged evidence he was a supporter of Calvinism. Some contend Luther changed his mind in later years.<sup>34</sup> The eminence of this Luther writing (endorsed in FC XI, as well as in I and II), coupled with the lingering charge from the Reformed, compelled F. Bente to author a twenty-plus page defense of Luther and his *De Servo Arbitrio*. It is included in the *Triglotta* (intro., 209ff.). Bente's conclusion is that Luther was stressing the principle "we must neither deny nor investigate nor be concerned about the hidden God, but study as he has revealed himself in the Gospel and firmly rely on his gracious promises in the means of grace."<sup>35</sup> P. Althaus offers a helpful distinction:

In the final analysis, Luther does not establish a theoretical doctrine of double predestination as Calvin does. In spite of all appearances to the contrary, his theology is at this point completely pastoral. His idea of the hidden God finally tends only to purify the Christian's faith from all secret claims and all self-security by proclaiming the freedom of God's grace. In this he agrees with Paul in Romans 9-11. He has just as little independent interest in an eternal rejection as Paul does.<sup>36</sup>

In relation to Ezekiel 18:23 and 32, Luther scorns any searching into the mind of God as to his pre-directing the damned. He remarks:

But why some are touched by the law and others are not, so that the former accept and the latter despise the offered grace, is another question and one not dealt with by Ezekiel in this passage. For he is here speaking of the preached and offered mercy of God, not of that hidden and awful [*metuenda*, fearful] will of God whereby he ordains by his own counsel which and what sort of persons he wills to be recipients and partakers of his preached and offered mercy. This will is not to be inquired into, but reverently adored, as by far the most awe-inspiring secret of the Divine Majesty, reserved for himself alone and forbidden to us much more religiously than any number of Corycian caverns.<sup>37</sup>

One of the great and saddest ironies in the history of Lutheranism is how the author of half of our Confessions—including his quintessential explanation of the scriptural doctrine of justification in Ap. IV—was the very one who sowed the seeds for several controversies after Luther's departure. This is the case in connection with ensuing controversies on predestination. Melancthon opened the door. Although the initial paragraph of Formula XI mentions no major

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<sup>34</sup> F. Bente, *Historical Introductions to the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (found in *Triglotta*) (St. Louis: Concordia, 1921), 224.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 225. Bente (219) re-emphasizes this point: "Wherever Luther touches on predestination, both before and after 1525, essentially the same thoughts are found, though not developed as extensively as in *De Servo Arbitrio*. He consistently maintains that God's majesty must be neither denied nor searched, and that Christians should be admonished to look and rely solely upon the revealed universal promises of the Gospel."

<sup>36</sup> Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, tr. R. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 286.

<sup>37</sup> LW 33:138, 139. The cave that is referenced is Corycos, today known as Khorgos. Located in Cilicia, it had a lore about it as being one of the entrances leading to the underworld.

controversy<sup>38</sup> that triggered the inclusion of a special article on election, Bente insists on a keen sense for the obvious:

The framers of the Formula were well aware of the fact that the least error in the doctrine of free will and conversion was bound to manifest itself also in the doctrine of election, and that perhaps in a form much more difficult to detect. Hence Article XI was not only intended to be a bulwark against the assaults on the doctrine of grace coming from Calvinistic quarters, but also an additional reinforcement of the article of Free Will against the Synergists, in order to prevent a future recrudescence of their errors in the sphere of predestination.<sup>39</sup>

In summary, we could say two things in particular prompted Andreas, Chemnitz, and crew to include Article XI in the Formula: Melanchthon's synergism was showing itself, and then there also was the long, drawn out controversy on the Lord's Supper. The latter is mentioned since Calvinism, unfortunately, had started penetrating Lutheranism. If the eyes of reason were not poked out on the clear teaching of the Real Presence, how could anyone expect less need for radical eye surgery in connection with election?

*For proper presentation (conversion also<sup>40</sup>)*

Lutherans know that a faulty understanding of predestination consistently leads to an error regarding conversion and vice versa. Philip Melanchthon's *Loci* of 1543 (found even in the 1535 edition) blatantly and foolishly contains the damnable "three causes of conversion": the Holy Spirit, the Word of God, and the consenting will of man. His explanation to the three causes betrays how his synergism in point of conversion resulted naturally in a faulty understanding of predestination. When he began to speak of a cause of conversion in human beings, he could not avoid the matching implication for election. Melanchthon wrote, "Since the promise is universal and since in God there are not conflicting wills, it is necessary that there is some cause within us for the difference as to why Saul is rejected and David received, that is, there must be a different action on the part of the two men."<sup>41</sup> So, there can be no question Melanchthon unwittingly contributed to a synergistic interpretation of predestination that would reveal itself primarily in the next century among such Lutheran pastors as Latermann, Dreier, and Hornejus.<sup>42</sup> Imagine how this egregious departure from *sola gratia* by Luther's right-hand scholar<sup>43</sup> fueled the cause of any who leaned toward an *intuitu fidei* presentation of election. The embers were ready to ignite.

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<sup>38</sup> A minor conflict occurred in 1561-63 in the city of Strassburg. John Marbach properly contended with Jerome Zanchi who was attempting to insert the Calvinistic "once saved always saved" into the local community.

<sup>39</sup> Bente, 204.

<sup>40</sup> The election controversy in America, several centuries after Melanchthon's time, had as much to do with conversion as predestination. The question is this: Does faith flow from election, or does election flow from faith? (Answer: the former.)

<sup>41</sup> P. Melanchthon, *Loci Communes* (1543), tr. J.A.O. Preus (St. Louis: Concordia, 1992), 44.

<sup>42</sup> F. Pieper, *Conversion and Election* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1913), 71.

<sup>43</sup> *Table-Talk* (LW 54:245) records that on August 1, 1537, Luther scribbled with chalk on the table: "Substance and words - Philip. Word without substance - Erasmus. Substance without words - Luther. Neither substance nor words - Karlstadt."

***Election Legacy: Lesson One – Grace preservation***

Whether in election, in conversion, or in preservation of faith, if grace is not grace in every way, then it is grace in no way. “This blessed doctrine of God’s grace in Christ is the doctrine which alone fully meets the sinner’s need. Unless grace does all (*sola gratia*), the sinner is lost. And unless grace is for all (universal grace), the sinner must despair.”<sup>44</sup> Thanks be to God, his grace that saves is intended for all and offered to all: “God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.... 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 5:19, 21). “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:23–24). It is also revealed that even faith and all of the sinner’s salvation is by grace alone: “By grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast” (Ephesians 2:8–9).

Take a short detour for a moment. *Gratia universalis* has come under attack by Calvinists through a faulty rendering of Romans 9:22–23. These verses are touted as proof for a divided or double track in the mind of God in how grace is issued. The verses are translated in the NIV (1984) this way: “What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath—prepared for destruction? What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory...?” The NIV rendering does not distinguish between the different Greek verbs used in verses 22 and 23. Each is translated as “prepared.” But the words are different (*κατηρτισμένα*—v. 22, has the meaning of prepare in the sense of “make, create or form,” but not in the sense of “decide or determine beforehand;” *προητοίμασεν*—v. 23, has the meaning “to prepare beforehand”). Moreover, the first verb (NIV: “prepared” in v. 22) can rightly be taken as a middle form, which is a reflexive in the Greek language, and therefore be translated as *God’s Word to the Nations* (GWN) puts it: “...those who had prepared themselves for destruction....” Lutheran exegete, G. Stoeckhardt, provides an appropriate explanation for the two verses: “The context stated that God wanted to make use of the time of patience and longsuffering, granted the vessels of wrath, to gather a people from the Jews and Gentiles, who here see and experience his goodness and mercy and there should see his glory.”<sup>45</sup>

Since grace truly is grace in every aspect, not least of which is found in God’s eternal election decree, there is certitude of salvation. Even a slight hint of the sinner’s salvation resting on some alleged merit in man would necessarily mean an element of doubt. But because our election to eternal life is all found in God’s gracious act of choosing and in connection only with the merits of Christ, the believer can exclaim, “I am certain! My life with God eternally is secure and nothing can remove that from me! Jesus’ blood and righteousness avails for my sins, and God’s election by grace has sealed the deal for me!” For each of us, grace preservation is colossal and personal.

U. V. Koren (1826–1910) wrote an excellent essay on this subject. In the middle of the controversies involving election and conversion, he penned a treatise called, “Can and Ought a Christian Be Certain of His Salvation?” This is regarded as one of the best works from the Norwegian pastor-theologian who founded and pastored a number of churches in the area of

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<sup>44</sup> These words are from J. B. Unseth as found in a short essay produced in the *Lutheran Synod Quarterly*, vol. 43, nos. 2 & 3: 251.

<sup>45</sup> George Stoeckhardt, *The Epistle to the Romans*, tr. E. Koehlinger (St. Louis: Concordia Mimeograph, 1943), 123.

Decorah, Iowa , and led the Norwegian Synod as its president from 1894–1910.<sup>46</sup> We offer some excerpts below:

[W]e must maintain that there is no difference between being certain of one's salvation and being certain of one's election. It may well be that a believer has not heard anything about election, or has not understood any of this doctrine: but this does not alter the case, however, for these two concepts, to be saved and to have been elected, nevertheless amount to the same thing in effect. Every single soul of the elect will be saved, and none except the elect (Matthew 24:24; Romans 8:30–33). To be one of the elect and to be saved are, accordingly, the same, and if one believes that he will be saved, it is the same as to believe that he is one of the elect. ...

But how can a Christian have certainty regarding his salvation, or, in other words, that he shall be kept in the true and living faith unto the end? He is to believe it. "The entire life which a truly believing Christian leads after Baptism is nothing else than an expectation of the revelation of the bliss which he already has. He certainly has it entirely, but nevertheless hid in faith" (Luther, *ibid*, 137). He is to believe, that is, humbly and in a child-like manner rely upon the promises which God has given him precisely concerning this. These promises are more firm than heaven and earth and are given just for this purpose, that we are to believe them, have a firm conviction that He will fulfill them in spite of the devil, the world and our flesh." ...

Wherever in the Gospel it seems as though God demands something of us, so that our salvation is made to depend upon it, Scripture shows that God Himself will fulfill the condition for us; otherwise it would not be fulfilled, our salvation would not be of God, and the Gospel would not be the Gospel. Here the Augustinian saying applies, "*Da quod jubes, et jube quod vis*" [sic]—that is, "Give me what Thou commandest me, and command what Thou wilt." ...

Here the objection will be raised: I can understand that this doctrine would be comforting if just *one* thing were added: whether I am really one of those who are chosen. But where is that written? How may I know whether I am one of the elect? Answer: You are not to know or want to know in the ordinary sense. You are to believe it, and do so on the basis of the promises God has given you.... But if we give God all the glory and believe that He will do everything for us, we also believe that He has determined this from eternity and has thus chosen us unto eternal life. [Note: Here Koren adds a footnote from Luther: "From the Word of God, a Christian knows and acknowledges his own unworthiness and has a true fear of God, but he also comforts himself with the grace of God and believes that in Christ, the Son of God, he has the forgiveness

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<sup>46</sup> Mark DeGarmeaux, professor at Bethany Lutheran College, recently finished translating Koren's *Collected Writings (Samlede Skrifter)* and is seeking publication soon. In his remarks to a group of Koren relatives visiting BLC from Norway on 10-17-11, DeGarmeaux said, "Always when I read the *Collected Writings*, I see Vilhelm as a careful and precise theologian. He has the highest regard for the Word of God. He understands and appreciates the heritage of the Lutheran church. He cites Lutheran theologians to show that he teaches Biblical doctrine in the same way they did.... Most of all, I see his love and concern as a pastor and caretaker of souls. He wants the people to know their Savior Jesus Christ. He wants them to be sure and certain of their salvation, based on God alone. One of his most important writings indicates this: 'Can and Ought a Christian Be Certain of His Salvation?' His answer is a firm Yes, because he pointed them to God's promises in Christ Jesus."

of sins and redemption, and that he is pleasing to God and chosen unto eternal life; that in every need, where he finds weakness and temptations, he can find refuge in God, call upon Him, expect His help and be certain that he will be heard," (Luther's *Sammtliche Schriften*, St. Louis-Walch edition, volume XI, 1860)].<sup>47</sup>

### *For testing the mettle of confessional Lutheranism*

#### *Election Legacy: Lesson Two—Grace reexamination*

The doctrine of election tests precisely whether or not one believes only what the Bible says and no more. As a dose of water in your gas tank is bound to create engine havoc down the road (especially in frigid Minnesota temps), so watering down the biblical doctrine of election—adding drops of reason from outside the revealed will of God—is bound to destroy the Manufacturer's engine of grace. Once human speculation is permitted entrance to the closed and perfect system designed by the holy Trinity it won't be satisfied till it runs its damaging course. No wonder the teaching on predestination has been described as the "shibboleth" of the Christian church.<sup>48</sup> F. Pieper remarks, "It has therefore been well said that in the doctrine of election a theologian takes his final examination. This Scripture doctrine sweeps the last remnants of Pelagianism and rationalism out of one's theology."<sup>49</sup>

It's imperative that requirements for pastoral colloquies and for seminary graduation include a thorough review of the issues involved in the Melancthonian era election/conversion struggles and also those of nineteenth-century American Lutheranism. A portion of study for all ELS pastoral colloquents deals specifically with synod history, perusing T. Aaberg's *A City Set on a Hill* and the recently reprinted *Grace for Grace*. Both volumes thoroughly treat the election issue. More than acquainting the applicant with some unique synod customs (chanting and lutefisk suppers), the hope is to engender full appreciation for thorough hermeneutics and confessional conviction.

### *The roar of Opgjør*

The 1880s election controversy in American Lutheranism, as we said, especially touched and affected the Norwegian Synod (est. 1853).<sup>50</sup> Weariness over contending for the truth, coupled with a feverish pitch for union at all costs, eventually and—in this case—unfortunately led to a sizable merger of Norwegian Lutheran bodies in 1917. But that same merger, tolerating a lack of dogmatic precision and confessional fortitude, served negatively as the catalyst for beginning what today is known as the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (est. 1918, "Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church"). To the confessional fathers of the ELS, a

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<sup>47</sup> H. Larson, trans., *Truth Unchanged, Unchanging: Selected Sermons, Addresses and Doctrinal Articles by Ulrik Vilhelm Koren* (Lake Mills, IA: Graphic Publishing, 1978), 174, 175, 186, and 197-198.

<sup>48</sup> This writer recalls a conversation in 1999 with Dr. Oliver Olsen, the former editor of the *Lutheran Quarterly*, stressing this very point.

<sup>49</sup> Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, vol. III (St. Louis: Concordia, 1953 ed.), 503.

