

Foreword

“How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, ‘Your God reigns!’” (Isaiah 52:7). These words of the prophet had special meaning at the ordination of Martin Vrsecky and Petr Krakora, the first national pastors of the Czech Evangelical Lutheran Church, on June 7, 2009. The Rev. Mark Grubbs, who served as missionary in the Czech Republic since 1997, conducted the service and performed the rite of ordination. His festive sermon was based on 1 Corinthians 2:1-5, with the theme “Focus Your Attention on Christ Crucified.” In this sermon the congregation was reminded that all preaching in the Lutheran Church is to center on Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

On April 1, 2009, the Rev. Raymond M. Branstad was taken home to be with his Savior. He served as president of Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary and College for a number of years. He also served on the Board of Regents of the college and seminary and was its chairman for twenty years. We thank the Lord for all the blessings given His church through this faithful servant. The sermon given at his funeral is included in this *Quarterly*. This sermon, based on Hebrews 4:9-10, was preached by the Rev. Matthew Luttman, his son-in-law, who is pastor of Grace Lutheran Church in Vero Beach, Florida.

As one studies Scripture the question arises: Does man consist of body, soul, and spirit or is he made up merely of body and spirit? Is a man dichotomous or trichotomous? This is the question that is raised in the essay “Do the Scriptures Teach a Trichotomy of Man’s Nature? Or a Dichotomy?” by the Rev. Thomas Heyn, who is pastor of Western Koshkonong Lutheran Church in Cottage Grove, Wisconsin.

The Rev. Bruce Wilmot Adams of Glengowrie, South Australia, has written an article entitled “Contextualization: Lutheran Mission within a Multi-Cultural Society.” This article reminds us that the church should be aware of cultural differences and be sympathetic to them, but it can never change the changeless Gospel of salvation.

Confessional subscription is of vital importance to orthodox Lutherans. We subscribe to the Lutheran Confessions because they are a correct exposition of Scripture and not merely in so far as they agree with Scripture. Ours is a *quia*, not a *quatenus*, subscription. Thus the Lutheran church interprets Scripture in the light of the Confessions. In his essay, “The *Quia* Subscription to the Confessions: Do We Interpret Scripture in Light of the Confessions or the Confessions in Light of Scripture?” Prof. Erling Teigen of Bethany Lutheran College discusses these issues.

The Rev. David Jay Webber, who is pastor of Redeemer Lutheran Church in Scottsdale, Arizona, has presented an article entitled “Some Reflections on the Military Chaplaincy: With Special Reference to Lutheran Chaplains in the Union Army During the Civil War.” This article explains that the chaplaincy program of the nineteenth century was different from that in the twentieth century. Because

of these changes in the twentieth century, the more confessional Lutheran synods decided that they could no longer participate in the national military chaplaincy program.

Hermann Sasse, through his writings, continues to influence confessional Lutheranism around the world. For example, one thinks of his seminal work on the Lord's Supper, *This Is My Body*, and his other works on the means of grace. In his essay, "Hermann Sasse and the Lutheran World Federation: Unity, Confessional Subscription, and the Lord's Supper," the Rev. Thomas Rank explains the relationship between church unity and the Lord's Supper in Sasse's writings. The Rev. Rank is the pastor of Scarville and Center Lutheran Churches in Scarville, Iowa.

In his essay, "Poisoning the Reservoir," Pres. John Moldstad uses the reservoir illustration to picture the scriptural doctrine of objective and universal justification. That declaration of innocence is brought to us through the aqueduct of the means of grace. When poisonous doctrine, such as the acceptance of homosexual clergy, is mixed with the truth, the reservoir becomes contaminated and endangers the faith of those drinking. Following this essay, one will find a statement published by Pres. Moldstad, with the encouragement of the ELS Doctrine Committee, in reaction to the ELCA resolution to allow gay clergy.

The year 2009 is a year of a number of different anniversaries. It is the 2000th anniversary of Arminius' defeat of the Romans. It is the 480th anniversary of Luther's Large and Small Catechism produced in 1529. It is the 500th anniversary of the birth of John Calvin, the father of Reformed theology, and the 400th anniversary of the death of Jacob Arminius, his chief rival in the Reformed tradition. Finally, it is the 900th anniversary of the death of Anselm of Canterbury. The essay "2009: A Year of Anniversaries" explicates the significance of these various anniversaries in the life of the church.

The Assembly of God is the largest Pentecostal church body in the world and is one of the world's fastest growing church bodies. In his book, *A Lutheran Looks at the Assemblies of God*, the Rev. Michael Feuerstahler gives a Lutheran evaluation of this Pentecostal church. Rev. Feuerstahler is the pastor of Saint Mark Lutheran Church in Brown Deer, Wisconsin. This book was reviewed by the Rev. Gregory Schmidt, who is pastor of Our Savior Lutheran Church in Naples, Florida.

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Sermon on 1 Corinthians 2:1–5

June 7, 2009

by Mark S. Grubbs

Text: When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power. (1 Corinthians 2:1-5, NIV)

Dear Friends in Christ, and especially, dear vicars, Martin and Petr,

In our Czech church, we refer to men who are studying for the pastoral ministry as “vicar.” Our vicars are men who over the last 8 years have spent thousands of hours in formal studies in the classroom and privately on their own. They have devoted themselves to learning the biblical languages of Hebrew and Greek, thoroughly studying the Holy Scriptures, church history, biblical teachings, the confessional writings of our Lutheran church, how to write and preach Bible-based sermons, and many other subjects in preparation for serving as pastors, that is, shepherds of God’s people.

In just a few minutes, Vicar Vrsecky will no longer be Vicar Vrsecky, and Vicar Krakora will no longer be Vicar Krakora. After today’s service, as God’s people, we will have the privilege of calling them Pastor Vrsecky and Pastor Krakora.

So this is a very special day. It is an historic day for these men who are about to officially begin their duties as men called by God Himself to serve as shepherds in His church. It is also an historic day for the Czech Evangelical Lutheran Church—these two men are the first Czechs who will serve as pastors among us.

This is also a very special day for all of us to give joyful and humble praise to our loving and gracious Lord. He alone is responsible for leading these men on the long journey of preparation leading up to today. He alone is responsible for providing the Czech Lutheran Church with dedicated, Bible-believing, Christ-centered pastors, shepherds of our souls, God’s own spokesmen among us. To the Lord alone be the glory and praise.

On this special day, God has an important message for Martin and Petr, and also an important message for each of us. In the text I read earlier Paul makes this statement: “For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (2:2). On the basis of these words, the sermon theme today will be: **Focus Your Attention on Christ Crucified!**

There are hundreds of passages in the Scripture which speak about pastors – about their qualifications to serve as preachers and leaders, about the many duties God gives to them and holds them responsible for, about how they should conduct their ministry and how they should conduct their own personal lives. But in today’s text, Paul points to the heart and center of what it really means to be a pastor. Petr and Martin: No matter what, and above all else, point people to Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

One vitally important part of your work as shepherds and preachers will be to tell people exactly what God says in His Word about sin and about sinners. God’s Word is crystal clear in regard to this subject and what it says is the most frightening message any human being will ever hear. God is an absolutely perfect and holy being. As our Creator, He not only demands that we be holy just as He is, but He also solemnly warns us that He will punish us with eternal death in hell if we fail to be holy—fail to be 100% perfect as He is. Yes, this is a frightening message and God intends for it to frighten us—to terrify us to the very core of our being.

Why in the world would God want to frighten us in this way? To put it simply, God wants all of us to realize and admit that we are unworthy of His love. He wants us to face the fact that we are spiritually lost. He wants us to see that we can do nothing to save ourselves. God wants that because only when we see our hopeless condition, are we ready to hear the Good News of what God Himself has already done to rescue us.

This Good News of God’s plan of salvation is the message Paul emphasizes in our text: Jesus Christ and Him crucified. To save a lost world, God sent His own beloved Son to this world. His eternal Son took on our human nature and was born of a virgin mother. As both God and man, He lived here in this sinful world. And He became our Substitute, our stand-in. God demanded perfect holiness from each of us, something absolutely impossible for us sinners to even begin to do. But, as our Substitute, Jesus fulfilled God’s demands in our place, always showing perfect love to His heavenly Father and always showing perfect love to His fellow human beings. As our Substitute, He truly fulfilled God’s demand for our holiness.

And, then having fulfilled God’s demand for holiness, He served as our Substitute once again, by suffering and dying in payment for our sins, in payment for the sins of the whole world. Jesus was both holy and innocent. But as our Substitute on the cross, He accepted our sinfulness and our guilt. And God our Father brutally punished our Substitute. Jesus felt the misery of the nails, the crown of thorns. He experienced the humiliation of being spit upon and taunted and mocked publicly. And, worse still by far, He suffered the total rejection of His heavenly Father, experiencing the agony of the damned in hell.

Thanks be to God, our Substitute successfully completed everything necessary for our salvation. His blood washed away the sins of the world. Every sin was paid for in full. As surely as He died on the cross, just as surely He rose again from the grave on the third day. His resurrection is the ultimate proof of His victory over sin, death and the devil. And, through faith in Him—Jesus Christ and Him crucified—we now have the forgiveness of sins, peace with God, and the certainty

of spending eternity at our Savior's side in heaven.

Martin and Petr, you will never need to guess as to what to emphasize in your teaching and preaching. You don't have to try to invent some exciting new spiritual concepts to share with people. Not at all. In fact, God simply asks you to keep on emphasizing what He Himself emphasizes in His holy Word: Jesus Christ and Him crucified. No doubt, there will be people who won't want to hear that message. Perhaps some will suggest you change it or make it more interesting or more palatable for modern people. Without a doubt, the devil can be counted on to do everything he can to tempt you away from making the message of Jesus Christ and Him crucified the heart and center of your lives, your ministry, your teaching and your preaching. But, dear brothers, stand firm. Remember that in the final analysis nothing is more important than this simple message. The message of Jesus Christ and Him crucified is absolutely in a category by itself. It is the heart and center of the Holy Scriptures. It alone has the power to save those who are lost. It alone has the power to strengthen Christians in their faith and in their commitment to living for their Savior. What a privilege you have to serve as pastors chosen by God to proclaim the joyful, saving message of salvation through Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

And, finally, I also want to speak to those of you who will now look to Martin and Petr as your shepherds. As I have said in this sermon, their most important job will always be to point you and others to Jesus Christ and Him crucified. But remember that there are many things that each and every one of you can do to help them in doing that all-important work. First of all, love and honor them as shepherds chosen by God to bring the message of Jesus to you and your children. Secondly, listen to them thoughtfully and regularly as they explain God's message in Bible classes and worship services. Thirdly, support them, with your words of thanks and encouragement and with your gifts to help supply their financial needs. And finally, pray for them—for the Lord to give them strength for their work, for the Lord to keep them faithful to His Word, and for the Lord to bless their sharing of that one all important message: Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Amen.

Funeral Sermon for Raymond M. Branstad

April 4, 2009

by Matthew E. Luttman

Text: *There remains then a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own works just as God did from His.* (Hebrews 4:9-10)

Dear Friends in Christ, and especially you, the family of Pastor Branstad,

In our text the writer mentions that there is rest—a Sabbath rest—for the people of God. Rest is something that has been in short supply in our extended family over the last few months. As Pastor Branstad's condition worsened and progressed, it has taken more and more effort on the part of the family to provide for his needs. Anyone who has taken care of a loved one knows that this is the case. The caregivers often pray for strength; that God will give the needed endurance to be able to take care of the loved one. Such people also trust in the promise of God that He will not lay any burden on us without also giving us the strength to bear up under it. Oftentimes in the case of a prolonged illness, like Pastor Branstad's, there is a feeling of relief when the loved one passes away. Because of our human nature, we feel guilty when we have that sense of relief. We should recognize when we have duties to fulfill in this life, it is the Lord who gives us those duties, but it's also the Lord that takes them from us. And so, if we do feel a sense of guilt about the relief, it is not necessary. The Lord has given us the responsibility and the Lord has taken away the responsibility.

You may have some of those feelings. But another thing that you should all feel is a sense of satisfaction, knowing that Pastor Branstad, in the waning years of his life when he was not able to take care of himself, received the best care possible. You were the ones who provided that for him. But none of this is the reason we come together today in joy. Our joy exists because he has been released from his burden in this life. We know that he is with his Lord and Savior today. He is the one who is at eternal rest, just as the writer says, "There remains then a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own works just as God did from his."

God instituted the Sabbath in the Old Testament so His people would be able to rest from their labors one day of the week, but also that they would have time to worship Him. The Sabbath was instituted for the good of God's people. In New Testament times we do not have a Sabbath as in the Old Testament. Today the Sabbath serves as a picture of the eternal rest that we have when our journey in this life is complete.

God instituted the Sabbath because He Himself rested on the seventh day

after His work of creation. The Sabbath rest in the Old Testament was a temporary rest that lasted one day a week and then the people had to go back to work again. But our rest in heaven isn't temporary. It lasts forever. All Christians should look forward to the day when our work in this life is over, with all of its burdens and difficulties. Then we will enter into our eternal rest with the Lord.

I've spoken a little bit about the work that you as family members did in taking care of Pastor Branstad. I would also like to talk a little bit about his work. Some of the members of our congregation remember Pastor Branstad's work. He served two vacancies in the congregation so you remember his sermons and how he dealt with people as a pastor. You recall that his sermons were always quite eloquent and also clear presentations of Law and Gospel. I'm sure the members also appreciated the evangelical spirit in which he dealt with people. Others remember the years he served as choir director. Pastor Branstad had a life-long love of music. Many know that in earlier years, when they were both in good health, Pastor Branstad and Pastor Gerhardt spent many Friday evenings listening to music in the Gerhardts' den.

All of these things Pastor Branstad did in his retirement. Before that, he spent over 40 years serving the church either as the pastor of congregations or as President of Bethany Lutheran College and Seminary. Pastor Branstad was always a very strong supporter of Christian education. As a young pastor he served in our synod as youth camp director for quite a number of years. He not only served as President of Bethany College and Seminary, but he also served on the Board of Regents of the college and seminary for over a quarter of a century.

Aside from his work, Pastor Branstad loved to travel. That was one of his favorite hobbies. During the years we lived in Europe he came to visit us several times. One of his favorite places to visit was Passau, Germany. The church in the city square in Passau has the largest church pipe organ in the world. It has over 17,000 pipes. Every day at lunchtime the church presents a concert. Pastor Branstad loved to go there and hear great church music performed on that instrument. On another trip we took him to Italy—to Venice, Florence, and Rome. In these latter years whenever we spoke about the trip to Rome, he would ask if we saw the Pope while we were there. "I wanted to set him straight on a few things!" he would always say.

During these last eight years of his life Pastor Branstad labored under a heavy burden—the effects of debilitating strokes and aging. He would often lament, "I can't see, I can't hear, I can't remember." When family members came into the room his first question was, "Who are you?" The burden was that Pastor Branstad knew this was happening. It made him very unhappy that he couldn't recognize his own family members and he couldn't remember the wonderful times he shared with them.

Pastor Branstad has been relieved of all of those problems now and he is resting with the Lord. He has also been relieved of another, and a greater problem, which we all bear: the burden of sin and the impending threat of death that we all face because of our sin. A lot of people think that pastors don't really sin very

much, so they don't have to think about their own sins. They mostly talk about other peoples' sins. But in fact, that really isn't the case. Pastors think a lot about their own sins. The reason is that we study God's Word every day. We see in God's Word that we have an evil human nature. That evil human nature leads us to sin against God. For pastors, as well as for all people, the wages of sins is death. Today Pastor Branstad has won the victory over that burden—over sin and death. How do we know he has won the victory? I'm sure there are many people who would answer that question by saying, "Pastor Branstad served in God's kingdom for over 40 years. Certainly he deserves his eternal reward, if anyone does."

But that is not what Pastor Branstad believed or what he taught. In his ministry he taught the truth of God's Word—that we are saved alone by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Scriptures tell us, "For it is by grace that you have been saved, through faith, and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works so that no one can boast." The reason we are saved by God's grace is that His Son is the only One who can save us. God's Son alone was able to live the perfect life God demands of all of us. It is only His Son who could render the perfect sacrifice that paid the penalty for our sins. God's grace is revealed in that He loved us enough to send His Son to save us from our sins. This is what Pastor Branstad believed and what he taught.

