

BLANK PAGE

## Foreword

Isaiah 12 is a great song of redemption written by the Old Testament evangelist. God is indeed our salvation because full redemption is found in Jesus Christ our Savior. Rev. Harry Bartels and Rev. Timothy Bartels prepared four devotions based on this Old Testament hymn of praise for the Circuit 12 Pastoral Conference at Saved by Grace Lutheran Church, Gresham, Oregon, on January 13 and 14, 2004. Rev. Timothy Bartels is pastor of the Gresham congregation. Rev. Harry Bartels serves the Parkland Lutheran Church, Tacoma, Washington.

In 2003 our synod celebrated the one hundred fiftieth anniversary of the Norwegian Synod, of which the Evangelical Lutheran Synod is the spiritual heir. As part of the anniversary celebration the essay, *The Drive to Opgjør* was presented at the 2003 ELS General Pastoral Conference. Here the essayist reviews and evaluates the events that led up to the 1917 merger that was ultimately the demise of the Norwegian Synod. This essay was written by Rev. Jerome Gernander of Richland Lutheran Church, Thornton, Iowa.

“It is taught among us that nobody should publicly teach or preach or administer the sacraments in the church without a regular call.” (AC XIV) This statement shows the high regard that our Lutheran Confessions have for the divine call. In the essay *The Pastor’s Proper Handling of a Call*, President John Moldstad explicates the doctrine of the call and proper call procedures in our midst.

The terminology “mortal” and “venial” sins has been used in the life of the church. In an essay entitled *It’s just a little sin*, Rev. Paul Zager gives an overview of the concept of distinguishing sins into the categories of venial and mortal. Rev. Zager is pastor of Holton Lutheran Church, Holton, Michigan.

In the Lutheran Reformation the article of justification by faith alone was restored to its truth and purity. On the basis of Christ’s work God does not impute sin to mankind, but declares the whole world righteous or innocent. We are declared righteous or justified by nothing we do or accomplish, but alone on the basis of

Christ's redemptive work which is counted as ours through faith in the Savior. Rev. Steven Petersen emphasizes the importance of this biblical truth in his essay *Universal Truths About Justification*. This essay was presented at a free conference sponsored by the Ukrainian Lutheran Church in Kyiv, Ukraine, on December 5-7, 2001.

The essay *The Lord's Supper the Feast of Salvation* was presented at the seminary of the Lutheran Church of Central Africa (LCCA) in Lusaka, Zambia, in May, 2004.

# Contents

Devotions on Isaiah 12 . . . . .	150
<i>Harry K. Bartels and Timothy J. Bartels</i>	
The Drive to Opgjør . . . . .	161
<i>Jerome T. Gernander</i>	
The Pastor’s Proper Handling of a Call . . . . .	202
<i>John A. Moldstad</i>	
It’s just a little sin . . . . .	221
<i>Paul R. Zager</i>	
Universal Truths About Justification . . . . .	236
<i>Steven P. Petersen</i>	
The Lord’s Supper the Feast of Salvation . . . . .	245
<i>Gaylin R. Schmeling</i>	
<b>Book Review:</b>	
Philip Jenkins, <i>The Next Christendom:</i> . . . . .	271
<i>The Coming of Global Christianity</i>	
<i>Gaylin R. Schmeling</i>	

## Devotions on Isaiah 12

*by Harry K. Bartels and Timothy J. Bartels*

Grace be unto you and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text for our opening and closing devotions at this conference is recorded in the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, chapter 12, verses 1-6, the entire chapter. We will work through it step by step during the four designated devotional periods. Here is the text:

- 1 *And in that day you will say:  
“O Lord, I will praise You;  
Though You were angry with me,  
Your anger is turned away,  
and You comfort me.*
- 2 *Behold, God is my salvation,  
I will trust and not be afraid;  
‘For YAH, the Lord,  
is my strength and my song;  
He also has become my salvation.’”*
- 3 *Therefore with joy you will draw water  
From the wells of salvation.*
- 4 *And in that day you will say:  
“Praise the Lord, call upon His name;  
Declare His deeds among the peoples,  
Make mention that His name is  
exalted.*
- 5 *Sing to the Lord,  
For He has done excellent things;  
This is known in all the earth.*
- 6 *Cry out and shout,  
O inhabitant of Zion,  
For great is the Holy One of Israel  
in your midst!”*

In the Name of Jesus, Dear Christian Brethren:

We have only very recently passed from the time of the glorious Christmastide, the Twelve days of Christmas, ending in fact, just a week ago today, with the beautiful Feast of the Epiphany of our Lord. The wondrous Christmas truth -- that God's Son came into the world for our salvation -- is for us to cherish and hold fast continually all our days; and it behooves us to come forth with a proper response in our lives to this sublime truth, which the Christian heart is wont to do and joyfully does do, being stirred and moved by the Holy Spirit with this precious saving truth.

The words of Isaiah 12 which we have as our text show eloquently what a proper response is, and prompt us to come forth with it. So in the brilliant afterglow of the Feast of the Nativity of our Lord and the entire Christmastide, we want to give some consideration to

THE RESPONSE OF THE CHRISTIAN HEART TO THE WONDROUS CHRISTMAS TRUTH AS SEEN FROM ISAIAH 12. We shall note that it is a response of

1. Joyful Praise to the Lord,
2. Implicit Trust in Him,
3. Devout Treasuring and Use of the Means of Grace, and
4. Zealous Testimony.

First, a response of joyful praise to the Lord. In the chapters of Isaiah preceding our text we hear the Prophet Isaiah speaking beforehand some remarkable things concerning the birth of the Savior into the world and of His blessed saving work which He would perform. In Isaiah 7:14 there is the prophecy, "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel." In Isaiah 9:6-7 there is the prophecy, "For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace There will be no end, Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, To order it and

establish it with judgment and justice From that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.” And in Isaiah 11 there are also these prophetic words looking forward to His coming into the world, “There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, And a Branch shall grow out of His roots. The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, The Spirit of counsel and might, The Spirit of knowledge, and of the fear of the Lord.” (Isaiah 11:1-2.) And then a few verses on, still in chapter 11, the chapter preceding our text, there are also these prophetic-like words concerning the Savior’s birth and work, “And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse, Who shall stand as a banner of the people; For the Gentiles shall seek Him, And His resting place shall be glorious.” (Isaiah 11:10.)

Then, after a few more beautiful verses in the chapter preceding our text, comes this great chapter with our text in which Isaiah speaks movingly of God’s people in these New Testament times coming forth with a proper response to Christ’s birth and the saving work which He has wrought -- first a response of joyful praise to the Lord. Says the opening verse of our text: “And in that day you will say: ‘O Lord, I will praise You; Though You were angry with me, Your anger is turned away, and You comfort me.’”

It is a most sobering fact that by the fall into sin we men aroused the anger of God against ourselves. Adam and Eve, our first parents, aroused the anger of God against themselves by the fall, and we fell with them, and so we also thus aroused the anger of God against ourselves.

For sin is rebellion against God and His Commandments. And it is not only by our rebellion in attitudes, thoughts, emotions, desires, words, and deeds that we have rebelled against Him, but already our old corrupt nature which we all have from our conception is in rebellion against God. The Prophet Jeremiah lays bare how rebellious our depraved hearts are by nature saying, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; Who can know it?” (Jeremiah 19:9.)

And because of the perverseness of our old corrupt hearts, and all the evil fruits which come forth from our corrupt condition, God in His just anger against us for our sin could

simply banish each of us to hell, to eternal suffering there, as we have justly deserved. But, O joy, now in the afterglow of the blessed Christmastide, with the precious Christmas truth before our minds and hearts, we possess wondrous hope and comfort.

This precious truth is that God in His grace, not wishing to banish us to hell in His well-deserved anger, sent His own beloved only-begotten Son into the world to be our Savior, in accord with His promise given already to Adam and Eve after the fall; had Him conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary; and in order that He might spare us from His anger and the punishment we had deserved, made His Son to be sin for us, and poured out His anger on Him in our stead, having Him bear the punishment in our place in His innocent and bitter sufferings and death upon the cross.

Our sin is indeed a terrible thing; and to see the holy anger of God which it merited, we need but look to the cross and behold as God pours it out upon His beloved Son there in our stead.

As Paul Gerhardt says in His great Lenten/Good Friday hymn, titled *“Upon the Cross Extended, See, World, Thy Lord Suspended,”*

*“How God at our transgression  
To anger gives expression,  
How loud His thunders roll,  
How fearfully He smiteth,  
How sorely He requiteth --  
All this Thy suff’rings teach my soul.”*

By thus bearing God’s anger in our stead, Christ has turned God’s anger away from us, and when we with repentant hearts put our trust in Christ, we are now spared from God’s anger. It is true that, as the Scripture says of the impenitent, “God is angry with the wicked every day.” (Psalm 7:11.) But if we hold to the Savior in repentance and faith, we are spared God’s anger and we have the peace with God which Jesus was born to bring, the peace of which the multitude of the heavenly host sang on the night of His birth, “Peace on earth, good will toward

men!” (Luke 2:14.) We have the *Favor Dei propter Christum*, the favor of God on account of Christ. How comforting that is for us!

How, then, in the brilliant afterglow of the blessed Christmastide we must be moved to respond to the precious Christmas truth -- that God’s Son came into the world for our salvation -- with joyful praise to the Lord, and, in accord with our text, exultantly confess from our hearts, as Isaiah said we would, “O Lord, I will praise You; Though You were angry with me, Your anger is turned away, and You comfort me.” Amen!

### **Tuesday Afternoon**

For our closing devotion of this afternoon’s session, we turn our attention again to Isaiah chapter 12:1-6. We continue now our consideration of

#### THE RESPONSE OF THE CHRISTIAN HEART TO THE WONDROUS CHRISTMAS TRUTH AS SEEN FROM ISAIAH 12.

This morning we looked particularly at verse 1 and noted that it is a response of

1. Joyful Praise to the Lord, and now from verse 2 particularly we note that it is also a response of
2. Implicit Trust in Him.

Our text continues in its 2nd verse concerning us, God’s people of these New Testament times, in this regard: “And in that day you will say:... Behold, God is my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid; ‘For YAH, the Lord, is my strength and my song; He also has become my salvation.’”

The precious truth of Christmas, that in Christ, God’s beloved Son, born for us of Mary, God has become our salvation, is intended and employed by God to elicit and build up our confidence in Him, our gracious God in Christ, and make us unafraid -- unafraid of the many things of which we would otherwise have reason to be afraid, had He not been born for us.

There is no need for us as believers to be afraid anymore of sin, death, hell, and Satan, since Christ was born to work our deliverance from them, and wondrously did so in His holy life, His atoning death, and His mighty resurrection from the dead -- all for us before His Father. And together with this there are the many problems of life, the trials, the tribulations, the crosses that come into our lives. Now that in Christ, born for us of Mary, God has become our salvation, we can also say in the face of all these: "Behold, God is my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid; 'For YAH, the Lord, is my strength and my song; He also has become my salvation."

St. Paul treats of all this so well in those great verses from Romans chapter 8, where He writes, "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: 'For Your sake we are killed all the day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.' Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:31-39.)

What implicit trust in God is breathed in these words! And in the brilliant afterglow of the Christmastide, in response to the wondrous Christmas truth, that in God's Son, born for us of Mary, God has become our salvation, yes, that in Christ we now have God as our dear Father, such implicit trust can also be ours, and, by the Holy Spirit's working, is also ours. And so we are moved to joyfully confess in the words of Paul Gerhardt's great hymn titled "*If God Himself Be For Me, I May a Host Defy*" -- that hymn in which in its 15 stanzas He ranges over Romans chapter 8 --,

*“This I believe, yea, rather,  
 In this I make my boast,  
 That God is my dear Father,  
 The Friend who loves me most;  
 And that, whate’er betide me,  
 My Savior is at hand  
 Through stormy seas to guide me  
 And bring me safe to land.”*

“Behold, God is my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid; ‘For JAH, the Lord, is my strength and my song; He also has become my salvation.’” Thus the Prophet Isaiah, by inspiration of the Holy Ghost, foresaw us believers exulting joyfully from our hearts in response to the precious Christmas truth. May our gracious God by the working of the Holy Spirit through His Word and Sacraments build us up evermore in such implicit trust until He has brought us safe to land in His paradise above, where we shall dwell with Him, our blessed God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the God of our salvation, in eternal blessedness! Amen!

### **Wednesday Morning**

For our opening devotion this morning, again we turn our attention to Isaiah chapter 12:1-6. So far in our consideration of verses 1 and 2 of this chapter in our conference devotions, we have seen from this chapter prophetically that

THE RESPONSE OF THE CHRISTIAN HEART TO THE WONDROUS TRUTH OF CHRISTMAS is a response of

1. Joyful Praise to the Lord, and
2. Implicit Trust in Him.

Now this morning we shall observe from verse 3 that it is also a response of

3. Devout Treasuring and Use of the Means of Grace.

The Prophet Isaiah, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, foresaw us believers of the New Testament coming forth with this response to the coming of God's Son into the world for our salvation, saying as He does in verse 3: "Therefore with joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation."

The Means of Grace, i.e., God's Word and His Sacraments, these are indeed "the wells of salvation," through which Christ, the Water of Life, who won salvation for us, comes to us with all of His saving grace and blessing, to work in us the implicit trust in the Lord which we all need, and to move us to continual praise to the Lord.

From these wells of salvation it is for us personally to draw joyfully with devout hearts throughout our life; and it is from these wells that we in the Office of the Holy Ministry are diligently to supply our people with the Water of Life.

Although the faithful have drawn and drunk from these wells from the beginning, they still remain full, for they are unfathomable and inexhaustible. When you come and drink from these wells, you find them most refreshing. Think of how one single word of Scripture often gives us new life and power and joy and peace! Think also of the refreshment that comes to us from the Holy Supper, in which Jesus feeds us with His own body and blood, the very body and blood which He took upon Himself in His holy incarnation, when He was conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary!

The world also offers us wells from which to draw -- wells of pomp and pleasure and the like. But these are not the true wells, not the wells of salvation, for ultimately they prove to be wells without water, which cannot satisfy nor refresh the heart of the thirsting soul.

Only God's Word and His Sacraments, the true fountains of living waters, are sufficient for our souls' need and the need of our people in our churches. The water from these divine wells of salvation is wholesome water, giving new life, cleansing the heart, healing the wounds caused by sin, becoming in us and our people a well of water springing up into everlasting life, creating in us and our people the new life in Christ which death itself cannot destroy.

Thanks be to our Lord, dear Brethren, that we have the privilege, yes, the charge given to us by Him of dispensing the water from these wells of salvation to His people to whom we

have been called! May God so work in us and keep us faithful so that we ourselves treasure evermore these wells and the living water which they bring, and drink heartily from them ourselves. May He also give us grace and strength to supply with all faithfulness His people from these wells, admonishing them not to neglect these wells to their souls hurt, and exhorting them to use them with all faithfulness to their souls salvation.

This too then characterizes the response of the Christian heart as shown by Isaiah 12 to the wondrous truth of Christmas - - that God's Son came for our salvation -- it is a response of devout treasuring and use of the Means of Grace, through which He brings His salvation to us. As by God's gracious working among us this response is found in us and our people, then what Isaiah, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, foresaw concerning God's people in these New Testament times is to God's praise fulfilled in us, "Therefore with joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. Amen!

### **Wednesday Afternoon**

For our closing devotion of this conference, we turn our attention once more to Isaiah chapter 12:1-6. So far we have considered verses 1 through 3, "And in that day you will say: O Lord, I will praise You; Though You were angry with me, Your anger is turned away, and You comfort me. Behold, God is my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid; 'For YAH, the Lord, is my strength and my song; He also has become my salvation.' Therefore with joy you will draw water From the wells of salvation." From these verses we have seen prophetically that

THE RESPONSE OF THE CHRISTIAN HEART TO THE WONDROUS TRUTH OF CHRISTMAS is a response of

1. Joyful Praise to the Lord,
2. Implicit Trust in Him, and
3. Devout Treasuring and Use of the Means of Grace.

Now we come to the last three verses of this great chapter, which are like a grand finale to it all. Like a powerful fountain bursting forth, sending its flow upward impressively, we hear the Prophet Isaiah foretelling that it will also be a response of

4. Zealous Testimony concerning the Lord and what He has done for our salvation.

Listen to these majestic verses, verses 4 through 6: “And in that day you will say: Praise the Lord, call upon His name; Declare His deeds among the peoples, Make mention that His name is exalted. Sing to the Lord, For He has done excellent things; This is known in all the earth. Cry out and shout, O inhabitant of Zion, For great is the Holy One of Israel in your midst!”

Here in stirring terms the whole Church is called upon to praise the Lord, to call upon His name, to sing to the Lord, for He has done excellent things; yes, to cry out and shout about this! “Cry out and shout, O inhabitant of Zion.” “The inhabitant of Zion” -- this is a wonderful term referring to the members of our Lord’s Church, for the Church is His Zion. “Cry out and shout, O inhabitant of Zion, For great is the Holy One of Israel in your midst!” “The Holy One of Israel” -- this is none other than our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, God’s only-begotten Son, born for us of the Virgin Mary, who has accomplished our salvation. He is the Holy One of Israel, and He is in our midst in His precious Word and Sacraments. Marvelous consoling truth for us!

Here in stirring terms the whole Church is called upon to bear zealous testimony concerning the Lord and what He has done for our salvation. The call goes out to the Church, “Declare His deeds among the peoples, Make mention that His name is exalted...For He has done excellent things...Cry out and shout, O inhabitant of Zion, For great is the Holy One of Israel in your midst!”

When we hear the Prophet declare that the call of these verses is to be proclaimed to the Church, it comes to mind that we who occupy the Office of the Holy Ministry are the ones through whom our Lord deigns to sound forth this call. This gives personal direction then to the words that preface this call, namely, the words,

“In that day you shall say,” i.e., we who are the Lord’s called Ministers of Word and Sacrament. Listen once more to these 3 concluding verses of this great chapter with this in mind: “And in that day you will say: Praise the Lord, call upon His name; Declare His deeds among the peoples, Make mention that His name is exalted. Sing to the Lord, For He has done excellent things; This is known in all the earth. Cry out and shout, O inhabitant of Zion, For great is the Holy One of Israel in your midst!”

May our beloved Lord be with us, His Ministers whom He has called, as we go home to our various posts, and grant us grace and strength as we carry out the work with which He has charged us. Amen!

SOLI DEO GLORIA

# The Drive to Opgjør

*by Jerome T. Gernander*

The subject of this essay is to reconsider and evaluate the events that led to the 1917 merger of three Norwegian Synods. The merger in effect was the beginning of our synod, which began with the 13 pastors and their congregations who refused to join the merger church. It's a good subject for this 2003 general pastoral conference, the 150th anniversary (almost to the day) of the founding of the old Norwegian Synod. We call ourselves the Evangelical Lutheran Synod; in reality we are the true heirs of the Norwegian Synod.

But what is our purpose? This answer, given 50 years ago, is just as true today:

Our purpose in considering these things is not chiefly to satisfy our curiosity and to evaluate the weaknesses of our fathers and former brethren. But it should serve as a lesson for us, who are still exposed to the same dangers as they were. And it will help us also to understand the problems of other synods; for, as The Preacher says, 'There is nothing new under the sun.' History is sure to repeat itself in so many ways. The arch enemy of the saving truth will use pretty much the same tactics at all times, to rob us of this truth, though they may appear in somewhat different form as the occasion demands. The Lord protect us against his machinations<sup>1</sup>

This essay is dedicated in grateful appreciation to Pastor Emeritus J. Herbert Larson (who was my pastor during my youth in San Antonio, Texas). He has helped me immeasurably by sharing with me not only his translations of previously untranslated Norwegian Synod documents, but also his insight.

The years covered in this historical essay are 1900 to 1917. But the beginning really goes back to the 1880s and the Election Controversy, which really never ended until the Merger. And the history went beyond 1917, into the fledgling years of our synod, when the right to the name "Norwegian Synod" was debated; when the little Norwegian Synod still was struggling to keep the hearts of its people and to regain the hearts of former brothers and sisters

who had gone into the merger church; and when the big church was rapidly drifting farther away due to its new associations with the National Lutheran Council. It's in these years after 1917 that this history is best learned from the writings of those who were continually reliving it, often against their will.

With that disclaimer given, this essay is – speaking strictly and narrowly – a consideration of the union movement in the Norwegian Synod in the years 1900-1917, centering on the controversial Opgjør (“Settlement”), a.k.a the Madison Settlement. (Note on documentation: A basic summary of this history is given in *Grace for Grace*, edited by S.C. Ylvisaker, Christian Anderson, and George O. Lillegard, p. 92-110; and in *A City Set On a Hill* by Theodore A. Aaberg, p. 44-74. Let the reader assume that historical information which is not footnoted comes from these pages in these books.)

### ***Disputed Points in the Doctrine of Election***

Before we track the progression (or, more properly, regression), beginning in 1900, it's best to have a brief look at the disputed points in the doctrine of election. Along with the desire for external church unity that is really a false “ecumenical” spirit, this was the issue: what people believed (or were willing to tolerate) about the doctrine of election or predestination.

Right in the Opgjør document the disputed points are put side by side. (See Appendix A, “The Text of Opgjør.”) Paragraph 1 speaks of “that doctrine of election which is set forth in Article XI of the Formula of Concord, the so-called First Form” of the doctrine, “and [that doctrine of election which is set forth in] Pontoppidan’s *Truth Unto Godliness*’ (*Sandhed til Gudfrygtighed*), the so-called Second Form of Doctrine.”<sup>2</sup>

This debate about “the first form” and “the second form” of the doctrine of election went back to the Election Controversy in the 1880s. The important point was the role of faith in the doctrine of election. The so-called “first form” and the so-called “second form” could not live side by side at that time. Rather, the Norwegian Synod at that time called “the first form” true and “the second form” false.

In the 1880s the Norwegian Synod came down on the side of the Lutheran Formula of Concord: that God has called or elected each person by grace, not in view of the faith, as if faith were the cause of a person's election; rather, the faith is a result of the election by grace. At the same time, of course, the Norwegian Synod in the 1880s rejected what it considered the opposite view: that God has called or elected each person *intuitu fidei*, "in view of faith." This position makes faith not the result of God's action, but the cause of it.

In summary, the issue was where you place faith in the doctrine of election. "The first form" places faith after election, as the result of election. "The second form" places faith before election; faith is the cause of your election.<sup>3</sup>

Another way of putting it is that "the second form" of the doctrine limited election to the final stage of salvation, a person's "glorification": that a person endures in faith to the end and goes to heaven; God sees this in advance, and therefore God elects him. Again, this puts the individual Christian's faith ahead of God's election, or as the cause of it. Against this, "the first form" of the doctrine declares that election consists of the entire "order of salvation." In other words, it includes God's calling us before the foundation of the world, and it includes God's calling us by the Gospel and bringing us to faith in the means of grace, as well as our enduring in faith to the end. Again, this puts faith in the position of being a result of God's election.

These two "forms" are against each other. Dr. Franz Pieper of the Missouri Synod noted in an analysis of the Opgjør in 1913 that "not two 'forms' of doctrine, but two doctrines, materially differing from one another, are presented in the theses."<sup>4</sup>

This really was the doctrinal issue: whether they were two acceptable "forms" of the true doctrine of election, or two different doctrines of election, one true and one false. Both the Missouri Synod and the Wisconsin Synod theological periodicals declared "the second form of the doctrine ...to be false doctrine which ought not be tolerated within the Lutheran Church," observed Dr. H.G. Stub, the president of the Norwegian Synod in these years and the main promoter of the Opgjør. Of course Stub did not accept that

these were two different doctrines: “[Opgjør speaks] only about the doctrine in the two forms.”<sup>5</sup>

An important issue is what to do with the source of the “second form” – Pontoppidan’s *Truth Unto Godliness*, Question 548, based on statements by 17th century dogmatician Johann Gerhard. The answer given to “What is election?” is: “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.”<sup>6</sup>

In the 1880s, the Norwegian Synod was willing to tolerate this position. “So long as the doctrine of sin and grace is kept pure, we do not regard anyone who has used, or uses, that incomplete concept of election as a false teacher. ... We stand in fellowship of faith with those who like Pontoppidan and Johan Gerhard teach correctly regarding sin and grace and who, like them, reject the doctrine that God has been influenced in electing men by their conduct.”<sup>7</sup>

But the Norwegian Synod did not make this position they tolerated equal with the position in the Formula of Concord.<sup>8</sup>

Before and after the Merger, H.G. Stub tried to show that the Synod always had considered the two positions equally correct. In 1921, Rev. George Gullixson showed this was not the case:

It was tolerated only when weak brethren who used it, by explicit statements guarded against its grammatical sense with rigid reservations. It was never considered a definition of the Election of Grace as taught in the Word of God. ... We were warned against the “intuitu fidei” doctrine morning, noon and night by spokesmen of the Norwegian Synod. Our congregations were asked in many instances to change a paragraph in their constitutions, so as to include the Book of Concord and thus to guard against the intuitu fidei doctrine ... We will not accept the doctrine of election in view of faith without reservations and become guilty of placing this subterfuge for synergism on par with the Lutheran Confessions. Dr. Stub has been busy ever since the adoption of “Opgjoer” endeavoring to make it appear that that which was made the exception with most rigorous reservations has later been made the rule without reservations by the old Norwegian Synod.<sup>9</sup>

Here Gullixson (one of the pastors who didn't join the Merger) highlights that the "in-view-of-faith" position was tolerated "with most rigorous reservations."