<sup>50</sup> Brenner (71-72fn3): "Missouri and Iowa were sparring over election and conversion as the Synodical Conference was being organized. It may seem somewhat surprising in the light of later developments that the theologians of the Ohio and Norwegian synods either took no note of the writings of the two sides or were not concerned about the doctrine of election as it was being presented in the pages of *Lehre und Wehre*." It was not until 1877 that lines began to be drawn in the newly-founded federation.



proposed compromise document (adopted 1912) intended for unity produced a discordant sound incapable of being ignored. Opgjør<sup>51</sup>, in Norwegian “settlement,” was anything but “settling.” Yet, for so many, the sound emitted from Opgjør appeared calming and inviting: something probably akin to Muzak elevating the rise of a synodical super-structure! It is a sad and sorry tale, but one needing to be told lest we forget where the road of hermeneutical compromise always ends.

ELS history can be described as a *reorganization*. There is an unwavering connection to the pure theological moorings that characterize the early years of the Norwegian Synod. Here we think of leaders like H. A. Preus, J. A. Ottesen, and U. V. Koren. There is also deep respect for the bond of confessional unity that developed between the pioneers of the Norwegian Synod and other confessional Lutheran leaders in our land, such as C. F. W. Walther of the Missouri Synod and Adolf Hoenecke of the Wisconsin Synod. The Norwegian Synod in 1872 had joined in official doctrinal fellowship with the Wisconsin Synod and the Missouri Synod via the formation of the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference, the “German–Norwegian–Slovak<sup>52</sup>” confessional organization that helped solidify those of Norwegian Lutheran heritage contending for the truth in the 1880s and then again in 1917–18. Thank God, through encouragement from Missouri<sup>53</sup> and Wisconsin theologians, Bjug Harstad and others heeded the roar of Opgjør and took concrete steps to form the “little Norwegian Synod,” once called a plucked chicken. With the grateful support of the Synodical Conference fathers and under the guiding providence of God, the dubbed “plucked chicken” would in time regain its plumage.<sup>54</sup>

### *Why many did not listen to the roar*

Earlier mention was made of several seventeenth-century theologians who did not speak clearly on the doctrine of predestination. Whether intentional or not, errors crept into their dogmatic expositions, or at least into the summations by others of those expositions. Why did people not listen to men like Walther, Koren, and Hoenecke as they refuted these errors and upheld the scriptural position? The simple answer is that many evoked allegiance to the eminent theologians of earlier centuries. Pieper explains: “The American representatives of *intuitu fidei* claimed that they were proclaiming the ‘very same’ doctrine as the old dogmatists; and this claim we contested. The discussions of this point were disagreeable, inasmuch as the general Lutheran public was hardly able to follow these historico-dogmatical disquisitions.”<sup>55</sup>

Before proceeding, we want to acknowledge a key supporting role played by the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. Hoenecke’s role in backing Walther in the election struggle has been documented by Jon Schroeder, “The Contribution of Adolf Hoenecke to the

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<sup>51</sup> The document also was known as “The Madison Agreement” or “The Madison Theses.”

<sup>52</sup> The Slovak Ev. Lutheran Church was formed in the United States in 1902.

<sup>53</sup> Francis Pieper, *Conversion and Election: A Plea for a United Lutheranism in America* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1913, 26). Pieper’s little treatise (*Zur Einigung der americanisch-lutherischen Kirche in der Lehre von der Bekehrung und Gnadenwahl*) gives a defense for the confessors of the Norwegian Synod who fought hard against the synergism of F. A. Schmidt. He includes a section entitled, “An Injustice Done the Norwegian Synod by the Madison Agreement.”

<sup>54</sup> The story is told that at the time of the historic Lime Creek meeting initiating the ELS, some man in a nearby northern Iowa town sarcastically remarked, “That little synod is nothing but a plucked chicken.” He obviously was a member of the merger church. Yet, a sensible down-to-earth Norwegian farmer is said to have replied, “Yes, but if the chicken is healthy the feathers will grow back.” (*Den Norske Synode er bare en ribbet hone. – Ja, men naar hone blir frisk og bra igjen saa skal fjaererne vokse tilbake.*) –anecdote from former ELS Pres. George M. Orvick.

<sup>55</sup> Pieper, *Conversion and Election*, 53.

Election Controversy of the Synodical Conference and an Appendix of Translated Articles.”<sup>56</sup> In summary, through the efforts of Hoenecke, the Wisconsin Synod stood behind Missouri but fraternally encouraged Walther to make several clarifications in his presentation.<sup>57</sup> Also, it is fair to say, the men from Wisconsin were not as charitable as Walther in defending theologians (i.e., J. Gerhard) who maintained an orthodox explanation of what was labeled the “Second Form” of election.

From what we gather, Aegedius (Giles) Hunnius (1550–1603) first introduced the expression of an election “*intuitu fidei*.”<sup>58</sup> He and others like him who departed from *sola gratia* suggested that the verb προέγνω (foreknew) of Romans 8:29 contained the **reason** God chose some for eternity. Instead of reading verse 29, “For those God foreknew he also predestined...,” they interpreted the passage to say: “For those whose constant faith he foresaw he also predestined.”<sup>59</sup> We wonder how Hunnius could have overlooked the Formula’s clear denunciation of there existing “within us a cause of God’s election, on account of which he has elected us to eternal life” (FC, Ep, XI, 20).

Johann Gerhard (1582–1637), generally recognized as the chief Lutheran theologian in the days post-Concord (1580), used the terminology of *intuitu fidei* (e.g., “...the consideration – *intuitus* – of faith must also be included in the decree of election”<sup>60</sup>). His reason for doing so was to counteract any Calvinistic idea that (because of Calvinism’s double absolutism) made faith in the grand plan of salvation superfluous.<sup>61</sup> Gerhard also said this about 2 Thessalonians 2:13: “So, in 2 Thessalonians 2:13, [Paul] says God chose us in faith because he is not able to elect in Christ except under the consideration of faith apprehending Christ (*nisi sub fidei Christum apprehendentis intuitu*).”<sup>62</sup> As a result of these unfortunate statements by Gerhard, who did not intend to detract from God’s grace in Christ as the sole agent in election, some later theologians were even less careful. In fact, both the Romans 8:29 passage and the one from 2 Thessalonians 2:13 were referenced by advocates of the *intuitu fidei* error. Gerhard, Calov, and Quenstedt were cautious when faith was mentioned in connection with election; no one could doubt – by all else written – where they stood in relation to God’s grace as juxtaposed with any human merit predestination and conversion.<sup>63</sup> Others were not so meticulous and left themselves open to synergistic suspicion (Latermann, Museus, Baier, etc.). But here, for the most part, is where a noticeable difference occurred between the language of a Gerhard and that of later American

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<sup>56</sup> J. Schroeder’s article appears in the *WELS Historical Institute Journal*, October 1999, 14–41. See also Brenner, fn3.

<sup>57</sup> Three such areas were cited for correction in 1881: that there are no conditions in God; that those who are lost perish because their perdition is foreseen by God; that the elect receive a richer grace. These emendations were received favorably. (J. Schroeder, 19). “Though, under Hoenecke, the Wisconsin Synod insisted on changes in phraseology, its support of Walther was never in question. Rather, Hoenecke and the synod served as a great encouragement to Walther in troubling times” (J. Schroeder, 18).

<sup>58</sup> R. Preus and W. Rosin, eds., *A Contemporary Look at the Formula of Concord* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1978), 275. See also R. Preus’ *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism, II* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1972), 98. Preus names Hunnius as the first to speak of *voluntas antecedens* and *voluntas consequens* in the context of the election doctrine.

<sup>59</sup> Preus and Rosin, 275.

<sup>60</sup> Theodore Aaberg, *A City Set on a Hill* (Lake Mills, IA: Graphic, 1968), 17. Aaberg refers to the Gerhard citation as found in the *Loci Theologici*, IV, 200 ff. He defends Gerhard in his way of using the expression.

<sup>61</sup> Gerhard used the terminology against the bare decrees of election found in Calvinism. One is not to look to a bare decree, but rather to the comfort of election found in the fact that God chose us from all eternity to be his own. He sent his Son to redeem all sinners. He sent his Holy Spirit to work faith in that redemption in our hearts and preserves us in that faith until the end. This is why our salvation is fully certain.

<sup>62</sup> This Gerhard reference appears in an article by J. Brenner, *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Spring 2012, 87.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

Lutherans preferring the *intuitu fidei* expression: “The latter refer salvation and perdition to a common source, the conduct of men. The former divide the question, and refer non-conversion and perdition solely and purely to man, and conversion and salvation to God alone.”<sup>64</sup> Hindsight proves that any use of *intuitu fidei* was at best unfortunate and ill-advised, but at worst subtly and heretically repugnant.

Church controversies, insofar as they substantially divide denominations, often have benign origins. The election controversy in American Lutheranism is no different. Today we in hindsight may cite some shocking quips<sup>65</sup> to epitomize the erring side in the controversy. But do we realize historically how gradually the shift occurred in the way the election doctrine was articulated through the writings of some venerable names in preceding years? John Brenner recently traced this shift. He notes, for example, how Wilhelm Sihler, prominent in the early days of Missouri, once (1855) employed the *intuitu fidei* terminology. But in 1881, “as the Election Controversy was disrupting the Synodical Conference, Sihler publicly renounced his statements on election *intuitu fidei*.”<sup>66</sup> Otto Fuerbringer (1810-1892) apparently did the same. Among Scandinavians, Erik Pontoppidan, the Danish theologian known for his catechism (1737), could be cited – as we will examine further in a moment.

### *Election Legacy: Lesson Three – Theologians can fail; Scripture cannot*

Theologians we fault for popularizing *intuitu fidei* sought solace for their position by appealing to passages that deal with justification *by faith*. Brenner records how several Lutheran fathers had twisted the eighth chapter of Romans: “Romans 8 says that God foreknew persons. It does not say that he foreknew faith. Those who teach election in view of faith are importing faith into this passage.... To prove that election is in view of faith one must not quote a passage that speaks about justification, but must find a passage that says that faith is the cause of one’s election. Scripture, however, speaks of faith as the effect of election, not the cause – *All who were ordained to eternal life believed* (Acts 13:48).”<sup>67</sup> Faith flows from election, not election from faith.<sup>68</sup>

Another complicating factor for many early Lutheran leaders was their view of Formula of Concord, Article XI. Did the article speak pointedly to the matter at hand, i.e., to the use of *intuitu fidei*?<sup>69</sup> Not all were fully convinced.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> F. Pieper, *Conversion and Election*, 62.

<sup>65</sup> F.A. Schmidt, for example, made a startling remark in 1884: “I believe and teach now as before, that it is not synergistic error, but a clear teaching of God’s Word and our Lutheran Confession, that ‘salvation in a certain sense does not depend on God alone.’” There is also this one by Schmidt in the same year: “If I should want to confess the doctrine that conversion and salvation in every respect depends on God alone and that man’s conduct here is entirely an indifferent matter, I would much rather subscribe to a Reformed Confession than to this ‘Redegjrelse’ [Koren’s “An Accounting”]. I reject it therefore with my whole heart as ‘containing false doctrine.’” (These are documented in Aaberg’s *A City Set on a Hill*, 36.)

<sup>66</sup> J. Brenner, “Walther and the Election Controversy,” *WLQ*, Spr. 2012, 89.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 117, 118.

<sup>68</sup> This saying is somewhat akin to the comparable quip, “Forgiveness first, then faith.”

<sup>69</sup> Those who followed F. A. Schmidt and the “intuituists” from Ohio made the claim that FC XI was to be viewed as addressing a *broader* concern than what Walther was postulating. A false assumption was made that the writers of the Formula implied a “dissimilar conduct” on the part of sinful man over toward the grace of God by way of explanation for what occurs in election/conversion. F. Pieper in his *Conversion and Election* (42) shows how paragraphs 57-64 of FC XI dispel any such assumption.

<sup>70</sup> An anecdote from court records in Worth County, Iowa, 1919, has made an impression on this writer as to the confessional integrity of his layman great-grandfather, Anders Moldstad. Anders was a general store owner in DeForest, WI, in the late 1800s. J. A. Moldstad (1874-1946), his son who was serving as the vice-president of the newly organized ELS, had been called to testify in a court case involving a property dispute known as the “Torgerson Case

Muddling the issue even more, early Norwegian Lutheranism in America did not consistently give allegiance to the Formula. This goes back to the motherland. When Lutheranism spread to Norway via Denmark in the 1500s (Bugenhagen's influence from Wittenberg to Copenhagen), seventeenth century Lutheranism in Christiania (Oslo) underwent serious change because of inroads made by Pietism and Rationalism.<sup>71</sup> Thankfully, certain Norwegian theologians like Gisle Johnson (1822-1894)<sup>72</sup> and Paul Caspari (1814-1892) continued to present confessional Lutheranism. Their leadership in training theological students of theology H. A. Preus, J. A. Ottesen, and U. V. Koren made for a renewed focus on the entire Book of Concord. The Formula of Concord was not readily used in early days of Lutheranism in the countries of Denmark and Norway, primarily because of a political situation. This unfortunate development was used by some in Norway who leaned toward pietism, e.g., Nils Hauge and then also his disciple Elling Eilsen (came to America in 1839). They downplayed dogma (e.g., the distinctions in the Formula) for the pragmatics of revivalism. But Caspari, Johnson, Nils Laache (1831-1892)<sup>73</sup> and other faithful confessors in Norway would have argued that the writing of the Formula was simply a thorough explanation of what *already* was set forth in the Augsburg Confession.

### *How to listen to the fathers*

In inter-church discussions today involving synods that hold in high esteem theologians of the past centuries, an important question to be raised is: To what extent do we make our appeal to "the fathers"? From one corner we hear, "Those guys seem like biblicists." From

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#3027" in April of 1919. Due to the church split (the ELS group away from the Norwegians entering the NLCA), each side in this Iowa community claimed the property. Both ELS leaders, Bjug Harstad (Tacoma, WA) and J. Moldstad (Chicago, IL), were asked to come and testify at the trial. Surprisingly the judge entertained much questioning and testimony involved in the doctrinal controversy on election (i.e., the old controversy revisited now because of the "Madison Settlement"). J. Moldstad gave a thorough explanation of what he and the Norwegian Lutherans who left the merger saw as a departure of biblical doctrine on predestination. (See **Appendix B** for a slice of the court testimony.) He then explained that, when a split occurred in the DeForest congregation in 1883, his father Anders—a deacon at the time—was at first on the opposite side of the dispute. But then he studied the matter carefully, going to the Scripture passages but also to the Formula of Concord, Article XI. From his attention to the Formula is how Anders switched his thinking and became a stalwart defender of H. A. Preus, his pastor who, however, was ousted physically from his pulpit on Good Friday of that year, 1883. (My grandfather, age 9, witnessed the stressful event.) So, even if the Formula may not have been so familiar to the Norwegian laity, some—including my great-grandfather—saw it as a defining resolution for the election debate.

<sup>71</sup> W. Petersen in a 1993 ELS convention essay related how U. V. Koren indicated rationalism had such a grip on the church that at the time for Koren's catechization, the young confirmand was simply 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" (ELS *Synod Report*, 1993, 87).