We also saw God's grace in his life on numerous occasions. In these last months we talked about Pastor Branstad's age. He might ask how old he was or we might ask him if he knew how old he was. He didn't know. When we told him he was 92 years old, he was very surprised. He would usually respond by saying, "I wasn't supposed to live this long!" That showed he did remember something. As a young boy Pastor Branstad suffered from Bright's Disease, which is a kidney ailment. The doctor told his parents that he was not going to live very long. Here we see God's grace in his life. God, by His grace, brought him through that ailment, and then led him into the ministry. That was another example of God's grace because, as a young man, Pastor Branstad did not intend to be a minister of Christ. Instead he had his heart set on a career in journalism. But through the guiding of the Holy Spirit, and also by the strong hand of his pastor, Justin Petersen, he was led to go to the seminary and became a pastor.

We also saw God's grace in his life during his illness. God blessed him with children who were willing and able to care for him in his declining years. When we think about that we especially thank Tom and Kirsten for caring for Ray for 6 years. And Nancy and I are very thankful that Margaret, Kris, and Ben moved to Vero Beach so they could share in his care after Kirsten's surgery. What a blessing it was for Pastor Branstad to have his family to take care of him.

A question that often comes up with those suffering from dementia is: "How can we be assured that God's grace applies to people with dementia, to people who no longer remember the things that they learned, or in Pastor Branstad's case, the things he taught all his life?" That is an area where the teaching of the Scripture concerning God's grace is very important to us. The Scriptures show us that faith and salvation do not depend on our knowledge. They

do not depend on our being able to rationalize the teaching of the Scripture. They depend on God alone. We can go to God's Word to have that assurance. In the Scripture the Lord says to us, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Another passage from Romans tells us, "Nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord." It is not our doing that we are children of God, that we have faith in Him, and that we are saved. It is God's doing. God calls us to be His children. He creates faith in our hearts through the means of grace. He is also the One who sustains faith in us unto eternal life.

Whenever we have a loved one, or a family member, or a friend who is suffering from dementia or Alzheimer's disease—and there are more and more of them all the time—we need to be assured by God's Word that He is the One who will preserve them in the faith unto eternal life.

By God's grace, through the merits of Christ alone, Pastor Branstad is resting in heaven according to the words of the Spirit in Revelation, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. Yes, they will rest from their labor for their deeds will follow them."

Today our hearts are heavy because we have lost a loved one, but we rejoice in the fact that our loved one is in heaven resting with the Lord. That should encourage us to follow his example. I'm talking about the example of faith in our Lord, for he trusted in Jesus as his only Savior from sin, death, and hell. That is what takes us to heaven. God comes to us through His Word, creates faith, and it is through faith in Christ alone that we have eternal salvation. So all believers—not just pastors—are examples for us in holding firm to the Word of God so our faith can be strengthened and we can be assured of eternal salvation. This is the example that Pastor Branstad gave us. Blessed be his memory. Amen.

Raymond M. Branstad

August 26, 1916 – April 1, 2009

Branstad traded journalism for ministry

by Tim Harlow

April 10, 2009

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Star Tribune, Minneapolis, MN

Raymond Branstad was sure that he was going to have a career in journalism, but the Lord had other plans for him, said his daughter Nancy Luttman, of Vero Beach, Fla.

As a high school student, Branstad had a job at his hometown newspaper in Lake Mills, Iowa, which offered to pay his college tuition if he promised to come back after graduation. But his pastor persuaded him to enter the ministry instead, Luttman said.

Branstad served as senior pastor at several churches within the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, established summer camps and synod conventions for young people and served as president of Bethany Lutheran College in Mankato.

Branstad, 92, died of kidney failure April 1 at Luttmann's home in Vero Beach.

He spent much of his early time in the ministry developing programs for teenagers. He helped start the synod's Camp Indianhead and organized yearly conventions and weekend retreats because "he felt strongly about keeping young people in the church," Luttmann said.

Branstad served parishes in Duluth, Holton, Mich., Suttons Bay, Mich., and Eau Claire, Wis., before he moved to the Twin Cities. He was senior pastor when two north Minneapolis congregations—Fairview and Emmaus—merged to form King of Grace Lutheran Church and moved to its current campus in Golden Valley.

Branstad earned an associate in arts degree from Bethany Lutheran College and his bachelor's and master of divinity degrees from Concordia Seminary in St. Louis. He took graduate-level journalism courses at the University of Wisconsin and studied at Harvard University. In 1970, he earned a master's degree in education administration from the University of Minnesota.

He returned to his alma mater, Bethany, in 1970 as president of the college and seminary. Under his leadership from 1970 to 1977, the school dramatically revised its curriculum in the Religion Department and increased the breadth and depth of courses offered. His major achievement was getting the two-year school to meet the standards necessary to become a fully accredited institution, said Ronald Younge, vice president for academic affairs.

"He enjoyed his time as president and he loved the school," Younge said. "He interacted with the students quite a bit. ... He was a good leader, and his gregarious personality fit in well."

Branstad continued to serve Bethany for 20 years as chairman of its Board of Regents.

He loved music and directed several choirs and played piano and organ until a week before he died.

Branstad led tour groups to sites in Germany made famous by Martin Luther and loved spending time at his cabin on Hay Lake in northern Minnesota, Luttmann said.

In addition to his daughter Nancy, Branstad is survived by three other daughters, Margaret Ostman and Kirsten Burcham, both of Vero Beach, and Judy Kassulker, of Plymouth; a son, John, of Plymouth; a sister, Avis Amundson, of Northwood, Iowa, 12 grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.

Do the Scriptures Teach a Trichotomy of Man's Nature? Or a Dichotomy?

by Thomas A. Heyn

Introduction

The question asked by the title of this paper arose based on a discussion with a member in our Sunday morning Bible class about a year ago. We were discussing man being body and soul and the member spoke to me after the class and said he had been taught that man consists of body, soul, and spirit. I was sure I had been taught in seminary that conservative Lutheran theology holds to a dichotomist understanding of man. I thought I would find a simple answer to the question: Is man dichotomous or trichotomous?

I began talking with other pastors and found that a quick and clear answer was not forthcoming. Perhaps further research and study would provide me with an answer to the question.

I discovered an interesting statement by Paul E. Kretzmann that is, at first glance, the short answer and proper presentation of this paper.

An open question, usually identical with a theological problem, is one which may occur to any Bible student as he ponders some Scripture doctrine, which, however, is not answered in the Bible, or at least not with sufficient clarity. Among problems of this kind we reckon . . . trichotomy as opposed to dichotomy . . . Such questions are theological problems because they cannot be solved in the Church on earth, since the divine solution in and through the inspired record is missing. If teachers of the Church insist on spending much time on these problems, they will usually be given to vain disputations, which lead to doting about questions and strifes (*sic*) of words, 1 Tim. 6:4, 5. . . . Open questions are not answered in Scripture, and therefore their solution can at best be only problematical, in agreement with certain general rules and principles set forth in the Bible. In most cases theological problems should merely be stated, if this should be deemed necessary, and the Christian theologian will then be ready to confess his ignorance as to the solution.¹

At this point, I should take Kretzmann's advice, confess my ignorance, thank the attendees of this conference, or apologize to them, and take my seat.

Such a response, however, would leave at least some of you wondering: What do the Scriptures teach about man, about body, soul and spirit, yes, especially about soul and spirit? That certainly is, or should be, a worthwhile endeavor, to learn from Scripture once again, what it teaches about these two important biblical concepts: man's soul and man's spirit. For that is where the controversy is focused—not on whether man has a body, but whether his soul and spirit are

synonymous with one another, somewhat synonymous, or entirely distinct and separate.

Where dichotomists and trichotomists agree

At the outset it should be remembered that the Bible uses various terms in describing man's nature. He has a body (σῶμα),² he is made of flesh (σάρξ),³ he has bowels (σπλάγχνα),⁴ he has a heart (καρδία),⁵ a will (θέλημα), a mind (νοῦς or διανοία),⁶ a soul (ψυχή),⁷ a spirit (πνεῦμα),⁸ etc. The dichotomy/trichotomy discussion usually focuses, perhaps mistakenly, on three of these components: body, soul, and spirit. This paper will have very little discussion of the scriptural teaching about the body. Rather, it will focus on the words, both in Hebrew and in Greek, that are typically, but not consistently, translated "soul" and "spirit."

Both viewpoints agree that at death, there is a separation of the body from something that is "not-body", i.e. soul and/or spirit. The body is mortal, but the soul or spirit lives on. See Luke 16:22-26,⁹ 23:43,¹⁰ Phil. 1:23-24,¹¹ 2 Cor. 5:8,¹² and Rev. 20:4.¹³

Where dichotomists and trichotomists disagree

Trichotomy

The argument for the trichotomy of man is based upon three principal passages.

For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12)

May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Thessalonians 5:23)

The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; . . . it is sown a natural (ψυχικόν) body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural (ψυχικόν) body, there is also a spiritual body. So it is written: "The first man Adam became a living being (ψυχὴν ζῶσαν)"; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. The spiritual did not come first, but the natural (ψυχικόν), and after that the spiritual. (1 Corinthians 15:42-46)

The passage from Hebrews distinguishes soul and spirit, seemingly so distinct that the Word of God can make a clear and clean cut¹⁴ separating the two, as a knife can cleanly sever the joints of the skeleton and open the bones to expose the marrow. The trichotomist argues that the same clear distinction between joints and marrow applies to soul and spirit. The distinction is as follows: the spirit is

that part of man that receives communication from God, the higher part of man to whom the Holy Spirit directs his efforts and the place where he works, Spirit to spirit. The soul is a lower part of man, separate from the spirit. It is the locus of rational thought, emotions, and sometimes even appetites and desires.

Although joints and marrow are clearly and completely distinguishable, they are both part of the body; they are not separate constituent parts. So also, although there may (or may not) be a clear distinction between soul and spirit, how does one conclude that they are separate constituents of man's nature? Could they not be rather two aspects or facets of the immaterial, non-mortal part of man's nature? Note that the writer to the Hebrews goes further in stating that God's Word divides, or judges, the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Is the heart a third constituent of man's nature? (More on this later.) What about thoughts and attitudes? Are they so easily and clearly distinguishable? And is the heart (here having a metaphorical meaning rather than a physical, biological meaning) part of the physical nature of man? Or part of the non-physical nature?

The second passage used by trichotomists is 1 Thessalonians 5:23. In discussing this passage, many trichotomists will explain it this way: Through the body, man is aware of the *world* around him through his physical senses. Through the soul, he is *self-aware* through his thoughts, emotions, and his rational mind. And through the spirit, he is aware of *God*, where the things of God are perceived. This view requires that the usage of "soul" and "spirit" throughout Scripture reflects such a clear distinction. In general, most trichotomists agree that the "soul" is the natural and lower life force of man (usually held to be in common with the animals) while the "spirit" is the highest part of man which communicates with God. We will see whether such distinctions are true in the discussion of dichotomy below.

The third reference of the trichotomist, 1 Corinthians 15:42ff, seems to distinguish clearly ψυχή and πνεῦμα. This passage may be one of the strongest in support of trichotomy, or at the least, that soul and spirit are not synonymous. The distinction between the two should be as clear as the distinction between Adam, the fallen man who brought death for life, and Christ, the man (God-man) who redeems humanity through death and brings them life. But identifying the distinction is difficult. Furthermore, note that most of the English translations translate ψυχικόν as "natural" or "physical," rather than "soul-like/soul-ish."

Although it may be easier to critique the trichotomist interpretation of the earlier passages, this passage is more difficult. That should not be surprising since 1 Corinthians 15 deals with the mystery of the resurrection and the nature of the resurrection body. None of us on this side of Judgment has experienced what that resurrection body is like. Although St. Paul tells us that it is sinless, glorified, immortal, etc., we cannot define how a post-resurrection "spiritual" body is distinguished from the pre-resurrection "natural/soul-like" body. It is important to note, however, that the subject of this passage is the body (σῶμα), not the soul and spirit *per se*. Ψυχικόν and πνευματικόν are adjectives describing the material body, not nouns describing the immaterial part(s) of man. Nonetheless, the passage does

tend to show that a real distinction exists between “soul” and “spirit.”

One other passage often mentioned in support of trichotomy is Luke 1:46, the Magnificat of Mary: “My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.” The trichotomist says the distinction between the soul and spirit is found in the verb tenses accompanying the nouns. The soul glorifies (present active indicative), while the spirit has rejoiced (aorist active indicative). The spirit (higher part of man) rejoices first, which then has its effect on the soul (lower part) which follows up with glorifying God. The dichotomist understanding, however, proposes that Mary is speaking in poetry with its characteristic Hebrew parallelism, and no sharp distinctions should be understood.

Comments by E.C. Bragg help us to understand better the trichotomist viewpoint. Regarding the creation of man in a trichotomous scheme, Bragg states:

The material part of man is the body, and the immaterial part is the spirit and soul of man. This can be readily seen from the account of man’s creation in Genesis 2:7. Here is the distinct formation of the dead body—(or it could be only sensual life, similar to all organisms, or cellular life) merely mass, without any human life or personality—the molding of his bodily shape. There stood the senseless frame, and there God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. This is the spirit nature of man—the candle of God in the soul of man, the part of man that contacts God. “And man became a living soul.” When God put this spirit of life in man, there was awakened the third element of man; “he became a living soul.” This is the medium between the spirit and the body, *a third element joining the two* [emphasis added]. Such are the teachings of all the Scriptures. There are two parts of man’s constitution: material and immaterial, body and the generic name for both soul and spirit, “soul.” “Fear not him which is able to destroy the body but is not able to destroy the soul; but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” Matthew 10:28. The word “soul” here is used in its multiple sense to signify both soul and spirit as that immaterial part of man which survives the death or destruction of the material part of man or the body.¹⁵

Bragg goes on to say that the body, soul and spirit are each separate unities. The spirit dwells in the soul, which is the medium between the spirit and the body, a separate element that joins the spirit to the body. And the soul dwells in the body. Passages which mention only soul, or only spirit, in connection with the body are using the words in a “plural sense” that covers the whole of the immaterial part of man.

Bragg uses the word “tabernacle” to describe the aforementioned dwelling of one part in the other. And, in fact, trichotomists, including Luther (when he takes the trichotomist view), agree that the tabernacle is a type of man’s nature. The holy of holies, where there is no light, is where man’s spirit is in communion with God, where his revealed Word, the light of man, illuminates the spirit in faith. The holy place, where the lampstand gives light, represents man’s

soul, which has the light of reason to understand the world in which man lives. The outer court, the place for the common man, represents the body, the lowest part of man in contact with the world, illumined by the bright sun which lays it bare for all to see.¹⁶ One problem with this view is that the Scriptures nowhere suggest this typology. In fact, the only typology suggested regarding the tabernacle is that the earthly tabernacle is a type of the true heavenly sanctuary. (See Hebrews 8.)

Finally, the trichotomist will often maintain that the distinction of spirit is that it is not used of animals, and it is the part of man that is made alive through the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. In other words, animals have body and soul, but no spirit. Unbelievers have a body and soul but a dead, or nonexistent spirit, while only believers have a body, soul, and spirit, or body, soul, and living spirit. One passage stands out as disproving such an exclusive view of the word for spirit: Jeremiah 2:24. “How can you say, ‘I am not defiled; I have not run after the Baals’? See how you behaved in the valley; consider what you have done. You are a swift she-camel running here and there, a wild donkey accustomed to the desert, sniffing the wind in her craving [lit. panting in the desire of her soul, נָפֶשׁ]—in her heat [lit. in the spirit, רוּחַ, of her heat] who can restrain her? Any males that pursue her need not tire themselves; at mating time they will find her.” Here is described an animal with a spirit, רוּחַ, and a spirit of physical passion at that—*not* the kind of spirit that trichotomists look for.