Rev. Christian Anderson showed the importance of it in a 1930 analysis:

The faithful teachers of the Synod ... showed clearly that if this definition of Election is to be taken in the sense which the words undeniably express, then it weakens and limits the glorious Gospel which God wants to proclaim in the passages which speak of Election. That this was actually the case became clearly evident when, during the controversy on Election, the consideration of the doctrines of the Call and Conversion were considered. Just as the so-called Anti-Missourians taught that God in Election took into account something in man, so they ascribed to man a certain ability through the prevenient grace to follow God's call and to resolve to accept His grace.<sup>10</sup>

Anderson's point is a very important one, especially as we consider the Opgjør and its history. The issue involved not only the role of faith in God's election, but also the means of obtaining faith in conversion. Even two years before the writing of the Opgjør, in the midst of ongoing doctrinal negotiations between the Norwegian synods, Koren himself said: "The disagreement which appeared on [election] ...surely rests on disagreement in the doctrine of conversion."<sup>11</sup> The result, in the text of the Opgjør, was a statement in Paragraph 4 giving man "responsibility" in "acceptance of grace."

This is why the position that had been tolerated could not be considered equal with the Scriptural position of the Formula of Concord. But it's what the Opgjør did.

### ***First Steps Toward the Merger (1900-1905)***

It's ironic that F.A. Schmidt was centrally involved in the first steps toward the merger of the Norwegian synods. He originated the Election controversy in the 1880s. When the massive withdrawals of congregations took place around 1887, Schmidt and his followers formed the Anti-Missourian Brotherhood. In 1890 they helped

form the United Norwegian Lutheran Church in America, known as the United Church. In 1900, the Norwegian Synod invited and began meeting with the United Church for doctrinal discussion. The participants included none other than F.A. Schmidt!

It's difficult to understand why the Norwegian Synod thought anything good could come from doctrinal discussions with declared opponents. Evidently, however, they recognized the dangers and intended to remain firm:

As late as the year 1900 the Synod conventions, together with resolutions declaring that they would work earnestly in an effort to bring about unity among the various Norwegian Lutheran bodies, adopted also a paragraph which reads as follows: "Also for the very purpose of furthering true unity and of preserving the truth of God's Word, which we believe that your Synod by God's grace possesses pure and true, our Synod wants to avoid and abstain from all kinds of unionism and all proceedings which would make it appear that we are in doubt whether we in all points have the truth pure and true or not."<sup>12</sup>

But discussing doctrine with opponents makes this goal too difficult, as the little Norwegian Synod's first president, Bjug Harstad, said at the 1921 convention: "People have continually held meetings in order to be united with opponents."<sup>13</sup>

The result, in this case, is that Schmidt himself published an article protesting the way negotiations were being handled. Then the Norwegian Synod's Church Council recommended to the Synod at the 1902 convention that the Synod not continue its involvement in the discussion, if Schmidt were not replaced. (They had asked the United Church to appoint someone else to take Schmidt's place on the committee.) They followed this up with a pamphlet that detailed Schmidt's past naughty behavior – dishonest, unreliable, etc. – during the Election Controversy. At the festive 1903 jubilee convention of the Norwegian Synod, the United Church sent a telegram questioning this opinion of the Synod's Church Council. The convention unanimously approved the Synod's answer: "If the Church Council has spoken evil, bear witness of the evil." One year later, the United Church gave its answer in a pamphlet titled: "The Church Council Has Spoken Evil." The synods should have had

little possibility of fellowship with each other.

Actually, the synods' wrangling out of one side of their mouths was canceled out of the other side of their mouths. While the Norwegian Synod was demanding the removal of Schmidt from the participants, it was stating its desire to continue union negotiations. While the United Church was challenging the Norwegian Synod on this, it was declaring that it still was holding out the hand of brotherhood.<sup>14</sup>

Because of this (and other factors within the Norwegian Synod), it shouldn't be a surprise that when the Hauge's Synod sent an invitation to the 1905 Norwegian Synod convention to participate in joint doctrinal discussions – obviously with the eventual goal of union – the Norwegian Synod (and also the United Church, for its part) appeared to hesitate not one bit! Right away, the Synod named its 5-member union committee that would meet with 5-member committees from the United Church and the Hauge's Synod. The Norwegian Synod committee originally consisted of three theological professors and two pastors: Professors H.G. Stub, O.E. Brandt and A. Mikkelsen, and Pastors H. Halvorsen and O.P. Vangsnes. Later, Mikkelsen and Halvorsen resigned and were replaced by Professors Johannes Ylvisaker and E. Hove.

The choice of men for the United Church's union committee is very revealing. It included their president, T.H. Dahl, even F.A. Schmidt, a theological professor named E. Kr. Johnsen, and (added in 1906) professor J.N. Kildahl.<sup>15</sup> The Norwegian Synod men knew Schmidt's opposition to their teaching on election. His earlier statement should have struck an ominous note now: "Have I not accused the Synod people of false doctrine and Calvinism, and have they not still conferred with me?"<sup>16</sup> Dahl, as we will see, made it known that he was very adamant against the Norwegian Synod's teaching on election. After the merger, Johnsen declared: "My view on the doctrine of Election is the same as it was 25 years ago."<sup>17</sup> Kildahl was a professor of symbolics in the United Church's theological seminary. As we will see, he fought hard against the Norwegian Synod's doctrinal position. In several Lutheran Sentinel articles in 1920, Dr. S.C. Ylvisaker showed that Kildahl's position was well known and did not undergo any change before or after the

Merger.<sup>18</sup>

Besides the formation of union committees, the other alarming event was the election of H.G. Stub to the position of vice president at the 1905 Norwegian Synod convention. Because President Koren was failing in health, it was commonly assumed that (a) the vice president probably would succeed Koren, perhaps even finish Koren's present term; and (b) the vice president at least would assume much of the work that a healthier Koren normally would do. Stub was the favorite of the restless, more "liberal" people in the Synod.

Stub actually had participated in the 1880s in defeating the false teaching on election. With Koren and others, Stub represented the Norwegian Synod at the October 1882 meeting of the Synodical Conference in Chicago. This was the meeting at which the Conference rejected F.A. Schmidt as delegate. The other synods in the conference – Missouri, Wisconsin, and Minnesota – had each accepted doctrinal statements in their respective synods that rejected the "in-view-of-faith" position. The Synodical Conference therefore, desiring to go on record, elected a committee to present a resolution on this subject.

The committee consisted of Ernst, Koren, Stoeckhardt, Walther ... and Stub. Their resolution included this declaration: "the doctrine that God has elected in view of faith is positively repudiated." Stub helped write this resolution. Stub voted for it. In fact, at the time he said: "Behind the second form [the "in-view-of-faith" position], Semi-Pelagians and synergists can hide, not behind the first."<sup>19</sup>

The question is: How did Stub become the champion of approving the very position he had repudiated so recently as the 1880s? We may never know. He was not new to the Synod. His father was H.A. Stub, one of the pioneer Norwegian Synod pastors. He had been a student of Walther in St. Louis.<sup>20</sup>

We don't know why Stub came to serve what many from this period call "the more liberal element which was developing." Rev. Christian Anderson, who lived through these years, said Stub "had always been a champion of the cause of union."<sup>21</sup> This perhaps is all

### *The Work of the First Union Committee (1906-1910)*

Beginning in October 1906, the union committees from each synod met together once or twice a year. They reported the results. The reports all had a happy tone. Evidently the committees quickly had agreed on the doctrines of absolution, lay activity in the church, the call, and conversion. They had the approved theses in hand.

Careful reflection would have shown a different picture. Did the Hauge's Synod now repudiate its conditional form of absolution? Did the United Church now repudiate its statements that followed its own F.A. Schmidt regarding a person's ability to choose salvation for himself? Not with Schmidt serving on the union committee! In fact, Schmidt refused to accept Thesis 11 in the Theses on Conversion (abstaining from voting): "When a person is converted, the glory belongs to God alone, because it is He who throughout, from beginning to end, without any cooperation on the part of man works conversion ..."<sup>22</sup>

The false doctrines taught in the United Church and in the Hauge's Synod never were repudiated by these committee members. The 1936 document *Unity, Union, and Unionism* – which uses this history as an illustration of why Christians of opposing beliefs should not have doctrinal discussions together – mentions that "members of the Norwegian Synod" made "a strong demand" for antitheses "in order to make sure that false doctrines formerly championed by other synods were no longer held by them." It also includes the testimony that "the committee members from the Norwegian Synod assured us that this would no doubt be done."<sup>23</sup> Their optimism was disappointed, however. The wish for antitheses never gained a hearing in the joint union committee.

President Koren himself believed antitheses were needed. Did he think so at the time, in 1907-1908? His thoughts on the subject are made public only at a later date.

In 1910, as part of his presidential address to the synod (which Stub was to read in his absence), Koren said the disagreement over election "surely rests on disagreement in the doctrine of

conversion.” In other words, not enough was said in the Theses on Conversion on which everyone so happily agreed. Koren went on to say, in his address prepared for the 1910 synod convention: “That a series of theses on this doctrine [of election] 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.”

Also in 1910, in a letter to Stub, Koren shed more light on his thoughts about the lack of antitheses in the earlier theses: “As I often have said – our [union] committee has been careless in not adding antitheses. Without these we have, in my estimation, no guarantee that an agreement has been attained in any point. Had an actual agreement been reached in the doctrine of conversion then there would not have been such difficulties with the doctrine of election.”<sup>24</sup>

Although many members of the Norwegian Synod had high hopes at this time, in retrospect it was a sign of grave consequences in the future:

These theses were hurriedly adopted in the excitement of the Union Movement without any debate, so that those who had been separated could be joined together as soon as possible. There was little probability that the individuals gave any serious thought to the fact that their doctrine and preaching was to be governed by these theses in the future.<sup>25</sup>

It was on to the doctrine of election for the joint union committee. Four words sum up their efforts from 1908 to 1910, from beginning to end, in full committee or in sub-committee: they could not agree! Here is the way it went:<sup>26</sup>

(1) For the Nov. 10-13, 1908, meeting a sub-committee was assigned the task of preparing a basis for discussion by the full committee. This committee consisted of H.G. Stub (Norwegian Synod), J.N. Kildahl (United Church) and M.G. Hanson (Hauge’s Synod). They brought nothing. They couldn’t even agree on how to start the discussion!

(2) Instead, the sub-committee brought three sets of theses: one set by Stub, one by Kildahl (of the United Church), and one by M.O. Boeckmann (also of the United Church). The union committee voted to make Stub's theses the basis for discussion.

(3) At three meetings (lasting 4 days each) from November 1908 to November 1909, the full committee discussed the first six of Stub's theses. They could not agree.

(4) At the Nov. 2-5, 1909, meeting, the United Church men recommended that "the second form" position found in Pontoppidan, question 548, be used as the basis for discussion. Their recommendation failed. The committee elected a new sub-committee (again with Stub as a member), which was to find a mutually agreed-upon basis for discussion.

(5) The joint union committees again met on March 29, 1910. The new sub-committee had failed to find a basis for discussion. Stub presented a revised version of his theses for consideration by the full committee. Boeckmann of the United Church presented a revised version of his theses. Rev. C.J. Eastvold, the Hauge's Synod president and a member of this newer sub-committee, presented his own set of theses on the doctrine. Nobody could agree.

(6) The Norwegian Synod committee members left the meeting. They did so they said in a written report to the committee, because the full joint union committee previously had resolved that if the sub-committee were "unable to present a joint doctrinal declaration," then the full committee would "not meet for further doctrinal negotiations."<sup>27</sup>

(7) The negotiations now were at an end, supposedly. The Joint Committee agreed not to meet any more. Each synod's union committee reported this to their synod conventions. This stage was seen by all as "a complete rupture."<sup>28</sup>

But it wasn't really the end. As it turns out, in spite of harsh language, the other synods were waiting for the Norwegian Synod to weaken its resolve.

What stirred the Norwegian Synod most were the words of President T.H. Dahl of the United Church, a member of his synod's union committee. At his church's annual meeting, Dahl declared

that the break-up of the negotiations was due to the insistence of the Norwegian Synod men on adopting Stub's theses. Dahl said these theses contained "unbiblical and un-Lutheran" doctrine. This was no casual comment. Dahl said this at two annual conventions of his church. In June of 1911 the United Church union committee issued a pamphlet explaining their reason for declaring the theses "unbiblical and un-Lutheran doctrine." Ten years later Rev. Bjug Harstad commented in reviewing the history: "In [the pamphlet] the biblical, Lutheran doctrine was definitely rejected. The proofs were essentially the same as we had heard from Schmidt, Boeckmann, Kildahl and others so many times for several years. Consequently nothing is heard either of the demand for more proofs or from our Committee any refutation of the wretched rational arguments and perversion of the teaching of the Scriptures and the Confessions of which that document is full."<sup>29</sup>

The response of Stub (and the Norwegian Synod) was a seemingly vigorous defense of the true doctrine.

First, Stub took his theses to the Norwegian Synod district conventions in 1910. The district conventions approved his theses as a correct expression of the doctrine of election – thereby rejecting the United Church doctrine.

Then, at a Dec. 13, 1910, meeting, the Synod's union committee stated "as an imperative for future discussions with the representatives of the United Church ... that they point out in which theses the unbiblical and un-Lutheran teaching is contained, provide proof of it, and that this first form the basis for our discussions." When this wasn't done, but rather theses by Eastvold were approved for discussion, the Norwegian Synod men left the meeting with the supposedly emphatic declaration that they "no longer took part in the deliberations."<sup>30</sup> This prompted the afore-mentioned pamphlet that the United Church came out with in 1911. We gain more insight into the real conviction of the United Church men in Stub's words; after the Dec. 13 meeting he wrote in "What Hinders Church Union Among Us" published in *Kirketidende*: "It was so far from being the case that the committee of the United Church would disavow the opinion of the December 13th meeting, that much rather several of its members repeated it in even stronger words. The Synod's sin

could not be branded in strong enough expressions. One speaker even thanked God twice because he had gotten the opportunity to brand our foundation as unchristian.”<sup>31</sup>

In spite of this appearance that the synods were crossing swords doctrinally, they actually were taking steps in the opposite direction.

The Hauge’s Synod and the United Church were giving the Norwegian Synod room to move toward compromise. The president of the Hauge’s Synod, C.J. Eastvold, said: “The action of the Synod in this matter is of the utmost importance.”<sup>32</sup> For his part, United Church president Dahl – in spite of branding the Norwegian Synod doctrinal position “unbiblical and un-Lutheran” – said in almost the same breath at the 1910 United Church convention: “Be it far from us to give up making an approach to these bodies with union as the ultimate result.” He recommended that the United Church continue union efforts by negotiating through the committees, and his church accordingly passed a resolution authorizing the continuation of negotiations, not only with the Hauge’s Synod, but also with the Norwegian Synod.<sup>33</sup>

It would be one thing if such heterodox churches were the only ones pursuing a hypocritical union. But the decisive factor that assured these negotiation were not at an end was that the Synod itself did things that left the door open, not just pursuing discussion but sending mixed signals to its own people.

First, at the 1910 district conventions – despite accepting Stub’s theses on election and approving the withdrawal of the union committee from the discussions – the Synod recommended that the union committee continue to work “as long as it has any hope that unity on the basis of truth can be attained.”

Second, the conventions added the clause: “that the two forms of the doctrine of Election presented by the Lutheran Confessions and by Johann Gerhard, respectively, ought not be divisive of church fellowship, and that it would be very regrettable if such should be the case.” This was Stub’s recommendation, even after bitter opposition from the United Church men! Added to this was the hope that God would bless “the work of church unity among us.”<sup>34</sup>

Perhaps this has been excessively detailed attention to the work of the first union committee. But it laid the groundwork for what happened later. In retrospect, the work of the first union committee was preparing the Synod for a doctrinal compromise (although that surely was not what they intended). Here at the end of 1910 it was not the opponents but the leaders of the Norwegian Synod who kept the door open when it should have been shut, by authorizing further discussion and by labeling the “second form” position “not divisive.”

Of this Christian Anderson wrote: “As to the effect of such a resolution there can be no difference of opinion among us today.”<sup>35</sup>

Our early synod leaders – the ones who lived through this battle and did not join the merger – considered these events between 1906 and 1910 critical for what took place later. Listen to the testimony of two of these men:

The chief danger of today, as it was previous to 1911 to 1917, is that so many church members are indifferent to the teaching of God’s Word. ... Such indifference ruined the old Synod and brought about the merger.<sup>36</sup>

This ignorance, together with the fact that our Synod, contrary to Titus 3:10 and other passages, continued to negotiate with the opponents long after they had plainly shown that they would not listen to our testimony to the truth, was no doubt the main cause of the deterioration and breakdown of the Old Synod.<sup>37</sup>

### *Preparations for Opgjør (1910-1911)*

Who in the Norwegian Synod would have admitted they were preparing for such a thing as a doctrinal compromise? But it was happening.

First, there was the very real rejection of Koren and the very real promotion of Stub. It’s true that Stub was arranging much of this. But he had followers. Rev. Christian Anderson remembered “much murmuring” about Koren’s 1902 essay, “What Hinders Union of the Various Norwegian Church Bodies.”<sup>38</sup>

Then there was Stub’s own treatment of Koren. In 1910 Stub

read Koren's presidential essay to the convention in the absence of the ailing president, and omitted Koren's paragraph which (a) cast doubt on the prospect of real agreement on the doctrine of election and (b) urged the adoption of strong antitheses (above, p. 8). Privately, Koren said to a synod pastor: "Did you notice the blow in the nose (næsestyver) which Dr. Stub gave me at the last Synod meeting?"<sup>39</sup>

The final point on this subject – really the final straw – was Stub's election to presidency of the synod in 1911, after Koren's death. The course of events from 1911 to 1917 shows the role of political maneuvering in his presidency. This is intertwined with the role of the Church Council.

Another danger which threatens the church is Church Politics. It was an important factor in destroying the old Synod and may also become a danger in our Synod. The Church Council (Kirkeraad) in the old Norwegian Synod originally served a good purpose but after 1910 it became a dangerous power for the Synod's downfall.<sup>40</sup>

"After 1910 ..." In other words, in Stub's hands it was used "for the Synod's downfall." Again Rev. Christian Anderson sheds light on this subject. He writes that "the presidents became the leading element in the Council" during the tenure of Koren, and "the office of president practically became one held by the incumbent for the rest of his life."

Koren's successor in office [Stub], who had always been a champion of the cause of union, found little difficulty in lining up the majority of the Council for this cause. ... Since the Church Council had gradually become such a strong influence in the Synod, when its power was taken into service of the liberal element, it was something which was not easy to resist.<sup>41</sup>

Stub's influence, then, helped prepare for the doctrinal compromise that was coming. Then, in 1911, two things happened:

1. The United Church proclaimed itself "ready and willing" to continue meeting with the Norwegian Synod with the goal of "bringing about a union," and sent a representative to bring greetings

in person to the Norwegian Synod convention one week later. The United Church also took the significant step of electing an entirely new union committee.

2. At the Norwegian Synod convention, after first rebuking the United Church for sending greetings to a synod it had accused of “unbiblical and un-Lutheran doctrine,” Stub recommended (without conferring with union committee members) that the Synod continue to negotiate with the United Church and elect an entirely new committee. The Synod did so<sup>42</sup> “though no dissatisfaction with the old members of the committee had been expressed.”<sup>43</sup>

Careful observation of the facts should have prevented the Norwegian Synod’s pastors and delegates from approving this action. What was known is that the United Church condemned the Norwegian Synod position as “unbiblical and un-Lutheran” and had not repudiated this.

The pamphlet that the United Church’s first union committee published in 1911, providing the reasons for the accusation of “unbiblical and un-Lutheran doctrine” on the part of the Norwegian Synod, was a current topic. S.C. Ylvisaker later wrote: “In 1911 this first union committee of the United Church made a notable declaration with regard to the doctrine of election. It contained certain very clear positive statements as well as accusations of unbiblical and un-Lutheran doctrine on the part of the Norwegian Synod. The report containing this declaration was published in the official organ of the United Church ... and has never been disavowed by the church despite violent efforts on the part of Dr. Stub and others.”<sup>44</sup> This pamphlet said that “the difference between the doctrine on election of the Synod and ours is not a question of two forms of doctrine alone, but of two kinds of teachings ... According to our doctrine God truly deals alike with men; but men conduct themselves differently toward His work of grace. This is the cause of the different results of God’s equally converting and saving grace.” Stub (at the same 1911 convention) responded in a sarcastic tone: “They have solved the mystery of election.”<sup>45</sup>

Why, then, was there not more opposition to resuming doctrinal discussions at this point with such declared opponents? Rev. Bjug Harstad recalled that the points in the pamphlet “were

rejected in as definite terms as usually.” But then the pamphlet “was left for free acceptance in the assembly.”

After this no serious objections to its contents had been heard, except by a stricken few remains of the old Norwegian Synod; thus the pointers and proofs of false doctrine contained in this instrument from the United Church committee must have been conclusive to our committee and many others.<sup>46</sup>

### ***The Doctrinal Compromise: Opgjør (1911-1912)***

The new union committees from the Norwegian Synod and the United Church met only two times before stalemate turned into complete “agreement.”

Their first meeting was held in St. Paul, Minnesota, November 21-24, 1911. Each committee presented its doctrine of election. The Norwegian Synod men afterward said they hadn’t suspected there was such doctrinal difference between the two sides. (They also expressed surprise that the United Church men accepted the Formula of Concord doctrine – showing ignorance of the situation; what the United Church wanted was a concession that the “in-view-of faith” position be given equal status with the Formula of Concord position.)

We can wonder how some of the Norwegian Synod clergy could have been so naïve about the doctrinal positions of each church body in this issue. We can only speculate, but ignorance surely played a part.

After the complete break in 1887 the majority of our people had tired of the controversy, so that they let it suffice to blame the opposition for the controversy, which they regarded as unnecessary, and neglected to continue to study the issues involved. Thus they became more and more ignorant of those issues, while the opposition by continuing their propaganda against our Synod kept the issues for which they had contended fresh in mind. When the opposition began to appear more friendly, many of our pastors who had stood firm seemed to feel that the matter was now just about solved.<sup>47</sup>

The committees decided to continue negotiations, and

designated a sub-committee of two men from each synod to prepare theses for the next meeting. It was held Feb. 14-22, 1912. Coming out of the last session, one of the Norwegian Synod men was asked, “Well, did you get what you wanted?” He replied, “Not exactly, but we pressed them pretty hard.” Our synod has said: “A better characterization of Opgjør than this remark has probably never been given.”<sup>48</sup>

On Feb. 22 a telegram came from Madison signed by J. Nordby (Norwegian Synod) and N.H. Hegge (United Church), the chairmen of the joint committee: “The committee on church union fully agreed.”

President Stub wrote in the Norwegian Synod’s *Kirketidende*: “The result is then that these committees together have found a solution satisfactory to both parties ... It must be stated: This is from the Lord.” One week later, the text of Opgjør was printed in *Kirketidende*.<sup>49</sup> In the United Church it was greeted with “a storm of jubilation.” Its convention unanimously (except for one dissenting vote) approved it.<sup>50</sup> But the Norwegian Synod began a long debate.

### ***Opgjør: The Doctrinal Issues***

Before we examine what was done with Opgjør, we need to highlight the points in its text that were at issue over the next five years.

1. In the first section, “that doctrine of election which is set forth in Article XI of the Formula of Concord, the so-called First Form, and [that doctrine of election which is set forth in] Pontoppidan’s Truth Unto Godliness, question 548, the so-called Second Form of Doctrine,” is accepted “unanimously and without reservation” (emphasis added).

The issue for Opgjør’s opponents was, first, that the two positions are “coordinated” – made equal, or equally true; and second, that it was to be accepted “without reservation” – not merely tolerated with reservations.

The objection – and the belief that the first section was nothing but United Church doctrine – was well founded. In 1915, Rev. Theodore Graebner wrote in *Lutheran Witness* that the

text of Opgjør fulfilled previous demands made by the United Church. This is true of the first section. In 1911, when the United Church established a new union committee, its official publication strongly urged “that the United Church accept the ‘First Form’ of Election, and the Norwegian Synod the ‘Second Form,’ and without restriction (‘uforbeholdent’) declare that no new theses on Election are necessary.” This is, almost word for word, what Opgjør says in Sections 1 and 2. Section 1 states that both sides “uforbeholdent,” “without reservation,” accept both “forms” of the doctrine, and section 2 declares that no new theses on election are necessary.<sup>51</sup>

From our perspective one of the authors of Opgjør leveled an even greater indictment against it. After the merger, testifying in court in a case involving church property for the Silver Lake congregation in Northwood, Iowa, Rev. R. Malmin said the word “acknowledge” was the key to understanding the paragraph: “In the church, when we wish to accept any doctrine, we always say that we believe, teach, confess or profess. We discarded all those theological terms, and, instead of that, we selected the term acknowledge or recognize.”

The word “acknowledge” is to be taken in its first sense, to own or admit knowledge of. Applying this sense to the first paragraph of Opgjoer, we can readily see how each party could subscribe to it “without reservation.” Both parties could say without reservation that they had knowledge of the fact that the United Church used the word election in a wider and narrower sense, that the second form is contained in the first, and that the two forms teach the same doctrine of election.<sup>52</sup>

2. In the third section it is stated that “two forms of doctrine have been used,” then it proceeds to state them, and then it declares: (a) “neither of these two forms of doctrine ... contradicts any doctrine revealed in the Word of God, but does full justice to the order of salvation ...” and (b) “we find that this should not be the cause for schism within the Church or disturb [the] unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace ...”

The old Norwegian Synod teachers would agree that both positions had been used. They could even agree that the second position didn’t contradict Scripture and the Confessions if

understood correctly and provisionally. But they would have said that the “in-view-of-faith” position couldn’t be made equal with the Formula of Concord position without causing division.

3. The fourth section rejects “every doctrine which ... would weaken man’s sense of responsibility in relation to the acceptance or rejection of grace.”

This was the “lightning rod” issue for what became the “large minority” of Norwegian Synod pastors who did not want the merger without changes in the Opgjør. To credit man with “responsibility” for accepting grace was the position of F.A. Schmidt that the Synod had rejected in the 1880s.