<sup>72</sup> Johnson had once studied in Germany, and while in Leipzig had formed a friendship with a young professor there, Carl Paul Caspari. "Johnson convinced him to apply for the position of lecturer in Old Testament at the University of Christiania and he was accepted. His rival for the position as new instructor was Grundtvig of Copenhagen, destined to become his most formidable theological opponent in future years. Johnson and Caspari became close friends and co-laborers whose gifts splendidly complemented one another.... Through Gisle Johnson and Paul Caspari, the young students who were to be leaders in the Norwegian-American churches fastened solidly upon their twin mottos: 'gegraptai' and 'verbum Dei manet in aeternum.'" (M. Langlais, "Gisle Johnson and the Johnsonian Awakening," *Lutheran Synod Quarterly*, June 1996, 13-14.)

<sup>73</sup> Bishop Laache was known for his family altar, *Husandagtsbog*. The Norwegian devotional was so popular it went through eight different editions. The most recent English version of *Book of Family Prayer* (trans. DeGarmeaux) can be ordered from the BLC Bookstore (1-800-944-1722).

another, “They first go to the dogmaticians.” One says, “Exegesis is what counts.” Another, “If we’re confessional Lutherans, why not cite the confessional writings?”

Let’s be clear: Confessional Lutherans accept Scripture to be the verbally inerrant and inspired Word of God. We also subscribe unconditionally (*quia*) to the entire Book of Concord as a true and pure statement and exposition of God’s Word. While we agree the Lutheran Confessions are to be read and studied in their proper historical context, this does not mean we believe the Confessions to be accurate only in dealing with specific problems the church had to counteract at the very time those writings were produced.<sup>74</sup> True Lutheran theologians of all times pledge themselves to the dogma of the Lutheran Confessions precisely *because* they have been convinced in the study of such that these writings convey the truth of Holy Writ. Therefore, when Lutherans are speaking with fellow Lutherans, it should be regarded as a *given* that appeal can be made to the Confessions.

The Confessions do not cover or exhaust every doctrine of God’s Word. What is covered, however, are teachings that came under scrutiny, not only in relation to Rome on the one hand and the Reformed on the other, but in relation to fellow Lutherans who were drifting (crypto-Calvinists). FC Article XI is a good example of dealing with the latter. While the election article does not *per se* address **directly** the issue raised by Schmidt in the 1880s and/or the recurrence of Schmidt’s error in 1917, the Formula—at least by implication—disallows anything at all in sinful man as influencing the mind of God in choosing sinners for heaven.

The writings of the fathers—including the 17<sup>th</sup>-century systematicians—never were intended to have center stage as the foundation on which to build any theological tenet. Rather, their extensive expositions were to serve as a supporting role. We could liken it to external scaffolding erected around the perimeter for viewing the monumental, divine structure of the Word itself. Where else, when church controversy divides households and even threatens life, can one rest assured he has not been misled by extraneous influences<sup>75</sup>? Luther said:

As for me, I pit against the dicta of the fathers, of men, of angels, of demons, not ancient usage, not the great mass of people, but solely the Word of eternal majesty, the Gospel. ...Here I stand; here I sit; here I stay; here I glory; here I triumph; here I scorn papists, Thomists, Henricists, sophists, and all the gates of hell, to say nothing of the words of men, however holy, or of deceptive usage.

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<sup>74</sup> Gospel reductionists in the 1970s, for example, argued that certain propositions in the Lutheran Confessions are historically conditioned and therefore cannot answer today’s biblical questions often posed by a more sophisticated culture (i.e., factual understanding of Genesis 1-11, etc.).

<sup>75</sup> It could also be mentioned that not only *extra*-biblical influences can affect the sure footing of scriptural doctrine. Within Scripture itself, it is vital that the confessional exegete compares “apples to apples” by a careful use of what is often called the “analogy of faith” hermeneutical principle. That is, **no explanation of Scripture is permissible which contradicts the sum total of all the clear passages of the Bible that set forth a given doctrine.** We can properly compare only those passages which deal with exactly the same doctrine, and here the more obscure passages must be explained by the clearer ones. If according to human opinion, there exists the difficulty that the *locus classicus* (sedes doctrinae) of one doctrine cannot be made to agree—according to our reason—with the *locus classicus* of another doctrine, then it is the duty of a faithful interpreter to acknowledge and declare this difficulty frankly. One dare not change the meaning of the concepts or give them a new form in order to force agreement with other doctrines. A case in point arose in the doctrine of election discussions in the early 1900s. At the first of five inter-synodical free conferences on election and conversion (held between 1903-1906), Dr. Franz Pieper was challenged by Ohio Synod and Iowa Synod theologians because their claim was Pieper and others were not allowing John 3:16 to influence how election should (from their perspective) be properly taught “in view of faith.” But “what Scripture teaches about election should be found in those passages that treat election specifically, Ephesians 1:4 as an example, but not John 3:16.” E. C. Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1992), 111.

God's Word is above all; the divine majesty is at my side. Therefore I am unconcerned even though a thousand Augustines, a thousand Cyprians, a thousand Henrician churches should stand against me. God cannot err and deceive.<sup>76</sup>

The basis for settling doctrinal differences in inter-church relations continues to be what Lutherans have always espoused. "We believe, teach and confess that the prophetic writings of the Old and New Testaments are the only rule and norm according to which all doctrines and teachers alike must be appraised and judged, as it is written in Ps. 119:105, 'Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.'"<sup>77</sup>

LCMS President Harrison's essay last year reminded us of the significance of the Augsburg Confession as a launch point for dialogue among early American Lutherans (i.e., Walther's free conferences). The *Augstana* is the summary confession *par excellence* of true Lutheran doctrine to which a *quia* subscription must be given by any churches, representative groups or individuals coming to the table.<sup>78</sup> There are corridors of Scripture, however, that the AC does not explore, some for obvious reasons (e.g., doctrines not in dispute at the time). The Formula too leaves some areas untouched. Without a doubt, the Lutheran Symbols need to be explored and confessed. How else can common ground be found?<sup>79</sup> But if we propose to move ahead with any official doctrinal discussions between the LCMS, WELS, and ELS, the differentiating items from the historical split (altar, pulpit, prayer fellowship; hermeneutical principles), as well as those of more current years (role of women in the church, cooperation in externals, church and ministry, liturgical concerns, doctrinal discipline), demand a careful look at the pertinent Scripture passages themselves.

Using election as an example, we can see what Walther did. Prior to Schmidt's formal charges against him, Walther conceded how some under Calvin's influence supposed a divergence in the Formula of Concord. So, what did Walther do? He directed back to Scripture. He did so even when God's Word did not give an answer to an alleged dilemma. Case in point: Near the end of his presidency for Missouri (1877) he lectured on predestination and said:

More recent theologians assert that what the Formula of Concord has written about election by grace is worthy of note; by this the teaching is further unfolded and more clearly revealed. But it has proposed two ideas which cannot be reconciled [namely, God alone is the cause for election to eternal life; sinful man is the cause for his rejection and damnation]; hence it is the task of our time to reconcile these two contradictions. But they will not be able to harmonize whatever God has stricken from the bounds of reason.... [T]he charm of the

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<sup>76</sup> Ewald Plass, *What Luther Says* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959, Vol. III), 1368 (#4414). The reference to Henrician churches is in relation to King Henry VIII of England; cf. Luther's 1522 *Contra Henricum Regum*, WA, 10, II, 214, 215.

<sup>77</sup> Epitome of the Formula of Concord, Part 1, par. 1; Tappert, 464.

<sup>78</sup> C. P. Krauth, *The Conservative Reformation and Its Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, reprint 1963), 204: "By a careful study of the symbolical books of our Church, commencing with the Augsburg Confession and its Apology, a more thorough understanding of the history, difficulties, true genius, and triumphs of the Reformation will be attained, than by reading everything that can be got, or that has ever been written *about* that memorable movement."

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 265: "It is a great mistake to suppose that our Evangelical Protestant Church is bound by consistency to hold a view simply because Luther held it. Her faith is not to be brought to the touchstone of Luther's private opinion, but his private opinion is to be tested by her confessed faith [i.e., the Augsburg Confession and the entire Book of Concord], when the question is, What is genuinely Lutheran?"

Lutheran church consists in the fact that it accepts what is written in God's Word. And when there is an apparent contradiction in Holy Scripture, it will stand unresolved.<sup>80</sup>

### *Why Opgjør was so unsettling*

If Lutherans awarded trophies for oxymoronic titles, "Madison Settlement" would be near the front of the receiving line. From a scriptural perspective, the document did not *settle* the doctrinal dispute. It did, however, function as a compromise, agreeing to let disagreements stand with no fellowship repercussions. The old election error of the 1880s (championed by Schmidt, Allwardt, Stellhorn, et. al.) subtly resurfaced in this merger statement of 1912. It was billed as "faithfully preserving" the doctrinal position of the old Norwegian synod,<sup>81</sup> but in actuality it was a sell-out to inevitable unionism at the price of truth: *God's* truth. Basically, Opgjør permitted either "Form One" – as it was known – (the election teaching of the Formula, expounded well by Walther and Koren) or "Form Two" (the teaching set forth in Pontoppidan's catechism) to have equal footing "without reservation."

Pontoppidan's *Truth Unto Godliness* (1737), familiar to each Norwegian Lutheran confirmand residing in America in the 1800s, listed this answer to Question #548 as to what constitutes the teaching of predestination or election: "That God has appointed all those to eternal life whom he from eternity has seen would accept the grace proffered them, believe in Jesus and persevere in this faith unto the end. Rom. 8:28-30." Koren stopped short of condemning Pontoppidan of false doctrine. But he did express reservations about his definition. He described it as a tolerable "incomplete concept," as long as the doctrine of sin and grace would be kept pure.

There was more to *Opgjør* than simply caving-in to seeing no measurable distinction between Form One and Form Two. With what came next, Aaberg says, the enemy came in and plundered the city!<sup>82</sup> – "The Joint Committee [of the merging synods] declared in paragraph four: 'We have agreed to reject all errors which seek to explain away the mystery of election... either in a synergistic or a Calvinistic manner...every doctrine which...would deprive God of his glory as only Savior or...weaken man's responsibility in relation to the acceptance or rejection of grace (Wolf, p. 234).'" Aaberg continues: "This paragraph ascribes to natural man a sense or feeling of responsibility regarding the acceptance of grace. Natural man, however, is 'dead in trespasses and sins' (Eph. 2:1). Scripture says: 'Ye must be born again' (John 3:7), and ascribes this work to the Holy Spirit working through the Gospel." In essence, the third article of the Apostles' Creed was at stake. For we find in Luther's explanation a repudiation of man's natural abilities and a complete dependence upon the Holy Spirit: "I believe that by my own reason or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, and sanctified and preserved me in true faith..." (SC, Tappert, 345).

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<sup>80</sup> C. F. W. Walther, *Essays for the Church*, II, collection from 1877-1886 (St. Louis: Concordia, 1992), 147.

<sup>81</sup> Aaberg, 52.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 50 (also: following citations from Aaberg are from same page).

## ***Background to Opgjør***

Flash back to the 1800s for a moment. Prof. Friedrich August Schmidt (1837-1928), who in his youth had been confirmed by Walther, served as a Norwegian Synod professor<sup>83</sup> at Concordia Seminary from 1872–1876. He was a gifted individual (knew Norwegian fluently!) and formerly had been viewed as a potential Walther replacement in St. Louis.<sup>84</sup> In 1876 Schmidt was called as the first president of the newly-formed seminary for the Norwegians in Madison, WI. During this time, F. A. Schmidt began voicing disagreement with Walther's series of essays on election (completed in 1879). By the early 1880s, charges of false doctrine were flying. Schmidt even accused Walther of Calvinism.<sup>85</sup>

Here was his convoluted logic: 1) F. A. said Walther disconnected God's election of sinners to eternal life from the faith in Christ necessary to obtain heaven. 2) He reasoned, just as Calvin's predestination doctrine made means of grace superfluous, so Walther was doing the same. 3) He also postulated Calvin's view of a limited grace was apparent, since "the Missouri system amounts to just this, that whom God wants to save, He saves; and as He wants to save only a few, only a few are saved."<sup>86</sup>

Talk about being disingenuous, let alone unfair! Walther neither denied faith in Christ—worked through means—as necessary for salvation, nor that God truly desires all to have salvation in Christ (1 Timothy 2:3). It was a matter of staying on topic! **Election by grace**—grace in every way—was Walther's contention. A treatise on faith, on means of grace, on universal atonement and grace—this certainly flowed from Walther's pen elsewhere.

Schmidt's charges vs. Walther did not gain much traction among the clergy of Missouri or Wisconsin. Ohio was different; it already left the Synodical Conference in 1881. The Norwegian Synod, influenced by its Madisonian seminary president, would suffer a real battle in the coming years. With no desire to have an adverse affect on the Synodical Conference, the Norwegian Synod withdrew from such in 1883 (rejoining again when the ELS formed in 1918). Ulrik V. Koren, at the time a district president in Iowa (became Norwegian Synod president, 1894–1910), authored "An Accounting" (*En Redegjørelse*)<sup>87</sup> exposing Schmidt's synergism with a thorough treatment of Scripture and the Confessions. One of his poignant remarks was this: "Since everything good in man is God's free and undeserved gift of grace, there is nothing in

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<sup>83</sup> The very first Home Mission offering in the Norwegian Synod amounted to \$77.15 and was taken to pay the traveling expenses of Prof. F.A. Schmidt as he in 1864 would extend his summer vacation and serve a Norwegian congregation in a German church in New York City. Schmidt was quite adept in languages. He had taken classes in the seminary under Walther. The story is told that he was disappointed in being passed over to be selected as Concordia's next president. (From a paper delivered by W. C. Gullixson to the Concordia Historical Institute, Nov. 4-6, 1987.)

<sup>84</sup> A. Schuetze, *The Synodical Conference – Ecumenical Endeavor* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2000), 93.

<sup>85</sup> To show how firm Schmidt was in bringing this charge, we draw attention to a letter addressed to Schmidt in 1913. It was written by J. N. Kildahl, president of St. Olaf College, and dated January 9. Kildahl, a Schmidt friend and sympathizer, wrote, "As I have said before, your battle against the false doctrine of the Missourians has not been in vain. It has led to victory among the Norwegians in this country.... And finally you can have the satisfaction that your struggle has borne fruit, and that you have saved the Norwegian people in America from Calvinism.... It is oft thus, that he who has taken the lead in a great cause, and has of necessity had to make many enemies, has not from his contemporaries always gotten the thanks due him; but history has rendered a more righteous judgment." (From ELS Archives, 6 Browns Ct., Mankato, MN.)

<sup>86</sup> This citation from an 1881 *Lutheran Standard* can be found in Schuetze, fn section, #26, 419.