Dichotomy

The argument for dichotomy recognizes that the Bible may discuss different aspects or facets of man’s nature without requiring those facets to be divided into separate elements. For example, in Mark 12:30 Jesus states the great commandment: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.” Does this dictate that man consists of four parts: heart, soul, mind, and strength? What about “parts” not mentioned? What about loving him with our body? Should not the members of our bodies be used in loving service? What about loving him with our spirit? Why is that aspect not included in this passage? How do you love God with your strength? Is this physical strength of the body? Some kind of internal strength, of soul or spirit? What about loving him with our will? It becomes clear that once you start down that road, the number of component parts of man’s nature becomes uncertain. Rather, the enumeration of Mark 12:30 may be understood not as an enumeration of parts, but as a piling up of different aspects or facets of man’s nature demonstrating how comprehensive man’s devotion toward God is to be.

So, what does Scripture say about the soul and the spirit? At man’s creation, his body is formed from the dust of the ground and God breathes into him a living soul (נֶפֶשׁ; Gen 2:7). Yet, his death is described as a separation of body and spirit in which the body returns to the dust and the spirit (רוּחַ) returns to God who gave it (Eccl 12:7). Then, in the New Testament, Jesus refers to the death of body and soul (ψυχή rather than πνεῦμα) in hell (Matt. 10:28).

Scripture links body and soul (ψυχή) in Matt 6:25¹⁷ and Matt 10:28,¹⁸ while linking body and spirit (πνεῦμα) in Eccl 12:7,¹⁹ 1 Cor 5:3-5,²⁰ and 1 Cor 7:34.²¹

Death consists of giving up the soul (or the breath; Gen 35:18,²² 1 Kg 17:21,²³ and Acts 15:26²⁴) and elsewhere as giving up the spirit (Ps 31:5,²⁵ Lk 23:46,²⁶ and Acts 7:59²⁷).

That which survives death is the soul (Rev 6:9²⁸ and Rev 20:4²⁹); and elsewhere it is the spirit that survives (Heb 12:23³⁰ and 1 Pet 3:19³¹).

The soul communes with God in Heb 6:19³² and the spirit communes with God in Rom 8:16.³³

2 Cor 7:1³⁴ speaks of sin affecting flesh and spirit and Eph 2:3³⁵ speaks of sin affecting flesh and mind.³⁶

The words, soul and spirit, appear hundreds of times in the Scriptures. There are additional examples of the soul and the spirit both being troubled, sad, or joyful. But the above list should be sufficient to show how often they are used synonymously, or where identical attributes are ascribed to each. In all the above passages, there appears to be no significant distinction between the use of soul or spirit; they appear to be synonymous.

Why it matters

At this point, the reader may ask, “What really is the difference? It is like asking how many angels can dance on the head of a pin. Does it matter?”

Lewis Sperry Chafer, in an article on anthropology in *Bibliotheca Sacra*, states:

A question arises at this point which has engaged and divided theologians in all generations, namely, is man a dichotomous being—two parts, material and immaterial with the supposition that soul and spirit are the same, or is he trichotomous—body, soul, and spirit? It would be readily conceded by all that, under any consideration, there is not the same breadth of distinction observable between soul and spirit as between soul and body, or spirit and body. Distinctions—far-reaching indeed—are implied between soul and spirit; yet these terms are used synonymously. Thus the controversy is between those who are impressed with the distinctions and those who are impressed with the similarities. It would be well to recognize that, when so required, the Bible assigns to these two terms a distinctive meaning and that, when no specific distinction is in view, the Bible uses them as interchangeable. In other words, the Bible supports both dichotomy and trichotomy. The distinction between soul and spirit is as incomprehensible as life itself, and the efforts of men to frame definitions must always be unsatisfactory.³⁷

Charles Hodge, in the second volume of his systematic theology, is not so equivocal. He sees the issue as one of considerable consequence:

This doctrine of a threefold constitution of man being adopted by Plato, was introduced partially into the early Church, but soon came to be regarded as dangerous, if not heretical. Its being held by the Gnostics that the πνεῦμα in man was a part of the divine essence, and incapable of sin; and by the Apollinarians that Christ had only a human σῶμα and ψυχή, but not a human πνεῦμα, the Church rejected the doctrine that the ψυχή and πνεῦμα were distinct substances, since upon it those heresies were founded. In later times the Semi-Pelagians taught that the soul and body, but not the spirit in man, were the subjects of original sin. All Protestants, Lutherans and Reformed, were, therefore, the more zealous in maintaining that the soul and spirit, ψυχή and πνεῦμα, are one and the same substance and essence. And this, as before remarked, has been the common doctrine of the Church.³⁸

A few examples show the problems created by the trichotomist view. Some trichotomists say that since man was created in the image of God, his nature will also reflect a triune arrangement, namely, body, soul, and spirit. Although there may not be agreement on which person of the Trinity is associated with which part of a trichotomous human nature, nonetheless, this idea concerning the image of God is fraught with problems. One could begin by saying that the Holy Spirit corresponds with the spirit of man. Since Jesus was incarnate, the Son must correspond with the body of man. That leaves the Father to be the part corresponding to the soul. But under trichotomous theology, the body is subordinate to the soul, and the soul to the spirit. Does the trichotomy analogy then require that the persons of the Godhead have some sort of subordinate/superior relationship? This clearly contradicts scriptural teaching on the Trinity, and runs counter to the Athanasian Creed. In fact, the Athanasian Creed, with its description of Christ's human nature, describes the human nature as dichotomous.³⁹

Daniel M. Brown links the trichotomist view with erroneous exegesis by the Charismatics.⁴⁰ Brown is an ex-Charismatic. In a discussion of 1 Corinthians 14 he shows how a trichotomist view is used by Charismatics to explain speaking in the spirit even though the mind (part of the soul) does not understand. Since they are separate, it does not matter that the soul cannot understand. Rather, the spirit is in direct communication with God while bypassing the soul. But a dichotomist view understands 1 Corinthians 14 in an entirely different way. It is Paul's argument that Christians should pray and prophesy so that there is understanding. Spirit *and* soul must be edified; spirit *and* soul must understand. Brown's is an interesting article refuting charismatic tongues-speaking and should be read. He concludes that Charismatics often downplay the Word of God. Rather than understanding *with the soul* what the Bible is saying, they rely on praying *in the spirit* to "see what the Holy Spirit says to me about these Scriptures." He goes on to say, "In spite of an often outward display of humility when saying such things, trichotomy has given them an excuse to reject God-ordained church authority and the historic creeds of the church fathers."⁴¹ Examples like those above demonstrate that the dichotomy/trichotomy question is *not*, by any means, inconsequential.

Conclusion

So, what shall we conclude? Is Kretzmann correct? Is this an open question? I find the arguments for dichotomy to be much more persuasive. Granted, some of the passages used by trichotomists to support their view are difficult to explain from the dichotomist viewpoint. Even St. Peter recognized that some of Paul's writings were hard to understand.⁴² The trichotomist viewpoint, however, faces larger hurdles. The sheer weight of passages where soul and spirit are synonymous, and the errors into which trichotomists often fall, leave me unpersuaded by the trichotomists.

Finally, having briefly reviewed what the Scriptures teach about the nature of man, one thing upon which we can agree is this:

I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. Psalm 139:14

Additional resources:

http://www.bible.org/page.php?page_id=3287

Bible.org Session 2 - What is man? Monism and Trichotomy

http://www.bible.org/page.php?page_id=3288

Bible.org Session 3 - What is man? Dichotomy, Conditional Unity, and Gnostic Dualism

http://sojournhuntsville.org/blogs/bob_pratico/2007/05/18/how_many_parts_do_we_have

http://www.the-highway.com/tricho-charis_Brown.html

“Trichotomists, Charismatics, and 1 Corinthians 14,” by Daniel M. Brown

Endnotes

¹ Paul E. Kretzmann, “Fundamental and Non-fundamental Doctrines — and Church Fellowship,” <http://www.confessionallutherans.org/papers.html>.

² 1 Corinthians 16:19.

³ Matthew 26:41.

⁴ Philippians 1:8.

⁵ Mark 12:30.

⁶ Romans 12:2; Mark 12:30.

⁷ Matthew 16:26.

⁸ 1 Corinthians 2:11.

⁹ “The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried. In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, ‘Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.’ But Abraham replied, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.’”

¹⁰ Jesus answered him, “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.”

¹¹ I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.

¹² We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.

¹³ I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years.

¹⁴ The very meaning of dichotomous, i.e. to cut in two, and trichotomous, i.e. to cut in three.

¹⁵ E.C. Bragg, class notes, “Anthropology,” Trinity College of Florida, <http://www.ecbragg.net/Class%20Notes/anthropology.htm>.

¹⁶ See Luther’s commentary on Luke 1:46 where he discusses the trichotomist view related to “soul” and “spirit” in Mary’s Magnificat, explaining the related 1 Thessalonians 5:23. *Luther’s Works*, W. VII, 550ff. “Let us take an illustration of this from Scripture (cf. Ex 26:33; Ex 40:1–11). In the tabernacle fashioned by Moses there were three separate compartments. The first was called the holy of holies: here was God’s dwelling place, and in it there was no light. The second was called the holy place; here stood a candlestick with seven arms and seven lamps. The third was called the outer court; this lay under the open sky and in the full light of the sun. In this tabernacle we have a figure of the Christian man. His spirit is the holy of holies, where God dwells in the darkness of faith, where no light is; for he believes that which he neither sees nor feels nor comprehends. His soul is the holy place, with its seven lamps, that is, all manner of reason, discrimination, knowledge, and understanding of visible and bodily things. His body is the forecourt, open to all, so that men may see his works and manner of life.”

¹⁷ Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life (ψυχή), what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life (ψυχή) more important than food, and the body more important than clothes?

¹⁸ Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

¹⁹ . . . the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.

²⁰ Even though I am not physically present, I am with you in spirit. And I have already passed judgment on the one who did this, . . . hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature (σάρξ) may be destroyed and his spirit (πνεῦμα) saved on the day of the Lord.

²¹ An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord's affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit.

²² As [Rachel] breathed her last (lit. going out of the שָׁנָה)—for she was dying—she named her son Ben-oni.

²³ Then he stretched himself out on the boy three times and cried to the LORD, "O LORD my God, let this boy's life (שָׁנָה breath[?]) return to him!"

²⁴ . . . men who have risked their lives (ψυχάς) for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

²⁵ . . . Into your hands I commit my spirit (נַפְשִׁי).

²⁶ Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit (πνεῦμα)." When he had said this, he breathed (ἐξέπνευσεν) his last.

²⁷ While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit (πνεῦμα)."

²⁸ When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained.

²⁹ And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God.

³⁰ . . . to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect.

³¹ . . . through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison.

³² We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain.

³³ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.

³⁴ Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.

³⁵ All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts (lit. desires and thoughts of the σάρξ and διάνοια). Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.

³⁶ Credit for this list of synonymous uses goes to Daniel M. Brown, http://www.the-highway.com/tricho-charis_Brown.html.

³⁷ Lewis Sperry Chafer, "Anthropology: Part 4," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 101:19 (2002).

³⁸ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. II (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), 51.

³⁹ For the right faith is, that we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and Man; . . . Man of the substance of His mother, born in the world; Perfect God and perfect Man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting. . . . yet He is not two, but one Christ: One, not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh, but by taking the manhood into God; One altogether; not by confusion of Substance, but by unity of Person. For as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man, so God and Man is one Christ.

⁴⁰ Daniel M. Brown, "Trichotomists, Charismatics, and 1 Corinthians 14," http://www.the-highway.com/tricho-charis_Brown.html.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² 2 Pet. 3:16 . . . His [Paul's] letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.

Contextualization: Lutheran Mission within a Multi-Cultural Society

Rev. Bruce W. Adams

When the Apostle Paul preached in Athens — a culture that did not know the Scriptures — he was not afraid to introduce the Gospel in terms the Athenians would understand. In his apologia he quoted Greek poetry; while on Mars Hill St. Paul made reference to a Greek monument he had observed bearing the inscription: “To the unknown God” (Acts 17:23). Realizing that the learned members of the Areopagus presumably acknowledged that a deity might exist, “Paul jumped at the opportunity. He saw a jumping-off point from which he could proclaim the Good News of Christ. He was willing to engage the Greek mind before he presented the Gospel.”¹

The medium by which the Gospel of Jesus Christ may be proclaimed and expressed within a particular indigenous, historic, and cultural framework, bears the title “contextualization.” Encircling Lutheran Christians living within this 21st century, striving to bear witness to Christ within the secularised western cultures, there is the obvious awareness of a veritable mosaic of subcultures from which people derive and to which they remain attached.

To journey down King William Street in the heart of Adelaide is to be reminded of the variegated racial and diverse cultural backgrounds of people living in this city. The media frequently reflect and express the attachment that people continue to hold as a trust to their national identity within the current multi-cultural western societies. Every person who reads this article is a distinct individual and the reflection of his/her unique birth, parentage, national, and cultural environment. Referring to the conversation of Jesus with the Samaritan woman as recorded in St. John’s Gospel (4:7-42), Dr. William B. Kessel states, “Each human being is a distinct individual with his or her own unique history and personality.”² St. Paul was ever prompt to remind his readers of his own Jewishness, describing himself as “of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee” (Philippians 3:5).

Whatever our roots may be as Christians, the Norwegian poet, Ivar Aasen, expressed in his poem the heritage of faith still treasured within the Evangelical Lutheran Synod:

Let us not forget our forefathers...
They gave us an heritage to treasure,
It’s greater than many would believe.³

However, the question still lingers as to how evangelical and confessional Lutherans can proclaim and communicate the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ

within the framework of indigenous cultures encircling the globe in this 21st century.

Cultural Awareness Recognized

As confessional Lutherans it is essential from the outset, when considering the subject of contextualization, to stipulate that God causes his church to grow only through the proclamation of the Gospel and the means of grace. The Book of Concord echoes the Scriptures when it insists:

And it is God's will to call men to eternal salvation, to draw them to himself, convert them, beget them anew, and sanctify them through this means and in no other way—namely, through his holy Word (when one hears it preached or reads it) and the sacraments (when they are used according to his Word). (Solid Declaration, Art. II. 50ff.)⁴

Attention to this missionary challenge engaging the Christian Church was drawn to my attention by a book co-authored by J. I. Packer (Anglican) and Thomas Howard (Roman Catholic) entitled: *Christianity: The True Humanism*, published in 1985. In this book the authors included this statement: “What you have all around the world is a fascinating variety of local ethnic cultures, which Christians should seek not to sweep away but to appreciate. They are all expressions of human creativity, having their own history and integrity, and are fascinating in their variety.”⁵ As to Christian truth finding expression within the indigenous cultures, contextualization is the name given to the process, and it is a major theme in present-day missionary thought.⁶

Because these differing ethnic cultures are ingrained throughout our Western countries, what contextualization calls for is the urgent necessity for confessional Lutheran churches to possess a cross-cultural awareness, concurrent with an empathy in communicating God's Word to those conditioned by their own cultural origin, whether indigenous or transplanted.

While warning of the postmodern endeavour to dissolve history, Gene Edward Veith alerts fellow-Lutherans as to their obligation to realize how “the combination of social changes, technological developments, and postmodern ideology has undermined the very principle of a unified national culture and has driven individuals to find their identities in subcultures.”⁷ This subcultural awareness is evidenced throughout Australian society in this new millennium.

In recent years a comprehensive and absorbing book entitled, *In Search of an Identity*, has been written by Johann Peter Weiss. Born in Berlin in 1928, Weiss emigrated to Australia in 1956. In the course of his lengthy work (600+ pages), Weiss not only includes a history of those first Lutherans who arrived in South Australia in 1838 as religious refugees, he also offers acute insights and observations of Australian life leading into the 21st century. Allied with his own personal search for identity in a country of his love, there are pertinent expressions of the Australian lifestyle coming within his own experience. He

then adds this penetrating proviso: “Why is it so wrong for migrants to adhere to their old cultures and languages, which in no way diminish their contribution to the Australian melting-pot of ideas, theoretical and practical, when it, in reality, promotes diversity and economic well-being for all.”⁸ This is followed by this profound insight: “A person without a past or the conscious effort to create a past for himself is like driftwood, forever condemned to float through life, never able to find soil into which to strike his/her roots.”⁹

Such undergirds what the Oxford scholar and theologian, Alister McGrath, penned in 1992: “To lose one’s distinctiveness is to lose something irreplaceable and identity-giving, evoking a sense of loss of place and purpose in the world.”¹⁰

Cultural Awareness and Confessional Lutheran Mission

A major reason for the convening of the Apostolic Council in Jerusalem, as recorded in Acts 15, was to designate and correct the spiritual and cultural differences and tensions existing between both the Jewish and Gentile Christians. The questions concerning all present came to an amicable conclusion as testified in a letter to all believers that “it seemed good to us, having come to one accord, to choose men and send them to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 15:25-26).