Not long after Opgjoer was adopted the United Church stated clearly that Opgjoer agrees exactly with what Schmidt had fought for. But reading his articles on the controversy a person will soon find Opgjoer’s assertions; for that reason one of Schmidt’s fellow-combatants [in the 1880s Election Controversy], Dr. [F.W.] Stelhorn, immediately expressed his satisfaction with Opgjoer and his joy over the fruit of Schmidt’s testimony.<sup>53</sup>

Again, this part of Opgjør fulfilled a previous demand made by the United Church. In 1911 Prof. Vignes of the United Church wrote that the anti-Missourians emphasized the notion that man has “some personal responsibility (ansvar) over against (ligeoverfor) the matter of his own salvation,” and he further explained that this means “it is left to [a person’s] own free decision whether he will walk on the path of life or of death.”

The very words of Opgjør, Section 4, reflect this: “reject every doctrine which ... would weaken man’s sense of responsibility (ansvar!) in relation to (ligeoverfor!) the acceptance of grace ...” Vignes concluded his 1911 appeal: “The Missourians emphasize God’s sole activity in our conversion; the anti-Missourians, man’s responsibility. Both are needed, each in his province. Let us all be both Missourians and anti-Missourians.” Graebner comments:

A better summary of the Madison Agreement than that contained in the last sentence cannot well be conceived. Through the reference to “responsibility for accepting grace”

and the “unreserved” adoption also of the Second Form doctrine, the anti-Missourians, to use the terms of our editorial in 1915, “had their views deposited in the theses” . . . No wonder the anti-Missourian element in American Lutheranism rejoiced when the text of the Madison Agreement became known, and heralded it as an anti-Missourian victory.<sup>54</sup>

4. In the “Resolution” which accompanied the Opgjør, the union committees restated Section 1’s “unreserved and unanimous acceptance” of the Formula of Concord doctrine of election and the “in-view-of-faith” doctrine; stated “the essential agreement concerning these doctrines which has been attained is sufficient for church union”; and recommended approval by each synod.

This is not a new point, simply a reiteration of the first controversial point in the Opgjør. But again it is clear that the “agreement” was no longer merely to “tolerate with reservations” the “in-view-of-faith” position, but to make it equal with the Scriptural and Confessional position, unconditionally.

### *Reactions to Opgjør Within the Norwegian Synod (1912)*

Those who supported the Opgjør tried to show that it was the traditional Norwegian Synod doctrinal position. Those who opposed it said that it wasn’t.

At first it appeared that the Norwegian Synod would have Stub’s support for changing the document to protect the Scriptural doctrine of election. On March 27, 1912 (barely a month after the Madison Settlement), Stub told Rev. M.F. Wiese: “Wiese, we must strike paragraph I in Opgjør” – because, he said, “it encumbered consciences.” At the Minneapolis Special Conference in April, Stub promised to recommend that the union committee strike the first paragraph. It never happened.<sup>55</sup> Instead, the authors of Opgjør explained its intention.

After that, the Synod went through a prolonged discussion of “What does this mean?” President Stub and the Synod men on the union committee answered: “It means we have kept our doctrine.” The United Church theologians and union committee members

answered: “It means that you have adopted our doctrine.” It became clear to many that it was a change in doctrine.

The first stage of this was the convening of district conventions in 1912 (there was no general synod convention that year). The Minnesota District conference came first. President Stub spoke in favor of accepting Opgjør. During the discussion, three union committee members were questioned (especially by Prof. Johannes Ylvisaker, a member of the first union committee and the father of S.C. Ylvisaker) about the meaning of the first paragraph and its unqualified acceptance of both doctrinal positions. They answered that the Synod’s committee members accepted “without reservation” the Formula of Concord position, “but can nevertheless recognize as brethren” those who hold the other position; one of them said “this first paragraph is to be understood so that it does not compel us to accept the so-called second form of doctrine.” The Minnesota District president said that Opgjør was to be accepted in light of these explanations, in light of Stub’s 1910 theses on election, and in light of Koren’s “An Accounting.” It’s not hard to see why it was approved by 209 votes out of 221.

Stub attended the other district conventions, reporting the Minnesota District’s action and pressuring them to do likewise. Bjug Harstad recalled: “We in the Pacific District at any rate were solemnly assured that the Synod’s teaching was now adopted in Stub’s theses and all the loopholes for synergism plugged up.”<sup>56</sup> But the next stage of reaction started to show the real situation.

The United Church began to respond. First, their union committee members did not accept the recent explanations by the Norwegian Synod men. In other words, the statement could not be accepted in light of the explanations.

Second, they made it quite clear that the statement could not be accepted in light of Stub’s 1910 theses on election, to say nothing of Koren’s “An Accounting.” In the fall of 1912, United Church Prof. J.N. Kildahl (a member of the first union committee) stated: “I am in agreement with Opgjør and am not conscious of having taught anything contrary to it.” In other words, Opgjør -- to his thinking -- endorsed his teaching, posing no doctrinal difficulties for him. He also stated at that time: “I am certain that Dr. Dahl, just as I, holds

the same opinion concerning Dr. Stub's theses (concerning election) now as we held before the acceptance of Opgjør." In other words, Opgjør and Stub's 1910 theses were not compatible. President Dahl and Prof. Kildahl (chief spokesmen for United Church doctrine) still believed Stub's 1910 theses to be "unbiblical and un-Lutheran," and did not think Opgjør unbiblical and un-Lutheran.<sup>57</sup>

Into 1913 the United Church theologians continued to object to the "best construction" interpretations put on Opgjør by Stub and the Norwegian Synod "majority." Kildahl, for instance, wrote:

Since Dr. Stub during the whole [1912-1913] winter so vigorously has contended that the Norwegian Synod stands now where Dr. Walther and the Missouri Synod stood at the beginning of the controversy of election, it appears to me that I, for the sake of the truth, ought to declare that I am not agreed with Dr. Stub in this. Dr. Stub finds Dr. Walther's doctrine in Opgjoer, I do not find it there.

Also S. Gunderson, one of the (United Church) authors of Opgjør, said in 1913: "The United Church has not changed a tittle of its doctrine, neither has the Synod. Opgjør is a compromise."<sup>58</sup>

This showed, even in 1912, that the Norwegian Synod's doctrinal position was being changed for them – by the United Church and the leaders of the Norwegian Synod, through the text of Opgjør that was being approved.

### ***Steady Progress Toward Union (1913-1916)***

All the districts of the Norwegian Synod had approved Opgjør. The real question now was how they would proceed toward a Norwegian church merger. However, Opgjør was not in the past. Remember that the "resolution" connected to it said: "the essential agreement concerning these doctrines which has been attained is sufficient for church union." The "agreement" on the doctrine of election – the substance of Opgjør – was the basis for the merger.

The bare outline of progress toward the merger, based on official action by the Synod, would look like this:

1. The union committees of the 3 synods met in the fall of

1912. The Norwegian Synod members said they had no authority to bring about a union agreement immediately.

2. The 1913 Synod convention approved enlarging the union committee's authority to include discussion of merger and the conditions to bring it about.

3. The 1914 Synod convention approved President Stub's report (which included results of the joint union committee negotiations) and the report of the convention "union committee." This included detailed plans for a merger. This was the vote for union. It was the approval of the merger.

4. The 1916 Synod convention approved forming the merger, approved a constitution for the new church, approved incorporating the new church, and approved turning over all Norwegian Synod property to the new church.

But this bare outline leaves out several important "stories": the story of the large minority's efforts to change Opgjør, the story of the political maneuvering by the Synod leadership to squash any efforts that intruded on ecumenical endeavors, and the story of the efforts by sister churches in the Synodical Conference to influence the outcome.

### *The Synodical Conference*

The Synodical Conference – in which the Missouri, Norwegian, and Wisconsin synods enjoyed pulpit and altar fellowship – was involved right away, though in a respectful, brotherly way. Rev. Christian Anderson recalled:

The Norwegian Synod for many years after the organization of the Synodical Conference was a part of this organization. Although the Norwegian Synod ... withdrew from the ... Conference during the controversy in the Eighties, it still continued to stand in the most intimate fraternal relation to the Synods now composing the Conference. ... When negotiations were going on between the three Norwegian Lutheran Churches, the synods of the Synodical Conference were intensely interested in the outcome. They had gone through the same controversies we had.<sup>59</sup>

The churches of the Synodical Conference could not stay

removed from the controversy. When Stub started defending Opgjør in 1912, one of his major defenses was that the doctrine contained in it was the doctrine that Walther and the Missouri Synod had held during the Election Controversy in the 1880s. Stub's argument was rejected (as mentioned above) by the United Church theologian Kildahl. As an "anti-Missourian," he (and others in the United Church) celebrated Opgjør especially because he believed that for the Norwegian Synod to accept Opgjør would lead to a break with Missouri. "The doctrine contained in the Missouri Synod's reports of the 1877-79 conventions is the doctrine against which we fought; and that doctrine I do not find in Opgjør."<sup>60</sup>

Stub and Johannes Ylvisaker attended the 1912 Synodical Conference meeting in Saginaw, Mich., to see how their brothers in faith viewed Opgjør. The convention spent two days reviewing the document, which had been put into English and German. The background to this is important:

The synods of the Synodical Conference were no more satisfied with [Opgjoer] than was a substantial minority within the Norwegian Synod itself. They considered, as we did, the so-called agreement a compromise. And when the Synodical Conference convened for its regular sessions a little later that same year, the sentiment for severing fraternal relations with the Norwegian Synod at once was very strong.<sup>61</sup>

The result of the Synodical Conference's deliberation was a three-fold request: to eliminate from the first three sections of the document the "coordination" of the two doctrinal positions; to include with the fourth section (the part giving man "responsibility" for "the acceptance of grace) an antithesis which would reject man's conduct as a reason for conversion; and for "a fraternal discussion" to take place between the Synodical Conference and the Synod.

Accordingly, the Synodical Conference elected a committee of three – H.T. Dau and Franz Pieper of Missouri and John Schaller (later replaced by T. Schlueter) of Wisconsin.<sup>62</sup> Years later, Christian Anderson wrote: "Could they have treated us any more considerately than this ... these brethren, who had treated us so generously and had stood so faithfully by our side for more than half a century?"<sup>63</sup> However, the committee was never able to meet

with Synod representatives. Stub referred the responsibility for this to the Church Council.

However, it didn't keep Stub from trying to prejudice the members of the Norwegian Synod against Missouri and Wisconsin. In making his case for Opgjør and the merger, Stub tried to make the case that the Synodical Conference churches had changed their position, often referring to "New Missouri."<sup>64</sup>

Two comments about the role of the Synodical Conference at this point:

1. Besides the efforts of the Synodical Conference delegation to meet with the Norwegian Synod leadership, the theological quarterlies of both synods included stern rebukes of Opgjør. Undoubtedly this helped bolster the "large minority" in its efforts, especially from 1913 on. But there is little documentation of this besides these later references to the debt owed the Synodical Conference and also the quick re-entry of the little synod into the Conference in 1918.

That the Missouri and Wisconsin synods were seriously questioning Opgjør is obvious from Stub's writings from 1913 on. For instance, in his 1916 Progress of the Union Movement, Stub says:

The fact that influence is being exerted against Opgjør from St. Louis, from Chicago and Wauwatosa is not surprising when one remembers that in both Missouri Synod and Wisconsin Synod periodicals the second form of the doctrine has been declared to be false doctrine which ought not be tolerated within the Lutheran Church and that therefore merger with a church body which wanted to use the second form of the doctrine would be a denial of the truth.<sup>65</sup>

This should remind us how important it is for brothers in faith to use their fellowship to strengthen one another, even at times by offering a rebuke in order to lead one another back to the "old paths" and the solid rock of the Word.

2. In 1913 Franz Pieper wrote and published Conversion and Election: A Plea for a United Lutheranism in America (original German title: Zur Einigung der amerikanisch-lutherischen Kirche in der Lehre von der Bekehrung und Gnadenwahl), specifically in

response to the Madison Agreement. It sparked some controversy in the Synodical Conference. His brother August Pieper and also John Schaller thought that he had been too soft. This was because F. Pieper's response was less severe than might have been expected. (My opinion: He was writing as a brother to gain a straying brother.) He said in part that Opgjør could be accepted if only a few changes were made. However, in no uncertain terms in this work, Pieper rejects what was objectionable to the large minority in the Norwegian Synod: equating the two positions on an equal basis, and crediting man with "responsibility" for the "acceptance of grace."<sup>66</sup>

### ***The Large Minority: Victims of Political Maneuvering***

Here we join under one heading the other two major "stories" of the years 1913-1916, since they can't be separated. The so-called "large minority" came about not only because of the doctrine contained in Opgjør, but also because of Stub's political maneuvering – "The most heartless church-political ring that ever operated outside of the Catholic church," Rev. George A. Gullixson said.<sup>67</sup>

First on the list is the fact that right after the Madison Agreement in 1912, Kirketidende (the synod's official publication) would not accept articles criticizing Opgjør, and the synod leaders convinced the influential Norwegian-language newspaper not to publish articles that would discourage union. Almost in response to this "the minority" appeared, publishing on their own what the Synod tried to stifle. Rev. M.F. Wiese began on his own to publish Retledning og Forsvar, "For Guidance and Defense." His words in the first issue show how the minority was spurred to action by the leadership's tactics:

It is of course our simple Christian duty to confess the divine truth and to warn against that which violates it. Since we are not getting an opportunity to do this in our Synod's organs, we are compelled to do it elsewhere. We know very well that this does not please the majority ...<sup>68</sup>

Here we should mention the work of Rev. Theodore Graebner. Later a Missouri Synod theological professor, during these years he was a Norwegian Synod pastor and also the editor of *Lutheran Herald*. In 1912-13 he published a number of articles and editorials critical of Opgjør and the union movement. In 1913, he resigned his position because of pressing parish work. When he joined the Missouri Synod, he continued, while writing for *Lutheran Witness*, to shine a light on the hypocrisies of the leadership's push for union. This is reflected in his 1921 three-part article in the *Lutheran Sentinel*, cited above.

The large minority moved into action, again spurred on by the leadership's actions, in 1913. The Church Council called for a special synod convention (that year no general convention was scheduled, only district conventions). This was a sign that Stub (through his arm, the Church Council) was aggressively pursuing merger. Previously the minority had been hesitant to campaign against Opgjør publicly. But now they formulated a petition (called Bønnskrift) and sent it to those who were known to be opposed to the Madison Settlement. The authors were Stub's former seminary colleagues, Johannes Ylvisaker, O.E. Brandt, and E. Hove. It was not a tremendously rebellious document; it wasn't against the union movement, but advocated church union only on the basis of full doctrinal agreement, and therefore insisted changes in Opgjør were needed.

Here the minority again was victimized by Stub's political tactics. Somehow he got hold of a copy of the petition. He had it published to discredit the minority. Stub snidely called it "anonymous," criticized "the method of procedure they have used," and at the convention all but denied their right of petition: "It was not the concern of other men to take this matter in their hands and send out a document to secure signatures for its consideration with complete neglect of the body's chosen committee."<sup>69</sup> A later evaluator of this history recalled that the minority's petition "was characterized as rebellion against the Synod."<sup>70</sup> Rev. Christian Anderson would later call the way Stub handled this "tactics ... to libel the minority."<sup>71</sup>

The result of this episode was that the minority's recommendation to the convention that the union committee continue discussing the disputed points in Opgjør failed, and by a 394-106 vote the convention gave the union committee greater authority to bring about the conditions for a merger to take place.

From 1914 to 1916 there was only more of the same.

We don't know exactly what Stub and the leadership were doing. But Wiese in the first issue of "For Guidance and Defense" gives us a good idea:

These Synod people who are striving to be loyal to their church body's principles are constantly exposed to attack in a two-fold respect. On the one hand, in the Synod's organs and in meetings people are trying to run down their character and are not giving them an opportunity to reply. They are being depicted as contentious, aristocratic reactionaries who do not want union at any price but only want to frustrate "the people's" goal with all kinds of theological finger-pointing and hairsplitting. On the other hand people are trying to split them into different camps by throwing suspicion on one or the other, by sowing doubt about the individual's determination and trustworthiness, by holding out to individuals the prospect of certain concessions, or even by threatening them with loss of office.<sup>72</sup>

Stub kept using his "bully pulpit" in his reports at synod conventions and in *Kirketidende*, writing that Opgjør was the position of Koren, Preus and Walther. To this end he wrote Progress of the Union Movement in 1916.

Meanwhile the merger preparations had been set in motion at the special convention of 1913. In 1914 the minority recommended the appointment of a "peace committee" to the synod convention, but lost the vote 327-173; instead, the convention passed the report of the convention union committee 360-170. As mentioned previously, this was the vote for union and approval of the merger. At the 1916 convention several motions to delay the impending action failed. The constitution for the new merger church was on the agenda. A substitute motion (signed by ninety-four) to ask the United Church to grant the changes in Opgjør failed. Instead, the convention approved the new church's constitution 520-103, approved forming the merger (491-187), voted to incorporate the new church, and

approved turning over all Synod property to the new church.

An illustration of this period is given by Rev. Bjug Harstad:

O.K. Teisberg of Stoughton, Wis., reports this: "During the Synod meeting at Sioux Falls, 1914, Dr. Stub met me on the street the morning when the voting on the articles of union should take place. I greeted him, and he said to me that I now must be a good boy and vote for union. I must not be so stubborn as before. I then asked him, are the church bodies now united in faith? He answered, yes, they have now become united. Then I asked him if he himself had changed position in doctrine since the days of the controversy? To this he answered, No, he stood firm on the same points in doctrine as before. I further asked if the United Church had changed standpoint. To this he answered that the United Church stood on the same point as before. I asked him, then, how he could say that there was unity in doctrine between the church bodies, when both bodies stood on the same standpoint as before? To this Dr. Stub answered that all this must now be forgotten and stricken out."<sup>73</sup>

### ***The Final Days of the Old Synod (1916-1917)***

This part of the history is the story of what happened to the large minority. This paper, in fact, is not so much about our synod as it is a question, first, of how the majority of the Norwegian Synod could accept Opgjør and go into the merger; and, second, how such a determined "large minority" could, in the end, be whittled down to the 13 pastors who met in Lime Creek in 1918 to begin the reorganized Norwegian Synod.

As soon as the 1916 synod convention had approved the constitution of the merger church, the minority presented a declaration with 176 signatures. It said, in part: "Since it has been decided to force union through without paying the least attention to the request for changes in Opgjør ... unless these changes are conceded, [the minority] cannot go into the new body, but is forced to maintain the Synod, continue its work, and protect its interests."<sup>74</sup>

During 1916 the minority had several meetings with the joint union committee in a final attempt to try to gain the changes in

Opgjør. Their representatives were C.K. Preus and I.B. Torrison. The joint union committee never would accept any changes to Opgjør. But at a meeting at Austin, Minnesota, the joint union committee issued an invitation to the minority to join the new church, in spite of their “reservations” about Opgjør, “as full equals and with mutual fraternal recognition.” This is called the “Austin Agreement.”

Preus and Torrison accepted the agreement, and at a meeting of the minority in January 1917 recommended that they all accept it. The majority of pastors present at that meeting (150-200) agreed to accept the Austin Agreement. But in its final form, the Austin Agreement that was presented to the 1917 Norwegian Synod convention by the joint union committee included this addition: “It is self-evident that the above resolution must not be interpreted in such a way that Opgjør, as the basis of union of the three contracting church bodies, thereby is abbreviated or changed.”

What did this mean? It meant that most of the determined minority joined the new church, believing their doctrinal position was acknowledged and recognized; but in reality they joined a church whose theology was that of the “unchanged” Opgjør. This was the theology of the United Church, the anti-Missourians who had opposed Koren, Walther, etc., in the 1880s.

In a 1919 article in the *Lutheran Sentinel*, it’s noted that Stub – at that time president of the new church – declared: “Opgjør is adopted by the three churches. No change in Opgjør as the basis for the union of the three churches has been made. ... Those who had scruples of conscience ... have declared that they can be along in the union as full equals and with mutual fraternal recognition. And why can that be done? Because, these differences are not a cause for dividing the church.” The writer of the article then says:

What was it then that the minority attained? What did it get? What did it amount to? It got leave to be along in the New Church body in spite of its different understanding of Opgjoer. This was what the minority got. And on this basis the minority today stands in the New Church. ... One can imagine what position in the New Church that part of the minority has which let itself be deceived into going into the union on a basis which did not exist.<sup>75</sup>

We can get a clear picture of what these issues meant when we hear the testimony of those who entered the merger for a short time but then withdrew. The testimony of such pastors as Norman A. Madson, C.J. Quill, Justin Petersen, H.M. Tjernagel, and S.C. Ylvisaker at the very least is their courage to leave the large synod and return to the Norwegian Synod, little and fledgling though it was. But we do have some of their comments, too.

In a Dec. 13, 1918 letter to his brother shortly before his withdrawal, S.C. Ylvisaker said: “You know that I have wanted to take this step for a long time, but have waited because others have said I ought to let the body show what it would do. To remain longer than this year, I feel, is going to be positively harmful to my Christianity.”<sup>76</sup>

S.C. Ylvisaker’s father, Johannes, who had been a leader in the large minority, entered the merger church under the Austin Agreement and died in 1918. Presumably he too would have withdrawn after a short time. At his death, Franz Pieper wrote: “He stood on the side of the minority, which held that changes must be made at three points in Opgjør before it would serve as a union platform for loyal Lutherans. What induced him who has now fallen asleep to join the new body in spite of its declaration that Opgjør must remain unaltered – about this we have no definite information.”<sup>77</sup>

Rev. C.J. Quill in 1922 withdrew from the merger church and published his declaration of withdrawal in the *Lutheran Sentinel*. In part he said:

I was opposed to Opgjoer unaltered as the basis for union and did always vote against it, which, no doubt, you know. But did I not enter the union with the Minority on The Austin Agreement? Carried along by implicit confidence in the brethren, who championed the Minority cause, by misconceptions, and neglect of due consideration, the blame for which is all my own, I did enter. But it was with much reluctance I did that.<sup>78</sup>

The history of 1917-1918, the final convention of the old synod, the first convention of the merger church, and the first convention of the reconstituted Norwegian Synod at Lime Creek, has been told many times and need not be rehearsed here. But it is

good to note a few things about what the first years brought to those who did not join the merger.

They continually had to relive the history of Opgjør, often against their will. They observed their former brothers and sisters in the faith taking part in the formation of the National Lutheran Council. Those who had known H.G. Stub for many years were horrified to hear that he had sponsored a resolution for the National Lutheran Council that read: “A polemic attitude should be abandoned, and if manifested, ignored.”<sup>79</sup> But this was not the worst.

They continued to be harassed in various ways. Rev. George Lillegard wrote: “Lawsuits, petty persecution, ridicule, and gossip have been the stock in trade of that Church against the Synod.”<sup>80</sup> The churches of the little synod were involved in court cases over their right to church property. Stub questioned their right to the name “Norwegian Synod” in these words: “the tiny little obstructionist church body which calls itself the Norwegian Synod – to which it has no right,” and: “this little church body has no right to exist, and its accusations against the Norwegian Lutheran Church are without foundation.”<sup>81</sup>

What do we do with this history? In one sense we do not thank God for the trouble which the evil foe was able to cause among the people of the old Norwegian Synod. But in another sense we do thank God. U.V. Koren said: “We brought this unadulterated Gospel with us from our mother church in Norway, but we had not acquired a truly clear insight into its glory, in opposition to all errors, until we came here, where both the free church conditions and the controversies which we have had to carry on have, under divine guidance, confirmed us in the old truths” (emphasis added).

The words of Norwegian Synod President Bjug Harstad to the 1921 convention are fitting words with which to close this review of our history:

Let us lay the following words of Dr. V. Koren on our hearts. He says: “But although after this gracious leading of the Lord, and (the connection with the Missouri Synod) both Law and Gospel rang both purer and stronger in the public testimony, although the comprehension of the hearers grew, in many

places to a surprising degree, and although joyous fruits in an earnest Christian life showed themselves round about in the congregations – not only in the older people but perhaps even more in the younger, the first generation growing up here in this country – yet however the congregations of the Synod continued to a large extent to bear the sorrowful marks of the mass- and false-Christianity of the state church.” We must rid ourselves of these marks. Since the opposing parties merged, the Synod is tempted to be in competition with them in size and power. I wonder whether the Lord has now been able to cure us of this illness. In any case, we ought all, pastors and congregations, know we are called not to be great and mighty before the world but only to everyone knowing for himself the power of grace to save souls. Then we must work against mass- and false-Christianity in our own congregations.<sup>82</sup>

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Christian Anderson, “Underlying Causes of the Deterioration and Breakdown of the Old Norwegian Synod,” a Norwegian Synod General Pastoral Conference essay printed in *Clergy Bulletin*, September 1953, Vol. 13, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> *The Union Documents of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, p. 38-39.

<sup>3</sup> This is well summarized in “The Basis of the Union” by Rev. John Hendricks, *Lutheran Sentinel*, Nov. 10, 1920, Vol. IV, No. 19, p. 291-292. The point is underscored in a presentation to the 1920 (third) convention of the little Norwegian Synod. At that time the merger church (Norwegian Lutheran Church in America) was a member of the National Lutheran Council. From an evaluation of theses on Election adopted by the NLC in 1919: “This paragraph states that ‘the causes of Election to salvation are the mercy of God and the most holy merit of Christ; nothing in us on account of which God has elected us to eternal life. We reject all forms of synergism and all forms of Calvinism.’ During the controversy which the Old Synod had about this doctrine our opponents always denied that they taught synergism – man’s co-operation with God in conversion. This being the case, a confession by accepting the Formula of Concord is not sufficient. ... In examining this paragraph we find a very serious omission: nothing is said regarding the *position* of faith in Election. Any one is permitted to teach that faith is a ‘necessary prerequisite of Election’ or that we are elected ‘in view of faith’ or ‘on account of faith.’ This un-Biblical doctrine changes the relation of faith and thereby the NATURE of faith. ... If we push faith out of the eternal decree of Election and place it ahead of Election we thereby not only change its position but also its nature, it no longer remains a fruit of Election, but it becomes the necessary prerequisite of Election, something which guided and determined God in forming His elective decree. Dr. Koren says: ‘If this, that God foresaw faith, is the thing that guided and determined God in Election, then the term “in view of faith” is false.’” *Proceedings of the Third Annual Convention ...*, p. 86-87.