<sup>87</sup> For access <<http://www.evangelicallutheransynod.org/beliefs/doctrinal-statements/an-accounting/>>. We include the concluding portion of "An Accounting" in **Appendix C**.



man which could induce God to elect him. Man's faith could not induce God to do this either, for faith is itself a free gift of grace from God...."<sup>88</sup>

In 1887 close to one-third of the pastors and congregations left the Norwegian Synod. They and Schmidt formed the "Anti-Missourian Brotherhood" and soon also the United Norwegian Lutheran Church in America (1890). Here are the stats of the aftermath: "Whereas in 1886, the Norwegian Synod consisted of 193 pastors, 723 congregations, and 143,885 souls; three years later it numbered 138 pastors, 512 congregations, and 93,891 souls."<sup>89</sup>

The saga on the election controversy among Norwegian Lutherans does not end with the removal of the dissenters in the late 1880s. Eventually, the Schmidt group served as one of the founding bodies of the Norwegian Lutheran Church in America (NLCA, est. 1917), a large predecessor of today's ELCA (1988).

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, merger fever pressured the wounded but faithful Norwegian Synod. Should the synod heed the call for a new, large Norwegian body? – urged by the push for a common (Bugenhagen) hymnbook in the English language (1913); urged by a visit of dignitaries from Norway concerned for preservation of culture; urged by those stressing joint efforts in missions; urged by a demonstrable celebration of unity in connection with the approaching 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation? With sad irony, the Norwegian Synod, suffering a waning and physically ailing president in the scripturally-loyal Koren, soon found itself in union talks with the former Schmidt sympathizers. The new president for the Norwegians, H. G. Stub (1910), leaned at first somewhat cautiously but then enthusiastically toward agreement with church bodies judged previously as erring.<sup>90</sup>

*Opgjør* became the "catalytic converter" for merging the Norwegian Synod with the United Norwegian Lutheran Church of 1890 and also with the Hauge Synod, the latter issuing the invitation for union. Though a significant number of pastors and laity in the Norwegian Synod objected to what they correctly perceived was doctrinal compromise, Stub defended and promoted *Opgjør*. A minority formed and issued reports against the acceptance of it. Finally, after considerable efforts, most on the minority side joined the majority, entering the 1917 merger with little substantive change to the document.

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<sup>88</sup> "An Accounting" also is found in *Grace for Grace*, ed. S. Ylvisaker, 173-188 (original edition).

<sup>89</sup> ELS *Synod Report* 2003, 50; essay by Rev. C. Ferkenstad.

<sup>90</sup> The liberal element backed Stub. The cry was, "Let's break the Decorah ring!" In 1910, with Koren about 84 years of age and close to death, Stub as vice president delivered Koren's presidential address. Conveniently, Stub omitted part of the address from Koren that seemed – for Stub's purposes – too strident. The paragraph omitted reads as follows: "The doctrinal discussions which have been carried on with other Norwegian Lutheran church bodies have not, it is my conviction, led to any reliable results. The disagreement which appeared in the discussion of the last point in which we follow the Book of Concord word for word surely rests on disagreement in the doctrine of conversion. That a series of theses on this doctrine is adopted does not prove that there is thorough agreement. This we have experienced before when all our positive theses were accepted while violent objections were made to the antitheses although these were only inevitable conclusions of the former. 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" (*Grace for Grace*, 98-99).

*Austin, Minnesota, meeting*

Here's what happened. The two pastors who led the minority, C. K. Preus<sup>91</sup> and I. B. Torrison, met with a newly-elected subcommittee for *Opgjør* in Austin, Minnesota, in December of 1916. The meeting was called for the intention of winning the support of Preus and Torrison and others for the "Madison Settlement." The Joint Committee (working on *Opgjør*) provided assurance that some concessions had been granted to the minority group. However, as Aaberg reports, the following note added to the signing of the "Austin Settlement" of Dec. 5-7, 1916, shows how the minority was hoodwinked: "It is self-evident that the above stated resolution must not be interpreted to mean that 'Opgjør' as the basis for union between the three contracting churches, is thereby abbreviated or changed." Regrettably, Preus and Torrison encouraged the minority members to sign on to the document for the upcoming June convention in Minneapolis, but they attached a carefully-worded resolution of acceptance.

Lutheran historian C. Nelson contends that the Norwegian Synod ended up approving the merger document by hearing *again* and *again* the assurance that the Two Forms of presenting the doctrine of election did not "mask two different doctrines." Nelson suggests the "Austin Settlement" allowed the minority "to fulfill its real desire for union without losing face." But we have to agree with Aaberg's assessment: "The ELS has not been so uncharitable as this in its judgment of the minority."<sup>92</sup>

*A minority of the minority*

The very day "merger mania" was celebrated in St. Paul, Minnesota, a small group of faithful pastors gathered nearby. The group gathered across the street from the huge convention at the St. Paul auditorium was a minority of a minority. The more sizable minority, originally opposed to the NLCA formation was "not willing to suffer the loss of the old familiar surroundings. They went along with the merger intent upon proclaiming the unconditioned gospel in a compromised situation."<sup>93</sup> That's the legacy of the Austin sessions. The little remnant of pastors and laity that would become the ELS gathered that day, June 8, 1917, at a conference room located in the St. Paul Aberdeen Hotel to initiate another church body. Insignificant in numbers, the group was resolute in its desire to preserve the precious heritage of salvation by grace alone through Christ alone.

*Grace for Grace* reports, "There was some difference of opinion in the beginning as to whether they ought to attempt to continue their work as an independent body or to make overtures to the Missouri Synod to be admitted as a special district of that body...." Most, however, believed that their "immediate duty was to preserve, so far as possible, the principles and traditions of the Norwegian Synod and that this could best be done by working independently."<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Christian Keyser Preus (1852-1921), son of Herman Amberg Preus, was vice president of the Norwegian Synod in 1911. He became the second president of Luther College, Decorah, Iowa in 1902. C. K. was the grandfather of J. A. O. Preus and Robert Preus. C.K., along with his father H. A., was deposed as pastor of the Norway Grove congregation, DeForest, WI, on Good Friday, 1883. In the year of 1885, a number of other Norwegian Lutheran pastors were deposed of their positions, including another important forerunner of the synod, J. A. Ottesen, who was put out of churches at West Koshkonong and Liberty Prairie near Madison, WI.

<sup>92</sup> Aaberg, *A City Set on a Hill*, 68, cf. also for the Clifford Nelson reference.

<sup>93</sup> G. Orvick, unpublished essay from the 1970s: "A Brief History of the ELS, 1918-1925."

<sup>94</sup> *Grace for Grace*, 117.

The Aberdeen Hotel group agreed upon the following two points as impetus for organizing a new synod: "1) We cannot for good 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."<sup>95</sup> Twenty-five years later, the *Lutheran Sentinel* carried an article describing the activities of the little group that very next Sunday. The words came from an original participant:

On Sunday forenoon, while the great union jubilee was being held in the St. Paul Auditorium, we gathered with the Fairview congregation in a small building in Minneapolis for services.... It was the First Sunday after Trinity (June 10, 1917), and the gospel text for the day was Luke 16:19-31. We were free, we were unafraid, and we were happy. We felt that the Lord was with us and that his grace was abundant. Our meeting was continued Monday forenoon and afternoon. Both doctrinal and practical questions were discussed. It was a small beginning and without temporal means, but God's blessings have been showered upon us. One with God is always a majority. May we remain faithful stewards to the end of time! God help us for Jesus' sake!<sup>96</sup>

The *Luthersk Tidende*, April 1, 1918, contained a simple announcement: "Pastors and member congregations who desire to continue in the old doctrine and practice of the Norwegian Synod will, God willing, hold their annual meeting in the Lime Creek Congregation, Pastor Henry Ingebritson's charge, June 14 and following days."

### *New beginnings at Lime Creek*

On June 14, 1918, thirteen pastors and a number of lay people<sup>97</sup> who could not in good conscience join the merger held the founding convention of a new synod at Lime Creek Lutheran Church in northern Iowa. Due to wartime, the governor of Iowa had outlawed use of foreign languages in public gatherings. So—Norwegian ingenuity—the group held its Norwegian worship service in a cornfield just over the Minnesota state line, a mile or so from the Lime Creek church, northeast of Lake Mills. President Bjug Harstad spoke fitting words to the assembly, based on Jeremiah 6:16, "*This is what the Lord says: 'Stand at the cross roads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls.'*" The official name of the newly organized church body was "Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church." For a long time the synod affectionately was known as "Little Norwegian Synod," until 1957 when the current name was adopted: Evangelical Lutheran Synod.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>96</sup> *Lutheran Sentinel*, April 27, 1943. The article was authored by this writer's grandfather, J. Moldstad, who served as pastor of St. Mark's in Chicago, IL, and was vice president when the new synod became organized. In the 1940s, at the time of the article, he served also as editor of the *Lutheran Sentinel*.

<sup>97</sup> The convention was attended by eleven pastors of the Norwegian Synod and 185 lay people, men and women. Four pastors from the Missouri Synod also were present for this historic event.

<sup>98</sup> It is interesting to observe that in 1917 at the time of the NLCA merger the Norwegian Synod had 986 congregations with 150,550 souls, served by 351 pastors, but only supported 14 Christian day schools. When the ELS came about in 1918, the desire for maintaining parochial schools was apparent, in so far as three out of the fourteen churches with schools came with the new little synod.

From the outset, the ELS fostered close ties with the Missouri Synod.<sup>99</sup> The old Norwegian Synod had sent its ministerial students to St. Louis for seminary training, and had supplied a professor there until it established its own seminary in 1876. Already in 1919 the ELS applied to the Missouri Synod for permission to set up a professorship at Concordia College in St. Paul, ensuring young men of the synod a higher education as they would head to St. Louis for seminary.<sup>100</sup> Later, a similar arrangement was made with the Wisconsin Synod.<sup>101</sup> Dr. Martin Luther College in New Ulm, MN, was used for the training of ELS Christian day school teachers.<sup>102</sup> The ELS kept in contact with the Synodical Conference, even though the Norwegian Synod—as mentioned—pulled out of the SC in 1883. The reorganized synod rejoined the Synodical Conference officially in 1920. Around this time, Sigurd Ylvisaker,<sup>103</sup> who recently had resigned as a professor at Luther College, withdrew from the NLCA. He was called to fill the position of professorship at Concordia on behalf of the “ELS” at the 1920 convention in Minneapolis. After Bethany College was assumed under synod control in 1927, Ylvisaker became the first full-time<sup>104</sup> president of the school. At its third annual convention the ELS approved cooperation with Missouri on the foreign mission field. This meant the synod elected a member to serve on the Board for Foreign Missions of the Missouri Synod.

### *Why Opgjør stands as a cracked monument for compromise*

Think of a tall bronze statue glistening so brightly in the sunlight that it hides fissures eroding its base. The Madison Settlement of 1912 is a stark example of how doctrinal compromise comes with the shiny appeal of promise but dulls and erodes even the best of consciences once centered in the Word.

How could many who were involved in the sizable minority, wanting nothing to do with any Schmidtianer-view of predestination, yield only a few decades later? Two points should be made: 1) H. G. Stub, himself a chameleon on the issue (in 1880–1890 he spoke strongly vs. the Schmidt position) played a huge role. If anyone could have called a halt to the compromise and union, it was he. Once he became president in 1910, his penchant for

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<sup>99</sup> Justin Petersen in 1938 delivered an address to the ELS, “In Commemoration of the Saxon Immigration.” He included these remarks: “How great indeed is our debt to the Missouri brethren, not only with respect to the enlightenment and strengthening given us in the aforementioned doctrines [election, conversion, etc.], but also in other matters both of doctrine and practice, e.g., the proper distinction between Law and Gospel (with special reference to Walther’s classic book), separation between church and state, correct principles of church government, ... the importance and blessing of parochial schools.... How great is our accumulated debt, our debt as pastors, teachers, and lay-people, our debt as congregations, and as a synod to our dear brethren of the Missouri Synod!” *ELS Synod Report*, 1938, 55.

<sup>100</sup> In 1946 the ELS opened its Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary in Mankato, MN, on the same campus as its Bethany Lutheran College. Today the seminary has its own facility on the campus, dedicated in 1996.

<sup>101</sup> When the Synodical Conference dissolved (1963, ELS & WELS pulled out; 1967, the official dissolution, when the Slovak Synod became a district of the LCMS), the ELS and WELS looked for a way to strengthen ties with each other and to “give outward expression to the unity of spirit” (*ELS Synod Report* 1965: 45). This led to the formation of the Evangelical Lutheran Confessional Forum in 1967. This WELS/ELS forum was instrumental in forming the international confessing fellowship of Lutheran bodies known as the CELC (Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference) in 1993.

<sup>102</sup> In the year 2003 the Elementary Education degree was approved as a major at Bethany Lutheran College.

<sup>103</sup> His father, Johannes Ylvisaker, author of *The Gospels*, died in the year of the merger: October 10, 1917. Johannes was one of the leaders who in 1887 helped form Our Savior Lutheran Church in Madison, WI (today, ELS). That same year in nearby Stoughton, WI, the large split occurred in the Norwegian Synod which at one time had over 140,000 souls.

<sup>104</sup> Holden Olsen was interim president for two years beforehand, followed by W. Buszin for one more year.

amalgamation grew and would result in himself presiding over it all, from 1917–1925. By the time of 1913, Stub forcefully appealed to the Norwegian Synod to assent to the majority report on the Settlement, saying, “Therefore, I urge you as strongly as possible...: do not vote for the minority report, but vote for the majority report! Nothing less is involved than the honor of the Norwegian Synod and the cause of union.”<sup>105</sup> 2) Through a series of meetings once stalwart confessors of the truth, who had commendable intentions entering the sessions, went away weakened in their confessional commitments.

Heading into the 1916 convention, here is how Aaberg describes the scene:

It should be noted that already in its initial request the Minority Committee made a significant concession in the conscience-bound demands presented by the Minority to the 1916 Synod convention. Regarding paragraph four, they then had insisted on the omission of the words “acceptance or” so that “The Settlement”<sup>106</sup> would speak only of man’s sense of responsibility in relation to the rejection of grace. In its communication to the Joint Committee the Minority Committee asked instead for the substitution of the word “duty” for “responsibility” as well as for other changes, so that “The Settlement” would read: “...or on the other hand weaken man’s feeling of duty over against the acceptance of grace or of guilt for the rejection of grace” (Thoen, p. 276). The synergism of paragraph four, however, did not lie in either “duty” or “responsibility” but in attributing to natural man, dead in trespasses and sin, a *sense* or *feeling* (*følelse*) of duty or responsibility in regard to the acceptance of grace.<sup>107</sup>

### *Confessional Lutherans still need warning*

The ELS in 1936 approved for publication a useful document known as “Triple-U” (Unity, Union, Unionism).<sup>108</sup> The series of six theses first appeared in 1935. The Triple-U sets a cautious path for official inter-church doctrinal discussions. Later that same year, essays by various pastors covered aspects of the theses. From those essays a revision was produced that went before the synod’s 1936 General Pastoral Conference. There was much concern at the time for the way Missouri was holding meetings with the ULCA and the ALC as these bodies desired closer relations. History had proven to the ELS a need for tightened parameters on inter-church dialogue. “That the members of the synod were quite wary of such committee negotiations is understandable in the light of the negotiations that resulted in the merger in 1917.”<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> E. Clifford Nelson, *The Lutheran Church Among Norwegian-Americans*, vol. II (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1960), 195. Stub said “union.” We would call it “unionism.”