That great missionary of the cross, St. Paul, gives direction as to how cultural awareness can be applied in the apostolic mission to relate the Gospel to the secularized people today. During his own cross-cultural ministry the Apostle exclaimed, “That I might win those without the law. To the weak I became weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some” (1 Corinthians 9:21-22). To assume from these words that St. Paul was prepared to compromise God’s saving Word to redeem sinful humanity would be a totally wrong inference. While ever conscious that the Lord had called him to do mission work among the Gentiles (Galatians 1:16), in his endeavours to proclaim Christ crucified, the conclusion of the English scholar, F.F. Bruce, holds true: “... while he preached the gospel to the Hellenes, it was no Hellenized gospel that he preached.”¹¹ His proclamation was ever “to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2).

For this octogenarian pastor emeritus, conscious of increasing frailties, it proves a source of encouragement to receive copies of “Thoughts of Faith,” with its special reference to the mission of the Ukrainian Lutheran Church. While ever cognitive of the rich culture of that eastern European country, the mission has exemplified through St. Sophia Seminary, the Gift of Life Ministry, the pastors and volunteers, that there persists the burning desire to share the Word of God with the Ukrainian people. For this Christ-centred mission, cultural differences melt away “because of the bond of Christian brotherhood united us all” in the Lord.¹² Therein lies the thrust of confessional Lutheran mission!

Cultural Awareness Applied

Dr. Martin Luther was ever conscious of the Lord's commands to proclaim the Gospel to all peoples, exemplified in Mark 16:15 and Matthew 28:19-20. In the Second Petition of the Lord's Prayer in the Large Catechism there is this prayer: "Dear Father, we pray Thee, give us thy Word, that the gospel may be sincerely preached throughout the world and that it may be received by faith and may work and live in us...."¹³ Such a prayer unfolds the intrinsic place of prayer in the ministry of outreach and mission among all nations, in the life and thought of Martin Luther, that great evangelical and catholic reformer.

For this stranger in far-off Australia, it would seem obvious that the immediate challenge confronting confessional Lutherans throughout North and South America is the growing population and influence of those people of Hispanic birth and cultural attachment, though such is but one segment in this world of 5.6 billion souls.

Professor David J. Valleskey adds the reminder that Christ is right at our doorstep:

The field is the world—at home and abroad—the inner city, the suburb, the town, the village, the countryside; the North and South and East and West; the African-American, the Hispanic, the Oriental; the Hindu, the Buddhist, the Moslem, the Confucianist, the Taoist, and Shintoist, the animist, as well as the person who worships Pocketbook or Intelligence; and down-and-outer and the up-comer, the rich and the poor, the learned and the unlearned.¹⁴

In the interests of church growth, modern Protestantism is plagued by efforts to be "politically correct," with worship services reduced to mere entertainment. It continues to be the conviction of this writer that such is Satan's intrusion into the life, witness, and worship of God's church. Though Lutheran Christians must seek to remove barriers that will hinder outreach and mission, it must ever be recalled that the Lutheran church is both a Word-centred, confessional, and liturgical church. As Professor Valleskey states,

Lutheran Christians...in keeping with the Scriptures, will as Paul Eickmann puts it, "make their confession to the means of grace as God's own objective promises of peace and life. They will point to the sacraments as God's work, not ours. They will urge adults to be baptized and to bring their children to baptism. They will invite the lost to find comfort in the liturgy, with its words of absolution, and in sermons which proclaim Christ crucified and risen."¹⁵

Throughout Australia there is an interest in Celtic culture. For this reason, I daily wear the replica of a Celtic cross purchased from an ancient Celtic centre in Glastonbury in England. From time to time, I have experienced people displaying interest in the cross and even inquiring as to its meaning. Edward W. Stimson in

Renewal in Christ writes, “The ancient cross on the Holy Isle of Iona was a Celtic Cross with a circle, the symbol of Jesus’ resurrection. It was the Cross of Saint John, whose teaching stressed eternal life by way of the Cross.”¹⁶ The meaning? “And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (John 17:3). What a message we have to share with people engulfed amidst the secular yet shallow scepticism of our times, all too frequently abetted by the pop culture of the modern media! Among the final words of that brilliant vendor of words, Malcolm Muggeridge, is this final testimony: “And it is the Cross, more than anything else, that has called me inexorably to Christ.”¹⁷

Endnotes

All Scripture references are from “The Holy Bible-English Standard Version,” (2003, by Crossway Bibles division, published by Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis).

¹ Charles Colson, *Faith on the Line* (n.p.: Victor Books, 1994), 115.

² William B. Kessel, “Share the Promise-Culture to Culture,” *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 36:3 (September 1996): 59.

³ *Built on the Rock* – In Commemoration of the Seventy-fifth Anniversary of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod 1918-1993, printed in the USA, 1.

⁴ *The Book of Concord*, trans. and ed. Theodore G. Tappert (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), 531.

⁵ J.I. Packer and Thomas Howard, *Christianity: The True Humanism* (Waco: Word Incorporated, 1985), 178-179.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 179.

⁷ Gene Edward Veith, *Postmodern Times* (Wheaton: Crossways Books, 1994), 144.

⁸ Johann P. Weiss, *In Search of an Identity* (Bern: European Academic Publishers, 2000), 441.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 415.

¹⁰ Alister McGrath, *Roots That Refresh* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1995), 55.

¹¹ F.F. Bruce, *Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), 127.

¹² Sally Warnke, “A Bittersweet Farewell to Ukraine,” *Thoughts of Faith Newsletter* (June 2009): 7.

¹³ *The Book of Concord*, 427.

¹⁴ David J. Valleskey, “A Biblical, Lutheran Theology of Missions,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 94:3 (Summer 1997): 168.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 171.

¹⁶ Edward W. Stimson, *Renewal in Christ* (New York: Vantage Press Inc., 1979), 9.

¹⁷ Malcolm Muggeridge, *A Twentieth Century Testimony* (London: William Collins, n.d.).

The *Quia* Subscription to the Confessions: Do We Interpret Scripture in Light of the Confessions or the Confessions in Light of Scripture?

by Erling T. Teigen

The topic assigned this study has to do with confessional subscription, that is, what is the role of the Lutheran Confessional writings for the way we do our work as pastors, teachers, and theologians. It can also be formulated as a question about the relationship between Scripture and confession.

The subtitle, as the topic appears in the minutes, is more specific, and in fact points to a specific issue, because the language of the statement refers directly to an 1858 essay by C. F. W. Walther. On several different occasions, in church history classes, pastoral conferences, and other theological convocations, discussion of Walther's assertion has always generated some puzzlement, if not downright rejection. To insist that one has to interpret Scripture according the Lutheran Confessional writings has been equated with confusion about *norma normans* and *norma normata*, elevating tradition and confession over Scripture, or "going too quickly to the confessions." On another side, the misunderstanding of the strict confessional subscription was illustrated in Dr. Ylvisaker's contact with an Eastern U. S. A. Lutheran. While in Leipzig, he became friends with another student, A. R. Wentz, later a dean of American Lutheran Church historians. S. C. Ylvisaker reports that he "was almost knocked over one day when he said, 'Well you of course, also believe in the verbal inspiration of the Formula of Concord.'"¹ On the face of it, the assertion is counterintuitive for one who holds to the *sola Scriptura* principle.

It would seem to me that there are three issues that need to be discussed here:

- 1) What is the historical context for such a claim, specifically Walther's presentation of 1858? (What did Walther say, and what did he mean?)
- 2) Is Walther's claim to be taken as a parochial peculiarity growing out of his own unique circumstances, or is it consistent with the wider confession of ecumenical, catholic Christianity as it stands in the ancient, catholic symbols of the Christian Church?
- 3) Are we today in our church bound to that understanding, i.e. is it in accord with the doctrine of the "pure, clear fountain of Israel, which alone is the one true guiding principle, according to which all teachers

and teaching are to be judged and evaluated”? (SD, Rule and Norm, 3, Kolb, 527)²

1. The Historical Context

C.F.W. Walther delivered his essay at the 1858 meeting of the Western District of the Missouri Synod. The essay was published in the district proceedings and then appeared in *Der Lutheraner*, August 10, 1858, under the full title: “Why are the symbolic books of our church to be subscribed not conditionally but unconditionally by the ministers of our Church.” It was more or less forgotten until a loose, abridged translation by A.W.C. Guebert was printed in the *Concordia Theological Monthly* April, 1947.³

Walther’s essay on confessional subscription needs to be seen in the light of its contemporary theological situation. In 1858 American Lutheranism was in an uproar. Missouri was still a newcomer on the American scene, albeit a very vocal one. The larger General Synod was being ripped apart by a controversy over seminary president S. S. Schmucker’s “American Recension of the Augsburg Confession.” Schmucker, a conscientious pietist, had become president of the fledgling seminary of the General Synod at Gettysburg in 1826. At that time, he was considerably more conservative than many others in the Pennsylvania Ministerium. The ministerium had been along in organizing the General Synod in 1820, but then in 1823 pulled out, not because the General Synod was too liberal, but because it was too Lutheran, and they wanted to pursue closer ties with the Reformed, as they had begun to do some years before, for example, in the 1787 organization of Franklin College. In 1823, the Pennsylvania Ministerium was more interested in reviving plans for a joint seminary in Pennsylvania with the Reformed.

But as time went on, the leaven of the confessional revival begun in Europe made itself felt through men like Charles Porterfield Krauth, and gradually, it could be discerned that the General Synod and the Pennsylvania Ministerium were becoming more Lutheran. The test as to *how* Lutheran came when Schmucker, in concert with several colleagues published their revised version of the Augsburg Confession, a document which intended to bring the Lutherans into a modern age and into closer alliance with the Reformed. Their new *variata* made the original Melancthonians look like gnesio Lutherans. The fundamental doctrines of Lutheranism were destroyed. Krauth was among the leaders of the opposition; he came from the new generation which was influenced by the confessional revival in Europe and articulated his confessional theology in the monumental *The Conservative Reformation and its Theology* (1871). In 1866, in an uproar over the admission of the Franckean Synod to the General Synod, Krauth led the revolt which resulted in the formation of the General Council, which was decidedly more confessional. The Pennsylvania Ministerium opened its own seminary at Philadelphia which became the center of the more confessional movement in competition with Gettysburg.

Walther's 1858 essay on the confessional principle set the stage for the position Walther and Missouri, along with the Norwegians took over against even the conservative General Council, and led them to establish the Synodical Conference. In 1871, the bodies proposing to form a conference published an explanation of their intentions. The document sounds as though it might have been penned chiefly by Walther, but in fact was written by F.A. Schmidt. Entitled *Denkschrift*, it laments:

This sad lack of confessional loyalty is sufficient to make it impossible for us to become members of the Council....Now we can have nothing to do with the unionistic spirit nor with the errors, wrong principles and sins against God's word connected with it. We can in good conscience have no dealings with it...as long as the General Council knows how to say nothing but "mum mum" with regard to the questions of doctrine and discipline which we have touched upon and which are so decisive a test of true Lutheran faithfulness to the confession.⁴

For Walther, *every* doctrinal position of the confessional writings, "no matter what position a teaching may occupy in the doctrinal system of the Confessions and no matter what the form in which it may occur...unconditional subscription bears upon every one of the teachings, and none of them may be set aside by any reservation of the subscriber."⁵ Walther defines *conditional* subscription as subscribing to the Confessions "with the condition that not every doctrine contained in the symbols needs to be accepted as in complete agreement with the Holy Scriptures and that a distinction may be made even in the doctrines appearing in them."⁶ Walther then proceeds to describe various kinds of conditional acknowledgment of the Confessions. The key, for Walther, is that the pious appeal that one simply accepts the Scriptures is not a confession at all: "The confession that one believes what is in the Bible is not a clear confession of faith that distinguishes one from false believers, for in spite of this declaration nobody knows whether one takes the Scriptures in their true sense or not."⁷

The primary purpose of confessional symbols is to make a clear and distinct statement of doctrine to the world and to distinguish the true church from the heterodox and the sects. But especially important is the third purpose: "(3) that the church may have a unanimous, definite, and common norm and form of teaching for its ministers out of which and according to which all other writings and teachings that are offered for test and adoption can and should be judged and regulated."⁸ And that finally leads Walther to say:

The symbols should be subscribed by ministers in the church in order to assure the church that they acknowledge as correct the interpretation and understanding of the Scriptures which is set forth in the symbols and *consequently intend to expound the Scriptures as the church does which they bind themselves to serve.*

Consequently if the church conceded that its ministers should not

be required to interpret the Scriptures according to the symbols but interpret the symbols according to the Scriptures, subscription would not give the church any guarantee that the pledged minister would understand and expound the Scriptures as it does but rather as he himself thinks right. Thus the church would actually set up the changing personal convictions of its ministers as the symbol to which it would obligate them.⁹

For Walther, what would be sacrificed in a subscription which says that the Confessions will be interpreted according to the Scriptures, as evangelical and pious as that sounds, is the very objectivity of God's revelation. That objectivity would be destroyed and for it would be substituted a purely subjective and individualistic approach to biblical revelation, which, in fact, is the heart of the pietistic aberration. Here, Walther has expressed the principle negatively. In affirmative form *the confessional principle means that our pastors and teachers are required to interpret Scripture according to the Confessions, not the Confessions according to Scripture.*¹⁰

In his *Americanisch-Lutherische Pastoraltheologie*, Walther makes the distinction between Scripture and Confession clear, and makes the further distinction between a source of doctrine and a criterion for teaching and confessing:

We do not regard the Symbols as the basis of our faith, for only the Sacred Scriptures are that. We regard them merely as the criterion of our confession concerning that faith, and through a written statement of intention to teach only according to them we are merely seeking a guarantee that our church will have in its teachers upright ministers and pastors, and not foxes and wolves. No one is exerting any absolute compulsion [on the candidate], and if he is reluctant to subscribe the Symbols, he can go off and earn his livelihood some other way.¹¹

2. Parochial Peculiarity?

Walther's view of confessional subscription was neither a parochial peculiarity nor just another version of Waltherian dogmatism. At least one representative of the Norwegian Synod was at that 1858 convention of the Western District. What he heard in Walther's paper would not have struck him at all of being objectionable or questionable. In fact, in the discussion at that meeting, Walther defended the Norwegian Synod for its less than complete listing of the symbols in its constitution. Just the year before, J.A. Ottesen and U.V. Koren had visited Missouri's Ft. Wayne convention where fellowship was declared to exist between the two bodies, and concluded an agreement with the Missouri Synod to send young men to the Missouri Synod seminaries at Ft. Wayne and St. Louis.

The legal foundation of the Church of Norway was not the entire *Book of Concord*, but only the Augsburg Confession and Luther's Small Catechism. The first publication of the *Book of Concord* in Norwegian did not appear until 1868, translated by two Christiania University professors who were most influential

on the men who established the Norwegian Synod. In his foreword to the first edition, Johnson explains the historical background for that legal foundation, much of which was rooted in the fact that at the time Norway was under the Danish crown, and that had everything to do with European politics. The fact that the legal basis in Norway is only the two confessions, that hardly means a rejection of the others, for that “would be the same as to restrict the Evangelical Lutheran Church to the church organizations who hold to those accepted by our Norwegian Lutheran Church.”¹² In the Introduction, Johnson/Caspari address the meaning of subscribing to the confessions, relying heavily on Rule and Norm, Epitome and Solid Declaration.¹³

When the Norwegian Synod was organized, beginning in 1851, there was no *Book of Concord* available in Norwegian, and the founders simply adopted the confessional standard they knew from Norway—the Augsburg Confession and Luther’s Small Catechism. All of them could read German; theological education without German was unthinkable. As pupils of Gisle Johnson, who had a thorough going knowledge of the confessional writings, as can be seen from his three volume *Den Systematiske Theologi*, and Caspari, who had studied in same surroundings in Leipzig as Walther, it is impossible to believe that in their training at Christiania they did not get exposed to all of the confessional writings. Their response to their American surroundings makes it clear that they understood the confessional writings very well.