<sup>4</sup> Franz Pieper, *Conversion and Election: A Plea for a United Lu-*

*theranism in America*, p. 19.

<sup>5</sup> H.G. Stub, *Progress of the Union Matter*; excerpts from Parts IV and VI (unpublished translation by Rev. J.H. Larson).

<sup>6</sup> From *En Redegjoerelse*, "An Accounting," written in 1884 by U.V. Koren and signed by more than 100 Synod pastors; quoted in *Grace for Grace*, p. 183, and in *The Union Documents of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, p. 57.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in *Grace for Grace*, pp. 183-184.

<sup>8</sup> In "An Accounting" Koren wrote: "We do not acknowledge [this position] as the presentation of Scripture and the Formula of Concord" (*Grace for Grace*, p. 183). One pastor who lived through the *Opgjoer* battle wrote: "You may ask: Did not many good pious men use this term, "Elected on account of Faith" and still maintain a correct doctrine of Faith, of Conversion, and of Justification? We answer that they did. But we claim that these pious men did not maintain this correct doctrine of Faith, of Conversion, and of Justification because they **followed** this man-made theory, "Elected on account of Faith," but because they **left** this system and clung to the Word of God and the Formula of Concord" (Hendricks, p. 299, emphasis in the original).

<sup>9</sup> "Dr. Stub's Reply (continued)," *Lutheran Sentinel*, March 16, 1921, Vol. IV, p. 585-587 (emphasis in the original).

<sup>10</sup> Christian Anderson, "Why the Norwegian Synod?" *Clergy Bulletin*, Oct.-Nov. 1955, Vol. XIV, p. 19-20.

<sup>11</sup> *Grace for Grace*, p. 98.

<sup>12</sup> Anderson, "Why the Norwegian Synod?" p. 22.

<sup>13</sup> Bjug Harstad, "President's Report," *Beretning om det fjerde aarlige Synodemoede*, 1921, unpublished English translation by Rev. J.H. Larson.

<sup>14</sup> Gustav M. Bruce, "A Brief History of Union Negotiations," in *The Union Documents of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, p. 7.

<sup>15</sup> "The old committee of the United Church consisted of the theological professors and the president of that church. They were competent men, who knew and taught the accepted doctrines of their church." J.E. Thoen, "The Objection of the Norwegian Synod to the First Paragraph of 'Opgjoer,'" in *Beretning om Det Syvende aarlige Synodemoede af Den norske Synode* (1924 Synod Report),

p. 50.

<sup>16</sup> From “What Hinders Church Union Among Us” by H.G. Stub, 1911 pamphlet, quoted by Bjug Harstad in “*Pioneer Days of the Norwegian Synod*,” *Beretning om Det ellefte aarlige Synodemøde*. 1928, p. 53.

<sup>17</sup> B.M. Holt, “My Reasons For Opposing the Norwegian Lutheran Church,” *Lutheran Sentinel*, August 4, 1920, Vol. IV, p. 77. Holt was a layman in the little Norwegian Synod. For this article he polled various clergy in the Merger church about whether they had changed their doctrinal position as a result of the *Opgjoer*.

<sup>18</sup> *Lutheran Sentinel*, “A Plea,” February 4, 1920, Vol. III, p. 498-504; and “What Constitutes a Declaration?” April 28, 1920, Vol. III, p. 707-711.

<sup>19</sup> *Lutheran Sentinel*: George A. Gullixson, “Dr. H.G. Stub’s Reply,” March 2, 1921, Vol. IV, p. 553-554; and Theodore Graebner, “A Rejoinder,” March 16, 1921, Vol. IV, p. 584.

<sup>20</sup> From correspondence with Rev. J.H. Larson, who has translated some of Stub’s writings: “In today’s nomenclature he no doubt would have been labeled ‘gifted and talented.’ He was devoted to the truth and the synod. He wrote/presented papers at district and synod-wide conventions on the Bible as the Word of God, Reconciliation and Justification; Koren said he could only underscore all that Stub had said on those occasions. Simply stated, Stub was not someone who shot up out of nowhere and suddenly found himself Synod president. He drew upon Scripture, the Confessions, the theologians of the distant past, the synod’s ‘fathers’ of his youth ... When he writes/speaks about election, he has *En Redegjoerelse* (An Accounting) in mind and wants only to speak in total agreement with it.”

<sup>21</sup> Anderson, “Underlying Causes of the Deterioration and Breakdown of the Old Norwegian Synod,” p. 6.

<sup>22</sup> Reprinted in *Documents of Lutheran Unity in America*, edited by Richard C. Wolf, p. 232.

<sup>23</sup> “*Unity, Union, and Unionism*,” reprinted in *Lutheran Synod Quarterly*, September 1993, Vol. XXXIII, No. 3, p. 35.

<sup>24</sup> Quoted by George A. Gullixson in “Dr. Stub’s Reply,” *Lutheran Sentinel*, March 2, 1921, Vol. IV, p. 588.

<sup>25</sup> Anderson, "Why the Norwegian Synod?" p. 20.

<sup>26</sup> The summary of these events is from information written not only in *Grace for Grace* and *A City Set On a Hill*, but also in *Unity, Union, and Unionism*, pp. 35-37; J.E. Thoen, "The Objection of the Norwegian Synod to the First Paragraph of Opgjoer," pp. 47-48; Bjug Harstad, "President's Report" to the 1921 Synod Convention (unpublished translation by Rev. J.H. Larson); and "A Brief History of Union Negotiations" by Gustav M. Bruce in *The Union Documents of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, pp. 8-10.

<sup>27</sup> Bruce, "A Brief History of Union Negotiations," p. 9.

<sup>28</sup> Thoen, p. 48.

<sup>29</sup> Harstad, "President's Report" to the 1921 Synod Convention, unpublished translation by Rev. J.H. Larson.

<sup>30</sup> Harstad, "*Pioneer Days ...*," p. 54.

<sup>31</sup> Harstad, "President's Report" to the 1921 Synod Convention, unpublished translation by Rev. J.H. Larson.

<sup>32</sup> Bruce, p. 10.

<sup>33</sup> Bruce, pp. 10-11.

<sup>34</sup> Bruce, p. 11; and Anderson, "Underlying Causes of the Deterioration and Breakdown ...," pp. 4-5.

<sup>35</sup> Anderson, "Underlying Causes of the Deterioration and Breakdown ...," p. 5.

<sup>36</sup> John A. Moldstad, "The Sacredness of the Ancient Landmark," *Report of the 27<sup>th</sup> Regular Convention ...*, p. 23.

<sup>37</sup> Anderson, "Underlying Causes of the Deterioration and Breakdown ...," p. 5.

<sup>38</sup> Anderson, "Underlying Causes of the Deterioration and Breakdown ...," p. 5.

<sup>39</sup> Gullixson, "Dr. Stub's Reply (continued)," *Lutheran Sentinel*, March 16, 1921, Vol. IV, p. 586.

<sup>40</sup> Moldstad, "The Sacredness of the Ancient Landmark," p. 23.

<sup>41</sup> Anderson, "The Underlying Causes of the Deterioration and Breakdown...," p. 6.

<sup>42</sup> Bruce, pp. 12-14.

<sup>43</sup> *Unity, Union, and Unionism*, p. 37.

<sup>44</sup> Ylvisaker, "What Constitutes a Declaration?" *Lutheran Sentinel*, April 28, 1920, Vol. III, p. 709.

<sup>45</sup> Gullixson, “Dr. Stub’s Reply (continued),” *Lutheran Sentinel*, March 16, 1921, Vol. IV, p. 588.

<sup>46</sup> Harstad, *Pioneer Days ...*, p. 56.

<sup>47</sup> Anderson, “Underlying Causes of the Deterioration and Break-down ...,” p. 4.

<sup>48</sup> *Unity, Union, and Unionism*, p. 37.

<sup>49</sup> Harstad, *Pioneer Days ...*, pp. 61-62.

<sup>50</sup> Bruce, p. 15-16. Rev. John Hendricks wrote in the *Lutheran Sentinel*, Nov. 10, 1920: “In 1912 our opponents accepted *Opgjoer* unreservedly with only one dissenting vote. Indeed a most remarkable happening. From coast to coast the secular press and the ecclesiastical press announced: Full Agreement. Only a handful of reactionaries within the Synod dared to harbor doubts as to the reality of this remarkable happening.” *Sentinel*, Vol. IV, p. 300.

<sup>51</sup> Theodore Graebner, “A Rejoinder: Light on the Origin of *Opgjoer*,” *Lutheran Sentinel*, March 30, 1921, Vol. IV, pp. 610-611.

<sup>52</sup> J.E. Thoen, “The Objection of the Norwegian Synod to the First Paragraph of *Opgjoer*,” pp. 62-63.

<sup>53</sup> Harstad, “President’s Report” to the 1921 Synod Convention, unpublished translation by Rev. J.H. Larson.

<sup>54</sup> Graebner, pp. 611-612.

<sup>55</sup> Harstad, *Pioneer Days ...*, p. 62-63; “What Is the Issue?” *Lutheran Sentinel*, Sept. 17, 1919, Vol. III, pp. 185-186.

<sup>56</sup> Harstad, “President’s Report” to the 1921 Synod Convention, unpublished translation by Rev. J.H. Larson.

<sup>57</sup> Ylvisaker, “A Plea,” *Lutheran Sentinel*, February 4, 1920, Vol. III, pp. 499-500.

<sup>58</sup> Thoen, “The Objection of the Norwegian Synod ...,” p. 62.

<sup>59</sup> In this section we draw heavily on an article written by Rev. Christian Anderson in 1919, in which he responds to slanders from H.G. Stub – then president of the new merger church – charging that the little Norwegian Synod was urging the Missouri Synod to “carry on propaganda in the congregations which belong to the Norwegian Lutheran Church.” Anderson reviews Stub’s invective against the Missouri Synod and the Synodical Conference in 1912ff. “Can Such Action Be Justified Before God and Man?” *Lutheran Sentinel*, October 15, 1919, Vol. III, pp. 250-255.

- <sup>60</sup> Theodore Graebner, *The Lutheran Herald*, May 15, 1913, Vol. VIII, p. 457, quoted in “The Selling of the Madison Opgjoer,” a Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary church history paper by Robert Edwards (1979).
- <sup>61</sup> Anderson, “Can Such Action ...,” p. 253.
- <sup>62</sup> Armin W. Schuetze, *The Synodical Conference: Ecumenical Endeavor*, pp. 124-125.
- <sup>63</sup> Anderson, “Can Such Action ...,” p. 253.
- <sup>64</sup> Documented in “Can Such Action ...,” by Christian Anderson, and in “A Rejoinder: ‘New Missouri,’” by Theodore Graebner, *Lutheran Sentinel*, March 16, 1921, Vol. IV, pp. 580-584.
- <sup>65</sup> Stub, *Progress of the Union Movement*, unpublished translation by Rev. J.H. Larson.
- <sup>66</sup> Edwards, pp. 10-11; E.C. Fredrich II, *The Twentieth Century Shaping of United States Lutheranism*, pp. 11-12; Franz Pieper, *Conversion and Election: A Plea for a United Lutheranism in America*.
- <sup>67</sup> “Dr. Stub’s Reply (continued),” *Lutheran Sentinel*, March 16, 1921, Vol. IV, p. 586.
- <sup>68</sup> M.F. Wiese, *Retledning og Forsvar #1* (For Guidance and Defense, 1<sup>st</sup> Issue), unpublished trans. by J.H. Larson.
- <sup>69</sup> Quoted in Aaberg, *A City Set On a Hill*, pp. 56-57.
- <sup>70</sup> “What Is the Issue?” *Lutheran Sentinel*, Sept. 17, 1919, Vol. III, p. 186.
- <sup>71</sup> Anderson, “Can Such Action Be Justified ...?,” p. 250.
- <sup>72</sup> Wiese, *Retledning og Forsvar #1* (For Guidance and Defense, 1<sup>st</sup> Issue), unpublished trans. by J.H. Larson.
- <sup>73</sup> Harstad, *Pioneer Days ...*, p. 63.
- <sup>74</sup> “What Is the Issue?,” *Lutheran Sentinel*, September 17, 1919, Vol. III, p. 187.
- <sup>75</sup> “What Is the Issue? (continued),” *Lutheran Sentinel*, October 29, 1919, Vol. III, pp. 280-281 (emphasis in original).
- <sup>76</sup> *Sigurd Christian Ylvisaker: 1884-1959, A Commemorative Volume*, ed. Peter Harstad, p. 77.
- <sup>77</sup> Graebner, “A Rejoinder: When the Smoke Screen Lifts,” *Lutheran Sentinel*, April 13, 1921, Vol. IV, pp. 654-655.
- <sup>78</sup> “Declaration of Withdrawal,” *Lutheran Sentinel*, May 10, 1922,

Vol. V, p. 709.

<sup>79</sup> Holt, "My Reasons for Opposing the Norwegian Lutheran Church," p. 75.

<sup>80</sup> George Lillegard, "Has the Norwegian Synod the Right to Exist?" *Luth. Sentinel*, Feb. 18, 1920, Vol. III, p. 536.

<sup>81</sup> Lillegard, "Has the Norwegian Synod the Right to Exist?" p. 536.

<sup>82</sup> Harstad, "President's Report," 1921 Synod Convention, unpublished translation by J.H. Larson.

## *The Pastor's Proper Handling of a Call*

*by John A. Moldstad, Jr.*

*Nothing can be more glorious here on earth than to be co-workers with God, to be laborers in his vineyard, builders of the temple where God himself will dwell, to be shepherds over his flock to feed both his sheep and lambs. Anyone who does not esteem this work to be great must consider Christianity itself as a thing to be despised.*

J. Ylvisaker – from his notes on I Timothy

Our ELS Catechism asks: “What provision has the Lord made for the church to carry on His work?” (#209) Answer: “To carry on His work the Lord has given the church the means of grace; He has also given it the authority to call special servants who are publicly to preach the Gospel and administer the Sacraments.” Two support passages are listed: God...reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, (2 Cor. 5:18). He gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ. (Eph. 4: 11-12, NKJV)

God the Holy Spirit works faith by connecting the hearts of sinners with the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. Only by these means can faith be initiated and sustained, since only here is the forgiveness of sins— obtained once for all by Christ at the cross—distributed and received. We rejoice that God has provided this simple but powerful method for us poor sinners to be brought into God's family of believers and preserved in this family! For the sake of good order, for proper care in handling Law/Gospel preaching and in administering Baptism and the Lord's Supper, and for indicating the earnestness and authority with which he desires his means of grace to be used, our God has given us the public ministry. Essential to this public ministry is the doctrine of the call—the authority, privilege and responsibility to administer

Word and Sacrament publicly.

The Lutheran Church distinguishes carefully between the call to serve in the public ministry of the Word (Eph. 4:11, Tit. 1:5, Rom. 10:14-17) and the responsibility to do the work of the universal priesthood of all believers (1 Pet. 2:9, 1 Cor. 7:17). In both cases, however, God alone does the calling. He alone brings sinners to saving faith in his Son, Jesus Christ. He alone gives the necessary gifts and equips Christians with the grace and the ability to carry out the vocation wherein he has placed them. But when speaking of the call to do the work of preaching/teaching the Word in a public manner (i.e., in the name and stead of Christ and on behalf of the church), Scripture sets this apart as a noble office requiring deepest respect and attentive adherence to Scriptural qualifications (e.g., 1 Tim. 3:1-7). There is no command in Scripture for individuals to be called into artwork, nursing, engineering, farming, etc., although God does guide people into these worthwhile occupations and often does so in rather unique ways. But the Lord has given a command to the church to appoint preachers and teachers of the Word of God by means of a call being issued through a group of Christians who gather for the purpose of using Word and Sacrament.

Our Lord Jesus himself is the one who has established the public ministry; that is, he has authorized and instituted it. The public ministry does not come about simply because the church considered it to be the most expedient and orderly way to proclaim the Gospel. Scripture clearly states: *It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers...* (Eph. 4:11). Our Lutheran Confessions concur: “The church has the command to appoint ministers; to this we must subscribe wholeheartedly...” (Ap XIII, 12).

### ***The Theology of the Call***

When a pastor weighs the responsibilities of his office, it is important for him to ascertain whether or not he has an actual call to serve. The first requirement of one qualified for public ministry work is to ascertain that the person has received a regular call to do the Gospel work. The Augsburg Confession teaches: “No one should

teach or preach publicly in the Church or administer the Sacraments without a regular call” (AC XIV). The primary passage on which this distinctive teaching of the Lutheran Church is based is Romans 10:14-17. The apostle Paul writes: *How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!’ But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, ‘Lord, who has believed our message?’ Consequently faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the Word of Christ.* Not only are these verses a *sedes* for the doctrine of the means of grace; they establish a need for a divine call to be extended for one to publicly administer the means of grace. The point is even stronger if one opts for a more literal translation of verse 17. William Arndt (see *Concordia Theological Monthly*, May 1954), for example, has rendered it: “So, then, faith comes through the proclamation, and the proclamation through the command of Christ [διὰ ῥήματος Χριστοῦ].”

Churches that do not depend on the means of grace but on spontaneity or enthusiasm as a cause for faith’s inception naturally minimize the significance of obtaining a divine call for public ministry work. Such churches frequently place the emphasis on an “inner call” and not on the prayerful decision of a calling body carrying out the will of the Lord. Luther spoke of zealots in his day “who despise (the mediate call) and boast of another calling, whereby they say the Spirit impels them to teach” (Plass, *What Luther Says*, II, #2970, p. 946). In the early days of our predecessor body, the Norwegian Synod, followers of Elling Eielsen felt that every Christian simply by virtue of membership in the universal priesthood of all believers had the power and authority to preach publicly without any need for an external call. But we maintain it to be a violation of God’s Word for any individual to assume the role of publicly preaching or teaching the Word without a specific call extended by the church. Speaking to the pastors at Ephesus, St. Paul said: Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church

of God, which he bought with his own blood (Acts 20:28). Hear also Luther again: “It will not be proper that one should of his own accord put himself into the foreground and appropriate to himself what belongs to us all” (Luther on Ex. 3:1; quoted in J. H. C. Fritz’ Pastoral Theology, p. 35).

Since God himself has instituted that the church call servants to administer publicly Word and Sacrament, our Lutheran Confessions teach: “For wherever the church exists, the right to administer the Gospel also exists. Wherefore it is necessary for the church to retain the right of calling, electing, and ordaining ministers. This right is a gift given exclusively to the church, and no human authority can take it away from the church... Here the words of Christ apply which testify that the keys were given to the church and not merely to certain individuals: ‘Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them’ (Matt. 18: 20)” (Treatise, 67-69).

The theology of the *rite vocatus* is clear. What is not always so clear is the way that the process works in extending calls, in deliberating over the reception or declination of such calls, and in handling aspects associated with the call where the secular, the material and the temporal impinge on the gravity of the divine call’s consideration. Questions come to mind: If a man is already serving under the auspices of a divine call, can and should his entertaining another call be considered truly divine? Is it divine only if and when he accepts it? Is God working against himself if a man has a call and then receives another? What are legitimate and illegitimate reasons for accepting or declining a call? Dare one make a trip to the new location when contemplating a call? Men at times have said, “I need to be in an area where my wife also can pursue her own personal endeavors”—what about this? To what extent, if any, can a man show interest in being open to receive a call, especially if he already is shepherding a flock? When—if at all—might a call be regarded as temporary (e.g., a semi-retired man asked to serve for a rather lengthy interim)? What should be the role of the circuit visitor in arranging call meetings and in guiding (influencing?) the congregation in the calling of a pastor? How direct should the CV be in urging a man to accept or decline a call? These are a number

of the questions we hope to address in this paper and also on which to receive input in the discussion period that follows.

## *The Significance of the Call*

### *For the Pastor*

It is important, first of all, that a pastor ascertain if a call being extended to him is valid and therefore divine. Without a valid call, there is nothing for the man to consider. J. Fritz in his *Pastoral Theology* speaks of calls that are both valid and legitimate. He lists as determinants respectively: a valid call is one “extended by those whom God has given the right to do so;” a legitimate call is one that “has been procured in the right manner” (p. 39). A. Schuetze and I. Habeck in *The Shepherd Under Christ* state: “A true call (*vocatio rata*) comes into existence when it is extended by those who have the right to call. To call is to commission. Only those can commission another to administer the means of grace for them who themselves possess these means, namely, the believers or saints, who are the church of God. (Apology, VII, VIII, 8-10)” (Schuetze, 1989 edition, p. 24). Entities unable (under ordinary circumstances) to extend a valid call would include government institutions or public schools in the calling of chaplains. Where can it be shown that such a “calling body” possesses the office of the keys? And in respect to legitimacy, Fritz says: “Only such a call is legitimate as has been received without one’s own initiative, which one accepts for conscience’ sake, because persuaded by others to do so and by one’s own obedience to God and one’s love to one’s neighbor. Luther warns against selfish desires for a change, saying: ‘Remain where you are until you are called; do not seek another call, do not impose yourself upon others; for your proficiency is not so great that it will burst open your belly...If God desires to have you, He will seek you out, yea, even send an angel from heaven to lead you where He desires to have you.’” (Fritz, pp. 37, 38)

Here we need to address a concern: If a pastor is currently serving under one call, can another call that he is considering be regarded as *divine*? Is it divine only once he accepts it? While in

the past God called prophets and apostles directly (immediately) and in such cases refusal would be a violation of God's holy will (Jonah 1:1-4), this is not the case in the extension of calls *mediately*, i.e., through a congregation. The mediate call, however, is no less divine (Acts 20:28). The man who is elected by a congregation's voters to consider the call to serve as its pastor should not treat this call as being *less divine* in nature than the call of prophets and apostles, even if/when he needs to deliberate between two or more calls at the same time. "God has not promised the church direct illumination in the choice of a person. Hence, not every call, even though it can in the above sense be called divine [in the sense that the congregation has acted on the basis of a right God has given to it], requires acceptance. The Lord may use a vacancy and declined calls in a congregation for salutary training and instruction" (Schuetze, p. 35). Two evident purposes served by the scenario of a pastor of a flock receiving a call to serve another flock are: a) that a man is caused to evaluate his ministry and his God-given abilities; and b) that a congregation is caused to review its own purposes and goals.

The man receiving the call is to trust that *God himself* has moved the congregation to extend to him the right and privilege to serve that parish as its pastor. If he is currently serving as pastor of a congregation, he ought not—when deliberating—assume automatically that the Lord wants him to move on to another flock. In this situation, *both* calls he has at the time—the one in which he presently serves and the one he has just received—have to be weighed with equal seriousness. Once the decision is made, the called pastor and the calling body should trust that the answer (whether accepting or declining) is in accordance with the will of God for the future work of his kingdom.

According to Walther (reflecting Chemnitz in his *Examen*), it is necessary for a pastor to be certain that he has a valid and legitimate divine call for the following reasons:

- Because the office of the Word is the office of God himself.
- The one who has a legitimate call can call upon God for guidance in the exercise of the office with a peaceful conscience and certainly expect to be heard.

- God wants to be present in the office with his Spirit and grace and wants to be effective through it.
- The call is also necessary so that the ministers of the church conduct their office with that much greater diligence, faithfulness and cheerfulness in the fear of the Lord. (Drickamer's edition of Walther's *Pastorale*, p. 19)

The doctrine of the call presents the pastor both with a solemn warning and with a tremendous comfort. It is a warning not to take the matter of the public ministry lightly, to be tempted toward laziness or worldly concerns. Remember the words of James, “*Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly*” (James 3:1). We also note how the words of Paul positively pose a serious attitude for one engaged in the work of the public ministry: “*So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things [mysteries] of God*” (1 Cor. 4:1). At the same time, the pastor takes great comfort in knowing that the divine call assures him that where he serves—even in the midst of dire duress or “alligator alley”—is a result not of human plans nor by chance but by God’s own design and direction. When Amaziah told Amos to leave Israel (the northern kingdom) and go back to Judah, Amos appropriately appealed to his call: “*But the Lord took me from tending the flock and said to me, ‘Go, prophesy to my people Israel’*” (Amos 7:15). In his second letter to the Corinthians, at a time when he needed to defend his apostleship from unjust criticism, Paul wrote: “*Such confidence as this is ours through Christ before God. Not that we are competent to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life*” (2 Cor. 3:4-6). The call gives the pastor the confidence that God who did the calling will also provide the competency for the tasks that lie ahead. “*I can do everything through him who gives me strength*” (Phil. 4:13).

### ***For the Congregation***

Walther says: “It cannot be expressed how important it is for the listeners to be certain of the divine call of their preacher. If the listeners are convinced of it, they will be satisfied at heart to have even a preacher with lesser gifts if only he is faithful. They will rather in simplicity hold to this: Our preacher is the one whom God has given us, through whom God wants to lead us to heaven. Under his shepherding God will not let us lack anything that is necessary for our salvation” (Drickamer’s edition, p. 20).

There are times, of course, when a congregation may painstakingly need to revoke the call of its public servant of the Word. This would be for false doctrine, for immoral living or for ineptitude in performing the duties of the office. The call demands the responsibility of the congregation in assuring scriptural Law/Gospel preaching and the proper administration of the Sacraments. However, a congregation which takes to heart the importance of the divine call, as applied in the words of Walther above, will not hastily seek to remove its called minister without serious regard for the doctrine of the public ministry.

In an excellent essay on the doctrine of the call delivered at a WELS conference in November of 2000, Pastor Paul Janke observes: “The Bible studies that are commonly conducted before call meetings are designed to help the voters understand the biblical doctrine of the call. It would be good, however, if this important Bible teaching were addressed more often and more widely than at the forum that a call meeting provides.”