<sup>106</sup> See **Appendix D** for the full and final edition of “The Madison Agreement.”

<sup>107</sup> Aaberg, *A City Set on A Hill*, 63–64.

<sup>108</sup> See **Appendix E** for the six theses.

<sup>109</sup> J. H. Larson and J. B. Madson, *Built on the Rock* (Mankato, MN: ELS, 1992), 85. It could be noted that, while the ELS rejoined the Synodical Conference in 1920, it did not—because of previous experience—care to be involved with the so called “Intersynodical Movement,” i.e., the Chicago Theses of 1925. The Chicago Theses, which certain voices in the SC regarded as being doctrinally sound on predestination, were accepted by representatives from Ohio, Iowa, and Buffalo. Yet, Ohio, et. al. were going into fellowship arrangements with the Norwegian Lutherans who had accepted the “Madison Settlement.” This shows how the wariness of the ELS toward official inter-synodical talks was not without warrant.

By the way, the Synodical Conference officially approved the six theses at its 1938 sessions in Watertown, WI. Another printing of Triple-U came in 1967. For our purposes here, it is especially interesting to note that Milton Otto, then chair of the ELS Doctrine Committee, wrote in a brief preface for the reprint:

During the years since 1938 a number of events have taken place in the Lutheran Church to which the contents of this pamphlet are very apropos. It was just because such developments were foreseen, if men would not heed the admonitions of Scripture, that this pamphlet was issued in the first place. It is being reprinted, with just a few minor editorial changes which in no way affect the theses or the argumentation in support of them, as a demonstration of what happens when Scripture is set aside.<sup>110</sup>

#### *Election Legacy: Lesson 4—Evidence of spirit unity needed for formal talks*

Synodical/denominational official instruments (doctrinal statements, convention resolutions, commission reports,<sup>111</sup> presidential releases, church periodicals, etc.) need to be scrutinized when churches are entering into meaningful *formal talks toward fellowship*. “Triple U,” Thesis IV, speaks to this: “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).” Whether the compromise of 1913-1917, the dangers of the LCMS-ALC talks in the 1930s, or the Synodical Conference fellowship issues of the 1950s and 60s, the voice of compromise has pressed to be heard. If initial joint committees give an itching ear to doctrinal compromise, one can expect in a similar way the entire theological ear of a denomination progressively turning deaf to the Word of God. Paul did *not* say in his letter to the Ephesians merely, “Make every effort toward unity,” but he stated, “Make every effort to keep **the unity of the Spirit**<sup>112</sup> in the bond of peace” (4:3).

In light of the above, something should be said for holding *informal* discussions and free conferences, such as here in Tacoma. When there are indications of confessional integrity, as we see with these three former SC bodies, it is beneficial for synodical leaders to gather and talk in order to dispel caricatures, to better understand one another in the struggles each church encounters, to stay abreast of current trends and challenges, and to determine if/when *formal* discussions (involving doctrinal commissions, use of documents – existing and new) should

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Brenner raises a strange twist, however: “Ironically it was also reported that the Norwegian Synod of the American Ev. Lutheran Church, which had broken with the merged Norwegian Church [sic] because the merger had been based on doctrinal compromise, was now requesting permission to send its theological candidates to Missouri’s seminary in St. Louis. The Norwegians would supply a professor of their own for the St. Louis institution” J. Brenner’s dissertation, 201.

<sup>110</sup> The ELS periodical *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* in its June/September 2003 issue contains the reprint. The entire statement also can be found on the ELS webpage <<http://www.evangelicallutheransynod.org/what-we-believe/doctrinal-statements/unity-union-and-unionism/>>.

<sup>111</sup> This writer more recently has learned that not all CTCR documents carry the weight of official doctrinal statements for the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.

<sup>112</sup> This is not a “community spirit” that easily yields false concord. This is a unity (doctrine and life) *in* and *of* the Holy Spirit (τοῦ πνεύματος). See R. C. H. Lenski’s commentary on Ephesians, 510.

occur. We live in extremely secular times where scant attention is given to the Word of God, and where conversations on nuanced points of doctrine appear quite anachronistic. We owe it to our Lord, to the good of the Kingdom at large,<sup>113</sup> and to confessional Lutheranism to make efforts to speak at least *unofficially* with each other, and to encourage toward reaffirming, embracing, and practicing the truth established in Holy Writ and as expounded accurately in the Book of Concord.

The ELS, when suspending fellowship with Missouri in 1955 (over the doctrine and practice of church fellowship), alluded in its carefully-worded resolution to a sincere desire to seek out those who demonstrate interest in the brand of Lutheranism characteristic of the old Synodical Conference. While it was evident the Synodical Conference needed to desist—as it ultimately did in 1967<sup>114</sup>—the synod pledged to work toward harmony among those searching to be truly confessional.

It is our firm conviction that we and those who stand with us represent the Scriptural principles and spirit of the Synodical Conference, and that it is the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod which has departed from them. Therefore we wish it to be clearly understood that we have no desire to suspend fraternal relations with those who agree with us in our stand and who testify with us against these present errors and unionistic practices. On the contrary, we wish to continue fraternal relations with them and to labor for realignment of Lutherans faithful to the Lutheran Confessions on more realistic lines than those which prevail under the present chaotic conditions in the Synodical Conference.<sup>115</sup>

Between the time of the 1930s and the dissolution of the SC, the Missouri Synod showed itself to be more and more open to official dialogue with those who had not agreed with the scriptural position on election. It was as if the election issue that had dominated so much of the theological time clock for the SC suddenly became a non-issue for Missouri. “The issue in the doctrine of election was not that Missouri had adopted election *intuitu fidei* but that the Missouri Synod was no longer concerned that such teaching must be clearly excluded by any confessional statement claiming to resolve past differences.”<sup>116</sup>

The 1928 *Beretning* (report) for the ELS contains a series of papers prepared for that year’s convention. The briefs were intended to show how the synod was set on following in the steps of the pious fathers of the Norwegian Synod. Under a typically prolonged heading, “The

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<sup>113</sup> A carefully defined and practiced “cooperation in externals” permits—as WELS Pres. Schroeder stated in his 2011 Emmaus lecture—“outward cooperation among Christians in activities that are truly external to the mission of the church, the use of the Means of Grace, and the proclamation of the Gospel.... [J]oint activity among churches that do not share a common confession is not *ipso facto* a violation of the biblical principles of fellowship” (39). In fact, the litmus test for true “cooperation in externals” is whether or not such joint activities/work under discussion can truly be carried on with all manner of churches and religious or civic organizations. We think of the recent case where religious organizations of various stripes joined forces to oppose the Health and Human Services ruling as an infringement on religious freedom (the HHS has demanded religious institutions offer abortifacient health care coverage). LCMS Pres. Harrison’s testimony before a congressional committee in February of 2012 was commendable. We also could mention that the controversial—and eventually overturned—Bennett Law of 1889, which required use of English in all public and private schools in Wisconsin, serves as another suitable instance where diverse religious groups combined efforts to counteract governmental intrusion on religious freedom.

<sup>114</sup> By 1963 both ELS and WELS were gone from the SC. The Slovak Synod in 1967 became a district of the LCMS.

<sup>115</sup> *ELS Synod Report, 1955*, 41–46.

<sup>116</sup> Brenner’s dissertation, 231.

Practical Problems Which Confront Us As the Logical Successors to the Old Norwegian Synod," it is interesting to note the four topics covered by the assigned writers: 1. To stand firmly on the true Lutheran doctrine of the authority of Scripture. 2. To emphasize continually the fundamental Christian doctrine of justification by faith in opposition to all synergistic doctrines, which are sweeping over the church today. 3. To bear clear testimony against all alliances with the world and with the erring churches, which threaten to rob us of the saving truth. 4. To endeavor, as much as lies in us, to preserve the faith of our fathers to posterity by establishing and maintaining Christian schools.<sup>117</sup>

### *How the election controversy has shaped the future*

The 1880s election/conversion controversy and its early 1900s reappearance were not about polity, personalities, or traditions. No one denies strong feelings between Schmidt and Walther<sup>118</sup> played a role. No one denies Stub's presidential succession of the aging Koren had some influence on the final outcome for the Norwegian Synod. But the crux of the matter was this: Is **grace** going to be **grace** in every sense of the term?

"God's undeserved love for sinners freely given" stands immovably in Scripture. This stands, no matter if discussed in connection with the means God uses to bring people to faith, or the Holy Spirit's working, or objective justification, or the election to salvation in the mind of God from eternity. It is purely **grace before time, grace in time and grace for all time**, for the merits of Christ alone is the determinant in man's salvation from beginning to end. We agree with Koren's assessment: "According to Scripture it belongs to the essence of grace to be free; for if grace is not free, i.e., undeserved by any kind of merit whatsoever in the one who is favored with it, then 'grace is no more grace' (Rom. 11:6), and a man cannot trust in the grace of God alone, Rom. 3:23-24, 27-28; Eph. 2:8-10."<sup>119</sup>

There is another related concern: Throughout the election debates—whether earlier or later era—a diminishing of **God's glory** was at stake. Koren also addressed this:

Every correct teaching and presentation of the eternal and saving election of God's elect children must "give to God his own glory entirely and fully, that in Christ he saves us out of pure mercy, without any merits or good works of ours, according to the purpose of his will, as it is written, Eph. 1:5: "Having predestinated us unto the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the Beloved'" (Formula of Concord, Thor. Decl. XI, 68). Every doctrine according to which our election and our salvation in any part and in any manner are ascribed to any other source

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<sup>117</sup> *Beretning* of the Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church (Mankato, MN: Bethany Lutheran College, 1928), 56.

<sup>118</sup> J. Brenner, "Walther and the Election Controversy," *WLQ*, Spring 2012: 119: "Although some have been critical of Walther for the way the controversy was carried out, in many ways he showed himself to be a model Christian theologian.... He was willing to depart from expressions long used by Lutheran theologians when he recognized that those expressions were open to misunderstanding at best and disguised false doctrine at worst. Yet he also showed the kind of Christian humility and faithfulness God expects of every Lutheran pastor and theologian when he publicly corrected statements of his own when others pointed out that those statements also were open to misunderstanding."

<sup>119</sup> U. V. Koren's *An Accounting*, paragraph #21.



than solely and alone exclusively God himself, robs God of his honor and depreciates the merit of our Savior.<sup>120</sup>

The teaching of God's **grace** and the deference to his **glory** are preserved for each of us today and for succeeding generations<sup>121</sup> by adherence to his Word, not merely with lips of praise but with action. Who, back in 1880, could have imagined any Norwegian Synod leader capitulating one day to a group thirty years later that would place into a founding document for its organization's premiere the synergistic phrase that **natural man has a sense or feeling of responsibility regarding the acceptance of grace?**<sup>122</sup> Who in the early 1900s would have imagined a series of alliances resulting finally in a mega body (1988) that today has resolved to ordain homosexuals? There is, of course, a host of doctrinal slippages in the interval where one more domino toppled the next. Choose the illustration you want: a little leaven...sheep's clothing...a drop of poison in the well...a little crack in the egg...dominos tumbling; these all picture the downward trajectory once a church body acquiesces to false doctrine, regardless of the appeal or how slight the error. Wherever and whenever God's Word is not followed, consequences occur in the course of time – and they are never pretty!

A startling account in the Old Testament involves a "man of God" from Judah as related in 1 Kings 13. During the time when Jeroboam was king in Judah, a "man of God" prophesied against the idolatrous altar at Bethel. He had been ordered by the Lord to do so. Jeroboam tried to entice the man to change his message, urging him to come to his home for something to eat. The man refused. He had been commanded by the Lord on exactly what to say. He had been told not to eat or drink anything. Then, we are told, an old prophet living at Bethel heard what had occurred. He sent his sons to go after the man of God, and this prophet asked the man to come home with him and eat. When the man of God was reluctant, knowing what the Lord had said about his not eating, the old prophet explained he too had received a message from God. The message was: the man should now go to the prophet's home and eat. (We are told the old prophet was lying.) So the man of God went with him and ate. Then God spoke to the old prophet and let him know he was to inform the "man of God" that he had defied the word of the Lord and therefore would die. This happened shortly. A lion met him on the road and killed him. All of this did not change the message God had spoken against Bethel. The destruction occurred just as the Lord had said through the "man of God." What a testimony this was for Judah and for people of all ages! God wants his Word followed exactly as he has stated. His doctrine is true, even when a sinner who fights with his own temptations conveys it.

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., paragraph #23.

<sup>121</sup> "Earthly inheritances can be handed down from generation to generation more or less automatically, but not so the *great* heritage. Truth, as a body of doctrine, can indeed be set before a people by the preceding generation, but each succeeding generation must, through the Holy Spirit, make this truth its own as part of its very faith and life before it can actually be said to possess it." T. Aaberg, *A City Set on a Hill*, 265.

<sup>122</sup> The ELS *Synod Report* of 1948 contains an interesting article by then-ELS pastor, J. A. O. Preus. Preus' article is entitled "What Stands Between?" He discusses point-by-point current (1946 ff.) errors in the ELC, the name adopted by the NLCA two years before Preus wrote the article. J. A. O. noted that, from his experience in the ELC, not only was the "intuitu fidei" view of election being taught at the ELC's seminary but, he said, "it is safe to say that fully 75% of the clergy of that body adhere to this view" (SR, 41). The same ELS convention report includes this note from Pres. A. M. Harstad on J.A.O. Preus: "Another new worker has been added in our midst in the person of Prof. J. A. O. Preus, Bethany College, Mankato, Minn. After he had resigned for conscience' reasons from the Evangelical Lutheran Church (Norwegian) and had signified his willingness to work in our midst, a colloquium was held with Prof. Preus by several members of the Board of Regents and the President of Bethany College. Having been found sound in doctrine, he was called to a professorship at Bethany College, which call he accepted. He was installed in office at the opening of the college for the fall term in 1947" (SR, 11).

The church fellowship doctrine and practice as presented in Scripture (Ephesians 4:3; Romans 16:17, etc.) is essential to any meaningful inter-church relations. Mutual commitment to the marks of the church—Word and Sacraments (AC VII, 2 and FC X, 31<sup>123</sup>)—must be given high priority and acceptance as both separatism and unionism are rejected. “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 fellowship. A strong position on Scripture and church fellowship go hand in hand; they are interlocking.”<sup>124</sup>

If unity is true, it will be blessed. More importantly, if God’s Word stands, then grace stands. If grace is true grace, it enables us to stand in the day of judgment before God’s throne of justice. For the grace we have received—*before* time and *in* time—is the grace of our dear Savior that can never fail to have us sinners prevail!

“I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels” (Isaiah 61:10).