The first Norwegian church on American soil was the so-called “Eielsen Synod,” officially “The Evangelical Lutheran Church in North America” was organized in 1846. Elling Eielsen, a follower of the Norwegian Pietist Hans Nielsen Hauge, was a lay preacher, but had himself ordained in order to appeal to the Norwegians of the State Church immigrating to America. The Eielsen constitution was rather vague in its doctrinal standard: “Our church body shall forever continue to be, just as it now is, in conformity to the genuine Lutheran faith and doctrine and built on God’s Word in the Holy Scriptures in conjunction with the *Apostolic and Augsburg Articles of Faith*, which together with the Word are the rule for our church order, and for our faith and confession as living members under our Savior Jesus Christ, who is the head of our Church.” (The Constitution reveals its chief concern in the next paragraph: “No one ought to be accepted as a member of our body, except he has passed through a genuine conversion or is on the way to conversion, so he has a noticeable sorrow for his sins, and hunger and thirst after righteousness, from which must follow an improvement in his conduct.”)¹⁴

The Norwegian Synod, however, faced a different problem as it organized. Because of its close association with the Church of Denmark, Norway, in its struggle to cope with both Pietism and Rationalism, had fallen victim to the so-called “Grundtvigian error,” which saw the Apostles’ Creed as divinely inspired. The first constitution was prepared by J.W.C. Dietrichsen, who was in the U.S. only temporarily. However, at the constituting meeting in 1851, Dietrichsen’s constitution was adopted and A.C. Preus was elected president. Paragraph 2

defined the doctrine of the synod as “revealed through God’s holy word in our baptismal covenant as well as in the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments.” A.C. Preus did not notice the problem, but when H.A. Preus pointed it out the next year, A.C. Preus agreed. In fact, his congregation had raised some questions about the constitution.

Later in 1851, H. A. Preus, younger cousin of A. C. Preus arrived. He had moved in the Norwegian circles fighting against the Grundtvigian idea, and had already seen the constitution before he left Norway, and expressed his concern to some then. At the 1852 meeting, Preus along with other new arrivals offered their formal objections. Since the offending statement was embedded in an “unalterable” paragraph, the synod was dissolved (or its organizing process was suspended) the constitution was revised, and presented anew in 1853. Now paragraph 2 read:

The doctrine of the Church is that which is revealed through God’s holy Word in the canonical writings of the Old and New Testaments interpreted in accord with the symbols or confessional writings of the Church of Norway, namely: 1) The Apostles’ Creed; 2) The Nicene Creed; 3) The Athanasian Creed; 4) The Unaltered Augsburg Confession, delivered to Emperor Charles V at Augsburg, 1530; 5) Luther’s Small Catechism.¹⁵

The doctrinal standard is simply that of the Church of Norway, which they saw no need to change. However, the form of confessional subscription is quite clearly a *quia* subscription, demanding that the Scriptures be “interpreted in accord with” the confessional writings. This paragraph was formulated well before the Norwegian Synod met Walther, and 5 years before Walther’s paper was presented.¹⁶

A decisive point for the future of the Norwegian Synod came in its early friendship with the Missouri Synod. The roots of the relationship is detailed in Carl Meyer’s *Pioneers Find Friends*. In 1855, the two-year-old Norwegian Synod, realizing that it could not depend solely on the Church of Norway for an adequate supply of pastors, resolved to send a delegation to visit some of the Lutheran seminaries in America—Capital in Columbus Ohio, Buffalo University (Martin Luther College in Buffalo, New York), and the “Lutheran University” (Concordia Seminary) in St. Louis. Finding their closest theological kin in St. Louis and Ft. Wayne, the delegation recommended that the Missouri Synod seminaries be the synod’s choice for theological education for their young men until such time as they would establish their own college and seminary. The larger part of Norwegian Synod candidates were trained at St. Louis, since that system was more familiar to the Norwegians than the “practical seminary” at Ft. Wayne.

In August 1857, still a year before Walther’s essay was presented, J.A. Ottesen and Nils Brandt wrote a report on their trip, in which they characterized the Missourians as having

a heartfelt trust in God, a sincere love for the symbols and the doctrines of the fathers, and a belief that in them His holy Word is

rightly explained and interpreted, and therefore a sacrificial, burning zeal to apply these old-Lutheran principles of doctrine and order. May the Lord graciously revive this spirit throughout the entire Lutheran church, so that those who call themselves Lutherans may no longer wrangle over questions settled by the Lutheran Confessions. May they rather show their true Lutheranism by truly believing that God's Word is taught rightly and without error in the Lutheran Confessions. Otherwise, the Lutheran name is but duplicity and hypocrisy.¹⁷

These words certainly indicate what the Norwegians had been looking for. It also puts the lie to the theses of some Norwegian-American historians and others over the years that the Norwegians only developed their preoccupation with doctrine, systematic theology, and an exaggerated confessionalism only after their exposure to Walther and the Missourians. That, in fact, was the mantra of the anti-Missouri party within the Norwegian Synod later in the election controversy during the 1870s and '80s. The pro-Missouri views of H. A. Preus and J. A. Otteson, both of whom served in the state of Wisconsin was labeled "Wisconsinism" by the pietistically inclined Norwegians.

In 1857, Ottesen, one of the visitors, and another young pastor, U.V. Koren, both of whom later engaged in voluminous correspondence with Walther, visited the Missouri Synod convention at Ft. Wayne where the "right hand of fellowship" was extended to them.¹⁸ According to the proceedings of the Ninth Synodical Convention of the Missouri Synod, the Church Council of the Norwegian Synod proposed, through Ottesen, establishment "of a Norwegian professorship at that institution, until they shall have gathered a fund sufficient for them to establish an institution in their own midst."¹⁹ The Missouri Synod accepted the proposal, and that began a significant collaboration between the two. The Norwegians read *Lehre and Wehre* and *Der Lutheraner*; and sent many young men to the Missouri seminaries until they opened their own seminary in 1876 in Madison, Wisconsin.

Two other testimonies as to the sense in which the Norwegian Synod and the ELS have subscribed to the confessional writings can be found in U.V. Koren and S.C. Ylvisaker. In a retrospective essay U.V. Koren wrote about the *Book of Concord* in the Norwegian Synod Church paper, *Maanedstidende*, November 1898. He presents a summary of the background of the *Book of Concord*, but then notes the part it played in the synod's struggles in this country, noting that to the opponents it had been an inconvenience in the controversies concerning Sabbath and Absolution. But in the election controversy, the *Book of Concord* was more than an inconvenience to them. The "Schmidtian doctrine" could not be reconciled "with the clear and definite statements in The Formula of Concord's Second and Eleventh Articles, and I have experienced that such cunning and unrelenting opponents were silenced by a passage from The Smalcald Articles." The best that they can muster is that the Concordia was not accepted in the Norwegian State Church, but, he notes: "That it has always been accepted among all true Lutherans—that does not matter in the least....They were perfectly willing even now to acknowledge The Augsburg Confession...but the Formula of Concord

was against them.” The difference between the two is simply this, in the words of a famous author, he doesn’t name, “that the hour-hand can never be as exact as the minute hand.”²⁰

One of those who came along with the “Little Synod” a year after the 1918 organization was Sigurd Christian Ylvisaker, who until 1919 was a professor at Luther College. After teaching for three years at Concordia-St. Paul and eight years of parish service in the little Norwegian Synod, he served from 1930 to 1950 as President of Bethany Lutheran College. During that time, he was one of the ablest theologians in the reorganized Norwegian Synod (ELS). In 1944, he was invited to address the Campus Pastors Conference meeting in Chicago, primarily Missouri Synod men, on the question “Does Endorsement of the Book of Concord Involve Endorsement of Every Statement in the Confessions.”²¹ In his essay, Ylvisaker endorses Walther’s 1858 essay, and most of his paper is devoted to a paraphrase and explanation of Walther’s paper. Ylvisaker concludes:

Though these Confessions list many teachings, they breathe the same spirit and point to but one object, the Christ of Calvary. Because they describe Him, it is not for us to change them on any point, for fear such change will point us to another Christ, even as two individuals may be exactly alike except in a single feature, the color of the eyes. Our Confessions are supported by two main pillars, the principles upon which our Lutheran Church is built, the doctrine of the inspiration of the Scriptures and the doctrine of justification by faith alone. By means of these two principles all teachings of the Confessions are knit together into one whole, they permeate every teaching, give meaning to them all. Those who deny wholehearted endorsement to one teaching, no matter how minor it may seem to be, in reality deny the very heart of our Lutheran faith, for no doctrine of Scripture can be separated from these two main principles. To deny endorsement to a single doctrine of the Confessions is to deny both the clearness and the authority of Scripture itself, which teaches these doctrines.²²

The confessional view expressed by Walther and the Norwegians was hardly a unique product of 16th-century repositionism. In 1941, Herman Sasse, who would hardly have been influenced by American Lutheranism, and who would not have uncritically appropriated an American parochialism, expressed the same view.

Sasse could just as well be describing American Lutheranism in the second half of the twentieth century—either the current rapprochement between the ELCA and the Reformed, or the general conservative tendency to feel cozy with the Reformed because of similar views on biblical inerrancy and moral issues. Sasse thinks that many problems could have been avoided in the 1930s in Germany had it been realized that the Lutherans and Reformed were divergent not only on miscellaneous issues (which Sasse certainly makes clear in his classic *Was Heisst Lutherisch*), “but also on the very nature of churchly confession.”²³ Sasse finds a colossal ignorance in certain theologians who “have with great show of learning

and even more of eloquence laid on Lutheran pastors and churches the Reformed idea of what makes a confession, as if it alone were the truly evangelical one.” And what is the difference? While Lutherans, according to Sasse, believe that the church is gathered around the confession, “Among the Reformed it is Holy Scripture around which the church is gathered.” Sasse acknowledges that the Reformed view “immediately strikes one as the more evangelical. One can see why the Lutheran Church has always been reproached for valuing confessions too highly and indeed for putting them above the Bible.” Sasse urges that we take the charge seriously, and make certain that it is not true. But finally, he says, “we can never concede that our church takes ‘Scripture alone’ less seriously than the Reformed and that it gives Scripture a lesser role for the church when it says that the church is gathered about the confession.” The argument can be reduced to this simple issue:

There is no denying that in this sinful world Scripture can also be misunderstood and misused. For a century before there was a New Testament the church had the same Bible as the synagogue. As soon as there was a New Testament it was commandeered by all the heretics. Today we share the same Bible with the worst of the sects. *The true church is gathered not around Scripture but around the rightly understood, the purely and correctly interpreted Bible.* (emph. sic) It is the task of the church’s confession to express the right understanding of Scripture which the church has reached.²⁴

This understanding of confessional subscription is essentially the same as Walther’s and indeed, it is the view of the *Book of Concord* itself. Anything less condemns one to a hopeless relativism, in which private views are normative, and there can only follow theological solipsism, as has been the case in the vast majority of Lutheran Churches today. Dogma is so privatized that confession is impossible. Those who want to call themselves “confessional” and yet cannot take an absolute, authoritative, infallible Scripture as the *norma normans*, the infallible, norming norm, are neither better nor worse than those who take a fundamentalistic and biblicistic view—who even with a clear confession of biblical inerrancy and infallibility, persist in doing end runs around the Confessions, and haughtily tell us in doctrinal discussions that they don’t want to hear about the Confessions, but about Scripture. Both Sasse and Walther would blanch, and would echo Luther’s words and tell such biblicists to go to their Zwinglians, just as much as they would tell the destructive critics and doctrinal relativists to return to their father of lies.

Sasse makes one other point worth noting. While the Reformed churches do have some confessional documents, they are not really symbols. They are all private collections of writings which have some sort of significance for a geographically and temporally limited group. Sasse quotes Barth’s definition of confession: “A Reformed confession of faith comes to formulation spontaneously and openly in a locally circumscribed Christian community, which in this way defines its character for the time being to those outside and gives direction for

the time being to its inner teaching and life. It is a statement of the insight given provisionally also to the universal Christian church concerning the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, which is witnessed alone in Holy Scripture.”²⁵ But for Lutherans, the Confessions of the church are not so geographically and temporally limited. They are in fact ecumenical. The Lutheran Confessions are not level II to the level I of the ecumenical symbols, but they are a statement of the same faith, not merely “seen differently,” but the same faith in essence as that expressed in the three ancient symbols. The Reformed confessions, *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, and the *Book of Concord* are not equally valid witnesses to the gospel. One is inherently the same as the ecumenical creeds and the others are not; one expresses the correct understanding of Holy Scripture and the others do not. The Lutheran Confessions see themselves as truly catholic, a catholicity which cannot be superseded by Trent or by the decrees of any synod, council or pope. And thus, Sasse notes, the Book of Concord alone sets the three ecumenical creeds at the beginning.

3. Are We in our Church Bound to this Understanding?

The third question we posed at the beginning was: Are we to day in our church bound to that understanding, i.e. that we are to interpret the Scriptures according to the Confessions, not the other way around? If we are going to claim that that we have a *quia* subscription to the confessional writings of the Lutheran Church, the answer must be in the affirmative. The same confessional understanding found in Walther and Sasse is found also in the Book of Concord. The confessors assert in Rule and Norm:

Once again we wholeheartedly confess our adherence to this same Christian Augsburg Confession, solidly based as it is on God’s Word, and we remain faithful to its simple, clear, unequivocal meaning, which its words intend. We regard this confession as a pure, Christian creed, which (after the Word of God) should guide true Christians in this time, just as in earlier times Christian creeds and confessions were formulated in God’s church when major controversies broke out. To these documents the faithful teachers and their hearers confessed their adherence at those times with heart and mouth. By the grace of the Almighty we, too, are resolved to abide faithfully until our end in this oft-cited Christian confession, as it was delivered to Emperor Charles in 1530. *We do not intend to deviate in the least from this Confession either in this document or in any other; nor do we intend to submit any other, new confession.* (SD Preface, 4,5, Kolb, 524 f., see Tappert, 502, emphasis added)

Fundamental, enduring unity in the church requires above all else a clear and binding summary and form in which a general summary of teaching is drawn together from God’s Word, to which the churches that hold the true religion confess their adherence. (R&N 1, Kolb, 526, see Tappert, 503, emphasis added)

Confessional Lutheranism is based on an affirmation or subscription to the Lutheran Confessions where Scripture is interpreted according to the confession of the church, where the Lutheran Confessions are not provincial addenda to the ecumenical creeds, but are in themselves fully catholic. In that way, Scripture itself is elevated above the vagaries of subjective, individual interpretations. Only the church gathered around that rightly understood Word of God is “the pillar and ground of truth” (1 Tm 3:15).

Sasse’s caution to make sure that we are not guilty of elevating the confessions above Scripture is well taken, of course. But in fact, it would be impossible to elevate the confessions above Scripture. If one accepts the authority of the confessions, one must also accept their assertion that Scripture is the highest authority and norm, and that the confessions only contain those doctrines which are drawn from Scripture. As Sasse shows is the case with the Reformed, the accusations of hyper-confessionalism or hyper-Lutheranism coming from within Lutheranism are nonsense, and may rather be a smoke screen for a pietistic *quatenus* subscription.

The confessions are, in that sense, our exegesis, i.e. our understanding of Scripture. That is not to say that we do not constantly test the confessions against the Word of God, using linguistic and hermeneutical skills in service of that infallible Word. If we truly accept the confessions as our own, we will value exegetical study for preaching, doctrine, and polemics all the more highly. But nevertheless, our confession as Lutherans demands that our pastors, teachers, theologians all, interpret the Scripture in accord with our Lutheran Confessions.

What does it mean, then, to interpret Scripture according to the confessions? It means simply that the Lutheran confessional writings are the definition of how the Lutheran Church interprets Scripture. Each individual, pastors and teachers of the church particularly, is obligated to compare the teachings of the Scripture and the confessional writings. And if they find that, according to their lights, the Lutheran *Bekennnisschriften* are NOT a correct understanding or exegesis of Scripture, they are free, nay, obligated, to declare that. But thereby, they also declare that they are something other than Lutheran.