### ***The Issuance of the Call***

When a congregation calls, its representative body of voters (or an authorized board/committee) issues the call on behalf of the entire church. In many cases this special meeting of the voters takes place even before the congregation’s “outgoing pastor” has had his farewell Sunday. The congregation, in consultation with the circuit visitor, arranges a special meeting where the voters carefully consider a list of candidates. After presenting a list of candidates submitted

to him by the synod president, the circuit visitor facilitates the discussion. He helps the congregation focus on matching its needs with the specific abilities and strengths of the men being considered for the call. This may take some time. In some churches the calling process is extensive because of the numerous responsibilities and special circumstances to address. In others, very little discussion may ensue. In either case, the amount of discussion or the length of the meeting should not be viewed as indicating that the call, when issued, is more divine or less divine respectively. All is committed to the Lord in prayer.

What if, after a call meeting, a member (voting or non-voting) feels conscience-bound to object to a call being issued? Arndt answers this well: “The result of the deliberations issuing in (sic) a call are made known to the whole congregation, and every member has a right to protest. To obviate the conceivable necessity for someone to protest after the final vote, as a rule all the candidates for the holy office are announced beforehand so that every member of the church has an opportunity of presenting comments or protests. Is this procedure right? Why not? We live in the blessed era of the New Testament where freedom is our birthright, one of our prized possessions. If that is the way the congregation wishes to do its work, we need not object, on principle” (Arndt, pp. 345, 346). Unanimity in issuing a call is important (not an absolute), so that the one called may prayerfully make his decision with full confidence in the stated desire of the calling body. Usually a motion to make the call unanimous is entertained at each call meeting.

An opening prayer at the meeting, or a prayer offered right before the voting begins, asks the Lord’s direction in this mediate process of issuing a call. “In no area is the injunction to go to God in prayer more important than in that of calling a pastor for a congregation” (Arndt, p. 348). A prayer such as the following might be used:

*O Lord Jesus, our dear Good Shepherd, you have instituted the holy ministry and therefore desire congregations to call shepherds to lead your redeemed lambs and sheep in the way of righteousness. Be with us this evening as we gather to call a pastor.*

*Guide our discussion and hear our prayers, for you alone know our needs and know who will best serve this church to the glory of your name and for the salvation of many souls. May your blessing rest upon the man whom we are calling tonight to be our spiritual leader. If it is your will, move him to accept this divine call so extended. Hear us for your own sake, for you have commanded us to pray that the Lord of harvest send forth laborers into his harvest. Amen.*

### ***The Involvement of the Circuit Visitor***

One of the duties of circuit visitors, as listed in our ELS Handbook, is to “provide assistance to congregations in calling pastors” (III, D, p. 15-A; see also “Guidelines When There is a Pastor or Teacher Vacancy in a Congregation,” p. 19-A). When the visitor becomes aware of a vacancy in his circuit, he is expected to consult with the synod president and obtain a call list for a scheduled meeting with the vacant parish. It is *strongly recommended* that the circuit visitor himself, or his assistant, be present at the meeting. If a congregation wishes to add the names of other ELS clergy to the list provided by the president, it surely has the right to do so. It is advisable, however, that any additional names be forwarded *in advance* of the meeting date so that proper resumes may be provided and pertinent information shared. When a church desires to call a pastor from a sister synod, this needs to be brought to the attention of the synod president so that he may consult with the president of the sister synod or of the district where the man currently is serving.

The call meeting can serve as a good opportunity for the congregation to review its salary package. The visitor should be prepared to show the congregation what is expected from the synod’s code in respect to home missions. He might also share with the church some special concerns that he has observed in regard to the accommodations for their called servant and his family.

Once the congregation has voted on issuing a call, a telephone call by the visitor to the called pastor is in order. This should be done *immediately* so that the man need not hear via the grapevine that he has a call. The visitor may make this call rather brief; extended discussions about the calling congregation and its

needs can occur once the call document arrives. The visitor should have on hand blank call documents and be ready to fill in the required information that evening or the next morning before sending it to the called pastor by registered mail.

How much should a visitor say in advising a fellow pastor of his circuit who receives a call? Since the visitor usually is an experienced parish pastor who sees both the needs of the circuit parishes as well as the “big picture” throughout the synod, his advice is welcomed. He should remind the pastor of the importance of the deliberation process. There is a reason why God has permitted the call to come at this time. He should also urge the newly called to do the necessary consulting with his congregation and with his fellow pastors in the circuit. With less experienced pastors, the visitor may wish to go through the appropriate steps in handling a call.

The visitor is invited to assist the president of the synod in suggesting names for call lists. He may know of fellow pastors in his circuit who should have the chance to move. In this regard, the question could be raised: Is it proper for a pastor to approach his circuit visitor (or synod president) and request his name be on a call list? A man should not seek a *specific* call. The Holy Spirit knows his address, phone number and email. The axiom holds: *The office should seek the man and not the man the office*. However, a man may occasionally feel synod officials should be aware of certain extenuating circumstances (e.g., his or his family’s health) as call lists are composed. This is not “seeking the call.” It is simply an honest realization that the kingdom of Christ’s Gospel may be better served by the opportunity to entertain a call.

### ***The Deliberation Process***

Are men today possibly more reluctant to move, compared to thirty or forty years ago? Do working wives and the ownership of homes make a difference? Is there a danger today of treating calls cavalierly and not giving the full weight of deliberation because of an inordinate amount of personal/family/material concerns?

The deliberation of a call, while at times disrupting and agonizing, is essential and also rewarding. The *mediate* nature of the

call makes the deliberation process indispensable. Very sparingly, Lutherans have used the expression “inner call” to mean the God-placed desire (1 Tim. 3:1 ὁρέγεται) to serve in the public ministry. But we do not speak of an inner call (i.e., a direct answer from God) as the way pastors today are guided in reaching call decisions. The method the Lord uses is that of receiving counsel and advice from fellow Christians, while they and the man called continue to commit the matter to the Lord in prayer.

The following questions may be of some help to a pastor when deliberating on a call:

- Where does God want me to serve? Am I praying for his guidance and will?
- Are the needs of my present parish less/greater than the needs of the calling congregation?
- Would the use of my gifts be better applied at the place where I’m being called?
- Are there gifts I have which are not being tapped in my present call?
- Am I too comfortable in my present parish that I no longer see the growing needs of my people and the opportunities for outreach?
- Would I personally grow by experiencing a new challenge?
- Is the Lord blessing the work where I am? What might this indicate?
- Are there special objectives still unfulfilled in my current parish?
- Is it best for me to leave when things are going well?
- What if things are not going so well? Am I running from responsibilities?
- What are my family needs? . . . the state of health?
- Since the public ministry calls for selflessness, am I listening to the scriptural warnings against materialism and worldliness? (1 Tim. 6:10, 11) (Phil. 3:19)
- How much should the length of the vacancy play into my thinking?
- Do I trust that God will guide me in making the right decision?

If there is uncertainty about a call, consider the advice attributed to Luther: “If one doubts that God has willed him to do a certain work, he had better not undertake to do it.”

Are there illegitimate reasons for accepting or declining a call? Since a pastor looks at the whole picture in reaching his decision, this may not always be easy to determine. While a pastor needs to be fully cognizant of his family’s needs/wishes and also the needs of a working wife, these matters in and of themselves should not be allowed to dictate automatically his response to a call. If his own abilities appear better suited for a certain parish and other indicators point him to see the Lord’s guiding hand, it would be unfortunate—to say the least—for him to accept or decline in conflict with his own personal convictions.

Only in rare cases should the pastor holding the call make a visit to the calling congregation. Impressions are important, even if a man can resist letting aesthetics and amenities have an influence.

Consultation with fellow pastors is encouraged. They may reveal strengths and weaknesses that the man himself is unable to see. These pastors also (especially in a small synod) may know well the situation and needs of the given parishes.

As soon as possible, the pastor will want to arrange for a meeting with his congregation. He plans to share with his members the pertinent specifics of the call he has received and also to give them a chance to share valuable input. Congregations have rights too. They want to express themselves on the issue. Congregations can become infuriated if they hear—after the fact—that their pastor had a call and declined/accepted it without telling them. One of our synodical guidelines reads: “He should call a voters’ meeting of his own congregation to give the congregation the opportunity to consult with him regarding the call he has received.”

How should this meeting be structured? Only one item should be on the agenda: the pastor’s call. Begin with a devotion on the doctrine of the call. Give them necessary facts, so that no one is confused. Place onto a dry eraser board or into a PowerPoint the needs of both parishes—as you, the pastor, see them. Put them side-by-side. Invite the members to evaluate them. Add to the list. The example below is from a meeting I held in 1984 with my parish in

Sioux Falls, SD, while contemplating the call to Lake Havasu City, AZ.

NEEDS AT BETHEL	NEEDS AT OUR SAVIOUR
Congregational growth	Continue mission progress
Assimilating newer members	Work under the ELS Mission Board
Evangelism	Church building project
Relocation/Land purchase	Promote fellowship in circuit
Christian education emphasis	Welcome visitors/tourists
Sunday school attendance	Youth work/Pioneer program
Shut-ins	Difficult region for work

Near the close of the meeting give the voters a chance to express their feelings by way of “advice slips.” In this way, even those who do not speak may be heard. In the opinion of this writer three categories work best in preparing these “advice slips”:

1. \_\_\_\_ I advise Pastor to stay. 2. \_\_\_\_ I advise Pastor to accept his new call. 3. \_\_\_\_ I prefer not to advise. A portion may be left blank for people to include their personal comments. These “advice slips” serve simply as personal opinion ballots meant to give the pastor counsel. Only he reads them—no one else. They are not to be described or viewed as voting ballots. He alone will prayerfully decide the call. If a congregation gives overwhelming advice for him to accept the call to a new parish, obviously this may have an impact. Yet, the ultimate decision is that of the pastor alone—not the voters, nor the advice slips, nor his wife, nor his children, nor synod officials.

Most calling congregations would like to know as soon as possible if a man is planning on declining a call. A period of three weeks to a month ought to be long enough for a man to complete his deliberations.

### ***Closure: Acceptance/Declination***

When the pastor has reached his decision, he should telephone the chairman of the calling congregation and inform him of the decision. This is to be followed by a formal letter (see Appendix on whom to copy) to the congregation. An email message may be sent, but should not replace the formal letter. If he has decided to decline, the pastor is well advised not to be too wordy in his letter of declination. He need not list reasons for declining. The pastor may show courtesy in returning any accompanying materials that were sent to him with the call, so that the congregation can use them again. If accepting, the pastor will let the congregation know that he will be in touch concerning arrangements for moving, installation, etc. (Again, see the Appendix for the guidelines.)

An email or phone call to the synod president is also in order, as well as to the respective circuit visitors. Other call lists throughout the synod may be affected by the current information provided.

A peaceful release should be secured from the former parish when a man has decided to accept a call. This is a way for the congregation to express itself, if it chooses to do so. In the unusual event that a peaceful release cannot be obtained, the pastor may resign to enable his acceptance of the new call.

In closing, there are still some questions we wish to address:

Does a pastor's resignation mean he ought to be disqualified from considering future calls? There can be numerous reasons why a man feels the need to resign. Resignation is always resigning from a particular call, and therefore the resignation takes one out of the public ministry. The public ministry is defined by the call. A man who has resigned may in certain cases be retained on the synod's clergy roster, with the understanding that he might serve in some other public ministry capacity at a future date.

What about temporary calls, such as one-year missionary assignments or retired clergy assisting churches for interim periods? Are these divine calls? Unless there are valid reasons to the contrary, the pastor's call is issued with the clear understanding that it is permanent. Fritz firmly contends: "A congregation is not justified in extending such a call [i.e., temporary], not even if it be specified that the call, after a certain time, may be renewed; nor should any preacher accept such a call, since before God it is neither valid nor legitimate" (Fritz, p. 39). Yet, we cannot prove from Scripture that a limited call is not divine.<sup>2</sup> Rev. Richard Lauersdorf explains: "Those who serve and those who call people to serve wait for the Lord to indicate how long that service is to be. The Lord can use changing conditions in a servant's life or in his capabilities to limit the length of service in a specific call. The Lord can also use changing needs in the calling body or weightier needs in another calling body to limit the duration of a specific call" (Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly, Fall 1989, p. 275).

Special circumstances may require a temporal nature for a certain call. When this occurs, great care must be taken not to violate the scriptural purposes for the public ministry. Generally, calls not permanent can at least give the appearance of letting fleshly concerns dictate. It can also lead to a hideous "hire and fire" mentality on the part of the calling body. "Let whatever must be done . . . be carried out in love. Those who serve in the public ministry are God's gifts to the church and are to be treated as such. We do not want to open the door to Satan for the sowing of his poisonous seeds of discord and rancor in anyone's heart. Nor do we in any way want to give the impression that we are undercutting the doctrine of the call" (WLQ, Fall 1989, p. 281).

In light of the way God uses pastors to dispense publicly the forgiveness of sins from the cross of Christ through Word and Sacrament, Christians will hold the office of pastor in high esteem. They will realize how important it is to show their appreciation, respect and dedicated assistance to him as he carries out the assignments of his call. In the words of Isaiah and Paul, the fellow believers exult: How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news! (Is. 52:7; Rom. 10:15)

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The advice given in this section of the paper should not be construed as the one and only official procedure. Pastors of our synod may/will vary in discussing the protocol for the deliberation of a call.

<sup>2</sup> In its recently released report, “Theology and Practice of the Divine Call,” the Missouri Synod’s CTCR states: “We are reminded that neither the Scriptures nor the Confessions explicitly address the details of the call process, including also this issue. They exhibit less concern about the tenure of a particular call than they do about the pure proclamation of the Gospel and the right administration of the sacraments . . . The integrity of the divine call must always be preserved and nothing done that will cause people to manipulate or pre-ordain the results of the process. In all situations congregations should be encouraged to remember that God’s Holy Spirit is at work throughout the process” (CTCR document, pp. 27 & 33).

# Appendix

## GUIDELINES FOR THE PASTOR'S ORDINATION AND INSTALLATION

### ARTICLE I: ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Upon receipt of a call the pastor should promptly send a letter of acknowledgment to the calling congregation and copies to the president of the synod, the circuit visitor of his own circuit, the visitor of the circuit to which he is called, and, if it is a mission call, the Missions Counselor.

### ARTICLE II: ANNOUNCEMENT

If a pastor is currently serving a parish, he should announce the receipt of a call to his congregation at once.

### ARTICLE III: CONSULTATION

A. He should call a voters' meeting of his own congregation to give the congregation the opportunity to consult with him regarding the call he has received.

B. He may also seek counsel from his visitor, from the president of the synod, from a mission board, if it is a mission call, and from other brethren.

C. He may also seek further information from the calling congregation.

### ARTICLE IV: DECISION

A. He should strive to reach a decision without delay.

B. If his decision is to return the call, he should inform his congregation and the calling congregation promptly. Copies of the letter should be sent to those listed in Article I above.

C. If his decision is to accept the call, he should seek a peaceful release from the congregation he is presently serving.

D. If his decision is to accept the call, then arrangements for installation in the new charge should be made with the congregation, the circuit visitor and the president of the synod.

**ARTICLE V: ORDINATION AND INSTALLATION**

When a Candidate of Theology receives a call, he shall arrange for his ordination and installation through the office of the president of the synod. This ordination will normally be held in a congregation to which he has been called.

*It's just a little sin...*  
*An overview of the concept of*  
*distinguishing sins into the categories*  
*of venial and mortal*

*by Paul Zager*

In the impressionable years between ages nine and eighteen, I spent a lot of time with a friend who was raised Roman Catholic. We didn't really try to proselytize one another. But he probably influenced me more than he realized. This is especially true for the matter before us in this paper. It happened more than once. We would be doing something mischievous, both worrying a little about being caught. But rather than let the "fun" stop, my friend would try to console me with the suggestion that what we were doing was a venial sin. His youthful explanation of that term had already taught me what that supposedly meant. It meant that if we got caught, it didn't matter much. "It was just a little sin."

That inaccurate oversimplification has for decades skewed my perception of the categorization of sin into slots like mortal and venial. I don't recall a discussion of this terminology ever coming up during my theological training at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. If it did, it must have been barely mentioned in passing. But whether it was due to a lack of presentation on the part of my professors or a lack of attention on my part as a student, the fact remains that reading Chemnitz' treatment of the subject in his "Enchiridion" was quite an eye opener. Not only did I learn that the categories are actually used by some reliable Lutheran dogmaticians, but —more importantly— I learned that the Roman Catholic church doesn't have exclusive rights to a definition of the terms. To the contrary, I found out that with a better definition and interpretation of the terms, one might still be considered an orthodox Lutheran even while making this distinction among the sins we and the people of our flocks commit.

The question still arises, however, whether it is a helpful

distinction for us to be making. Will we help burdened and worried souls find comfort or will we embolden lax sinners to excuse their sinning by declaring, “It’s just a little sin!”? My goal is to present a current and accurate picture of the Roman views of this doctrine, contrasted with the Lutheran definitions of the terms. Then with such information in hand, we can consider whether it is good for us to employ this distinction in the pastoral care of the souls the Lord has given us to shepherd.

### *The Roman Catholic view*

The priest at St. Michael’s parish a few miles from Holton Lutheran was most helpful when I went to the rectory seeking books which would help me understand the Roman use of this distinction. Father Alber seemed quite familiar not only with the theory and doctrine of mortal and venial sin, but even with the names of some of the ethicists and moral theologians who best represented a “leading edge” Roman understanding and use of these categories. He was able quickly to pull several volumes from his bookshelves which could help inform me regarding current trends in Roman thought.

With that being said, however, be aware that there is no one, unified understanding of this doctrine among the Roman writers. One writer decries the stereotypical approach of some [older] Catholics who try to make a list of mortal sins based solely on the “matter,” or “concrete action,” involved in the sin.

“... contemporary moral thinking focuses on personal responsibility and so tries to retrieve the personal factors of knowledge and freedom in order to appreciate the moral significance of an action. In looking further, then, at how contemporary theology speaks about sin, we will focus primarily on what constitutes mortal sin, *because personal sin which truly deserves the name “sin” is mortal sin*. St. Thomas himself claimed as much (ST I–II, q. 88, a. 1). Venial sin derives its meaning by analogy to mortal sin.”<sup>1</sup> (emphasis ed.)

I found it absolutely refreshing to read a Roman theologian writing what is highlighted in the quotation above. In my own

teaching, I find myself stressing the point frequently that “sin is sin is sin.” So seeing such a bold de-emphasis on any difference between mortal and venial sin from the pen of a Romanist author is encouraging.

Unfortunately, Gula eventually goes even farther away from a concrete identification with particular actions. Rather, there seems to be a total absence of anything concrete as his position is further defined.

Properly understood, actions cannot be separated from persons and from a relational context. Single actions are the product of interactions, deliberations, and desires over a period of time. To understand our actions as contextual, we might think of the moral life as a kind of story. Individual actions are like the incidents which make up the story. No action has its proper moral significance in isolation from the whole narrative. *Since all moral action is interaction, each individual action finds its proper meaning from within the total narrative that is the moral life.*”<sup>2</sup> (emphasis ed.)

This and additional examples from Gula seem to present the concept of mortal sin entirely within the sphere of relativism. But what is consistent with this and with the older Roman approach of making catalogs of mortal sins is this: the approach is still an attempt to be predictive. If certain conditions are met, then a mortal sin, rather than a venial sin will have been committed. Gula and other contemporary Roman, moral theologians have simply made those conditions so “squishy” that almost any sinful action can be deflected out of the category of mortal sin.

While keeping Gula’s comments in mind, think about the stereotypical Roman approach to mortal sin. There’s nothing “squishy” there at all. That approach is often summarized in the listing of “deadly sins.”

“Romanists list seven: *superbia, avaritia, luxuria, ira, gula, invidia, acedia (Traegheit, sloth)*, and then devise a penitential system that is to be applied by the church, in which the priests measure out the *satisfactio operis* in their sacrament of penance.”<sup>3</sup>

Such a listing of deadly sins seems so utterly arbitrary as to be useless. By comparison, the approach of modern moralists and ethicists seems to be much more thoughtful, although not any more biblical. Is the more malleable approach of the contemporary moralists really an improvement? The Catechism of the Catholic Church has a fairly straightforward definition of what must be in place before a sin should be considered a mortal sin. “Three conditions must together be met: Mortal sin is sin whose object is grave matter and which is also committed with full knowledge and deliberate consent.”<sup>4</sup>

That catechism goes on to explain some of its terminology.

Grave matter is specified by the Ten Commandments, corresponding to the answer of Jesus to the rich young man: “Do not kill, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.” The gravity of sins is more or less great: murder is greater than theft. One must take into account who is wronged: violence against parents is in itself graver than violence against a stranger.”<sup>5</sup>

It would be interesting to find what Scripture verses the authors of the Catholic catechism use to defend this gradation of the gravity of sin. This writer cannot think of any Scripture which would apply. But the definition of grave matter is not the only area in which the older approach of Rome appears to be arbitrary. One must not only have knowledge that an act is sinful or simply give consent to the sinning. It must be full knowledge and complete consent on the part of the person sinning before the sin can be considered mortal. In addition, the Catholic catechism goes so far as to state that “Unintentional ignorance can diminish or even remove the imputability of a grave offense. ...The promptings of feelings and passions can also diminish the voluntary and free character of the offense, as can external pressures...”<sup>6</sup>

In common language, this seems to say that anger caused when someone pushes me out of my lane on the highway can turn my vengeful road-rage-murder of that person from a mortal sin to a venial sin because “feelings and passions can diminish the voluntary and free character of the offense.” It takes Flip Wilson’s stock

phrase: “The devil made me do it!” to new levels of sophistication and philosophical argumentation. It shouldn’t be surprising that another Roman moralist asked and then concluded: “Does this mean that mortal sins are only very rare? They are probably rarer than traditional moral theology did assume.”<sup>7</sup>

This is at odds with the stated goal of contemporaries like Gula who want the concept of gradation of sins to be more contemplative. In the end, the current approach makes it nearly impossible to commit a mortal sin! Yet, if it becomes common knowledge that the moral theologians have eradicated mortal sin through clever philosophy, why would the common laymen even worry about it? Why contemplate the theological subtleties or even give a thought to any penalties? One might expect instead that most laymen would conclude: “It’s just a little sin!” regardless of the *matter* involved, and commit the sin without much thought at all.

Perhaps it’s a matter of perception... one type of perception on the part of the theologians, and another type of perception entirely for the average layman. Even while stating and expressing some degree of agreement with the more traditional Romanist categories and definitions, some of these Roman theologians also come up with some very “Lutheran” sounding statements. To do so, they either must ignore the inconsistencies, or else they must understand some of what they write in an extremely broad sense.

Take Peschke as an example. He notes that the current system for making distinctions goes back unchanged to the Council of Trent. He added the comments that not only common sense, but also the opinions of the church fathers are helpful in determining the gravity of sin, as to whether that sin would be mortal or venial. His writing seems to indicate a whole hearted agreement with and acceptance of the three fold criteria for declaring a sin to be a mortal sin. Peschke quotes Piet Schooneberg approvingly: “We commit mortal sin when we transgress God’s law in an important matter with full advertence and with a wholly free will...”<sup>8</sup> Peschke even approves the proper response to the committing of mortal sin, according to the very traditional theology of Rome. While venial sins can be taken care of through personal confession directly to God, a mortal sin can be forgiven only if it is confessed to someone

ordained, who in turn officially has the ecclesial authority to forgive sin of such gravity.<sup>9</sup>

Yet, such highly traditional views of mortal sin — surprisingly— sit side by side with more contemporary thinking in Peschke’s writing. He notes that “there exists a dynamic relation between venial and mortal sins insofar as venial sin prepares the way for mortal sin. By committing venial sins, man disposes and readies himself to commit a mortal sin.”<sup>10</sup> As we shall see, this is not so far from the Lutheran understanding of mortal and venial sins.

In conclusion, we can say that while the distinction between mortal and venial sins is still part and parcel of Roman theology today, it is hardly a solid block of doctrine. It is rather a fluid mass (mess?) which seems to move and flow in different directions every time a philosopher attempts to give it shape. The one constant seems to be the thought that the distinction can be made now —in this lifetime— perhaps even before the actual committing of the sin. Thus the distinction between mortal and venial sins is predictive in Roman theology.

### *The Lutheran view*

Lutheran theologians have a much different approach to making this distinction between mortal and venial. And at least in the writings of the early Lutheran theologians, the conclusions are succinct and obvious. That’s what struck me when I first read Chemnitz on this subject in his *Enchiridion*. Finally, here was an approach to showing the seriousness of sin which fit well with God’s own declarations of judgment against sin, combined with His proclamation of grace through Christ. That’s right. The concept of mortal/venial sin can be understood in the light of a proper Law and Gospel paradigm.

As a representative of modern Lutheran thought on this subject, I’ve quoted Pieper. What follows here is the entirety of what Pieper has to say on the subject of mortal and venial sin. What makes this entire presentation different from what we saw in the Roman camp is indicated in those first four words: “As to their effect...” It is extremely important that Pieper does not say anything

about a particular sin, in and of itself. He is making any statements about “mortality” or “veniality” entirely on the basis of the *effect* a particular sin has on an individual’s eternal status.

As to their effect, sins are divided into mortal sins and venial sins.

Mortal sins are those which result in the death of the sinner. This term takes in all the sins of the unbelievers. In the case of the believers those sins are called mortal which force the Holy Spirit to depart from one’s heart, which destroy faith. Venial sins are sins which, though they in themselves merit eternal death, are daily forgiven to the believer. They are also called sins of weakness. They do not drive the Holy Spirit from the heart, do not extinguish faith.

Here we note another point which the Romanist writers seemed to be willing to identify, but not necessarily to accept without reservation: Venial sins *merit* eternal damnation in and of themselves; that is, under circumstances other than God being gracious, those very same sins would be mortal. But because the Christian lives in a state of grace, those sins are forgiven before they can wreak such eternal havoc. We will, in a moment, see Chemnitz’ comments on the Christian living in grace.