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.<sup>125</sup> (ELH #583)

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<sup>123</sup> Referencing these two familiar sections, Franz Pieper wrote, “Here our Church declares that by ‘correct unity’ it understands agreement ‘in the doctrine and all articles of the same,’ not merely in some of the same. At the conclusion of Article XI of the Formula of Concord, our Church asserts that it has a true desire and love for unity and strives for it, but it must be [real] unity: ‘We desire such harmony as will not violate God’s honor, that will not detract anything from the divine truth of the holy Gospel, that *will not give place to the smallest error*’ (FC SD XI 96). . . . Though the Lutheran Church grants that also among the heterodox there are still true Christians to be found, nevertheless it has always refused to practice churchly fellowship with those who are heterodox [Irrgläubigen], in order not to offer support for a false understanding of churchly unity, that is, the view that agreement in *all* parts [of Christian doctrine] was not necessary, or, in other words, as though it were not necessary to accept the entire Word of God” (“On Unity in the Faith,” by F. Pieper in 1888, tr. Matthew Harrison, *At Home in the House of My Fathers*, Lutheran Legacy: 2009, 574).

<sup>124</sup> W. Petersen, “Our Great Heritage,” *ELS Synod Report* 1993, 102.

<sup>125</sup> Wikipedia contains this interesting remark: “God’s Word Is Our Great Heritage was written in 1817 by Nikolaj Frederik Severin Grundtvig, a Danish Lutheran Pastor. Grundtvig wrote the hymn as the 5<sup>th</sup> verse to Martin Luther’s Ein feste Burg [1]. The hymn was translated into English by Ole Gulbrand Belsheim in 1909. In 1916, Friedrich Otto Reuter, then a professor at Dr. Martin Luther College, put the hymn to a tune of his creation. Many hymnals use this arrangement, including *The Lutheran Hymnal*, *Lutheran Service Book* (LCMS) and *Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal* (WELS), though the *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary* (ELS) has retained the original melody to the hymn. The hymn is also the school hymn of Michigan Lutheran Seminary.”

## Appendix A

We include here an excellent devotion by Johann Gerhard (1852–1637). The devotion appears in Gerhard's *Manual of Comfort* (1611), where the author typically begins each of his meditations with a statement by the afflicted (Law) followed by a statement from the comforter (Gospel). The English translation here is by John M. Drickamer, according to the German edition by Carl J. Boettcher.

### **Am I Written in the Book of Life?**

The afflicted person says: Only they persevere who are written in the book of life. How can I know that I am written in it?

The comforter says: The book of life is Christ. It is called "the book of the Lamb" (Rev. 13:8; 21:27). Being written into this book is nothing other than the election of the believers to everlasting life, which takes place in Christ. For it is said of the believers that they have been chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4) and that their names were written in the book of life from the beginning of the world (Rev. 17:8).

As with election so with being written in the book of life; one may not judge in advance but only afterwards. As many as have been ordained to life, hear the Word of salvation, believe in Christ, show the fruit of the Spirit, and persevere in the faith. "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness [of God] in himself" (1 John 5:10). The Holy Spirit bears witness in the hearts of believers that they are God's children (Romans 8:16) and are written in the book of life. Those whom God has chosen from eternity, whose names are written in heaven (Luke 10:20), he calls through the Word and justifies through faith in Christ (Rom. 8:29-30). Such faith is shown in calling on God, being patient under the cross, and desiring sanctification.

A wholesome consideration of election and the book of life must begin with the wounds of the Crucified. Whoever believes in him and perseveres in faith has been justified and is written in the book of the living (Rom. 10:9). Or have you not been accepted into God's grace through baptism? Have you not been cleansed from sins by the blood of Christ? Have you not been renewed by the Holy Spirit? Those are clear signs that you have been written in the book of life. Believers "are all children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Gal. 3:26-27).

God has written not some tablets of fate but rather a book of life. He has chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world. Seek your election and your writing in the book of life in Christ alone. Amen.

## Appendix B

In the District Court of Iowa, In and for Worth County.

April Term, 1919.

Case No. 3027

The Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Association in Worth and Winnebago Counties, Iowa, and Southern Part of Freeborn County, Minnesota, Silver Lake N.E.L. Congregation, Concordia N.E.L. Congregation, Ole T. Haugo, Ole E. Ellingson and Ole Gunderson, Trustees of Silver Lake N.E.L. Congregation and Herman Storre and Gerhard C. Dahl, Trustees of Concordia N.E.L. Congregation.,  
Plaintiffs.

v.

A.J. Torgerson, et. Al.,  
Defendants.

Consolidated With  
Case No. 3048

Same plaintiffs v. A.J. Torgerson, Defendant.

In Equity.

Before Hon. C.H. Kelley, Judge.

Appearances for plaintiffs... T.A. Kingland and  
Senneff, Bliss, Witwer & Senneff.

Appearances for defendants... R.N. Nelson,  
M.H. Kepler,  
D.W. Telford and  
F.A. Ontjes.

Cause reported by George A. Blake,  
Charles City, Iowa.

\* \* \* \*

[NOTE: Here only a portion of the testimony follows...]

John A. Moldstad,

a witness produced, being first duly sworn and examined on behalf of the defendants, testified as follows in direct examination by Mr. Kepler:

Q (2:12) Your name?

A John A. Moldstad, M-o-l-d-s-t-a-d.

Q And how old are you?

A Forty five years old.

Q And what is your business or profession?

A I am a Lutheran minister.

Q And how long have you been such minister?

A Thirteen years.

Q To what church do you belong?

A Well I have always belonged to the Norwegian Synod.

Q And where did you get your education?

A I graduated from Luther College 25 years ago and from the University of Wisconsin and from Concordia Seminary at St. Louis.

Q And how many years did you spend at Luther College?

A I was there for six years.

Q That is at Decorah Iowa?

A That is at Decorah Iowa.

Q And how long did you spend at the University of Wisconsin?

A Two years.

Q And what branches were you taking there, what studies?

A Why United States history and political economy and some other branches.

Q And then what did you study at Concordia Seminary?

A Theology.

Q And how long were you there?

A Three years.

Q Three years. And when did you graduate from Concordia Seminary?

A 1906. I had been teaching and had been in business in the mean time. I used to teach up here at Albert Lea Minnesota at the academy 22 years ago.

Q And are you versed in the doctrine of the old Synod Church?

A Yes I think I know it quite well.

Q And do you... Are you familiar with the doctrine of the United Church before this new church was formed?

A Yes.

Q In your opinion was there any difference in the doctrine of those churches?

A I think there was.

Q Yes. And what was that difference?

MR. SENNEFF: Object to that as wholly immaterial as to what differences existed between them.

BY THE COURT: Well go ahead, he may answer.

A Well the main points at issue between us as has been brought out this morning was on the subject of election and the subject of conversion.

Q And are you familiar with the Opgjor?

A Yes I happen to be.

Q Do you understand that was the basis of union between the three churches?

A Yes the opgjor is declared so in I think this pamphlet that was gotten out for the annual meeting or for the union meeting, the three annual meetings in 1917; it has been placed here; I noticed it here today and it is declared specially in the so called perquisites and articles of union which is also referred to in the question by counsel a little while ago, -the opgjor is absolutely referred to as one of the bases of the foundation for this new church body. The so called common reports and opgjor, which are an expression of the common understanding of the questions which have previously been in controversy between the various church bodies, and this opgjor as well as the so called common reports they make or constitute the perquisites for the union of these three bodies and are to be kept as such. That is a definite paragraph. It is paragraph 2 in the so called articles of union. It is so declared. And this opgjor was adopted at Madison Wisconsin in February 1912, I believe the final agreement was reached on the 22nd of February, It was published about a month later. Of course some of us had typewritten copies of that before that but before its publication it was preceded by a letter from Dr. Stub of our church in our church paper as well as by a letter from President Dahl in the church papers of the United Church. Of course these letters paved the way for the coming of the opgjor and prepared the people for the acceptance of it. I believe, to be absolutely exact, that the letter from President Dahl of the United Church was printed in the same number of their official organ as the opgjor. So that it was published and it was discussed at several conferences that spring. We discussed it in Chicago and I know it was discussed at Minneapolis where Dr. Stub himself declared that it was a psychological impossibility to accept the first paragraph as it here stood. That is to accept both the first form of the doctrine and the second form of the doctrine of election. He declared that to be a psychological impossibility and the conference unanimously passed a motion asking Dr. Stub, -that is appointing him and asking him to have this first paragraph stricken out but he found that to be impossible.

MR. SENNEFF: Now just a moment; we move to strike the answer of the witness as to what Dr. Stub said as hearsay.

A Well it is a matter of record.

MR. SENNEFF: Just a moment; it is hearsay and it does not appear that the witness was present and if a matter of record it is secondary.

BY THE COURT: Ruling reserved.

Q Were you present?

A I was not at Minneapolis because the Minneapolis conference and the Chicago conference were both held at the same time. I got a telegram from the president of the Minneapolis conference telling me of this motion.

Q Did you see a published report of Dr. Stub's speech?

A Well I presume I did. It was... It has been written up a great deal; it has been mentioned often and I... It seems to me if I remember correctly that at Iola in June 1912 he also mentioned, -made use of this same sentence that it was a psychological impossibility to accept these two forms of doctrine.

Q Were you there?

A I was at Iola yes sir. I would not declare positively; I cannot quote his exact words there because of course there he had changed his opinion; he was advocating the acceptance of the opgjor there. But now do you wish me to speak in general on the subject of these two forms of doctrine?

Q Yes. I want to ask you, -we'll ask you whether the first form of doctrine and the second form of doctrine as referred to in section one of this agreement are opposed or contrary or whether they can stand together?

MR. SENNEFF: Object to that as calling for witness' conclusion or opinion.

BY THE COURT: Well he can state his views in the matter.

A Well in my conviction these two doctrines... In my opinion they are not just sort of two forms of the same doctrine as has been claimed sometimes but they are two entirely different doctrines. It is not a very difficult matter to see that. The definition in paragraph three here is really very clear; there is really a double definition you might say of each one of them in paragraph three of opgjor. In the first place they speak of these two forms of doctrine but now with the doctrine of election at any rate it is not such that you can have the form that will stand alone without the doctrine and that the doctrine will stand alone without the form. I am convinced in my conscience and convicted by the Bible that here is at least one doctrine where form and doctrine absolutely cover one another and the moment you change the form you immediately also change the doctrine. Here are two distinct doctrines. One doctrine, -both refer to a doctrine the doctrine of election or refer to a decree. The doctrine of election is a decree just the same as a decree of court. It is a decree that has been decided by the Triune God in eternity. Now then the question is what was this decree. The first form, -the so called first form of the doctrine, which is the official Lutheran Church doctrine and always has been ever since 1580 and there is no other official Lutheran doctrine, -the other is the doctrine of private theologians, private teachers in the church. Now this official Lutheran doctrine which is put into the Formula of Concord or into the Book of Concord when that was completed in the year 1580, -this form of the doctrine embraces as paragraph three here very properly says the whole way of salvation, God's entire method of saving a sinner, from the calling to the glorification. You can divide that up into as many steps as you want to. Of course the easiest for the common man is to follow the three articles of Luther's little catechism. There in the third article of Luther's little catechism he says, "The Holy Ghost has called me by the gospel enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me." And of course down at the bottom finally is the glorification and then in the middle there is a little two line paragraph which says that, "In this Christian Church God daily and regularly forgives me and all believers in Christ." Now you have these various points. That is the way of salvation according to the Bible and according to the Lutheran doctrine. Now the Formula of Concord and the official doctrine of the Lutheran Church is that God from eternity decided, decreed according to His own purpose and grace through Christ Jesus, -decided to just these things for each individual Christian that is finally saved. That is the first form of doctrine and that is the definition that is set forth here in paragraph three and when it says here that, "Some, with the Formula of Concord, make the

doctrine of election to comprise the entire salvation of the elect from the calling to the glorification and teach the election to salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth," that is the first form of doctrine. Now of course that has been the teaching of the Lutheran Church since 1580. There have been men who have held other views of course. You cannot in a big church body like that make every one hold the whole doctrine every time. And this has been the doctrine of the Norwegian Synod all this time also in spite of the fact that there may have been here and there, especially some of the men who have been educated in Norway and most particularly in later years, -there were a few exceptions among the earlier ones too, -who have held the so called second doctrine, the second form of doctrine or the second doctrine. I think this word "form" is very misleading and I therefore dislike using it. Now what is the second form or the second doctrine of election? This doctrine was formulated, -not to say invented, -by certain theologians in the Seventeenth Century. I do not know whether it is possible for anybody to exactly fix the date that this was first promulgated but even the theologians of the Seventeenth Century as far as I know did not all formulate it in the same way; they did not all express this second form of the doctrine in exactly the same words. There was a little variation there. It was not that they, -they all said as I read it... Well I believe they all said that they also accepted the Formula of Concord but for some reason or another they thought that this doctrine was a little handier to use, especially in combating the Calvinists and so they formulated this doctrine which of course really is a doctrine, a philosophical system or doctrine, that they made you might say out of their own heads. There is no scriptural form that I have ever been able to find at any rate, and I have the declaration of such learned men as Dr. Stub and others on election that they cannot find any scriptural passages, which teaches or upholds or defends the second form of election. It has been made clear here this morning so that I am not going to go into all the scriptural texts and everything that was mentioned here today but the second doctrine of election is also a doctrine, it is the doctrine of glorification, and the third paragraph gives a very good double characterization of it. In the first place it says, "\*\*\*while others, like Pontoppidan, in consonance..." that means together with, -"with John Gerhard, Scriver and other acknowledged doctrinal fathers, define election specifically as the decree of final glorification, with the Spirit's work of faith and perseverance as its necessary postulate..." If I translated this I would say prerequisite or antecedent as Rev. Harstad did this morning. That is the first definition given here. Now I think they do Gerhard and Scriver and even Pontoppidan an injustice by saying that these men demand all this as a prerequisite; at least I have not been able to find in their writings those things; there might be of course; take a man like John Gerhard he has written a tremendous lot and when you write a great deal you may make a slip sometimes and he may have said something that somewhere can be construed in this way. But if you take John Gerhard as he has usually been used in the Norwegian Synod why I don't think you can find anything like this stated being a prerequisite. Then that continues this definition of the second doctrine of election and they say, "\*\*\*and teach that God has ordained to eternal life all those whom from eternity He foresaw would accept the proffered grace, believe in Christ and remain steadfast unto the end;". That is question 548 of Pontoppidan. That is the answer to question 548 of the Pontoppidan translation. Now you notice that Pontoppidan does not say anything about a prerequisite. Now I cannot go as far as Brother Harstad did. I cannot accept this answer to Pontoppidan. Well he didn't accept it either but I cannot accept that as a definition of election. He asks the question, "What is election?" and then he gives this answer which does not fit his question and my chief reason for not accepting that is because unless a person has been trained to it I do not believe that it is possible for a person to use this second doctrine even in this mild form that it is set forth by Pontoppidan, -to use it without getting into a snare, without getting into trouble. It has been my experience, -I have tested this out on a good many church people during these last years, -I have always found when I asked them, "Now read that and then tell me what it means," and they will tell you that it means that God ordained to eternal life all those whom he from eternity foresaw would accept and so forth. That is He would, -He had ordained that, He had predestinated that, elected them because He saw or He foresaw these things. That is the danger. His foreseeing is made a cause of his election and that is all wrong. That is contrary to Scripture. There is the danger. There is more danger for the common church member in this passage than there could be if it was put in the old straight forward form, -that is by the dogmaticians. There is a danger. There is a practical danger for the church man. Now then it is just the same as if you say, "This is a hand; the hand consists of the palm and the thumb and