Not to be denied, of course, is the fact that the confessors, Melancthon and Luther as much as anyone, often see points in a text that others do not; that errors in historical judgment are included in the confessional writings, and that some archeological and linguistic discoveries eluded the fathers which we today are privileged to have. No one claims a plenary or verbal inspiration to the confessors. And there may be some knotty issues like the *sempervirgine*²⁶ or the *clausa utero* of the Formula of Concord.²⁷ We shouldn’t be too quick and too cavalier in our dismissal of those assertions, but at the same time, those statements do not stand as systematic, dogmatic assertions of the confessors, which were the subject of debate and struggle. Issues like that, which may be incidental conclusions, ought not become excuses to duck the issue on key doctrinal issues.

The *quia* subscription to the Book of Concord means exactly what the confessors declared in the Preface to the Book of Concord:

that it has been our intent to tolerate no other teaching in our lands, churches, and schools than what was once professed at Augsburg in 1530....By means of God's grace we, too, intend to persist in this same confession until our blessed end and to appear before the judgment seat of our Lord Jesus Christ with a joyful, undaunted heart and conscience (Preface, Kolb-Wengert translation).

Appendix

In the Forward to the first edition of the Norwegian Book of Concord (1868), the translators address the question, “What does it mean to have the entire Book of Concord published in Norwegian?”

We have already expressed ourselves, in the subscription invitation, as to our intentions in publishing the present translation of the collected confessional writings of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, which was published in 1580 under the title “The Book of Concord.” We said there: “Even if only a part of these confessional writings (the three ecumenical symbols, the Augsburg Confession, and Luther’s Small Catechism) have gained legal standing in the Norwegian Lutheran Church, the remainder belong to a rich treasure of Evangelical Lutheran insights that deserve to be more familiar to Lutheran Christians here in this country than has been until now possible, since only a few of them (as far as we know, only the Apology and the Large Catechism) have been accessible for all those who could not go to the sources themselves.” From these words, it will be clear in which sense we have called the collection of these writings “the confessional writings of the Evangelical Lutheran Church.”

As little as we have wanted to add to those legally valid for our Norwegian Lutheran Church, just as little has it been our position to deny our church the right to be called an Evangelical Lutheran Church because it has not granted recognition to all of them. We have only wanted to declare that in the Book of Concord we have collected the confessional writings which within the Evangelical Lutheran Church have gained official recognition, without reference to whether this recognition is universal or only partial. The common usage which we have thus followed is, we believe, fully justified ecclesiastically. To reject the place of the Apology, the Smalcald Articles, Luther’s Large Catechism, and the Formula of Concord in the enumeration of “The Evangelical Lutheran Church’s Confessional Writings” because *this* church has not granted them legal recognition in their entirety, would be the same as to restrict the Evangelical Lutheran Church to the church organizations who hold to those accepted by our Norwegian Lutheran Church.

The Introduction deals in detail with the issue of confessional subscription:

When it is asked “What is the meaning of these writings [the Lutheran Confessions], and especially what is their relationship to the Holy Scriptures, the answer is the same as that given concerning the relationship of the ecumenical creeds to God’s Word. The Church’s confession is, like the individual Christian, an echo of God’s Word to us, a reflection of the eternal light of truth, which in the Word casts its beams into each Christian heart which does not close itself against that light. The church believes that in the Old and New Testaments’

prophetic and apostolic writings, it has the “pure clear fountain of Israel which is the only true standard by which all teachers and doctrines are to be judged and appraised” [SD Rule & Norm, 3; citations following are from the *Concordia Triglotta*]. About “other writings, however, of ancient or modern teachers,” it says that they “must not be regarded as equal to the Holy Scriptures, but all of them together are to be subjected to them and should not be received otherwise or further than as witnesses [which are to show] in what manner after the time of the apostles, and at what places, this [pure] doctrine of the prophets and apostles was preserved” (Ep, R&N, 2). This applies now also to the church’s confessional writings. They are “not judges, as are the Holy Scriptures, but only a testimony and declaration of the faith, as to how at any time the Holy Scriptures have been understood and explained in the articles of controversy in the church by those then living and how the opposite dogma was rejected and condemned” [Ep R & N, 8]. When the church acknowledges these writings as its symbols or confessional writings, it does so only because according to its conviction they are “taken from God’s Word and are founded firmly and well therein” [SD R&N, 5] because there it has found and now possesses what it necessarily expresses as the common Christian faith, “a brief compass” of the correct Christian faith, “a unanimously accepted, definite, common form of doctrine which all our evangelical churches together and in common confess, from and according to which, because it has been derived from God’s Word, all other writings should be judged and adjusted as to how far they are to be approved and accepted” [SD R&N, 10]. It is thus by no means the church’s idea to set up its confessional writings beside the Holy Scriptures as our addendum to them, as a continuation of what was given in the divine revelation as if it was not in itself sufficiently complete, as the saving fountain and foundation of truthfulness. It will not have them viewed as a divine word of revelation, but only as a churchly confession, as an expression for, a witness of, what it has in faith acquired from the revealed truth of Scripture, and now, standing firmly on the ground of Scripture, publicly confesses as its own unanimously accepted Christian faith. Therefore no one can demand that without further ceremony, one should assume as true what the church puts forth as true in its confessional writings. Just as it confesses as presented for faith and teaching only what has found it firmly grounded in God’s Word, so must it also expect and earnestly desire that everyone who would agree to it do this only when he has tested its confession on the Scripture, the unfailing proof stone, and found it in conformity with this rule and guide of faith.

For those who desire to become members of this church, it must be presupposed that its confession has already passed this test, and accordingly acknowledge its confession as grounded and conformed to God’s Word. Of such, it ought to be expected that none of them will “think ill of us that we derive from them an explanation and decision of the articles in controversy, and that, as we lay down God’s Word, the eternal truth, as the foundation, so we introduce and quote also these

writings as a witness of the truth and as the unanimously received correct understanding of our predecessors who have steadfastly held to the pure doctrine” [SD R&N,13].

(Konkordiebogen eller den evangelisk-lutherske Kirkes Bekjendelsesskrifter, Norwegian translation by C. Caspari and Gisle Johnson. Second edition. Christiania: Jacob Dybwad, 1882, Forward, unnumbered page. English translations by E. Teigen.)

Endnotes

¹ Sigurd Christian Ylvisaker, *Letters from Leipzig to his family in Minnesota 1907–1910*, trans. Erling T. Teigen (Mankato: Bethany Lutheran College, 2000), 70.

² Citations from the *Book of Concord* in this paper will be from *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert.

³ The Guebert translation was reprinted in the *Confessional Lutheran Research Society Newsletter*, Letter No. 2, Quinquagesima, 1986. It was reprinted also in *Concordia Journal*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (July 1989): 274f. A more thorough translation appears in *Lutheran Confessional Theology in America 1840-1880*, ed. Theodore G. Tappert (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972). Most recently, it appears in *Essay for the Church: C. F. W. Walther*, Vol I (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1992) as a reprint of the edition appearing in Tappert. References here will be to the Tappert edition.

⁴ Richard C. Wolf, *Documents of Lutheran Unity in America* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 194. The “mum mum” is a reference to Luther’s letter to the Christians in Frankfurt. Luther is alarmed at those pastors who say “Believe in the body, which Christ meant, and ask no further.” It simply will not do to piously repeat the words of Scripture. “Here there is no use in rolling mush around the mouth and saying, ‘Mmmm, mmmm.’ One must not teach him ‘Believe in the body, as Christ meant’.” Luther’s advice to those who have such Zwinglian preachers is: “If his pastor is one of the double-tongued sort who mouths it out that in the Sacrament the body and blood of Christ are present and true, and yet who prompts an uneasiness that he is selling something in a sack and means something other than what the words say, you should go to him, be free to inquire of him and have him say quite plainly what it is he gives out to you with his hands and what you receive with your mouth....One should put to him the straight question: ‘What is held here in hand and mouth!’” (WA III, 558-571, tr. Jon Vieker in *Concordia Journal*, Vol. 16, No. 4 [October 1990]: 333ff.).

The point is that Luther demands a confession of the truth which does not simply repeat the word of Scripture but states clearly what Scripture means.

⁵ Tappert, 58.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*, 66, emphasis added.

¹⁰ Walther addressed the issue also in his 1863 *Die rechte Gestalt einer vom Staate unabhängigen Evangelisch-Lutherischen Ortsgemeinde*: “Regarding the binding of the ministers to the Symbolical Books of the church, it is to be noted that this is a congregation’s chief bulwark against any attempt on the part of the ministers to become lords over their faith (2 Cor 1:24: “Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy, for by faith ye stand”).

All false teachers declare that they want to teach according to Holy Scripture. But if ministers refuse to be bound to the acknowledged Confessions of the orthodox church, the congregations have no guarantee that they will not teach papistic, Calvinistic, chiliastic, Methodistic, rationalistic, and other [erroneous] doctrines; nor could the congregation discipline and depose them as apostates. Or even if they could do this, they would always be exposed to new disputations and controversies, even regarding articles of the general Christian creed. By binding ministers to the Symbols of the church these disputes would be eliminated once for all. Hence since a Lutheran congregation dearly loves the pure doctrine of the divine Word, its faith, its Christian liberty, its rest and peace, it ought earnestly to refuse to accept a minister who declines to be bound to our precious *Concordia*. From its very beginning, therefore, our church, after the pattern of the ancient orthodox church, did not receive anyone as its minister who did not previously solemnly promise to teach according to its Confessions and never to depart from the doctrines taught in it or from the expressions used therein” (C.F.W. Walther, *The Form of a Christian Congregation*, tr. John Theodore Mueller [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1963], 71f).

¹¹ C.F.W. Walther, *Amerianisch-Lutherische Pastoraltheologie*, 5th ed. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1906), 53, n. 1, as cited in Arthur Carl Piepkorn, “Walther and the Lutheran Symbols,” *Concordia Theological Monthly* XXXIII, No 10 (October 1961): 614. According to Piepkorn, Walther is here using F.E. Rambach.

¹² *Konkoriebogen eller den evangelisk-lutherske Kirkes Bekjendelsesskrifter*, Norwegian translation by C. Caspari and Gisle Johnson, second edition (Christiania: Jacob Dybwad, 1882), forward, unnumbered page (English translations by E. Teigen).

¹³ Ibid. See Appendix.

¹⁴ E. Clifford Nelson and Eugene L. Fevold, *The Lutheran Church Among Norwegian-Americans; A History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1960), I, 337.

¹⁵ Ibid., 344.

¹⁶ In 1868, the constitution was revised, chiefly because it was found that some of the provisions were not so workable in a free church situation. At that time, the confessional paragraph was changed to read: “Synod adopts as its confession of faith the symbolical books or confessional writings of the Norwegian Lutheran Church, because these present a pure and incorrupt exhibition of the doctrine contained in the Divine Word. These confessional writings are:...” and the same are mentioned. However, a note is appended to the article stating: “a. The only reason why the other symbols of the Lutheran Church are not yet mentioned among the symbolical books of our Synod, is the fact that they have hitherto been little known to our congregations.” (Todd Nichol, *Vivacious Daughter* [Northfield, Minnesota: The Norwegian-American Historical Association, 1990], 182, Appendix I.) I have found no record of a debate as to why the wording was changed, though it certainly is not a departure from the substance of the previous

statement.

The 1918 constitution of *Den Norske Synode af den Amerikanske Evangelisk-Lutherske Kirke* had a rather austere confessional standard: “*Den Norske synode bekjender sig til samtlige den lutherske kirkes symbolske bøger eller bekjendelseskrifter, indeholdt i Konkordiebogen, some følger,*” and then lists the ecumenical creeds and 7 documents of the Book of Concord (*Beretning om Synodemødet holdt i Vor Frelasers menighed Albert Lea, Minn....1919.*) The present constitution has added to that: (I don’t know when) “because they are a correct statement of the teachings of the Scriptures, namely....”

¹⁷ Carl Meyer, *Pioneers Find Friends* (Minneapolis: Lutheran Brotherhood Insurance Society, 1963), Appendix A, 69.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 83.

²⁰ Ulrik Vilhelm Koren, *Truth Unchanged, Unchanging: Selected Sermons, Addresses and Doctrinal Articles* (Lake Mills, Iowa: Graphic Publishing Company, 1978), 168, 169.

²¹ In 1956, that essay was printed in the *ELS Clergy Bulletin*, Vol. XVI, Nos. 1 & 2 (September & October), and in September 2001 reprinted in the *Lutheran Synod Quarterly*, Vol. 41, No. 3 (September 2001).

²² *Lutheran Synod Quarterly*, 41:3, 200.

²³ “Church and Confession—1941” *We Confess Jesus Christ*,” tr. Norman Nagel (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1984), 83.

²⁴ Sasse, 84.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 80, quoting Barth’s 1925 memorandum to the Reformed World Alliance on the “Desirability and Possibility of a General Reformed Confession of Faith.”

²⁶ SA I, 4 *Sempervirgine*, which is not an exegetical or dogmatic conclusion, but a term commonly used to denote Mary. The evidence that Mary did have other children is no stronger than the evidence that she did not.

²⁷ SD VIII, 24 (Kolb, 620), notes that it appears first in the Torgau book: “*Is Filius Dei etiam in utero matris divinam suam maiestatem demonstravit, quod de virgine, inviolate ipsius virginitate, natus est. Unde et vere Θεοτόκος, Dei genitrix, est et tamen virgo mansit.*” Walther would argue at this point that we are obligated to the dogmatic conclusion of the Formula, Mary as *theotokos*, but that the exegetical basis for the *virgine, inviolate* is unclear. At the same time, a quick dismissal of the Formula’s assertion seems at best cavalier.

Some Reflections on the Military Chaplaincy: With Special Reference to Lutheran Chaplains in the Union Army During the Civil War

by David Jay Webber

Confessional Lutheran churches have always been cognizant of their duty to minister to the spiritual needs of their members who serve in the military, but they have also often struggled with the theological and ecclesiastical ambiguities that are associated with the military chaplaincy. Before the Second World War all of the major Lutheran synods in America participated in the military chaplaincy, even though the more conservative ones were uncomfortable with certain aspects of this participation. The concerns focused on two issues. Since the government was in many respects regulating and supervising the ministry of the chaplains, and was paying their salaries, some Lutherans were concerned that this represented a confusion of the civil and spiritual powers. As they saw it, the government seemed to be involving itself in activities and responsibilities that God had actually assigned to the church. And, in light of the traditional Lutheran teaching regarding church fellowship, which would not approve of “unionistic” worship services that are conducted jointly by Lutheran clergymen and clergymen of other confessions, or that are deliberately emptied of their distinctive Lutheran content, many Lutherans were concerned about the strongly ecumenical thrust of the military chaplaincy. While recognizing that a Lutheran pastor would certainly be willing to share God’s Word with people of other denominational backgrounds according to their need, they were also aware of the fact that the military often considered it to be in its interest to blur or minimize the doctrinal differences between the various churches, and to encourage a more generic and (presumably) less controversial type of religiosity among soldiers and sailors. Confessional Lutherans did not want their chaplains to be put into situations where they would be pressured to compromise their convictions. Nevertheless, because of the Lutheran churches’ concern for the spiritual welfare of their members in the military, and with an appreciation for the unique ways in which the military chaplaincy could facilitate pastoral care to Lutherans and others in times and places when it would be most needed, these churches concluded, at that time in history, that the benefits of participation outweighed the drawbacks.

Several Lutheran chaplains served with the Union army during the Civil War (1861-1865),¹ and two of them were from synodical bodies that were quite conservative in their theological outlook: Claus Lauritz Clausen of the Norwegian

Synod and Friedrich Wilhelm Richmann of the Missouri Synod. These pastors would have shared the concerns regarding church-state confusion and confessional integrity that are summarized above, and during the Civil War such concerns would not have been without some justification. For example, when the chaplain of a Wisconsin regiment preached about the possibility of damnation for those who do not repent of their sins and believe in Christ, his Colonel responded:

I don't want any more of that doctrine preached in this regiment. Every one of my boys who fall fighting this great battle of liberty is going to Heaven, and I won't allow any other principle to be promulgated to them while I command this regiment.²

But these Lutheran pastors also knew that the chaplaincy can give a minister of the Gospel unequalled opportunities for the faithful administration of the means of grace. The ministry of an exemplary Methodist chaplain, from an Indiana regiment, was described by a soldier as follows: "Without a thought for his personal safety he was on the firing line assisting the wounded, praying with the dying, doing all that his great loving heart led him to do. No wonder our boys love our gallant chaplain."³ And so, all points being considered, Clausen and Richmann were willing to serve as chaplains, and their respective synods were willing to endorse this service.