Pieper further noted:

The Romanists teach that certain actual sins are venial in themselves and do not deserve eternal, but only temporal punishments. The Arminians hold essentially the same view as the Catholics. The Calvinists teach that in the case of the elect even *peccata enormia* do not destroy faith nor deprive them of the Holy Ghost. The Scholastics enumerate seven sins as mortal sins: *superbia, avaritia, luxuria, ira, gula [gluttony], invidia, acedia*. This list is misleading; any sin may become a mortal sin if we persevere in it against the admonition of our conscience.”<sup>11</sup>

Roman theologians and moralists seem to want to make the distinction based on the matter of the sin, itself. But as noted, Pieper is here pointing to the effect of the sin, not the matter of the sin. That is why Pieper and other orthodox Lutherans will agree with that closing statement. It deserves repetition here. “...any sin may

become a mortal sin if we persevere in it against the admonition of our conscience.”

Chemnitz is more thorough in his treatment of the subject than Pieper. But for all the extra verbiage from Chemnitz, one thing is still clear: Chemnitz does not have a different understanding or a different doctrine than Pieper. The variety of understandings apparent among the Roman theologians is not evident among the orthodox Lutheran writers, despite a time difference of several centuries between Chemnitz and Pieper.

Initially, Chemnitz offers only the briefest of summaries regarding mortal and venial sin.

When we speak of sin as to what it is per se, no sin, according to the statement of the Law, [and] considered in its own nature, so to say, and per se, is venial; but all [sins] make one subject to eternal death and damnation. Therefore the distinction between mortal and venial sin is valid after a person has already been reconciled with God through faith in Christ; we will therefore postpone it to that place.<sup>12</sup>

It is interesting that the Roman writer Peschke, quoted the early Roman church father Baius, who wrote, “there is not a single sin which, of its nature, is a venial sin, but every sin deserves eternal punishment.”<sup>13</sup> Chemnitz, above, might well have been quoting Baius. (Obviously, another school of thought gained prominence in Roman thought, pushing aside conclusions like those from Baius. Peschke noted in a footnote that Occam, Gerson and Baius did not find their conclusions accepted by the [Roman] church.)

Most likely because Chemnitz is dealing with the effect of sin, rather than the matter of sin, he is more concerned to show his readers the dangerous path of development which can turn any venial sin into a mortal sin, regardless of the matter of the sin. He begins by showing the difference between a mortal and venial sin, noting that this difference can exist only in someone who is already a Christian.

Now, then, since it is clear that no sin per se deserves forgiveness, likewise that no sin is so horrible that it cannot be forgiven to those who repent and believe in Christ-why, then, are some sins in the reborn called venial, some mortal?

This should be well and carefully explained, so that each Christian can know and determine if he is living in mortal or venial sin. The explanation consists essentially in this, that everyone examine himself as to whether or not he has true repentance and faith. Ro 2:4-5; Jer 5:3; 2 Co 13:5. Original sin, which still dwells in the flesh of the reborn, is not idle, but is the restless law of sin in our members, enticing, tempting, driving to sin with various suggestions and evil lusts. Ja 1: 14; Ro 7:8; Gl 5: 17. Since, then, one who is reborn does not delight in this kind of carnal lusts, and is neither led by them nor follows [them], but earnestly represses and crucifies them as sins and mortifies [them] through the Spirit, lest they rule or be performed (Ro 6: 12; 7: 15; 8: 13; Gl 5:24), this very thing is a very sure sign of true and earnest repentance. And when the reborn pray that God would not impute these weaknesses to them but forgive for the sake of Christ, and at the same time believe and trust that Christ, as the true propitiation, would, in the sight of God, cover this their uncleanness with His innocence and obedience (Ro 4:7; Ps 32:1; 1 Jn 1:7; 2:1-2), this also is a sure sign of true and justifying faith. And where true faith, in earnest repentance, apprehends Christ in the Gospel, and relies on Him and is supported [by Him], there is no condemnation, but the pure grace of God, forgiveness of sins, and eternal salvation (Ro 8: 1; 1 J n 1 :9; Ps 32:2). ***In this way there are and occur these venial sins in the reborn, for which they are not condemned, because, as Augustine says, they live under grace.*** (emphasis ed.)

But what if we indulge and delight in evil lusts and seek occasions to give them free rein (Ro 6:12,. Mi 2:1; la 1: 15)?

***Then they become mortal sins...*** (Ro 8: 13; la I: 15),<sup>14</sup>  
(emphasis by ed.)

The reading of those last few lines above was the “ἔρηκα” moment for this writer. The fundamental difference between the Roman view of mortal and venial sin and the Lutheran view became clear. While the Roman view tries to be predictive, the Lutheran view of these two classes of sin is retrospective. Only as God’s final judgment of the sinner becomes known, or only as the Christian looks back and sees his own sincere repentance for a sin does anyone really know whether a sin was venial or mortal. If a “little white lie” is not covered by God’s grace as it is received in faith, then that “little white lie” is a mortal sin. Conversely, if a string

of eighteen serial murders is removed and washed away when the murderer is led to faith which trusts Christ for forgiveness, then that string of murders is a venial sin.

Recall again those words which were quoted earlier from Pieper: “...*any sin may **become** a mortal sin if we persevere in it against the admonition of our conscience.*” It is not the action—the matter—which determines whether a sin is venial or mortal. It is the effect of the sin on the immortal status of the individual which will determine whether a sin is mortal or venial. What this means is that you and I cannot determine definitively before its commission whether a sin has one status or the other. That determination will always be in hindsight, after the fact of its commission... or after the fact of its confession or lack thereof... or even after the fact of its judgment. Again, we cannot determine whether a sin is venial or mortal *predictively*. We can only do so *retrospectively*.

This viewpoint seems to be consistent across the centuries. Even from the “classic era” (dare we say “wordy era”?) of the Lutheran dogmaticians, while we can find more words, we don’t find any real difference in understanding. In his compendium of the Lutheran dogmaticians, Heinrich Schmid has a nearly page long quote from David Hollaz regarding mortal and venial sin.<sup>15</sup> But it doesn’t really clarify anything we have already read, or add anything to it. An admittedly cursory reading of pertinent sections in Krauth’s *The Conservative Reformation and Its Theology* did not even produce a reference to the subject at hand. Perhaps it is because the Lutheran theologians are not trying—predictively—to produce of catalog of sins or types of sin which are especially dangerous, that there is simply not a need to say that much on the subject.

### ***Practical implications***

Since we can say that the distinction between these two grades of sin can be understood properly, we should ask whether or not we ought to be making the information known to the dear souls God has placed in our pastoral care. Will knowing the difference between venial and mortal sins help our parishioners live a more sanctified life? Will it help them either appreciate or be more certain

of God's grace?

On the positive side, I would suggest that knowing the difference might help remove a heavy load of guilt from the conscience of those who have a highly sensitive and tender conscience. Such an application could go something like this:

“Pastor, I can't imagine how God would ever want anything to do with me again. The thoughts I've had toward that man who tried to molest my child are nothing short of murder in God's eyes. I might as well stop pretending. I can't even be a Christian anymore.” Clearly this suffering Christian thinks he has committed a mortal sin.

As that person's pastor, here is one possible approach. “You're right. Jesus does say that anyone who hates his brother is a murderer. But you told me you confessed that sin to God. God's promise is true whether you feel like it is or not: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” (I John 1:9 NIV) This sin hasn't condemned you to hell. This sin is forgiven. You're still a Christian. You're still living in faith.” Looking back at this person's response to his sin makes it clear that his sin is a venial sin. It has not driven the Holy Spirit from his life. It is not a mortal sin.

In his case, just knowing that there is such a thing as a sin which does not destroy saving faith will be helpful in providing reassurance that he hasn't lost either faith or heaven.

On the other hand, there might be times we end up wishing we had never mentioned this distinction between mortal sins and venial sins among our members. How many times have you thought you provided an especially clear explanation of some doctrine in a sermon or in Bible class, only to have a member make a comment to you which sounds like almost the direct opposite of what you said? Frustrating, isn't it?

That very thing might happen once we open the Pandora's box of venial sin to our members. How easy it could be for an otherwise clear-headed Christian to start thinking like my childhood friend. “Oh, it's just a little sin!” In effect, we might inadvertently end up giving license to sin to those who are looking for some kind of escape hatch to do what they want, no matter what

God's instructions might be.

At the other extreme of that equation is the danger for those who have a tender conscience. In their cases, we might overburden a person with fear of having committed a mortal sin, which might actually end up being venial sins. The literature suggests that many a person has confused the concept of mortal sin with the "sin against the Holy Spirit." Ultimately, of course, both mortal sin and the "sin against the Holy Spirit" will lead to the same damnation. But there is a difference. Jesus specifically said that "anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come." (Matthew 12:32 NIV) John refers to this same sin in his first epistle when he writes: "There is a sin that leads to death. I am not saying that he should pray about that." (1 John 5:16b NIV)

Now, obviously, the very terminology "mortal sin" suggests that such a sin leads to death, too. And it does! But the instruction which John gives is enlightening. We should not pray about the one who commits this sin against the Holy Ghost. On the other hand, don't we pray fervently for someone who has committed a sin which is destroying or has destroyed saving faith? We commonly agree that King David had committed a mortal sin when he sinned with Bathsheba. Yet, Nathan went to the king to rebuke him and call him to repentance. David's sin was a mortal sin. But it was not the sin against the Holy Spirit... not unless God changes His mind and says that *sometimes* the one who sins against the Holy Spirit should be called to repentance, *but at other times* should not. But God "does not change like shifting shadows." (James 1:17 NIV) He wants those who have committed mortal sins to be called to repentance. He only instructs us to withhold such a call to repentance from those who have committed blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

Unfortunately —again— people do not always listen so well. Once they hear that there is such a thing as a "mortal sin," they might automatically equate it with the "unforgivable sin" and wrongly despair of receiving God's mercy, even though God's Word is leading them to know they should repent.

## *Conclusion*

Is it useful to make this distinction between mortal and venial sins? After reading a bit more on the subject, my personal opinion is that there might be some situations in which a person with an overly tender conscience would benefit from hearing that there is such a thing as a venial sin. For that matter, it might be helpful for someone with a dulled conscience to hear the thunder of the law threatening hell, because he has apparently committed a mortal sin which has killed saving faith in his life.

But situations which require this approach might be a rather small percentage of the Christians we shepherd. I tend to think we might create more problems than we solve if we make a point of teaching this distinction across the board. Because of the potential for abuse and/or misunderstanding of this technical and scholastic distinction, it is perhaps more appropriate to pull this terminology out of the closet only on a case by case basis, to be used for pastoral counseling when circumstances seem to demand a distinction between “a little sin” and a damning sin.

While our fathers were not writing specifically about the distinction between mortal and venial sins, I believe these words from the Smalcald Articles speak directly to our topic, nonetheless, and put into writing what we might say to a concerned member if asked about making the distinction:

This repentance...does not debate what is or is not sin, but hurls everything on a heap, and says: All in us is nothing but sin. What is the use of investigating, dividing, or distinguishing a long time? For this reason, too, this contrition is not [doubtful or] uncertain. For there is nothing left with which we can think of any good thing to pay for sin, but there is only a sure despairing concerning all that we are, think, speak, or do [all hope must be cast aside in respect of everything], etc. <sup>16</sup>

## Bibliography

- Catechism of the Catholic Church*; United States Catholic Conference, 1994
- Christian Dogmatics*, Volume I; Francis Pieper, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, 1950.
- Christian Ethics, Moral Theology in the Light of Vatican II*, Volume 1; Karl H. Peschke, C. Goodliffe Neale, Ltd., Warwickshire.
- Concordia Triglotta - English : The Symbolic Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. Lutheran Church. Missouri Synod*. Includes Historical Introductions by F. Bente and indexes of subjects. (electronic ed.) Northwestern Publishing House, Milwaukee. 1997
- The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*; Heinrich Schmid, Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis. 1961
- The Interpretation of The Epistles of St. Peter, St. John and St. Jude*; R.C.H. Lenski, Augsburg, Minneapolis, 1966.
- Ministry, Word, and Sacraments, An Enchiridion*; Martin Chemnitz, trans. by Luther Poellot, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, 1981.
- Reason Informed by Faith: Foundations of Catholic Morality*; Gula, Richard M.; Paulist Press, Mahwah, NJ, 1989.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup>Gula, Richard M., *Reason informed by faith: foundations of Catholic morality*, Paulist Press, Mahwah, NJ, 1989. page 109
- <sup>2</sup>ibid. page 111
- <sup>3</sup>Lenski, R.C.H. *The Interpretation of The Epistles of St. Peter, St. John and St. Jude*. Augsburg, Minneapolis, 1966. pages 536-537
- <sup>4</sup>*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, United States Catholic Conference, 1994. page 455.
- <sup>5</sup> ibid.
- <sup>6</sup> ibid.
- <sup>7</sup>Peschke, Karl H.; *Christian Ethics, Moral Theology in the Light of Vatican II, Volume 1*; C. Goodliffe Neale, Ltd., Warwickshire. page 300
- <sup>8</sup> ibid., page 300
- <sup>9</sup>ibid., page 297–298
- <sup>10</sup>ibid., page 302
- <sup>11</sup> Pieper, Francis, *Christian Dogmatics, Volume I*; Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, 1950, page 568–569
- <sup>12</sup>Chemnitz, Martin, *Ministry, Word, and Sacraments An Enchiridion*, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, 1981. trans. by Luther Poellot. page 57
- <sup>13</sup> Peschke, op cit. quoting Baius, page 299
- <sup>14</sup> Chemnitz, Martin, *Ministry, Word, and Sacraments An Enchiridion*, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, 1981, transl. by Luther Poellot. page 104
- <sup>15</sup> Schmid, Heinrich. *The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis, 1961 p.254
- <sup>16</sup>Lutheran Church. Missouri Synod. (1997). *Concordia Triglotta - English : The Symbolic Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. Smalcald Articles*. Includes Historical Introductions by F. Bente and indexes of subjects. (electronic ed.) Page 489 Part III, Article III, par. 36. Milwaukee WI: Northwestern Publishing House.

# *Universal Truths About Justification*

*by Steven P. Petersen*

During the past several years I have enjoyed the privilege of visiting a variety of places of worship. In Melbourne, I watched as two archbishops conducted funeral rites for a famous political philosopher at St. Patrick's Cathedral. Among the guests: the Prime Minister of Australia. In the cathedral of Santa Domingo in Lima, I stood before the shrine of Spaniard Juan Pizarro, the conqueror of Peru. Architecture and furnishings reflect both native and colonial influences. In Wittenberg, Germany, where Luther preached in the City Church, I studied Cranach's famous triptych illustrating the Means of Grace, which Luther struggled to restore to the Church. Here in Kiev, at Vespers in the Monastery of the Caves, I watched golden-robed, black-bearded priests chant an ancient liturgy as incense filled the air. At Asian Mission Church in Irvine, CA, I donned white gloves to assist in the distribution of the Lord's Supper to our Korean members, many of them former Buddhists. I have worshiped beneath a thatched roof in the upper Amazon basin and in the thin air of the Andes Mountains.

In each of these places, climate dictates church design, custom influences church practice, history determines theological emphasis. And so, *becoming all things to all men* (I Cor 9:22), Christian worship varies according to culture. Is Christian doctrine so affected? It had better not be!

Christian liberty allows us much latitude regarding ecclesiastical design, liturgical expression, pastoral practice, etc. At times, these may well reflect a specific culture in which the Church is found. But despite the many influences culture may press upon the Church, there are two over-arching realities which pertain regardless of culture: the doctrines of sin and objective justification. And there is only one way through which the transcendent God deals graciously with man in every culture: the Means of Grace. Finally, despite outward similarities between the Christian and others in his culture, the Christian is unique: believing God's promises, he possesses God's ultimate blessings.

***1) Two over-arching realities pertain regardless of culture: the doctrines of sin and objective justification.***

God's perfect creation was polluted by sin and plunged into a state of deterioration which eventually leads to death. The fall into sin is the first and greatest catastrophe, not merely for Adam and Eve as individuals before God, but for all of their descendants as well. *By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned* (Rom 5:12). Death is unmistakable evidence of man's moral deficiency. As a result of the Fall, now every man is spiritually blind and he *does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned* (I Cor 2:14). And not only is man subject to death and spiritual blindness, but there is an active, aggressive aspect to man's fallen condition: his corrupted mind is *enmity against God*; for it is not subject to the law of God (Rom 8:7).

We are shackled to our sinful human nature by virtue of the original sin we have inherited from our first parents. Because *flesh gives birth to flesh* (John 3:6) each man must confess with David, *I have been a sinner from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me* (Ps. 51:5). This corruption of our human nature causes us to commit sins against God's law. *Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander* (Matt 15:19).

Sin is everything that is contrary to the Law of God, *sin is lawlessness* (I John 3:4). How different we are by nature now from God's original intention! Since he says to us, *be perfect, therefore as your heavenly Father is perfect* (Matt 5:48), and since *whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it* (James 2:10), and since *cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law*, (Gal 3:10) our sin presents a serious problem. In Paul's stark words, *the wages of sin is death* (Rom 6:23).

So sin disables us. Spiritually crippled, not even the Christian is able to obey God's law. Therefore, no one is able to gain salvation by personal obedience to God; *no one will be declared*

*righteous in his sight by observing the law* (Rom 3:20). In spite of our best efforts, we cannot justify ourselves, remit our own sins or save our own souls.

It comes naturally to us to deny responsibility for our sin, to shift blame from ourselves, and to make every attempt to explain it all away. However, the simple reality that *all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God* (Rom 3:23) applies universally regardless of any cultural influences which might exist.

***Pastoral points:***

How do you teach the Law and sin? Do you point to the Commandments? Conscience? Death as evidence? Disappointment in the behavior of yourself or others? Upheaval in society? Natural disaster?

The world's religions and man's inborn *opinio legis* teach that we can earn favor with God through correct behavior. Christianity, however, teaches that we are accepted by God through the forgiveness of sins in Christ. Cultural influences, no matter how persuasive or appealing, cannot alter this bedrock reality. We teach our children always to hold firmly to the doctrine of justification by grace, for Christ's sake, because it is the chief doctrine of the Christian religion. Though attractive alternatives surface all around us, *salvation is found in no one else [than Christ], for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved* (Acts 4:12). That God would graciously justify sinners, instead of requiring them to earn forgiveness, distinguishes Christianity from all false religions and gives enduring comfort to the repentant sinner. Christ's words to the paralytic are a cool cloth to our own fevered foreheads: *take heart, son; your sins are forgiven* (Matt 9:2).

When the reality of our sinful condition terrifies us, our personal confidence for eternity can rest only on the Biblical assurance that God the Father has by grace forgiven all sinners and declared them righteous in Christ. God's grace in Christ, His undeserved love for mankind, not man's merit, is the motivator for the blessing of forgiven sin. *In him (Jesus Christ) we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance*

*with the riches of God's grace* (Eph 1:7). Since it is true that *All . . . are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus* (Rom 3:24) then we each will find comfort, being “one” among the “all”.

Christ's life, death and resurrection form the basis for God's loving disposition toward us. To begin with, Jesus was *perfect* for us. He has done right in all the ways that we have done wrong and now *through the obedience of the one man [Jesus] the many [we] will be made righteous* (Rom 5:19). The sinless, innocent life of Jesus, *born of a woman, born under law* (Gal 4:4), his active obedience to God's law, was accepted as though it had been achieved by mankind.

Further, Jesus was *punished* for us; in fact, *He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world* (I John 2:2). The responsibility for a world full of sin was charged to him. Jesus became accountable before God for our guilt, and *he himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live to righteousness* (I Pet 2:24). In this, his passive obedience, Christ became the object of God's vented wrath over sin.

Finally, Christ's resurrection from the dead is *proof* that God's plan of salvation worked. That *he was delivered over to death for our sins and raised to life for our justification* (Rom 4:25) means that God accepted what Christ has done for the world with his perfect life and innocent death. The resurrection is a public announcement that God is satisfied and a guarantee that we will rise from death to life also, for Christ is the *firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep* (I Cor 15:20).

Jesus' perfection as the world's representative, his punishment as the world's substitute and his resurrection as God's declaration of completion constitute his redemptive work on behalf of all the world. First, this forms the basis for God's acquittal of all people of the guilt and punishment for sin. Having given *himself as a ransom for all men* (I Tim 2:6), Jesus truly is *the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world* (John 1:29). And second, this forms the basis for God's imputation to the world of the righteousness of Christ. *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 Cor 5:19,21).*

It is to our eternal joy and comfort that God regards sinners in Christ as though they had never sinned, for now we know that *he will keep us strong to the end, so that we will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ (I Cor 1:8).*

***Pastoral points:***

How do you teach objective justification? How is it the basis for evangelism of unbelievers? The basis of comfort for troubled Christians? Note three “p”s: perfect, punished, proof. A fourth comes later in the final section.

Is the Gospel preached if the active obedience is neglected?

The Pietist declines to announce forgiveness until he has complete confidence that the sinner is sufficiently repentant. Where is the danger in that way of thinking?

“Lift up your hearts to the Lord, for almighty God, our heavenly Father, has had mercy upon us, and has given His only Son to die for us, and for his sake forgives us all our sins.” – The Absolution

***2) The way the transcendent God deals graciously with man in every culture: The Means of Grace***

It is true that *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 (Rom 3:23,24).* That reality is the basis for the means of distribution of the justification Christ won for the world; for if Christ had not won remission of sin, there would be nothing

of value to distribute and if it were not distributed freely by God to man, it would need to be earned by man. How does this justification become ours? Only through the Means of Grace.

In a general sense the only way God imparts the greatest blessing to man is through the Gospel, the good news about His grace in Christ. Paul was committed to the task of *testifying to the gospel of God's grace* (Acts 20:24) because that Gospel is God's own proclamation to mankind of his grace and pardon in Christ. And the Gospel is not merely an intellectual announcement about spiritual matters. It not only announces God's good will in general terms to a general audience. It actually conveys to individual sinners the forgiveness Christ obtained, *for in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed . . .* (Rom 1:17). In the Gospel, God himself speaks to us exactly what he gives to us, saying, *take heart, son; your sins are forgiven* (Matt 9:2).

The Gospel has power to bless because God the Holy Spirit works through it. *No one can say, "Jesus is Lord, except by the Holy Spirit* (I Cor 12:3). God's Holy Spirit animating the Gospel message, it is *the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes* (Rom 1:16). Faith in Christ as Savior is the God-intended product of the Gospel, for Paul says *faith comes from hearing the message and the message is heard through the word of Christ* (Rom 10:17). The power of the Gospel is not negated or enhanced by the merit or status of the one administering it.

In a more specific sense, God deals graciously with sinners through absolution and the Sacraments. The Church has the assurance *If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven* ((John 20:23). Applying the Gospel to the penitent in absolution, God's representative announces accomplished fact, not speculation about possible good fortune based on future personal conduct.

Also in the specific sense, the Sacraments convey God's grace and pardon. These sacred acts, ordained by God, through which external means are connected with God's Word, offer, convey and seal to sinners the grace of Christ. So, Jesus tells us that we are to make disciples by *baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit* (Matt 28:19). And so also,

he promises forgiveness with these words, *Drink from it all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins* (Matt 26:27b-28).

We might say that the Means of Grace are both “offerative” and “operative,” as they not only hold out forgiveness, but actually create the Christian faith through which that forgiveness is received. In every culture, it is only through the Means of Grace, in the written and spoken Word of the Gospel, absolution and the sacraments, that God deals graciously with his world.

***Pastoral points:***

How do you illustrate the Means of Grace? Lutheran theology distinguishes between salvation obtained (the cross) and salvation distributed (means of grace).

*“Here stands the font before our eyes,  
Telling how God did receive us;  
The altar recalls Christ’s sacrifice  
And what His table doth give us;  
Here sounds the Word that doth proclaim  
Christ yesterday, today, the same,  
Yea, and for aye our Redeemer.”* (Grundtvig)

What is the significance of God coming to us in common elements such as water, bread, wine and the spoken word?

***3) Despite outward similarities between the Christian and others in his culture, the Christian is unique: believing God’s promises, he possesses God’s ultimate blessings.***

Through the faith created and nourished by the means of grace, the blessings of the Gospel are apprehended personally by individuals. Therefore, though there may be common similarities

between the Christian and others in his culture, the Christian is profoundly different since through faith he personally *possesses* the forgiveness of sins which Christ won for all the world. *We maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law* (Rom 3: 28).

Unlike unbelieving neighbors who have never heard the Gospel, and unlike unbelieving church members, hypocrites of whom it is said *the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard it did not combine it with faith* (Heb 4:2), the Christian believes the Gospel and through faith receives all the Gospel promises and offers. In this we see the primary blessing of the faith created by the Holy Spirit through the means of grace.

Contrary to our natural inclination and the urging of all other religions, Christianity resists works righteousness. *To the man who does not work* (that is, does not attempt to earn right standing before God by his own good works) *but trusts God who justifies the wicked,* (that is, believes God's declaration that sinners are justified in Christ) *his faith is credited as righteousness* (Rom 4:5) (that is, by faith one becomes personally righteous before God as God imputes to him the righteousness of Jesus Christ.) This subjective justification by faith is the sinner's personal possession of the objective justification which the Gospel offers to all the world.

Faith does not prompt God's forgiveness, win it or earn it. That was done in Christ's living, dying and rising. Faith apprehends or possesses the forgiveness already obtained by Christ. The credit in every way belongs to God who *called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ* (2 Thes 2:14). Though God has declared the whole world justified on the basis of Christ's atonement, only the Christian receives the benefit of that declaration through the faith created by the Holy Spirit through the Means of Grace. Paul rejoiced that through faith he had gained, and was found in, Christ, *not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ – the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith* (Phil 3:9).

Many blessings accrue to Christians as a result of justification. Our relationship with God is no longer driven by fear,

for *there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus* (Rom 8:1). Instead of being God's enemies, *we are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus* (Gal 3:26), and *if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ* (Rom 8:17).

***Pastoral points:***

“Possess” is the final “p” in my Gospel presentation. How is the Gospel both “invitation” and “transportation”?

“To those that believe on His name, He gives power to become the sons of God, and has promised them His Holy Spirit. He that believes and is baptized shall be saved.” - The Absolution, continued.

What pastoral comfort is granted the sinner in the Christian doctrine of justification?