four fingers." And you say, "No, that is not a hand; the hand is the palm and the thumb." Well you will see those are two entirely different definitions of a hand. To me this is just the way these two different doctrines of election look. The one is the whole hand; that is the first form; that is the official Lutheran teaching. The other is just the thumb and the palm of the hand; that is the second form or second doctrine or the teaching of a certain few teachers within the Lutheran church. Now I hope I have made this distinction between these two doctrines clear. That is the difference between these two doctrines that were in the church. Now this difference of course makes it psychologically impossible for anybody to know what the first paragraph of the Madison opgjor says because you will notice it says there, "The Synod and the United Church committees on union acknowledge unanimously and without reservation the doctrine of predestination which is stated in the Eleventh Article of the Formula of Concord..." Now then you have to supply, "And the doctrine of predestination which is stated" "-in Pontoppidan's Explanation, Question 548." Now then you cannot accept or acknowledge or recognize both of these entirely different doctrines of election and recognize them without reservation and that is what we have never done in the Norwegian Synod, never; we have never recognized it without reservation. That is the point especially here that there is always, -wherever there has been even what you might call a recognition there has always been a reservation made. Now what has been the Synod's position towards this second form of the doctrine? I said before that is the official doctrine of the Norwegian Synod, -the first form of the doctrine. As long as I have known the Norwegian Synod and I have been interested in this question well I suppose at least 35 possibly 36 years; I was a boy perhaps 9 or 10 years old when this controversy arose in our congregation. I happened to be a member of the first congregation that split or that deposed its pastor so I lived through it and I know what it costs in the matter of fanaticism and in the matter of being pretty short of change because my father was in business in that town and of course nearly the whole opposition to a man quit trading with him so that we were getting along with what we could get along with there for some time just simply because my father lost his business through this controversy. Besides that we were put out of our church so that we had no place to meet and what was more we started to meet in the school houses and they happened to have the members of the school board and they locked the school houses on us and there was one hall in the town which was used Saturday evenings as a dance hall; we rented that but after we had had it once or maybe twice that was closed because the man who owned the hall belonged to the other side and we couldn't use that and we had to travel five miles out in the country to a school house in order to find a place where we could hold services because in that school house there was another church worshipping and they could not close it on us unless they closed it on everybody. Well probably that hasn't anything to do with this question that I am talking about exactly but it shows the effect it had on the people there, the fanaticism that arose as a result of this. This question was thrown into that congregation; it was unprepared to receive it; they didn't understand it; they didn't know what they were doing at all. One of the leaders of the opposition which deposed that minister told me a few years ago before he died, he was then quite an old man, he said, "We didn't know what we were doing, and if this same question were to arise now it would be lots worse now," he says, "because these young people don't know anything about the question at all and we knew nothing." That is the way he felt about it in his old age, this man who had been almost leading the opposition to Rev. H.A. Preus of the Synod and deposing him. Now the second form of the doctrine had really had no standing and had really been of no importance in the Norwegian Synod up to the controversy started by Dr. F.A. Schmidt; it had really been of no importance. It is true for a while they used that large Pontoppidan. You always have to bear in mind that there are two Pontoppidans; there is a large one which I suppose was authorized for use in Norway once upon a time. Whether it has ever been used very much I am unable to say and I don't think there is anybody that can say it. I doubt that there are any statistics on it. I have heard of one or two congregations over there where it was used but as a matter of fact as far back as when my mother went to school, and she is 76 years old, when she went to school back in Norway...

MR. SENNEFF: Just a moment; it seems to me, your honor, we are making quite a lot of record on hearsay testimony that is not going to help us when we get through.

MR. KEPLER: It is the history of the thing.



MR. SENNEFF: Well but what his mother told him is hearsay and immaterial and a man that died a couple of years ago; it is all immaterial. We object to it and also move to strike from the answer of the witness so far given the relation of what somebody told him about certain things and also object to this proposed answer for the same reason.

BY THE COURT: Ruling reserved; go ahead.

A Well the point that I was just going to make is this, that it is very questionable how generally this large book of Pontoppidan, –how general its use as a text book for teaching children ever was because as long back as when my mother went to school she used the little epitome; she has it today and I have seen it of course from my childhood on and she never used anything else. And of course here in our country I have heard of one congregation down at Lisbon, Illinois, using the large book but otherwise the book that we always used to instruct the confirmation classes, previous to the time that we got out our own revised version which is still shorter, was the little epitome. Of course there this question 548 does not appear at all; it appears only in the large book. And my point is simply this, that that is practically an unknown subject to the lay people or to most of the lay people at any rate in our Norwegian Synod until it was thrown like a fire brand into our congregations by Dr. Schmidt in the early eighties. He started the controversy by writing in German against the Missouri Synod but then he couldn't get away with that and so he threw the controversy into the Norwegian Synod and right in among the lay people because he started a paper, a Norwegian paper; he was a German but he is very efficient in Norwegian and he began a Norwegian paper and that Norwegian paper was brought around and it had a tremendous circulation. I know we had it in our home and my father, –I remember this very keenly, –my father was inclined to side with Schmidt but finally he says one day he says, "I believe I had better see what the other side says." So he went to his book shelf and got down his Book of Concord which he happened to own and he read the Book of Concord and he said, "No, Schmidt is wrong and Preus is right." And so he quit siding with Schmidt on this. Now that was really the start you might say of this question. That was the start of this question in our synod, this throwing it in as a question at issue. Our minister was deposed on Good Friday and the church closed for Easter Sunday because he would not sign the papers that had been drawn up by Dr. F.A. Schmidt.

Q Well now what...about that controversy how long has that controversy lasted? Now has that controversy ever ceased?

A Of course it kind of died down you know. It started about the year 1880 and lasted until 1888 when I think it was 55 ministers and a great many more congregations seceded from the Norwegian Synod, maybe not all at once but little by little throughout that year, perhaps the next year; they seceded because the Norwegian Synod majority taught the first form of the doctrine and would not subscribe to the second form of the doctrine. Then the controversy had lasted some time and it had been very heated. Of course I was only a school boy then so I was not along in any of these controversies or conferences; I have most of the documents relative to them; I have the documents relative to the conferences and conference reports. It was in 1884 that all those ministers who stood with the Synod drew up and signed a document known as the "Redegjorlse." It was a document setting forth the position of the Norwegian Synod on the subject of election.

MR. NELSON: Was that ever adopted by the Synod?

A I don't think it was ever adopted and made official in that way but it has always been recognized or tacitly recognized or spoken of as the official expression of the Norwegian Synod on the subject of conversion and election. However, the same doctrine was embodied in a series of theses that were submitted in 1910. They were submitted to all the districts of the synod and as far as I know they were unanimously or nearly unanimously accepted at all the district synod meetings in 1910 where the doctrinal position of the Norwegian Synod with respect to the doctrine of election is clearly set forth. And now I said a while ago there might have been some men even from the earliest days who were inclined to hold this second form of doctrine and there may have been a few more in later years. It always was a very small minority after 1887. You see in 1887 the so called Anti-Missourians left us. There were if I am not badly mistaken 55 ministers and then quite a number of congregations. They went out; they seceded from the Norwegian Synod. For a while they stood alone as the Anti-Missourian Brotherhood and then in 1890 they united with the Norwegian Augustana Synod, –not to be confused with the Swedish Augustana

Synod, –and the Norwegian-Danish Conference, to form the Lutheran, –the so called United Norwegian Lutheran Church of America. That was formed in 1890. Now of course after this secession there was peace, perhaps too much peace in the Norwegian Synod and the fighting was simply in the papers between the United Church on the one hand and us on the other. The controversy was kept alive in that way. There were some free conferences. There was one up at Wilmer but these free conferences led to nothing and then finally I think in 1905 the Hauge Synod issued an invitation to the other two church bodies to elect committees to see if they could not come to an agreement on other doctrines and effect a union. And then that was done and from 1905 to 1910 these committees held meetings as you have already been told this morning. They seemed to come to an agreement on various questions, even on the most difficult and most vital question, namely, that of conversion. Even in 1908 in Chicago there were those who raised an objection and a very serious objection to the theses or sentences on conversion that were, –that had been agreed to because there were no antitheses; that is there were no sentences at the end setting forth the negative side and that was of course a very grave mistake because unless you have those to the ordinary Christian what his pastor’s teaching is in this respect on this subject. If the pastor teaches, –accepts all the doctrines on conversion and also accepts the Book of Concord’s teaching on election then that man can feel quite safe that his pastor is going to teach right on all these important questions while if his pastor seems to teach right on these other questions and then teaches the wrong doctrine of election then that man had better look out because he can never be sure that his pastor is teaching right. That is a very serious and practical importance in this doctrine as I see it. I would not take any chances on belonging to a congregation of a man who taught the second form of the doctrine. I would have to be eternally on my guard; that is the way I would feel about it. Now that is the practical importance of these things and it has you see a direct and indirect importance. Now the Norwegian Synod’s position I would like to make, –the old position, –clear. The old position is of the great majority and that was quite plain in 1887 at Stoughton, Wisconsin, when the final split came, when the secession came. The majority of the ministers held to the first doctrine of the subject of election. The first doctrine of election the doctrine of election as taught in the Eleventh Article of the Formula of Concord that is and that was the position also afterwards. In the theses adopted in 1910 only 9 years ago in June the same position was reiterated. Now what was the Synod’s position toward the second form of the doctrine? We often casually say that the Synod with limitations with reservations gave a certain recognition to the second form of this doctrine, of this second doctrine; that has often been said. Personally I always feel that that is a very inexact statement. The Synod in its relation to this second tropus this second doctrine of election really always dealt with the man or the individual himself instead of with the doctrine itself. In all these expressions, for instance in the expression or reservation that was made by four of our delegates to the synodical conference in Chicago in 1882 that started by making this reservation and then it was reiterated in the so called “Redegjorlse”, an explanation setting forth our teaching that was published in 1884. The Synod always said that while it could not accept as a definition of election this question 548 of Pontoppidan’s, –they could not accept that because it was incomplete, –never the less they would not break fellowship with this individual man who taught that doctrine provided they taught correctly about sin and grace, –that is about conversion and all the other important doctrines. That has been the position all along. In other words we have sometimes said they would not tolerate the second form of the doctrine or second doctrine. Well I don’t think that that is true. I don’t think it is true when put abstractly like that. I don’t think that we have ever tolerated the abstract expression of the doctrine as expressed in this Seventeenth Century form but we have tolerated the fact that certain men who otherwise taught correctly, –that certain men held this doctrine; that we have tolerated; that we have agreed to and we have recognized them as brethren because we had reason to believe they were Christians and we accepted their profession of faith, they taught correctly about sin about fallen man and about the grace of God and then we tolerated this wrong teaching about the doctrine of election as a weakness of those brethren. That is the way I have always understood it. This question 548 has always been accepted in the sense of these Scripture facts that are set forth there but not as the doctrine of election. I am well aware of the fact that there was once one district which did pass some sort of a resolution which I have not here but it was in the minutes of the meetings, –passed a resolution to the effect that it recognized this answer of Pontoppidan but that was just one district and not the whole Synod. You see in the Synod the rule was

that in order to have a resolution be binding on the Synod to make it a Synod resolution it had to be passed by all the districts. That was the former rule. Now I believe, –well at least it was 4 out of 5 but that is unimportant.

Q Well now is there anything further? I think you have covered the ground there. Is there anything further on the matter of conversion?

A Yes.

Q Any further distinction that that you wish to talk about?

A Yes I feel that it is necessary. I have spoken of paragraph one which is a psychological impossibility. We can accept the first part of it but not the last part because that is psychologically impossible. In paragraph three there seem to be some other things to object to besides just that reference to the Eleventh Article of the Book of Concord. There are some things that I think are untrue but the main part of paragraph three is after all the definition of the two doctrines of election and I don't personally, –I don't agree to the last part there but that is not, –that is to all of what is in the last part. But in question... That is in paragraph four of this Madison opgjor it starts out fine, starts out very nicely as far as I can see. Of course I am not a great theologian or a great scholar, just a common ordinary Chicago preacher, but the first part looks good to me and if they had only stopped where they should have stopped why we would not have been able to find any fault with it. But in the last four lines there... Now personally I would be by nature a unionist. I like to be a great friend with everybody a hail fellow well met and all that and it would personally to me have been a very great triumph if I could for my conscience have gone into this new church body. It really would have been a very great triumph and it was a terrible shock to me when I first heard the opgjor read. I did not see it first, I heard it read; it was just like getting a bucket of cold ice water down your back; that is the way I felt because I immediately foresaw what was going to happen. I knew that it would be passed through and I told Dr. Stub in 1919....

Q Well now just tell the difference there is, –what difference in doctrine there is.

A Well now the last few lines there in other words we “reject every doctrine which either on the one hand would rob God of His honor as the only Savior or on the other would weaken man's sense of responsibility in respect of the acceptance or rejection of God's grace.” This word “sense” is used in the sense of feeling here; it is man's feeling and that last part, “We reject every doctrine which...” should have been left out; either reject every doctrine which would rob God of His honor as our only Savior, –that is very good of course but it really does not mean anything alone that way like the joke in the funny papers; it really does not mean anything standing as naked as it does; and then they go to work and append right to that “or on the other would weaken man's sense of responsibility, –feeling of responsibility, –in respect of the, –or over against as the literal translation would be, –acceptance or the rejection of grace.” Now it has already been pointed out here today that that is synergism. Synergism means that a man is helping God, that a man is converting himself by his own power to some extent at any rate. There are so many different shades of this meaning that it makes it very difficult.

Q Now just a moment in respect to that. Was this agreement written up in the, –is the original in the Norwegian language?

A The original opgjor?

Q Yes.

A Yes sir, the original opgjor is.

Q And this exhibit....

A That is exhibit “C”.

Q Is?

A A translation into English.

Q Is the English translation?

A Yes; there have been several translations. This translation is very clear when you can hold it along side of the Norwegian but the word “feeling” would be the translation of the Norwegian word “følelse” but the word “sense” I believe if I am not very badly mistaken is also used in this same meaning. Now we are talking about weakening man's sense of responsibility his feeling of responsibility in respect of the acceptance of grace. That presupposes that man feels because here you are talking of that whole paragraph, you are talking about unregenerate man, you are not talking about a Christian, you are

talking about a person that still is as Saint Paul says “dead in trespasses and sins.” You are talking about the carnal mind, you are talking about the natural man who receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God because they are foolishness unto him the Bible says; that is what you are talking about here all the time. And I have never heard anybody claim that this had reference to man after conversion. You are talking here about an unconverted unregenerate man the natural sinful man dead in trespasses and sins and about that man who is a spiritual corpse. You are talking as though that spiritual corpse had a feeling of responsibility in respect of the acceptance of God’s grace and a feeling of responsibility over against the rejection of God’s grace and of course that is pure synergism in my conviction. Of course there you are up against the definitions too.