This service was indeed appreciated by the men with whom they were associated. Out of respect for their chaplain, and with gratitude for his ministry to them, the members of one of the companies of Clausen's regiment (the 15th Wisconsin Infantry) honored him by giving themselves the nickname "Clausen's Guards." And Clausen was positively impressed by the spiritual earnestness of most of the soldiers and officers to whom he ministered. He wrote:

Attendance at services was completely voluntary for both the officers and soldiers, except on certain occasions such as when the whole army unit was ordered out, and a few times when the Regiment was drawn up in formation. If attendance had been forced, we naturally could not have drawn any conclusions about the moral and religious state of the Regiment from the numbers attending, but as it was, since each could follow his own desire in this regard and it was evident that most of the Regiment attended services and followed them with deep interest, one can be led to draw the most favorable conclusion.⁴

In Richmann's regiment (the 58th Ohio Infantry) attendance at the chaplain's services was not voluntary, but the soldiers were nevertheless attentive to the sermons that were preached. Richmann commented on this:

The soldiers have orders to attend services, but they seem to be willing to listen with reverence to the sermon. This much is certain, many of these soldiers who at home no doubt spent the hour set aside for worship in a beerhall, are now in a much more receptive mood for

God's Word than they were when they were not exposed to physical danger.⁵

Richmann noted further that

It causes much trouble to assemble the individual companies of wounded soldiers for the services, yet there is always a small band which hears the Word of God with joy. Usually I preach mornings at six and evenings at six, once in German and the other time in English.⁶

He also reported, "The moral condition of my regiment seems to be better as compared with others; at least, one does not hear as much cursing here as elsewhere and sees no drinking and card playing."⁷

During the Civil War the military chaplaincy was much less centralized than it is in the armed forces of our time. Chaplains in the Union army were salaried at the same rate as a captain of Cavalry, but the only "rank" that they were authorized to hold was that of "Chaplain." In other words, they were not a part of the regular military command structure. In keeping with this principle, the distinctive uniform that they were authorized to wear was black in color, rather than blue, and without traditional military insignia. Also, according to the "volunteer regiment" system that was in use during the Civil War, the chaplain of a state regiment would usually be chosen by the vote of the staff officers and company captains of that regiment. Such a chaplain would not be liable to be transferred against his will by federal military authorities from one unit to another.

Another aspect of the "volunteer regiment" system was that companies and regiments were generally raised in one particular region of a state. This means that the men who served together in one regiment had usually been recruited together in the communities where they had been living together before the war. When we realize that American society in the 1860s was largely a patchwork of socially and ethnically homogeneous towns and urban neighborhoods, made up of people who often shared the same religious beliefs, then we can understand why a typical Civil War regiment, often drawn from a cluster of communities in close geographical proximity to each other, was usually not characterized internally by a large degree of cultural and religious diversity. Clausen's regiment, for example, was made up almost completely of Scandinavians, most of whom were Lutherans, and Richmann's regiment was made up largely of Germans. But cultural homogeneity did not always translate into religious homogeneity. While Richmann's regiment did include "some members of our synodical congregations, as well as some other Lutherans," he observed that "almost all German officers, the staff, and the largest part of the German companies...consist of members of the Catholic Church."⁸

It is also worthwhile to take note of the unique ministry of William Alfred Passavant during the Civil War. Passavant is well known in Lutheran history as a gifted pastor and preacher, as the editor and publisher of religious periodicals, and as the founder or patron of various educational institutions and institutions

of mercy. During the Civil War, Passavant served, informally and occasionally, as a civilian chaplain. In its 1861 convention the Pennsylvania Ministerium had actually wanted to call Passavant to this kind of ministry in a more formal and permanent way. The Ministerium noted, "Inasmuch as so great a proportion of the volunteers from Pennsylvania and other States are members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, we realize our responsibility as a Church to provide for the spiritual welfare of our members, called from their homes to defend our common country." Accordingly it resolved to call and appoint Passavant "to be the missionary chaplain of this Synod in the volunteer armies of the United States," and pledged "the support necessary to sustain him in this field of useful labor."⁹ After much deliberation Passavant declined this call, but from time to time he did leave his home in Pittsburgh in order to minister to those who were serving in the military. His efforts were usually carried out among soldiers who were recovering (and sometimes dying) from wounds and disease in federal military hospitals. Passavant – and the Lutheran deaconesses with whom he worked – cooperated closely with Dorothea L. Dix, who served the Union during the Civil War as the superintendent of army nurses. But Passavant also had opportunities to preach to soldiers in the field. He described such an occasion in the following words:

The pulpit was a camp chest with the heavens for a sounding board, while the many soldiers, not yet recovered from the prostration of the hurried march on Monday last, were stretched out on the ground before me. At the close of the service a large number came forward and gladly accepted some tracts but the stock on hand was exhausted before half of the soldiers were supplied.¹⁰

During the military build-up that preceded the entry of the United States into the Second World War, the government reorganized the military chaplaincy in a way that accentuated those features of the program that conservative Lutherans had previously found most troubling. Chaplains were now incorporated more directly into the command structure of the armed services, and each chaplain was placed into one of three basic religious categories: Catholic, Protestant, or Jewish. Lutheran chaplains were, of course, categorized as "Protestants." While they would still be permitted to conduct worship services of a distinctly Lutheran character, they would also be expected to conduct generic "Protestant" services that would be acceptable to any "Protestant" soldier or sailor who might attend. For these and other reasons, the Wisconsin Synod, one of the more conservative Lutheran bodies, concluded that the time had come to bring to an end its participation in the military chaplaincy program. Previously, especially during the First World War, the Wisconsin Synod had made use of both civilian and military chaplains, but now it decided to provide pastoral care to its members in the military exclusively through the use of civilian chaplains who would be called and supervised by the church. This approach was later adopted also by the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (successor to the Norwegian Synod), a sister church of the Wisconsin Synod. The Missouri Synod, while sharing many of the same theological concerns, responded

in a different way. It decided that it would be able to accommodate itself to the changes that had been introduced by the government, while also encouraging its chaplains to maintain their Lutheran distinctiveness as much as possible. Missouri Synod chaplains still serve as part of the armed forces of the United States.



C. L. Clausen (left), W. A. Passavant (center), F. W. Richmann (right)

Endnotes

¹ See John W. Brinsfield, et al., editors, *Faith in the Fight: Civil War Chaplains* (Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania: Stackpole Books, 2003); Warren B. Armstrong, *For Courageous Fighting and Confident Dying: Union Chaplains in the Civil War* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1998).

² Quoted in James I. Robertson, *Tenting Tonight: The Soldier's Life* (Alexandria, Va.: Time-Life Books, 1984), 149.

³ Quoted in Bell Irvin Wiley, *The Life of Billy Yank: The Common Soldier of the Union* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1978).

⁴ Quoted in Ole A. Buslett, *Det Femtende Regiment, Wisconsin Frivillage* (Decorah, Iowa: 1895), on the web site for the 15th Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry: www.15thwisconsin.net. For more on Clausen, see David J. Webber, "C. L. Clausen: Civil War Chaplain in the Civil War," *Lutheran Sentinel* 74:6 (July 1991): 6-7.

⁵ From excerpts of Richmann's diary published serially in the *Daily Corinthian* (Corinth, Miss.), May 1954.

⁶ A report published in *Der Lutheraner*; quoted in Karl Kretzmann, "A Lutheran Army Chaplain in the Civil War," *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* XVII:4 (January 1945): 100.

⁷ A report published in *Der Lutheraner*; quoted in Kretzmann, 99.

⁸ Reports published in *Der Lutheraner*; quoted in Kretzmann, 101, 99.

⁹ Quoted in George H. Gerberding, *Life and Letters of W. A. Passavant* (Greenville, Pa.: Young Lutheran Co., 1906), 311-12.

¹⁰ Quoted in Gerberding, 314.

Hermann Sasse and the Lutheran World Federation: Unity, Confessional Subscription, and the Lord's Supper

by Thomas L. Rank

In 1967, twenty years after the birth of the Lutheran World Federation, Dr. Hermann Sasse addressed the appropriateness of the following judgment regarding this organization: "...its main purpose is to help the Lutheran Churches of the world to die a painless and edifying death in the hope for a glorious resurrection in the great Ecumenical Church of the future."¹ At that time Sasse considered this judgment too harsh and, perhaps, premature. He did so, not because he put his trust in the church politicians and bureaucrats of the Lutheran church, but because of his confidence in the Lord of the church and the Holy Spirit.² He also acknowledged the good intentions of those individuals and church bodies participating in the organization. For example, Dr. Michelfelder, the first secretary of the LWF, one year after the organization of the federation stated:

We do believe that there is a "communion of saints," "the Holy Christian or Catholic Church." We do not teach nor believe that salvation comes only through the Lutheran Church. On the other hand, we are not ready to join those who want to reduce all denominations to a least common denominator of doctrinal agreement and form a new church universal. There are those who think this is necessary to ecumenicity. Such added thinking would not produce a church, but only another denomination whose credo would be but one digit above zero. The World Council of Churches would soon go the way of all "air castles" if it is to be suspended to such sky hooks. No, let the ecumenical movements of the world stand on the pillars of the church whose members know not only what they believe but in Whom they believe.

One of the most important issues at stake at the Assembly in Amsterdam is the question of confessional representation. There will be "ecumaniacs" who will want to make a "puree" out of Methodists, Greek Orthodox, Presbyterians and so they will lose their identity. Let those who have no convictions than that it is expedient to unite do so.

That there are too many denominations and unnecessary divisions every one will admit. But this is no time for superficial thinking. Now is the time for all men, clergy and laity, to restudy the Word of God and their own confessions. If this produces loyalty to confessions it is

of God and no temporary advantage for expediency's sake dare change such convictions.³

The fact that Sasse believed a harsh judgment of the Lutheran World Federation to be worthy of any consideration is noteworthy. Sasse was not a man embittered by his exclusion from the ecumenical endeavors of the Lutheran church. His considerations of the LWF were not the words of a lonely man who simply succumbed to the discouragement of a life near its end. Rather, these are the words of a man cognizant of the ecumenical history of the twentieth century, a man who for forty-four years had been either directly or indirectly involved in both inter-Christian and inter-Lutheran ecumenical endeavors, and a man aware of the compromises necessary to produce the organization called the Lutheran World Federation.⁴ Dr. Sasse pondered this judgment only after prayerful study and a firm grasp of the confessional writings of the Lutheran church, the *norma normata*.

While Dr. Sasse refused to render the harsh judgment noted above, he was a consistently strong critic of the LWF. His criticisms arose from his ongoing study and application of the main issues involved in church union (whether between various Christian denominations or between Lutherans only). The studies of those main issues run through many of his writings prior to and continuing beyond the formation of the LWF in 1947. They include (but certainly were not limited to): altar fellowship (church fellowship), adherence to the Lutheran confessions (the clear and necessary distinction between a *quia* and a *quatenus* subscription), the Lord's Supper (true Lutheran (scriptural) vs. a Reformed understanding), and the unity of the Christian Church (the distinction between the hiddenness of the Church and its visibility).

The True Unity of the Christian Church

Our churches also teach that one holy church is to continue forever. The church is the assembly of saints in which the Gospel is taught purely and the sacraments are administered rightly. For the true unity of the church it is enough to agree concerning the teaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments. It is not necessary that human traditions or rites and ceremonies, instituted by men, should be alike everywhere. It is as Paul says, "One faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all," etc. (Eph. 4:5,6).⁵

Dr. Sasse's understanding of this basic confession of the Lutheran church formed his approach to the unity of the Christian church. His was not the way of gospel reductionism in regard to the *satis est* of AC VII. Rather, he understood the deep truth of the gospel in all its fullness. He also in this article recognized the tension between that which is seen and that which is hidden.⁶ "One great truth, then, that is confessed in Article VII of the Augsburg Confession is that the church of Christ is always an object of faith. The other great truth is that it is always a reality in

this world.”⁷⁷ The distinction between reality (sight) and faith was a large part of his critique of the ecumenical movement in general.

Is it not time to be done with ecumenical fanaticism and return to believe in the *Una Sancta*, which exists as a reality in, with and under the confessional churches, whose unity we cannot see, just as we cannot see the people of God, the body of Christ, with our earthly eyes?⁷⁸

In particular application to the Lutheran World Federation, he hoped that the meeting in Hanover, Germany, 1952, would result in a clearer articulation of the Lutheran church’s confession of the church than that which had come from the first meeting in Lund, Sweden, 1947: “The first thing, which Hanover owes to the Christian, and to the Lutheran world, is a clear, unmistakable statement regarding what a Church of the Lutheran Confession is.”⁷⁹ Unfortunately, his hope would remain unfulfilled by the LWF.

Over the course of the years succeeding the Hanover meeting, Dr. Sasse continued his call for the Lutheran church to address adequately and substantially the meaning of AC VII. Not only individual churches should do so, but also, and perhaps especially, that organization which purported to speak for most the Lutheran church in the world, the LWF.

Today the question we cannot escape is whether the way things went with Lutheranism in Germany will be the way things go with Lutheranism elsewhere in the world. Will Lutheranism everywhere become merely a viewpoint within church bodies that are not in fact Lutheran? The confessionally committed Lutherans in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden are even more lonely today than their brethren in the faith in Germany. The churches to which they belong are now only nominally Lutheran. Things are moving in the same direction also in America, and with the same speed with which everything seems to happen in the New World. The fact that Lutheranism now faces the greatest crisis in its history cannot be hidden by the putting together of big new church bodies in America, nor by the gigantic organization of the Lutheran World Federation with its reported 60 million “Lutherans,” including the atheists and Communists in whole countries that once embraced the Reformation. The crisis is evidenced theologically in the general uncertainty regarding the great article of the Augsburg Confession about the church. Whatever else it may mean, this article is the Magna Carta of the Lutheran Church.”¹⁰

Subscription to the Lutheran Confessions

Why did Dr. Sasse give such weight to Article VII of the Augsburg Confession? He did so because of his understanding of the necessity of a *quia* subscription to the Lutheran confessions in their entirety (in contrast to the *quatenus* subscription¹¹) and what this meant for the Lutheran church in its

attempts or desire to unite with other church bodies (Lutheran or otherwise).

The old confessions are being replaced everywhere by new “confessions” or doctrinal statements. It is significant that all these new documents follow the pattern which, as a spokesman for modern Reformed theology, Karl Barth, has established in his opinion for the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (Cardiff 1925) on the possibility and desirability of a new Reformed confession of faith (*Ges. Vorträge* Bd. 2, 1928, pp. 76-105). The Confession can only have a locally limited validity; it must be regarded as something preliminary which may be replaced at any time by a better insight into the truth of Holy Scripture; it must never claim catholicity in space and time, as the Lutheran confession does which claims to express the truth of God’s Word which is the same everywhere and at all times. This view of modern Reformed theology has found its practical expression in the union movements in Europe (Germany, Holland, France), in the Ecumenical Movement (see the definition of the nature of unity by the WCC), and especially in the “younger churches” throughout the world. Everywhere we find the new confessional formulas, different according to the local needs, in Canada, U.S.A., India, Australia, New Zealand, Germany, (“Barmen” and the EkiD) and in many other churches throughout Christendom.¹²

The Lutheran churches of the 20th century had begun to follow the weaker understanding of confession as iterated by Karl Barth in the above paragraph. Especially note the words, “The Confession can only have a locally limited validity...it must never claim catholicity in space and time” Here Sasse saw the great danger such a view of the confessions brought into the church. He noted:

If it is no longer possible to say whether a confessional statement is in accordance with Scripture or not, or if I can say no more than, “Today it appears so to me; therefore I will allow it to stand provisionally,” then my doubt is basically not toward the confession but toward Scripture. I have lost confidence in it to interpret itself. I hear then only the confusing throng of exegetical opinions as they contradict one another, but no longer the clear and unmistakable voice of God’s Word.¹³

Sasse was convinced that this understanding of a confession disarmed the Lutheran church, leaving it helpless in the face of the union movements throughout the 20th century. Whether it be the German Lutheran churches and the Barmen Declaration of 1934, the Federation of Lutheran Churches of India and the Church of South India in the 1950s, or the inter-Lutheran union which resulted in the Lutheran World Federation, Sasse saw one common theme in these “defeats” of the Lutheran church: the lack of a strong confessional commitment which resulted in the Lutherans compromising again and again. Yet this was nothing new according to Sasse. He had noted earlier that same propensity in

struggle for the Lutheran church in Prussia during the 19th century:

The tremendously depressing thing about this struggle for Lutheranism in the Old Prussian *Landeskirche* is that again and again the Lutherans presented ultimate demands that must absolutely be met if they were to remain in the *Landeskirche*, and that they invariably submitted when their demands were denied – a process which *mutatis mutandis* had been repeated in our day in the relation of the Lutheran *Landeskirchen* to the Church of the Reich.¹⁴

“They invariably submitted.” The Lutherans did not hold their ground in the face of the union movements. Sasse’s judgment on the German Lutheran church during the birth of the German Evangelical Church (DEK) applies equally to Lutherans before and after, who, when challenged to unite in order to form a common front against a common enemy or when challenged to merge in order to demonstrate the visibility of the Christian church, caved in to the pressure.