The Gospel: *“It is the power of God to save From sin and Satan and the grave; It works the faith which firmly clings To all the treasures which it brings.”* (Loy)

Church architecture, liturgical style, mission methodology, etc., may be affected by the culture in which the Church finds itself. Variety in areas of *adiaphora* is understandable and acceptable. However, regardless of the cultural setting, the truths about man's sin, the remission of the sin of all by God for Christ's sake, the transmission of that good news through the means of grace, the sinner's reception of that blessing by faith – these absolutes cannot be altered to fit cultural constraints.

*Lord, help us ever to retain  
the Catechism's doctrine plain!* (Helmbold)

# The Lord's Supper the Feast of Salvation

*by Gaylin R. Schmeling*

## I. The Command and Institution of the Sacrament

- A. Types and Pictures of the Supper
- B. The Institution of the Supper
- C. The Supper and the Real Presence
- D. The Last Will and Testament of Christ
- E. The Supper and Sacrifice
- F. The Physical Elements in the Supper
- G. The Supper and the Words of Institution
- H. The Supper and 1 Corinthians 10:16
- I. The Supper and John 6
- J. The Supper and Closed Communion

## II. The Proper Preparation for the Sacrament

## III. The Blessings of the Sacrament

- A. The Supper Bestows the Forgiveness of Sins
- B. The Supper Gives Life and Nourishment
- C. The Supper and the Holy Spirit
- D. The Supper and the Sanctified Life
- E. The Supper and Our Daily Burdens
- F. Union with Christ and His Body the Church
- G. The Supper Gives Eternal Salvation
- H. The Supper and Eschatology
- I. A Lord's Supper Prayer
- J. Bibliography

## **I. The Command and Institution of the Sacrament**

### *Types and Pictures of the Supper*

The early church fathers and the Lutheran fathers saw

many pictures and types of the Lord's Supper in the Old Testament Scriptures. Gerhard enumerates a multitude of pictures of the Lord's Supper. Melchizedek's offering of bread and wine to Abraham, the father of believers, points to the meal of salvation of our great high priest Jesus Christ. Pictures of the Supper are seen in the tree of life in the Garden of Eden, the Passover lamb, the manna in the wilderness, in David's invitation to Mephibosheth to eat at his table (2 Samuel 9:13), in Elijah's food (1 Kings 19:6-8), in Ahasuerus' feast (Esther 1:3), and in Isaiah's burning coal. (Isaiah 6) Allusions to the Supper are found in the poor that eat and are satisfied (Psalm 22:26), in the Good Shepherd who prepares his table in the wilderness (Psalm 23; John 10), and in Psalm 111 where the Lord's wonderful works are remembered, his covenant of redemption stands forever, and he gives food to those who fear him. (Johann Gerhard, *Baptism and Lord's Supper*, pp. 212-218; *Loci Theologici*, Locus 21, Para. 11-12, Preuss ed. 5:6-7)

### ***The Institution of the Supper***

The institution of the Lord's Supper is recorded in Matthew 26:26-29, Mark 14:22-25, Luke 22:15-20, and in 1 Corinthians 11: 23-25. As our Lord and his disciples gathered that first Maundy Thursday evening, they came together to celebrate no ordinary meal. This was the Passover, the most solemn meal for God's Old Testament people. It was to remind Israel of how the Lord once saved their first-born in Egypt through the blood of the Passover lamb. This meal, however, not only pointed back to God's deliverance in Egypt through the blood of the Passover lamb, but it also pointed forward to the blood of the true lamb of God who would redeem all men on the cross. As our Lord reclined at this meal for the last time, he was the fulfillment of the Passover ritual for all times.

Jesus used this setting to institute his New Testament meal of salvation. In the Passover Old Testament believers ate the flesh of the Passover lamb, which was to picture for them the true lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world. Here Jesus, the very lamb of God, did not give New Testament believers merely a picture of his flesh and blood with bread and wine. He gave them

his true body and blood wherein he bestowed upon them all the blessings of the cross.

As the Passover meal got underway, Jesus took bread. This was a large flat loaf of the unleavened bread, the matzah, for only unleavened bread was used in the Passover. He gave thanks, or blessed it, and broke it for distribution. Exactly what that blessing entailed we are not told. Still it must have been quite different from the usual Passover benediction. Concerning the blessed bread that he was offering his disciples and inviting them to receive, the Lord said, “Take, eat, this is my body which is given for you. This do in remembrance of me.”

### *The Supper and the Real Presence*

Notice what Jesus said concerning the bread which he was offering his disciples: “This is my body.” Jesus did not say, “This is a picture of my body,” nor did he say, “This only represents my body.” Rather he said, “This is my body.” Concerning his true body Jesus said to the disciples, “This is given for you.” This very body which they received on their lips was the same body which was the once and for all sacrifice for sin on the cross. Having received Christ’s body in the Supper, the disciples received all the blessings of Christ’s redemptive work.

The Words of Institution continue: “In the same way also he took the cup after supper.” Jesus took the third cup of the Passover, the cup of blessing according to 1 Corinthians 10:16. This was a cup of wine, for only wine was used in the Passover. He blessed it even as he had blessed the bread and gave it to them saying, “This is the new testament (covenant) in my blood.”

Matthew explains further, “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.” (26:27) These words of explanation concerning this cup, which is his true blood, allude to the ratification of the first covenant in Exodus 24. Real blood ratified the old covenant and the people were given that real blood in testimony of the fact that they received the blessing of the sacrifice. They were sprinkled with the blood of the animal sacrifice which pointed to Christ. Likewise real blood ratified the

new covenant, and God's people are still given that real blood of the true lamb of God so that they are certain that the benefits of Christ's redemptive sacrifice apply to them. The words of institution summarize the blessings of this sacrament with the phrase "for the forgiveness of sins," which shows that the whole treasure house of salvation is offered in this Supper. This is Luther's point in the *Small Catechism*, "For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation."

Jesus concluded his institution with the command, "Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." A similar command had already been given concerning his body. These words explain that this institution was not meant as merely a one-time occurrence in the past. It is to be repeated until Christ comes again in glory. (1 Corinthians 11:26) Each time Christians celebrate this Supper they bring Christ's great sacrifice into remembrance and receive the treasure of that sacrifice: the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.

On the basis of Holy Scripture we reject both the Reformed and the Roman Catholic views of the sacrament. The Reformed Church teaches the doctrine of representation. This means that the Supper is merely a sign or a symbol of Christ's body and blood, a meaning contrary to the clear teaching of the Words of Institution in which Christ declares, "This is my body, this is my blood." The Roman Church maintains the doctrine of transubstantiation, an instantaneous replacing of one substance with another. The substance of bread and wine is to be replaced with the substance of Christ's body and blood with only the accidents (outward forms) of the bread and wine remaining. This is contrary to the Scripture which speaks of the bread and wine being present in the sacrament. (1 Corinthians 11:26-28) As Lutherans we teach the biblical doctrine of the real presence. Because of the sacramental union both the Lord's body and blood and the bread and wine are present in the Supper. This doctrine is explained by saying that Christ's body and blood are in, with, and under the bread and wine. The Scripture clearly teaches that in the sacrament the bread is the true body of Christ and the wine is the true blood of Christ.

We confess the doctrine of the real presence for the following reasons: 1) The Words of Institution declare that the bread and wine

are Christ's true body and blood. (Matthew 26:26-29, Mark 14: 22-25, Luke 22:15-20, 1 Corinthians 11:21-25) 2) The Bible states that the cup is a communion of (participation in) the blood of Christ and that the bread is a communion of (participation in) the body of Christ. (1 Corinthians 10:16) 3) The Bible states that unworthy communicants are not guilty of bread and wine but of the body and blood of Christ. (1 Corinthians 11:27) 4) No one has the right to change a divine institution and last will and testament. Just as we do not have the right to change the will and testament of a relative who has passed away, so we do not have the right to change the words of our Lord's last will and testament that declare, "This is my body, this is my blood." (Mark 14:24, Galatians 3:15) In our day many maintain that they teach the real presence, but in actuality they merely teach a spiritual presence. One that subscribes to the scriptural doctrine of the real presence will confess that in the Supper: 1) He receives the very body, born of Mary, and the very blood which ran from his wounds. 2) He receives the Lord's body and blood not only by faith but also with his mouth. (*Manducatio oralis*) 3) The unbeliever also receives Christ's body and blood, but to his harm. (*Manducatio indignorum*)

### ***The Last Will and Testament of Christ***

The sacrament is the last will and testament of Christ for Jesus says that this "is the New Testament in my blood." It is a gift or inheritance for God's people and not a human work or something we offer to God. According to Luther the sacrament contains all the elements of a last will and testament.

Since God in the Scriptures again and again calls his promise a testament he means to announce thereby that he will die; and again, in calling it a promise he means to announce that he will live. And thus, by that one word he wanted to make us understand that he would become man, die; and yet live eternally . . . A testament is nothing but the last will of one who is dying, telling how his heirs are to live with and dispose of his properties after his death. . . . Four things are necessary in a complete and proper testament: the testator, the oral or written promise, the inheritance, and the heirs; and all of

these are clearly visible to us in this testament. The **testator** is Christ, who is about to die. The **promise** is contained in the words with which the bread and wine are consecrated. The **inheritance** which Christ has bequeathed to us in his testament is the forgiveness of sins. The **heirs** are all the believers in Christ, namely, the holy elect children of God—wherefore Paul in Titus 1 [:1] calls the Christian faith the faith of the elect. (LW 36:179-180)

Before a man dies he often prepares his will in which he bequeaths his property to whomever he desires. Those remembered in his will may be totally unworthy, but he has the right to do as he pleases with what is his. Then, through his death, the will is made effective. Likewise, Jesus is the testator who prepared for his death and established his will, his gift. The Holy Supper is Christ's last will and testament which is to be distributed to believers for all time. This testament he ratified and made effective through his death on the cross. We, his heirs, do nothing to obtain the inheritance nor are we worthy to receive it. The Holy Supper is totally and completely a testament or a gift from God. It is the greatest inheritance that we can ever imagine. It is more valuable than all the wealth of this world. Here is bequeathed to us the greatest treasure of all times, all the blessings of the cross.

### *The Supper and Sacrifice*

The atonement sacrifice for all sin was finished and completed at the cross when the Savior cried out, "It is finished." (John 19:30; see also 1 Peter 3:18, Hebrews 7:26-27, 9:12) Since the sacrifice of Christ is complete, the Roman Catholic Church perverts the priestly office of Christ when it speaks of each repetition of the Lord's Supper as an unbloody sacrifice—the same sacrifice as the sacrifice of the cross, only in an unbloody manner: "The sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are *one single sacrifice*... 'In this divine sacrifice which is celebrated in the Mass, the same Christ who offered himself once in a bloody manner on the altar of the cross is contained and is offered in an unbloody manner.'" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para. 1367)

To say that the Supper is the same sacrifice as the sacrifice of

the cross, namely, that in the sacrament Christ's body and blood are again offered up to appease God's just anger over sin, impairs the oneness of the once and for all sacrifice on the cross. (Hebrews 7:26-27, 9:12) The sacrifice of the cross cannot be all-sufficient, offered once, and still need to be continually offered in the Mass. The only way that the sacrament may be spoken of as a sacrifice is that the very body and blood which were once offered for the redemption of all, are now present in the Supper conveying the blessings of that redemption to the individual. Chemnitz writes in his *Examen*:

The fathers call the body and blood of the Lord which are present in the Supper a saving sacrifice, a pure host, our ransom, the purchase price of our redemption, the ransom for the sins of the world, a propitiatory sacrifice and a propitiation, **not because the body and blood of Christ are offered in the Mass by the action of the priest in order that they may become the ransom and propitiation for the sins of the whole world, but because that sacrifice which was once offered on the cross for our redemption and for the sins of the whole world—the body and blood of the Lord—is present, is dispensed, offered, and taken in the Lord's Supper, so that the power and efficacy of this offering, once made on the cross, is applied and sealed individually to all who receive it in faith.** Thus Cyprian says of the Lord's Supper: "This life-giving bread and the cup of blessing, hallowed by the solemn benediction, benefits the life of the total man, being at the same time a medicine and an offering, to heal our infirmities and to purge our iniquities." (Chemnitz, Ex. 2, 491)

The Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions are extremely emphatic in their rejection of any form of propitiatory sacrifice in the Supper which militates against the once and for all sacrifice of the cross or makes the sacrament a human work or sacrifice.

### ***The Physical Elements in the Supper***

According to Christ's institution, bread and wine are the physical elements in the Supper. Matthew speaks of the contents of the cup in the sacrament as "this fruit of the vine." (Matthew 26: 29) This is the liturgical term for wine in the Passover meal. This indicates that the Lord used wine in the Supper. Also, in April at

the time of Christ such a thing as grape juice was an impossibility. There was no refrigeration in that warm climate. Unfermented grape juice could be obtained only when the grapes were freshly pressed—before the juice naturally fermented.

The other physical element used in the Lord's Supper was bread. Here the general Greek term for bread made from grain is used. We know that unleavened bread was used in the last supper, because it was a Passover meal and only unleavened bread was used in the Passover. Yet Jesus in the recorded words of institution did not use the proper term for unleavened bread, indicating that any bread made from grain may be used in the Supper. As a result, the Eastern Church has traditionally used leavened bread and the Western Church, unleavened bread. The earthly elements of the sacrament are wine from grapes and bread from grain.

### *The Supper and the Words of Institution*

When Christ said, "Do this in remembrance of me," he commanded us to continue this institution. What is necessary for a valid Lord's Supper? Jesus said, "Do this," i.e., do what I have done. One is to take bread and wine, bless them with Christ's almighty Words of Institution which effect the presence, and distribute his true body and blood so that they may be eaten and drunk.

The Lord said, "Take, eat, this is my body which is given for you... Drink of it, all of you, this cup is the New Testament in my blood, which is shed for you and for many, for the remission of sins. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." These are the words of blessing Christ gave to the church so that in our Lord's Supper celebration the Word may be joined to the elements to effect the presence of his body and blood, as Augustine says, "The Word is joined to the element and it becomes a sacrament." (SA III V:2, *Tappert*, p. 310)

The Lutheran Confessions maintain that the Words of Institution cause the presence of Christ's body and blood. "For where his institution is observed and his words are spoken over the bread and cup (wine), and the consecrated bread and cup (wine) are distributed, Christ himself through the spoken words, is still

efficacious by virtue of the first institution, through his Word, which he wishes to be there repeated.” (FC SD VII, 75, *Triglotta*, p. 999)

### ***The Supper and 1 Corinthians 10:16***

Another portion of Scripture which is important in the study of the Lord’s Supper is 1 Corinthians 10:16: “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?” (NKJV) St. Paul did not say that the cup and bread are only visual aids to help us understand Christ’s redemptive work. No, he said that the cup and the bread are a communion, a partaking of Christ’s body and blood. It is the very same body that came forth from the Virgin’s womb and died on the cross, the very same blood with which he washed away the sins of the world.

In 1 Corinthians 10:16 the imperative “Do this” of the Words of Institution is particularly illuminated. Here “the cup of blessing which we bless” is explained. Notice that it is a cup which the church is to bless. Then the “Do this” is not only a command to distribute and receive but also to bless. One can distribute and receive forever, but without God’s commanded blessing it is only bread and wine. It is God’s blessing which causes Jesus’ body and blood to be present. On the other hand, one can say God’s blessing forever, but if there is no distribution and reception there is no sacrament, for Christ’s full institution has not been carried out. The blessing with which the church is to bless the elements in the Supper is the Words of Institution.

### ***The Supper and John 6***

John 6 has been understood by some as speaking directly to the institution of the Lord’s Supper. John 6 is then held to be St. John’s institution narrative of the sacrament. However the eating and drinking in John 6 refer to the eating and drinking which a believer does by faith through the means of grace, receiving all the blessings of Christ’s body and blood offered up for salvation. Therefore the Lutheran fathers teach that John 6 does not specifically apply to the

Lord's Supper because here the eating and drinking are figurative, while in the Words of Institution the eating and drinking are literal. The second reason that John 6 does not refer directly to the Supper is that the sermon recorded in John 6 occurred a year before the institution of the Supper. Therefore, the sermon in John 6 cannot apply to the dogma of the sacrament. The third and most important reason Lutherans reject this viewpoint is that the eating in John 6 always results in salvation (John 6:51), while in the Lord's Supper the participants may eat judgment to themselves. (Johann Gerhard, *Baptism and Lord's Supper*, pp. 340ff., 454; Chemnitz, Ex. 2, 326-328; Chemnitz, LS 235-240)

At the same time, there is a definite connection between the Words of Institution and John 6. John 6 speaks of the spiritual eating that is necessary for worthy participation in the Holy Supper. All communicants, both the worthy and unworthy, eat sacramentally with the mouth the very body and blood of Christ born of the virgin, but only those who eat spiritually through true repentance and faith receive all the wonderful blessings offered through that body and blood. Thus, John 6 applies to worthy participation in the sacrament, and in this sense speaks to the Holy Supper as our Confessions state.

There is therefore a twofold eating of the flesh of Christ. The one is spiritual, of which Christ speaks chiefly in John 6:48-58. This occurs, in no other way than with the spirit and faith, in the preaching and contemplation of the Gospel as well as in the Lord's Supper. It is intrinsically useful, salutary, and necessary to salvation for all Christians at all times. Without this spiritual participation, even the sacramental or oral eating in the Supper is not only not salutary but actually pernicious and damning. (FC SD VII, 61, *Tappert*, pp. 580-581)

### ***The Supper and Closed Communion***

According to Paul the sacrament draws us into one body, the body of Christ. (1 Corinthians 10:17) All Christians who eat his body and blood are united in his body, the church. The sacrament ties them together far more intimately than any bond of blood. The unity that is effected in the sacrament assumes a unity in doctrine

and belief. All the communicants present themselves as one spiritual family. Because the Lord's Supper draws us into one body, we will receive the sacrament only with those who are one with us in Christ, those that teach his Word in its truth and purity. (John 8:31) The Supper is a confession of agreement in doctrine. Allowing one to commune that does not believe all the teachings of the Bible or communing at an altar that does not confess all the truths of God's Word is really a lie. By this practice we are saying there is unity of belief when there is no unity. We are declaring unity or fellowship with individuals who are not confessing the teachings we have learned from the Bible. This is contrary to the directive of the Lord. (Ephesians 4:3, Romans 16:17)

Church fellowship or confessional fellowship is a participation in sacred things (*communio in sacris*), the means of grace. This fellowship is created by those very means of grace and is evidenced in every expression and manifestation of a common faith. Christians practice church fellowship on the basis of the pure marks of the church. The marks of the church are to be pure, that is, there must be complete agreement in all the doctrines of Scripture in order to exercise fellowship. There are no degrees or levels in the practice of church fellowship and there are no expressions of a shared faith which are excluded from church fellowship. Church fellowship is a unit both in respect to the doctrine of Scripture, that is, there must be consensus in all the doctrines of the Word for fellowship, and in respect to the various expressions of a shared faith that they all be considered a unit or an indivisible whole. There is either complete fellowship or none at all. (Romans 16:17, 1 John 4:1, 2 John 9-11, 2 Timothy 2:16-19, Galatians 1:8-9, Matthew 7:15-19)

## **II. The Proper Preparation for the Sacrament**

In order to receive the benefits of the Holy Supper, we are to be worthy and well prepared, as Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 11: 27-29. "Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and

drinks without recognizing the body and blood of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself.”

Before going to the Lord’s Supper every Christian should carefully examine himself. The order of confession in our church aids the individual Christian in such self-examination. However, confession, whether public or private, should not take the place of personal examination. Each Christian before coming to the sacrament will examine his life in accord with the Ten Commandments. When we look into the mirror of God’s law we see our endless failures and sins and our desperate need for the forgiveness and strengthening of the Supper. If we do not see our failures, then we need to take a better look at the mirror of the law and understand its real intent. When we see our sins and are not sorry for them, we should not attend the Supper because we will not be worthy guests. The impenitent, that is, one who is not sorry for his sins, receives the sacrament to his harm, rather than to his blessing. (1 Corinthians 11:30)

In order to obtain the benefits of the Holy Supper we need to be well prepared to receive it worthily, as Paul says. (1 Corinthians 11:28) This, however, is not a worthiness brought about by the Law, but by the Gospel, and it does not consist in a perfect life and entire purity of the soul. Rather, to be worthy and well prepared means that we have a sincere sorrow over our sins. We will confess them, striving to do better, and earnestly long for the forgiveness of sins. At the same time this worthiness includes a confident faith in Jesus the Savior. He paid for the sins of the whole world on the cross with his body and blood, and he gives us that very body and blood in the Supper for the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.

It should be remembered that weak believers are not to be numbered among the unworthy. Those who feel their spiritual weakness and failure to live the Christ-like life, yet desire to become stronger, are indeed proper guests at the Lord’s Table. Such persons the Lord will not cast away. Rather, he invites them to come, for he instituted the Holy Supper as strengthening, nourishment, and medicine for the weak and infirm. He extends to all the gracious invitation, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest (Matthew 11:28), and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.” (John 6:37)

As a Christian prepares to receive the blessed sacrament, he will use questions such as these to examine himself.

1. Am I truly sorry for all my sins in thought, word, and deed?
2. Do I believe that Jesus my Savior paid for all these sins on the cross?
3. Do I believe that Jesus gives me in the Supper his body and blood for the forgiveness of my sins, life, and salvation?
4. Do I sincerely desire with the aid of the Holy Spirit henceforth to amend my sinful life?

Come then and receive the meal. Receive the life-giving flesh and blood of Christ, our ransom, the food for the way, the medicine of immortality, a foretaste of the feast of the lamb.

### **III. The Blessings of the Sacrament**

Luther aptly summarized the blessings of the Supper in the *Small Catechism*: “The benefit which we receive from such eating and drinking is shown us by these words: Given and shed for you for the remission of sins, namely, that in the sacrament forgiveness of sins, life and salvation are given us through these words. For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation.” Forgiveness of sins is the chief blessing of the sacrament, as the Words of Institution declare, and from it flow all the other blessings of the Supper.

#### ***The Supper Bestows the Forgiveness of Sins***

The Lord’s Supper is a real means of grace. By means of grace we mean an instrument or channel which brings the benefits of the cross to us and makes them our own. This sacrament is the Gospel. Here we receive all the benefits of Christ’s redemptive sacrifice. On the cross Jesus obtained salvation for all people. He won salvation once and for all at Calvary but he does not distribute

and give it at the cross. This he does through the Supper and the other means of grace, baptism and the Word. Luther demonstrates the connection between the cross and the Supper.

So that your readers may the better perceive our teaching I shall clearly and broadly describe it. We treat of the forgiveness of sins in two ways. First, how it is achieved and won. Second, how it is distributed and given to us. Christ has achieved it on the cross, it is true. **But He has not distributed or given it on the cross.** He has not won it in the Supper or Sacrament. There He has distributed and given it through the Word, as also in the Gospel where it is preached. He has won it once and for all on the cross. But the distribution takes place continuously before and after, from the beginning to the end of the world. (LW 40: 213-214)

The holy sacrament is a real impartation of the remission of sins obtained for all people on the cross. In our weaknesses and failures we can often begin to wonder whether we are really forgiven. How can God forgive a wretch like me? Are my sins just too great to be pardoned? In this Supper the Lord Jesus removes our every doubt. As we come to the Lord's Table we are in spirit at Golgotha, kneeling before the cross, embracing his dying body, and drinking from His five bloody wounds. It is Jesus' body hung on the cross and his shed blood which have paid for the sins of the world. (C.F.W. Walther, *Brosamen*, pp. 112ff.)

As a kidnapped child is bought back by the parents with money, so Jesus bought us back not with gold or silver but with his holy precious blood and his innocent suffering and death. His body and blood are the ransom for sin. In the Supper we receive the very thing which paid for sins, the very thing which freed us from hell's destruction. Then no matter how great and terrible our sins may be, no matter how heavily they burden our conscience, in receiving this sacrament we need never wonder whether our sins are forgiven. Within us we have the very ransom money which paid for our sins, namely his true body and blood.

***The Supper Gives Life and Nourishment***

The Holy Supper confers life. This is not temporal life which we received through natural birth, but it is that new spiritual life which has been regenerated in us through the new birth in holy baptism. Since this life is still weak and imperfect, and constant growth is necessary, the Lord Jesus has instituted this sacrament as a true spiritual nourishment. Luther says concerning this in the *Large Catechism*:

Therefore, it is appropriately called the food of the soul since it nourishes and strengthens the new man. While it is true that through Baptism we are first born anew, our human flesh and blood have not lost their old skin. There are so many hindrances and temptations of the devil and the world that we often grow weary and faint, at times even stumble. The Lord's Supper is given as a daily food and sustenance so that our faith may refresh and strengthen itself and not weaken in the struggle but grow continually stronger. For the new life should be one that continually develops and progresses. Meanwhile it must suffer much opposition ... For such times, when our heart feels too sorely pressed, this comfort of the Lord's Supper is given to bring us new strength and refreshment. (LC V 23-26, *Tappert*, p. 449)

Our Lutheran Confessions quote the early church fathers as saying, "Christ's flesh is truly a life-giving food and His blood truly a quickening beverage." (FC SD VIII 76, *Tappert*, p. 606) Likewise, Chemnitz cites the fathers of the Council at Ephesus in 431 AD: "The flesh of Christ on account of the union with the divine nature, which is life itself, is made life-giving or a life-giver and it thus has the authority or power to give life, and this authority it exercises in the action of the Lord's Supper in the believers." (Chemnitz, TNC 474) The body and blood of our Lord in the Supper are life-giving. They are never unfruitful, impotent, or useless. Here we receive the body and blood of the living God into this body made of dust. What can be more powerful? What can be more beneficial? This is the greatest treasure in the life of a Christian. It is the greatest benefit for body and soul. This dual gift of life-giving bread and cup of blessing benefits the life of the total man, being a medicine and an offering to heal our infirmities and to purge our iniquities.