MR. KEPLER: Well you may take the witness.

CROSS EXAMINATION BY MR. SENNEFF:

Q (3:05) You read on farther in language as plain as the English language can make it that they reject the idea that the sinner has anything to do with his own conversion?

A I don’t quite agree that it is as plain as the English language can make it but it is good, it is good.

Q Yes, plain enough so that any man can understand that what that committee said was that in their combined and unanimous judgment man had nothing to do with his own conversion don’t it in section five and you agree with that don’t you?

A Are you through?

Q Yes sir, I am through with that question

A Yes, as far as that is a question.

Q Well now just let us see if you and I cannot get along faster by my asking a question and you answering it.

MR. KEPLER: If he wants to make any explanation....

MR. SENNEFF: If he can’t answer the question by yes or no.

A It is not fair to you.

Q Don’t worry about that.

A Or to me as far as it goes.

Q Well here it is your idea is it not that man has nothing to do with his own conversion.

A Absolutely.

Q Yes.

A Absolutely.

Q So if the committee have in language that ordinary man can understand said that thing then you are in accord with them?

A Certainly.

Q Yes.

A But here they contradict in section five what they said in four.

MR. SENNEFF: I move to strike the last part of the answer following the word “certainly” as volunteered and not responsive.

BY THE COURT: Sustained.

Defendants except to the ruling of the court.

Q Not you say that in, –at the 1910 Synod meeting there was a clear presentation of the Synod’s position or the Synod’s attitude in the matter of the two forms?

A Yes sir.

Q Do you know who wrote that?

A Dr. St... Well they are usually spoken of as Dr. Stub’s theses.

Q Yes. And the position of the Synod in regard to these two forms was made clear at that meeting wasn’t it?

A Quite clear I think.

Q Yes. And is it not true that in that thesis of Dr. Stub he did recognize the two forms?

A No I don’t think he did but he simply...

Q Well those are readily accessible; we can find them.

A Yes you have them there; I gave them to you this morning.

Q Finally the real difficulty or the danger as you put it is in the interpretation that might be placed upon Pontoppidan's Explanation?

A Well when you use Pontoppidan's form yes.

Q Yes.

A That is the words themselves are a misstatement.

Q Yes but the Pontoppidan explanation if followed as you construe Pontoppidan's Explanation, - that is not objectionable to the Synod?

A Well that depends on what you mean.

Q Well I mean just as I put it.

A Well it is objectionable as a definition of election; it would do it might do as a pretty fair description of the elect.

Q But here in this paper the settlement you would say that this was reasonably plain English: "Whereas the conferring church bodies acknowledge that Art. 11 of the Formula of Concord presents the pure and correct doctrine of God's Word and the Lutheran Church regarding the election of the children of God to salvation, it is deemed unnecessary to church union to construct new and more extensive theses concerning this article of faith".

A I hold that that is in contradiction to the last half of the first paragraph.

Q Well now just take this one at a time; this second paragraph you are in accord with that?

A That is with the doctrine expressed there yes; I would not agree with the preamble, that whereas.

Q Well that does not change the substance does it at all?

A Not the doctrine.

Q "Whereas the conferring church bodies acknowledge that Art. 11..." You claim article 11 of the Formula of Concord presents the pure and correct doctrine of God's Word and the Lutheran Church regarding the election of the children of God to salvation don't you?

A Absolutely.

Q Now if that is what they meant to say then you are in accord with their idea?

A Yes, sure.

Q Yes.

A That is correct.

Q And you believe that Pontoppidan's Explanation or second form if correctly interpreted does not contradict any doctrine revealed in the Word of God don't you?

A No sir I don't believe that; that is just what I do not believe.

Q No matter what interpretation you pass upon it?

A Take the words in that line.

Q I am not asking you about this book at all now.

A Well but I can't answer a question that is not put.

Q If you can't answer it just say so. I ask you this question now and if you can't answer it you say so: Do you say that no matter what interpretation you put on the Pontoppidan explanation of the second doctrine that it is contrary to the Word of God as revealed in the Bible?

A I couldn't say because I wouldn't know what I was talking about.

Q You know what Pontoppidan's Explanation is don't you?

A Yes, sure.

Q And you know how you interpret it?

A I have no way of interpreting that so as to make it fit the Word of God.

Q You have no way?

A No sir, I cannot interpret that so as to make it fit the Word of God. To me Pontoppidan's Explanation or rather his Question 548 is the most utter nonsense; that is the way it looks to me; that is my conviction.

Q I see. I see. You know that prior to 1880, -you were a pretty small boy but you have told us a good deal about that, -1880 and prior to that time the church did recognize Pontoppidan's Explanation of the second doctrine as being not heretic?

A No I don't know that because I don't think it was ever mentioned; I don't think so.

Q You don't believe that is true?

A I don't think so.

Q You were not here when Dr. Dau testified yesterday were you?

A No.

Q There is no way in your mind that no matter what explanation you placed upon it that second doctrine can be consistent with the first?

A No, they are opposites.

Q You are in disagreement then with both Mr. Harstad...

A No not...

Q And Dr. Dau?

A No; if I understand them I am in absolute agreement with them.

Q Well Dr. Dau testified yesterday that they did not call it heretical or objectionable...

A That is different.

Q Just a moment. -if they placed a construction upon the second doctrine in accordance with Pontoppidan's Explanation. Now do you agree with that?

A I didn't hear them say that you know. I couldn't.

Q Assuming that he said that do you agree with that?

A No, because that would be something opposite of what I said a little while ago.

Q All right. You are an officer of this new church that has just been organized are you?

A Well I am the temporary vice president of the Norwegian synod yes.

Q I see. You don't mean... That is the new synod that is being formed?

A Well it is the remnants that we are getting together.

Q I see.

A Of the old synod.

MR. SENNEFF: Yes. That is all.

MR. KEPLER: That is all.

BY THE COURT: Call your next.

## Appendix C

[Only a portion of the concluding section to Koren's "An Accounting" is here included.]

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

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

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

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

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

10. No man who will not trust in God alone for salvation, but who thinks that he must himself be able to contribute something to it, can have any certainty by faith that he will be saved. Rom. 4:16; 9:16; Eph. 2:8-9; 2 Chron. 13:18; Ps. 84:12.

11. The certainty by faith that salvation will actually be attained is not an absolute certainty, as if it were impossible for a man to hinder it; for preservation does not take place by compulsion, and the possibility of apostacy [sic] is, therefore, not removed. Nor are the promises of God to the believer a prophecy that he will be saved. Rom. 8:24-25; 1 Cor. 9:27; Rev. 2:10; Mark 4:17.

12. Recognition of the possibility of apostacy [sic], and the earnestness which results from it in working out one's own salvation with fear and trembling (filial fear) does not take away the believer's certainty of salvation, nor does it limit it, but strengthens it; for that is one of the means whereby God preserves the believer. For it compels him continually to seek refuge in God's promise of help which strengthens and preserves him in the firm faith and hope that the possibility of apostacy [sic] shall by the grace of God not become a reality. That recognition, therefore, will always accompany the true certainty by faith of salvation. Where it is forgotten and a man falls into sinful security, there the grace of God and faith are lost. (Cf. Pontoppidan, *Sandh, til Gudfr.*, Q 86, 670, 514.) Tit. 2:11-13; Phil. 2:12-13; Mark 13:33-37; 1 Tim. 1:19; 6:10; Ps. 2:11; 1 Pet. 1:4, 8, 17.

13. A man cannot arrive at certainty by faith concerning his salvation and election by brooding over election or by wanting to get that clear first, but alone by building on the universal grace and the call of God's love in Christ. But he who in this way has become a believer will have, especially in temptation, this comfort in the teaching of God's Word concerning election, that God who in the Gospel has promised him salvation, has ("since through the weakness and wickedness of our flesh it could easily be lost from our hands") "wished to secure my salvation so well and certainly that He ordained it in His eternal purpose, which cannot fail or be overthrown, and placed it for preservation in the almighty hand of our Savior Jesus Christ, from which no one can pluck us" (John 10:28). (Formula of Concord. Thor. Decl., XI, 37.) Luke 16:29; Rom. 11:34; John 1:12-13; 2 Tim. 1:9; 1 Pet. 2:6; Ps. 9:10; John 3:16.

[Note: In the above quotations from the Formula of Concord, we have used the English version of the *Concordia Triglotta*, (St. Louis, 1917) - S. Ylvisaker, ed.]



## Appendix D

### 1912 Madison Agreement

1. The Union Committees of the Synod and the United Church, unanimously and without reservation, accept that doctrine of election which is set forth in Article XI of the Formula of Concord, the so-called First Form...and Pontoppidan's *Truth Unto Godliness*...the so-called Second Form of Doctrine....

2. Since both the conferring church bodies acknowledge that Article XI of the Formula of Concord presents the pure and correct doctrine of the election of the children of God unto salvation as taught by the Word of God and the Confessions of the Lutheran Church, it is deemed unnecessary for church unity to set up new and more elaborate theses on this article of faith.

3. However, since it is well known that in presenting the doctrine of election two forms of doctrine have been used, both of which have won acceptance and recognition within the orthodox Lutheran Church;

Some, in accordance with the Formula of Concord, include under the doctrine of election the whole order of salvation of the elect from the call to the glorification...and teach an election "unto salvation through the sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth;"

While others, with Pontoppidan, in conformity with John Gerhard, Scriver, and other recognized teachers of the Church, define election more specifically as the decree concerning the final glorification, with faith and perseverance wrought by the Holy Spirit as its necessary presupposition, and teach that "God has appointed all those to eternal life who He from eternity has foreseen would accept the offered grace, believe in Christ and remain constant in this faith unto the end"; and since neither of these two forms of doctrine, thus presented, contradicts any doctrine revealed in the Word of God, but does full justice to the order of salvation as presented in the Word of God and the confession of the Church;

We find that this should not be cause for schism within the Church or disturb that unity of the spirit in the bond of peace which God wills should prevail among us.

4. Since, however, in the controversy over this question among us, there have appeared words and expressions – justly or unjustly attributed to the respective parties – which seemed to the opposite party to be a denial or to lead to a denial of the Confession;

We have agreed to reject all errors which seek to explain away the mystery of election...either in a synergizing or a Calvinizing manner...every doctrine which...would deprive God of His glory as only Savior or...weaken man's sense of responsibility in relation to the acceptance or rejection of grace.

5. On the one hand we reject:

a) The doctrine that the cause of our election is not solely the mercy of God and the holy merit of Christ, but that there also in us is a cause on account of which God has elected us to eternal life;

b) The doctrine that in election God has been determined by, has taken into account, or has been influenced by man's good attitude or anything which man is, does, or omits to do "as of himself and by his own natural powers";

c) The doctrine that the faith in Christ which is inseparably connected with election is in whole or in part a product of, or depends upon, man's own choice, power, or ability....

d) Or that this faith is the result of an ability and power imparted by the call of grace, which therefore now dwell within and belong to, the unregenerate heart, enabling it to make a decision for grace.

6. On the other hand we reject:

a) The doctrine that God in the election acts arbitrarily and unmotivated, so that He points out and counts a certain arbitrary number of any individuals whomsoever and appoints them to conversion and salvation while all others are excluded;

b) The doctrine that there are two kinds of saving will in God, one revealed in Scripture in the general order of salvation and one that is different from and unknown to us, which concerns only the elect and brings to them a more cordial love, a more powerful call from God and greater grace than to those who remain in their unbelief and lost condition;

c) The doctrine that when the resistance, which God in conversion removes from those who are saved, is not removed from those who are finally lost, the cause for this different result lies in God and a different will to save in His election;

d) The doctrine that the believer can and shall have an absolute assurance of his election and salvation, instead of an assurance of faith, drawn from the promises of God, connected with fear and trembling and with the possibility of falling away, which, however, he believes by the grace of God shall not be realized in his case;

e) In brief, all opinions and doctrines concerning election which directly or indirectly would conflict with the order of salvation, and would not give to all a full and equally great opportunity to be saved, or which in any way would do violence to the Word of God which says God "would have all men to be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth" – in which gracious and merciful will of God all election to eternal life has its source.

On the basis of the above agreement the committees on union recommend to their respective church-bodies the adoption of the following resolutions:

Whereas, our confessional writings establish that "to the true unity of the church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments"; and

Whereas, our previous committees by the grace of God have attained unanimity with respect to the doctrines concerning the call, conversion and the order of salvation as a whole, and we all confess as our sincere faith that we are saved by grace alone without any cooperation on our part; and

Whereas, the deliberations of our new committees have led to a satisfactory agreement concerning the doctrine of election and to an unreserved and unanimous acceptance of that doctrine of election which is set forth in Article XI, Part II of the Formula of Concord and Question 548 in Pontoppidan's *Truth Unto Godliness*...we therefore declare hereby, that the essential agreement concerning these doctrines which has been attained is sufficient for church union....

[Taken from F. C. Wolf's *Documents of Lutheran Unity in America* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1966), 232-235.]

## Appendix E

### The Six Theses of the Triple U<sup>126</sup>

In view of the fact that continued efforts are being made to unite all Lutherans in one fellowship, we adopt the following theses as expressing the principles which must guide us in seeking to effect such fellowship.

- I. The spiritual unity of the Holy Christian Church, which is the body of Christ, is not dependent upon any such externals as a common organization or language, but alone upon the possession of the saving faith in Jesus Christ. True Christians will, however, “endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3), and will therefore also seek to establish and maintain church fellowship with all who are one with them in confessing the true faith.
- II. We acknowledge one, and only one, truly unifying influence and power in matters both of doctrine and of practice, namely the Word of God; and only one God-pleasing procedure in striving for unity: That “the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity, and we as the children of God lead holy lives according to it.”
- 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.
- IV. We hold that inter-synodical committees are useful in promoting Christian fellowship only a) 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 b) where it is clear that those in error sincerely desire to know “the way of God more perfectly” (Acts 18:26).
- V. Where such evidence of unity is lacking, or where it is clear that those in error do not sincerely desire to know “the way of God more perfectly,” but such committees nevertheless are elected to confer with them with the view to church fellowship, there is grave danger that the work of these committees will result in indifferentism and in compromise of Scriptural doctrine and practice. (For examples of this, consider the mergers and unions of recent years among Lutherans.) The duty of testifying to the truth of God’s Word and thus promoting unity, rests at all times upon all Christians. Cf. I Peter 3:15.
- VI. Scripture warns us clearly and emphatically against entanglements with errorists (Romans 16:17, Titus 3:10, 1 Timothy 6:3–5). Any reluctance to heed these warnings and commands of Scripture is unionism already conceived in the heart, which if allowed to develop, will result in full-fledged unionism, as history also attests.

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<sup>126</sup> The entire document of “Unity, Union, and Unionism” (1936), including expansion of the six theses, can be found at <http://www.evangelicallutheransynod.org/beliefs/doctrinal-statements/unity-union-and-unionism/>.