### *The Supper and the Holy Spirit*

We tend to forget that **we receive the Holy Ghost in the Supper** together with the body and blood of Christ even though we know that the Spirit comes to us in all the means of grace. He comes in all his fullness with all his many gifts. In 1 Corinthians 12:13 St. Paul writes, “For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.” Commenting on this passage Gerhard states, “We drink one and the same Sacrament so that we also receive one and the same Spirit; just as we receive one and the same Baptism, so that we be one body.” (Johann Gerhard, *Baptism and Lord’s Supper*, p. 375; see also Johann Gerhard, *Schola Pietatis*, I:74) 1 Corinthians 12 has been understood in this manner by a number of other confessional Lutheran theologians. (See M. Chemnitz, *The Lord’s Supper*, p. 193; C.M. Zorn, *Die Korintherbriefe*, p. 106)

### *The Supper and the Sanctified Life*

Since the flesh and blood of Christ are life-giving, they provide the strength that believers need to live a more sanctified life. Out of thanks for all that Christ has done for us by saving us from everlasting death, we will desire to lead a Christ-like life. Yet as we view our lives we see failures on every side. We do not have the strength in ourselves to battle the attacks of the devil, the world, and our flesh. Then as we are tossed about by temptations, when it seems that we have no power in ourselves, we come to his wonderful Table. Here he gives us his quickening flesh and blood which provide the strength for a holier life. It is the power to walk in his loving footsteps. We can indeed do all things through Christ who strengthens us. (Philippians 4:13)

The Lutheran fathers make considerable use of the vine and branches picture of John 15 in connection with the Supper. By receiving his body and blood we are ingrafted into him, drawing life from him as branches from the vine. We are so united with him that we can say, “It is not I that live, but Christ lives in me.” (Galatians 2:20) When we remain in him and he in us through a regular use of

Word and sacrament we will bear abundant fruit, for without him we can do nothing.

### *The Supper and Our Daily Burdens*

As the Christian journeys through this life, he meets conflicts and troubles all the way. There are often financial difficulties at work, problems in our family, and conflicts with our friends. There are dreaded ailments like cancer and heart disease, and even the death of those most near and dear. For this reason the German Lutheran fathers often speak of this life as the *Jammertal*, the “vale of tears.” Yet in every difficulty and problem of life the Lord Jesus says, “Come to my Table, all you that labor and are heavy laden, I will give you rest.” Through the sacrament of his body and blood he gives us the strength to face all the problems of life and power to overcome and obtain the victory. (Philippians 4:13, 1 Corinthians 15:57) Come to this refreshing repast. Here is the nourishment, the heavenly manna we need all the way through the journey of this life. It is a pure and wholesome remedy imparting salvation and comfort that cures and gives life for both body and soul. “For this bread is a comfort for the sorrowing, a healing for the sick, a life for the dying, a food for all the hungry, and a rich treasure for all the poor and needy.” (LW 51: 95) In the *Large Catechism* Luther speaks of the sacrament as our refuge and comfort in life:

In this sacrament he offers us all the treasure he brought from heaven for us, to which he most graciously invites us in other places, as when he says in Matt. 11:28, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy-laden, and I will refresh you.”...**We must never regard the sacrament as a harmful thing from which we should flee, but as a pure, wholesome, soothing medicine which aids and quickens us in both soul and body.** For where the soul is healed, the body has benefited also. Why, then, do we act as if the sacrament were a poison which would kill us if we ate of it? . . . But those who feel their weakness, who are anxious to be rid of it and desire help, should regard and use the sacrament as a precious antidote against the poison in their systems. For here in the sacrament you receive from Christ’s lips the forgiveness of sins, which contains and conveys God’s grace and Spirit with all his gifts, protection, defense, and

power against death and the devil and all evils. (LC V 66-70, Tappert, p. 454)

The Lord's Supper is a heavenly and spiritual nourishment unto eternal life for both the body and soul of the believer. Because of this, believers in every burden and conflict of life will come to the Supper. This will also be the case in physical needs and sickness and especially at the hour of death. For there is no better help than that of the divine physician who gives his life-giving flesh and body as the soothing medicine which aids and quickens us in soul and body.

### ***Union with Christ and His Body the Church***

There are many today who are seeking a closer walk with Jesus, a closer relationship with the Savior. There are times in every Christian's life when he feels very distant from the divine Redeemer. At such times the Christian is not to attend some wild emotional revival to have an experience of Christ. He is not to try to wrestle with the Lord in prayer until he feels his presence. Rather he is to go where the Lord has promised to be found, in the Word and sacraments. In the Supper there is an intimate union with Christ, for here he comes into the believer with his body and blood and remains with him. He draws us into union and communion with the divine.

Together with speaking of granting us union with Christ through his body and blood, another way of expressing the blessings of the Supper is to speak of it as permitting us **to partake in the divine**. This is common in the works of both Chemnitz and Gerhard. This salvific theme is based on a number of passages from Scripture (2 Corinthians 3:18, 8:9, Galatians 3:26, 4:7, John 17:23, 1 Corinthians 12:12-13, Romans 8:29, 1 John 3:2, Psalms 82:1-6, Genesis 1:26), but first and foremost on 2 Peter 1:4, "By which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that by these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." In the Supper we partake in the divine, having union and communion with the deity itself:

Therefore, in order that we might be able to lay hold on Christ

more intimately and retain Him more firmly, not only did He Himself assume our nature but He also restored it again for us by distributing His body and blood to us in the Supper, so that by this connection with His humanity, which has been assumed from us and is again communicated back to us, He might draw us into communion and union with the deity itself. (Chemnitz, *The Lord's Supper*, 188) Thus this Holy Supper will transform our souls; this most divine sacrament will make us divine men, until finally we shall enter upon the fulness of the blessedness that is to come, filled with all the fulness of God, and wholly like Him. (Johann Gerhard, *Sacred Meditations*, 20:111)

This incorporation into Christ that the Lord's Supper grants constitutes at the same time a true communion among all members of his body, the church. One cannot be united with Christ without also at the same time existing in communion with all the other members of this body. As he comes into us with his flesh and blood, uniting us with himself, so he comes into all the other communicants, drawing us together as his church. Paul says, "Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf." (1 Corinthians 10:17) As many kernels of wheat are ground together to form a loaf of bread, and as many grapes are crushed to form one cup of wine, so in the Supper we become his one body, the church, by partaking of his one body in the sacrament. This is a wonderful fellowship where we will bear one another's burdens by showing love and compassion to each brother and sister in need. Because this sacrament draws us into one body, we are to receive the sacrament only with those who are one with us in Christ, those who teach his word in its truth and purity. Otherwise we are really lying. We are declaring we are one when we are not one.

### ***The Supper Gives Eternal Salvation***

The Holy Supper confers salvation. Where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also eternal salvation. In the Supper the believer receives the very ransom money that paid for his sins and freed him from destruction. This payment of ransom is what has thrown open the doors of heaven and broken every barrier down. As we receive his body and blood in the Supper we know that heaven

is ours. This sacrament is a ford, a bridge, a door, a ship, and a stretcher by means of which we pass from this life to the eternal. (LW 35:66)

As Christ walked among men, people were healed and raised from the dead by his very touch. His flesh and blood are life-giving. Then as we receive his glorified and risen body and blood into our dying body, we are assured that, even though it returns to the dust from which it was formed, on the last day it will break forth from the grave glorified like Christ's glorified body. So we will ever be with the Lord. Because of this, the early church fathers have often spoken of the Supper as the *viaticum* "the provision for the way," the medicine of immortality which is a food preparing us for eternal life. Luther clearly points to the sacrament as a pledge and seal of the resurrection and eternal life:

So, when we eat Christ's flesh physically and spiritually, the food is so powerful that it transforms us into itself and out of fleshly, sinful, mortal men makes spiritual, holy, living men. This we are already, though in a hidden manner in faith and hope; the fact is not yet manifest, but we shall experience it on the Last Day (LW 37:101)... Similarly, the mouth, the throat, the body, which eats Christ's body, will also have its benefit in that it will live forever and arise on the Last Day to eternal salvation. This is the secret power and benefit which flows from the body of Christ in the Supper into our body, for it must be useful, and cannot be present in vain. Therefore it must bestow life and salvation upon our bodies, as is its nature. (LW 37:134)

Martin Chemnitz quotes the early church fathers using the same comforting language:

Because in the Eucharist we receive that body of Christ which has been given for us, and blood of the New Testament which has been shed for the remission of sins, who will deny that believers there receive the whole treasury of the benefits of Christ? For they receive that through which sins are remitted, by which death is abolished, by which life is communicated to us, by which Christ unites us to Himself as members, so that He is in us and we are in Him. Hilary says beautifully: "When these things have been taken and drunk, they bring about both

that Christ is in us and that we are in Him.” Cyril says: **“When in the mystical benediction we eat the flesh of Christ in faith, we have from it life in ourselves, being joined to that flesh which has been made life, so that not only does the soul ascend through the Holy Spirit into a blessed life, but also this earthly body is restored by this food to immortality, to be resurrected on the last day.”** Therefore we receive in the Eucharist the most certain and most excellent pledge of our reconciliation with God, of the forgiveness of sins, of immortality and future glorification... Beautiful is that statement of Ignatius, which is found in his Epistle to the Ephesians [20], where he calls the Eucharist pharmakon athanasias, antidoton tou mee apothanein, alla zeen en theo dia Ieesou Christou, katharterion alexikakon, that is, **“a medicine of immortality, an antidote, that we may not die but live in God through Jesus Christ, a cleansing remedy through warding off and driving out evils.”** (Chemnitz, Ex. 2, 233-234)

This is the medicine of immortality, an antidote that we may not die, but live forever in him.

### *The Supper and Eschatology*

Near the end of the book of Revelation, the Apostle John assures the elect, “Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!” (Revelation 19:9) The Lord’s Supper begins the messianic wedding banquet, the victory banquet, which will reach its full consummation in heaven. The Supper is the messianic feast which will culminate in the feast of the lamb, the lamb’s high feast. Then because we receive his glorified and risen body and blood in the Supper, which is the antidote for death, we know that this very body will one day break forth from the grave, glorified like Christ’s glorified body. Thus we will ever feast with the Lord in paradise above.

The risen Lord walked with the Emmaus disciples on the way, became a guest and then the host at their meal. (Luke 24: 13-35) He taught them his Word and revealed himself to them in the breaking of bread. Now as the church gathers in Word and sacrament worship, he is the host who gives himself to us for food as the beginning of the messianic victory banquet, where all tears

are wiped away and death is swallowed up forever, a foretaste of heaven.

Paul says, “Whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes.” (1 Corinthians 11:26) Not only does the Supper point us back to the sacrifice of the cross, but it also, at the same time, points forward to the final consummation of our redemption on the last day. Each time we celebrate the sacrament we do it eagerly awaiting the second coming as did the whole ancient church when it cried *Maranatha*, “Lord come quickly.” The Father then gives us his Son under the form of bread and wine as a foretaste of the great wedding feast of the lamb which will be ours at his second coming. In the Supper we for a moment step out of our mundane workaday existence, where we carry one after another to the grave, and we have a foretaste of heaven, where the lamb once slain himself descends and angels prostrate fall. Here is heaven on earth as the Lutheran fathers prayed, “Your Supper be my heaven on earth, till I enter heaven.” Then as we eat at his Table here, we have the certainty that we will be at his Table there where we will eat of the heavenly manna and drink of the river of his pleasure forevermore.

### *A Lord’s Supper Prayer*

O Lord, although I am not worthy that you would today enter my heart, yet I need your help and desire your grace for the strengthening of my faith. My only confidence as I near your holy altar is that you have invited me, a poor miserable sinner, to receive your body and blood for the forgiveness of sins.

O Lord Jesus, now unite yourself with me so that I remain in you and you in me, ever undivided both here in time and forever in all eternity. May your holy body, Lord Jesus Christ, nourish me; your rose-colored blood quench me, your bitter suffering and death strengthen me. O Lord Jesus Christ, hear me, and in your holy wounds hide me, that I never be separated from you. From the old evil foe redeem me, and in the true faith keep me. Then I, together with all the elect, may joyfully sing your praises both here and hereafter in eternity. Amen.

## Bibliography

*Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1994.

Chemnitz, Martin. *The Examination of the Council of Trent. Part II*. Translator, Fred Kramer. St. Louis: CPH, 1978.

Chemnitz, Martin. *The Two Natures In Christ*. Translator, J.A.O. Preus. St. Louis: CPH, 1971.

Chemnitz, Martin. *The Lord's Supper*. Translator, J.A.O. Preus. St. Louis: CPH, 1979.

Chemnitz, Martin. *Ministry, Word, and Sacraments, An Enchiridion*. Translator, Luther Poellot. St. Louis: CPH, 1981.

Diestelmann, Jürgen. *Actio Sacramentalis*. Gross Oesingen: Lutherischen Buchhandlung H. Harms, 1996.

Dix, Gregory. *The Shape of the Liturgy*. London: Dacre Press, 1975.

Gerhard, Johann. *A Comprehensive Explanation of Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper (1610)*. Translated by Elmer M. Hohle. Malone, Texas: Repristination Press, 2000.

Gerhard, Johann. *Loci Theologici*. Berlin: Gust. Schlawitz, 1863.

Gerhard, Johann. *Postille*. Berlin: Herausgegeben und verlegt von Gustav Schlawitz, 1870.

Gerhard, Johann. *Sacred Meditations*. Translated by C.W. Heisler. Decatur, Illinois: Repristination Press, 1998.

Gerhard, Johann. *Schola Pietatis*. Nürnberg: Gedruckt zu Jena Georg Sengwald, 1653.

Hoenecke, A. *Dogmatik*. Vol. IV. Milwaukee: NPH, 1912.

Jeremias, Joachim. *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*. Translator, Norman Perrin. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977.

*Kleine Gebets-Schatz*. St. Louis: CPH, 1886.

Lenski, R.C.H. *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1964.

Luther, Martin. *Luther's Works*. Vol. 8, 22, 35-40. St. Louis: CPH.

Luther, Martin. *Luthers Sämmtliche Schriften*. Vol. II, XIX, XX, XXIb, St. Louis: CPH.

Mastrantonis, George. *Augsburg and Constantinople*. Brookline: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1982.

McKenna, John. *Eucharist and Holy Spirit*. London: Mayhew-McCrimman, 1975.

Montgomery, John. *Chytraeus on Sacrifice*. St. Louis: CPH, 1962.

Peters, Edward F. "*The Origin and Meaning of the Axiom: 'Nothing has the Character of a Sacrament Outside the Use' in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century Lutheran Theology.*" (Th. D. dissertation, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 1968.)

Pieper, Francis. *Christian Dogmatics*. Vol. III. St. Louis: CPH, 1953.

Porta, Conrad. *Pastorale Lutheri*. Nordlingen: Beck'scheBuchhandlung, 1842.

Roberts, Alexander, and James Donaldson. *Ante-Nicene Fathers*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985.

Sasse, Hermann. *This is My Body*. Adelaide, S.A.: Lutheran Publishing House, 1977.

Sasse, Hermann. *We Confess the Sacraments*. Translator, Norman Nagel. St. Louis: CPH, 1985.

Schmeling, Gaylin. *God's Gift to You: the Lord's Supper*. Milwaukee: NPH, 2001.

Schmid, Heinrich. *Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. Translators, Charles Hay and Henry Jacobs. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961.

Schöne, Jobst. *Um Christi Sakramentale Gegenwart: Der Saliger sche Abendmahlsstreit*. Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1966.

Tappert, Theodore G. *The Book of Concord*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959.

*Triglot Concordia, The Symbolical Books of the Ev. Lutheran Church*. St. Louis: CPH, 1921.

Vajta, Vilmos. *Lutheran Worship*. Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958.

Wainwright, Geoffrey. *Eucharist and Eschatology*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1981.

Walther, C.F.W. *Brosamen*. St. Louis: CPH, 1897.

Walther, C.F.W. *Pastorale*. St. Louis: CPH, 1872.

Wisloff, Carl. *The Gift of Communion*. Translator, Joseph M. Shaw. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1964.

Ylvisaker, Johannes. *The Gospels*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1932.

Zorn, C.M. *Die Korintherbriefe*. Zwickau: Verlag des Schriftenvereins.

## Periodicals

Schmeling, Gaylin. “*God’s Gift to You: The Means of Grace.*”  
1989 ELS Synod Report.

Schmeling, Gaylin. “The Theology of the Lord’s Supper.”  
*Lutheran Synod Quarterly*. Vol. XXVIII, No. 4 (December, 1988)

## Abbreviations

Lutheran Confessions (all quotes are from the Tappert Translation unless otherwise indicated):

AC - Augsburg Confession

Ap - Apology of the Augsburg Confession

FC - Formula of Concord

LC - Large Catechism

SD - Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord

Luther’s Works:

LW - American Edition

St. L. - St. Louis Edition

WA - Weimar Edition

Writings of Chemnitz:

MWS - Ministry, Word, and Sacrament

TNC - Two Natures in Christ

Ex - Examination of the Council of Trent

LS - Lord’s Supper

# **Book Review:**

## **The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity**

*by Gaylin R. Schmeling*

Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002. 270 pages. \$28.00

Doom and gloom appear to describe the prevailing attitude towards the future of Christianity in Western culture. Viewing modern Western society, many assume that Christianity is on the way out. However, Christianity is alive and well as Philip Jenkins demonstrates in his book, *The Next Christendom*. Jenkins believes that the twenty-first century will be not only a very religious century but also a very Christian century. This new Christianity will not center in its traditional stronghold of Europe and North America, the Global North. Rather we are to look South for the new Christian center of gravity. (p. 3) In the Global South Christianity will blossom especially in Africa and Latin America.

On what does Jenkins base his assertions? Today there are already more non-Western Christians than Western Christians. Twenty million of the world's 70 million Anglicans live in Nigeria. (p. 59) The number of Christians in Africa has increased from 10 million in 1900 to a staggering 360 million in 2000. (p. 4) Should the present birth rate and present growth rate of Christianity in the Global South continue, this area will easily be the center of Christianity in the next generation. The population explosion in this area seems to assure the dominance of Christianity in this century. At the same time there is a population decline in Europe, the traditional stronghold of Christianity. (p. 81f) Countries such as Brazil and Nigeria could possibly be the new homeland of the Christian faith. Jenkins gives the warning, "Christianity is flourishing among the poor and the persecuted, while it atrophies among the rich and secure." (p. 220)

The new Christianity of the South tends to be much more conservative and literal in its understanding of the faith than the liberal West. Many of the southern Christians have been influenced by the rise of Pentecostalism. (p. 63f) The growth of the Assemblies of God is but one example of this phenomenon. It appears the theology of new Christianity will not be the liberal undoctinal theology of the World Council of Churches but more in line with traditional biblical principles. Remember the 1998 Lambeth Conference of the global Anglican Communion in which the southern bishops formed a solid bloc to defeat liberal motions on gay rights. (p. 202) Remember the outrage of the head of the Anglican Church in Nigeria at the 2003 consecration of Gene Robinson as bishop of the Episcopal Church in New Hampshire in spite of the fact that he was openly gay. In February 2004, thirteen Primates of the Global South issued a statement concerning the current state of affairs in the Anglican Communion.

The actions of the Episcopal Church of the United States of America (ECUSA) in the election, confirmation, and consecration of Canon Gene Robinson have created a situation of grave concern for the entire Anglican Communion and beyond. Their actions are a direct repudiation of the clear teaching of the Holy Scriptures, historic faith and order of the church. . .The world needs to know that the rebellious and erroneous actions of the ECUSA are contrary to the teaching of the Anglican Communion and represent a departure from five thousand years of Judeo-Christian teaching and practice. By their actions, ECUSA has separated itself from the remainder of the Anglican Communion and the wider Christian family. (Peter Toon, "The Disfigured Face of the American Episcopal Church," *Mandate*, Vol. 27 Nos. 2 & 3, p. 12-13)

All this should confirm to us as confessional Lutherans that the churches that emphasize their historic doctrine and practices are growing, while those who attempt to change it, or mimic others, or de-emphasize what makes them truly unique are in decline. Those churches that offer a vigorous and robust theology and life are growing, while those that embrace a watered down version of mainline Christianity are in decline.

Islam is on the rise in the modern world, and in many places there has been a revival of its strength and fervor. There are fears that it could overrun Christianity in places such as France where the birth rate of the North African immigrant workers far surpasses that of the nominal Catholic population. There is even the thought that what the Turks failed to do in their invasions of Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries will become an accomplished fact in the twenty-first century. Islam is definitely growing, but, according to Jenkins, Christianity is keeping pace. Considering the birth rates in the South—where the heartland of the Christian faith will be found—one could conclude that Christianity should continue to be the dominant faith in the twenty-first century. “By 2050, there should still be about three Christians for every two Muslims worldwide. Some 34 percent of the world’s people will then be Christian, roughly what the figure was at the height of European world hegemony in 1900.” (p. 5)

While it is true that Christianity is keeping pace with Islam, it should be noted that as Christian churches grow there will probably be more conflict with Islam. Jenkins claims this will be due mainly to Islam. He writes, “In the world as a whole, there is no question that the threat of intolerance and persecution chiefly comes from the Islamic side of the equation (p. 170). . . inter-religious violence in recent years tends to be initiated by Muslims against Christians, and that trend is unlikely to change.” (p. 171) Christianity is growing side by side with Islam in many countries, a condition which could result in potential conflict in these areas. An example of this is found in the country of Sudan. Here the northern part of the country is mainly Muslim and the southern part is Christian. The Muslims in the north have persecuted and waged war against the south, intending to destroy Christianity there. (p. 171) Another example is found in Egypt. In the past century the ancient Coptic Church has experienced a renewal and there have been converts to the Coptic Church. This has resulted in severe persecution of the Christians by the Islamic community. A place to watch in the future will be Nigeria. This country is almost evenly divided between Islam and Christianity. By 2050 Nigeria may be one of the most active Christian nations or one of the most Islamic.

In the early Middle Ages many Irish monasteries were built in rough terrain, on high hills and mountains, at the edge of the sea, and on the rugged islands like Skellig Michael. In that early Medieval Era they were some of the last outposts of Christianity when much of Western Europe had been overtaken by barbarian paganism. These Irish monks didn't say "woe is me" and hide behind the walls of their monastery. No, they preserved the text of the Holy Scripture and other Christian literature and spread the message of salvation. Their missionaries went everywhere. They were responsible for the re-Christianization of Britain and Western Europe. In the same way, Jenkins assumes that the Global South will initiate the re-Christianization of the post-modern western world. With the dearth of priests and nuns in the Roman Catholic Church of North America many parishes are being served by Filipino priests and nuns. Immigrant black churches in England are beginning to do mission work among the white population. (p. 207) London's Kingsway International Christian Centre (KICC), founded by Pastor Matthew Ashimolowo, who came as a missionary from Nigeria, claims to be the largest church created in Britain since 1861. Pastor Ashimolowo "attracted controversy by urging, logically enough, that the Anglican Church should just 'die gracefully' in the United Kingdom and hand its buildings over to newer groups like his own." (p. 99) "The Brazilian IURD is one of many bodies expanding its influence into Europe and North America, where it has purchased radio stations and real estate." (p. 206) "In 2000, some conservative Episcopalians took a step that was remarkable enough at the time, and would have been shocking only a few years earlier. Charles Murphy III and John H. Rodgers Jr. traveled to Singapore, where they were ordained as bishops by Archbishop Tay and the Anglican archbishop of Rwanda, Emmanuel Kolini, as well as several other African and American clerics." (p. 203) These two individuals became missionary bishops charged to serve conservative Anglican congregations in North America that desire to maintain the doctrines of the historic church. They formed the Anglican mission in America.

Jenkins brings back into focus the truly Eastern origins of the church. The Christian Church has often been labeled as a Western

religion, virtually synonymous with Europe and the West. Jenkins reminds his readers that the Christian Church began in the Middle East and that there are many historically Eastern Christian Churches. He points out the valiant history of the Armenian Christianity, the Syrian Orthodox Church, and the Coptic Church of Egypt. He gives special emphasis to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church with a membership of around 25 million. (p. 19)

As Jenkins considers the next Christianity he does not want the reader to forget China and the Orient. Korea is a Christian success story. “The growth of individual congregations has been dazzling. The Full Gospel Central Church in Seoul now has over half a million members, earning it a place in the Guinness Book of Records as the world’s largest single congregation.” (p. 71) The growth of Christianity in China is exploding. Estimates of the number of Christians in China today range in the area of 20-50 million, and these numbers are probably too low. Christianity has also made rapid progress in the Chinese diaspora scattered around the Pacific Rim in nations like Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore. (p. 70)

Jenkins’ book, *The Next Christendom* has a number of things to say to confessional Lutherans today. Jenkins points out that churches that emphasize the historic doctrine and practice of the Scriptures are growing while those which are de-emphasizing the truths of Scripture are on the decline. We thank God that He has preserved the teachings of Holy Scripture in their truth and purity in our midst. We ask that the Lord strengthen us so that we continue to stand firm in the true doctrine of the Bible and that the gentle rain of the Gospel pass not from us when it also moves to another place. Many other lands that were once the centers of the Gospel have now become spiritual wastelands. In 2050 will there be a need for confessional Lutheran missionaries from Peru or Zambia to be sent to Minnesota and Wisconsin? Lord preserve our zeal for the sweet message of the Gospel found in Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

Jenkins emphasizes the great potential growth for Christianity in the Global South. This should encourage us to use all the resources that we have to strengthen and support our missions and sister churches in those areas. As members of the ELS we have fertile

fields in Peru and Chile and a potential field in Korea. These mission fields must remain a high priority in the total operation of our ELS. As members of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC) we will support our sister churches in the Global South. A church body that specifically comes to mind is the Lutheran Church in Central Africa. This church body founded in 1953 now has over 30,000 members, a total that makes it the second largest church in the CELC. We desire to continue to encourage and support this sister church and others so that confessional Lutheranism continue to thrive in these areas where Christianity is exploding. Then from these areas there will soon be missionaries proclaiming Christ the Light of the World to new lands where people are still walking in darkness and the shadow of death.