Remarkable and disquieting in the highest degree, however, was the remarkable defection of so many of our best theologians in the pastoral office, teaching office, and church government. Like the needle of a compass which for inexplicable reasons suddenly loses its bearing, these men lost the gift of discerning the spirits. Their theological judgment was lost. They made decisions which they never would have made earlier and would never make today. They said yes where, according to their entire being, their deepest convictions, they had to say no. Where they wanted to speak, where they had to speak, because it was the last irretrievable hour, they were silent.¹⁵

The role of the Lutheran confession had been minimized to such an extent that its meaning was no longer understood, or at best simply not applied to a specific situation in church history. This led to the loss of the Lutheran substance, understood according to AC VII: the purely taught Gospel and the rightly administered sacraments.¹⁶

The Lord’s Supper

Augsburg Confession Article VII provided the overall way by which to approach church union, according to Sasse. In addition, for union specifically with Reformed churches, he looked to AC X. “Our churches teach that the body and blood of Christ are truly present and are distributed to those who eat in the Supper of the Lord. They disapprove of those who teach otherwise.”¹⁷

The correct understanding (or lack thereof) of the Lord’s Supper is an issue that historically divides Lutheran and Reformed churches. It therefore is a major item for any attempted union. This is true also for intra-Lutheran unions between synods which may or may not agree as to the substantial meaning of AC X.

We cannot send the members of our congregations to an altar (if an altar can be spoken of in the Anglican Church; for a real altar is indeed forbidden there) where every communicant must read in his "Book of Common Prayer" the words that the natural body and blood of Christ are in heaven and not here, and [where it is asserted] that the body of Christ would not be a true human body, if he were to be in more than one place at the same time. So long as this "black rubric" stands in the Anglican communion liturgy, there can be no communion fellowship between us and the Anglicans, not to mention all the other hindrances which make it impossible for us, despite all the great things which it has, to re-discover in the Church of England the church of the gospel.¹⁸

This aspect of Sasse's theology applies to his critique of the LWF because of that organization's inability to refuse admission to church bodies only marginally or nominally Lutheran due especially to their weak doctrine of the Lord's Supper.

But churches which do not hold the Lutheran Confessions as the only public doctrine could not be admitted. However, this has been done in the cases of the Church of Brazil, of Italy and some others. The Church of Pomerania could have returned to the Church of their Lutheran Fathers. But then it could not remain a member church of the "Evangelical Church of the Union." The acceptance of the Church of the Batak before it had accepted the Unaltered Augsburg Confession and the whole Small Catechism was a clear breach of the Constitution. One could sympathize with that church which is a daughter of the (United) Barmen mission. One could try to find means and ways to support it morally and financially. But to regard its un-Lutheran confession as a substitute for the Augustana should have been impossible. For this confession does not teach the sacraments according to the Catechism, it is silent on the Office of the Keys. It was for mere church-political reasons that it was admitted and that it got at once a share in the government of the L.W.F. This grave violation of its constitution will have far-reaching consequences for the L.W.F. For now churches in other parts of the world which are in the same position will demand admission. The *Lutheran World* has repeatedly reported on union negotiations and suggested that Lutheran Churches which join the new unions in Africa and other parts of the world should have the right to remain members of the L.W.F.¹⁹

Here we see Sasse's concern both for the confession of the truth and for providing a charitable approach to those churches which do not subscribe unconditionally to the Lutheran confessions. But this charitable approach was not to lead to a compromise of the confession of the truth.

There is one thing we cannot accept. We can under no circumstances view false doctrine, contrary to scripture, as of equal legitimacy with pure doctrine or tolerate it in the church only as a hypothetical

possibility. For this reason we have, as has the orthodox church of every age, no *communicatio in sacris cum haereticis*. If this is called intolerance then we confess that we are intolerant people in the same sense the apostles were (I Tim. 6:20 f.; Tit. 4:10; I Jn. 4:1ff.) and as was Luther. But we assert that this “intolerance” which is an abomination to Deists of every age, because they know nothing nor can know anything of ultimate truth, because they do not know Jesus Christ as the truth in person, is of the essence of genuine Christian faith. Without this “intolerance” over against heresy there is no real Lutheranism. Without the condemnation formulas at the end of the individual articles the Augustana loses its meaning. Without the “they reject those who teach” [*improbant secus docentes*] there is no Lutheran doctrine of the Supper. Without serious discipline with regard to the Supper so that only those are allowed to come to the Lord’s table who know what is received there and desire to receive it, there is no Sacrament of the Altar. This is not Luther’s discovery. This was ever so in the church since the days of the apostles. The question to world Lutheranism today is whether these principles still obtain [*gelten*]. They do if the confession obtains. They are an element of the confession. It is certainly not left to our pleasure whether we would continue to allow them to obtain, for then we would have already fallen away from the confession.²⁰

To emphasize the importance of the doctrine of the Lord’s Supper, Sasse compares it, even equating its importance in certain contexts, to the chief article, Augsburg Confession Article IV on justification.

If the article about justification is the *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae* in the discussion with Rome and with the Pelagianizing fanatics [*Schwärmer*], then the article about the Lord’s Supper has no less importance for the church battle against the spiritualism of the fanatics, and against the spiritualism of the humanists, which destroy the church.²¹

Why was the Lord’s Supper so central to Sasse’s view of ecumenical activity? Fundamentally because “the sacrament is the Gospel.” To understand this truth is to understand the all-encompassing nature of this article of faith for Sasse, just as it had been for Martin Luther.

Just as the church stands or falls with the Gospel, so she stands or falls with the Sacrament of the Altar. For the Sacrament is the Gospel. This is the conviction, not only of Luther, but of the New Testament: “For as often as ye **eat** this bread and **drink** this cup, ye do **shew the Lord’s death till he come.**”²²

And

Indeed, [Luther demanded from the Bohemians the acceptance of the

doctrine of the real presence as a condition for church-fellowship] for exactly this reason, the words of institution are the gospel, which one must simply accept and may not change: “On these words rests the matter completely. Every single Christian should and must know them and not allow them to be taken from him by any other teaching, even if it were an angel from heaven. They are a word of life and salvation, so that to him who believes through such faith all sins are forgiven, and he is a child of life, has overcome hell and death. The greatness and power of this word cannot be expressed; for they are the sum of the entire gospel. Luther was convinced that no one can understand the entire consolation of “given and shed for you” who does not believe “This is my body,” “This is my blood.” The question upon which everything depends is whether this is Biblical or not.²³

It is only by understanding this inviolable identification of the Lord’s Supper and the Gospel that one can appreciate Dr. Sasse’s unwillingness to give up this teaching for any church union. Sasse would ask, “How can one give up the Gospel for the sake of the church?” It was for him a nonsensical act since the Gospel itself creates the church and without it there is no church.

This true ecumenicity of the Lutheran church must always be kept in mind, if we want to understand the inexorable seriousness with which it has always upheld the principle that church- and altar-fellowship can be practised only where a consensus on the truth of the Gospel and on the Sacraments of Christ has been reached. To the world this seems to be a contradiction, because it thinks in terms of “broad-mindedness” and “narrow-mindedness.” In the church of Christ, however, such contradiction does not exist, because the quest for truth and the quest for unity are one; in our Lord’s high priestly prayer for his Church the petition “That they all may be **one**” is inseparably connected with the preceding “Sanctify them through thy **truth**.”²⁴

Further:

Accordingly, if a deep correspondence obtains between the Sacrament of the Altar and the church, then the destruction of this sacrament must of necessity lead to the destruction of the church. Here lies the basis for which Zwingli and the other “Sacramentarians” were for Luther destroyers of the church, with whom there can be no ecclesiastical fellowship.²⁵

Sasse’s contention for the real presence of the Lord’s Supper was based on the clear words of Scripture and the clear exposition of Scripture in the Lutheran Confessions. He relied upon this Word of God to create unity. He was not at all prepared to give up on this point because he realized what was at stake.

It is useless to emphasize the principle that there can be no church fellowship between Calvinists and Lutherans as long as there is full

communicatio in sacris between the Church of Sweden and the Church of Scotland and the Church of England. As long as Anglican bishops participate in the consecration of Lutheran bishops in Sweden, Finland, India and Africa and the mythical “apostolic succession” is extended also to Lutheran bishops in Germany, as the Anglicans (Stephen Neil in Hamburg) claim, there is not and cannot be any agreement on the meaning of AC articles 7 and 10.²⁶

Here we see how a church’s subscription to the Lutheran Confessions and its subsequent confession of the Lord’s Supper impact its approach to church unity. Where the confessional writings are only conditionally understood or subscribed to, there church unity will proceed outside the boundaries of the confessional writings. Where the real presence of Christ’s body and blood in the Lord’s Supper are considered negotiating points or considered something that can safely be compromised without harm to the church, there the real presence will be sacrificed for the “greater good” of church unity.²⁷

It must be remembered, though, that Dr. Sasse was never an opponent of church unity as such. He took seriously the scandal of a disunited Christendom, especially as demonstrated on the mission field. In fact, as noted earlier, he was involved with a wide range of church union attempts. Yet he always kept in mind the fact that the achievement of outward unity was of itself nothing. Outward unity must always express the true unity of doctrine. He was content to believe the unity of the church, the body of Christ, without necessarily seeing that unity or experiencing it in the here and now.

The serious Roman Catholic, the serious Lutheran, the serious Calvinist, the serious Anglican, the serious Baptist, all stand nearer to the eternal truth than the one who hazards making no confession, because he maintains that the truth is finally undiscernible. And because of this they also stand closer to each other. The unity of the Christian West was not really broken at the time of the Reformation. It was broken first at the end of the seventeenth century, when the struggle between the confessions ceased and the time of indifference and tolerance began. So long as the confessions still wrestled with each other and dialogued with each other, they knew they belonged together. Though we do not desire to cover over their sins, the polemic of the age of orthodox theologians was therefore more Christian than the peace and tolerance of the eighteenth century.²⁸

The Deficiencies of the Lutheran World Federation

Understanding Dr. Sasse’s approach to church union (confession of truth, not toleration of error), his *quia* subscription to the Lutheran confessions, and his contention for the Lord’s Supper as understood according to the Lutheran confessions, we can then better perceive his criticisms of the Lutheran World Federation.

Sasse saw a number of deficiencies in the LWF. While its constitution was acceptable, it compromised its own constitution by allowing churches to join which did not accept the unaltered Augsburg Confession.²⁹

Most of the Lutheran churches in America are members together with the European Lutheran churches in the Lutheran World Federation. They see, or they ought to see, what is going on there. They cannot but see how the Confessions have become little more than a formality for many. They cannot be ignorant of what is taught in the member churches. Have things gone so far that our American brothers in the faith recognize the ordination of women? Or is this to be regarded as an internal matter for each church by itself? What has been heard from the Lutheran churches of America as they have watched one church after another welcomed into membership in the Federation, some of whom do not call themselves Lutheran, some who quickly put on the name? Subscription to the constitution of the Federation may be lightly done; many churches have no intention of considering the doctrine of the Augsburg Confession as that doctrine, and no other, which is to be preached and taught, have no commitment to guard this doctrine or repudiate what contradicts it.”³⁰

Also, while its character as a federation was initially highlighted in contrast to it being a “church,” this distinction soon fell. Sasse considered the concept of a federation an acceptable way for church bodies (Lutheran or otherwise) to work together.

These basic principles apply in the case of a federation of Lutheran Churches such as the Lutheran World Federation. It can only be acknowledged as a federation of Lutheran Churches if these churches are truly Lutheran in the sense that the doctrine of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession and the catechisms stand *extra controversiam*. If this is not the case then the Lutheran World Federation is in no way different from any other alliance of churches. One cannot say: “If we Lutherans can join a federation with Reformed or United Churches with the understanding developed above, how much easier can we enter into an alliance with other Churches which call themselves Lutheran and also wish to be Lutheran!” In reality it is not easier, but more difficult. With the Reformed and Catholics I can operate together in external matters on the common basis of the ancient ecclesiastical confessions. I can also enter into a doctrinal discussion with them on the basis of the ancient confessions and the Holy Scriptures (e.g., on justification or the Supper). But if I speak with, or operate together with Lutherans then I have to be certain that we are at least unified on these questions.³¹

Sasse believed that “the first goal of the federation is *cooperatio in externis*.”³² That was why he could, for example, to some extent work toward the adoption of the Barmen Declaration in 1934. However, when it became clear that

this declaration was in the manner of a confession, that was going too far; it went beyond cooperation in externals, and became church union without theological prior agreement.³³ “The mistake of the ‘Barmen Theological Declaration’ lies not in the fact that the evangelical churches spoke a common word against the threat of a totalitarian state, but rather that they said it in the form of a joint confession of doctrine.”³⁴ The same criticism applied to the LWF.

While German Lutherans in particular welcomed the help of fellow Lutherans from other parts of the world after World War II, that charity in the form of donations for food and shelter did not mean that all these Lutherans were in doctrinal agreement. Yet who can deny the very real human response to such outward demonstrations of care and concern for brothers and sisters in Christ? Does not the heart yearn to go beyond such charity and show even deeper unity through joint worship services, shared pulpits and altars? And especially so after the unspeakable tragedy of World War II, with the evidence of human catastrophes scattered throughout the continents of Europe, Asia, and Africa? But it is against just such emotional responses that Sasse warned. These emotions cannot serve as any lasting or true foundation for achieving church union. This seeming callous attitude, no doubt, helps explain why confessional men such as Dr. Sasse were (are) looked upon so harshly by those who truly desire outward union.³⁵ The insistence upon doctrinal agreement at the expense of outward unity is contrary to human experience and desire.

As the federated state so also the federated church solves the problem of how to bring into harmony with each other unity and diversity, ecumenicity and confessionalism. It is all so remarkably “obvious” that the advocates of this view of the church simply cannot conceive of anyone opposing it. They can see in an opposing view only the worst sort of reaction, the pointless attempt to reprimatinate the past. He who dares to swim against this stream appears in the eyes of the world, the Christian and even Lutheran world, as laughable. No publisher, no journal dares to print such an opposing view. Should anyone ever be of the opinion that this should still be discussed publicly, then “Lutheran” bishops are very anxious to censure such attempts so they do not occur. So let it at least be stated here: This view of the church is once again nothing other than the reflection and transference of secular thought [into the church]. Just because the world today seeks a form of communal life in which smaller communities are “united” or “federated,” it need not be the will of God that the church also exist in this way.³⁶

This desire for unity explains also the increasing lack of desire for antitheses in doctrinal statements. Antitheses provide boundaries and clarifications that are often deemed counterproductive to the ecumenical and unifying effort. But it is precisely by its antitheses that the Lutheran church has provided a clear, unambiguous confession of the truth of God’s Word. Would or could the LWF provide such help for the Lutheran church? Sasse wrote, “The Lutheran Churches

of the world need a clear directive regarding what is asserted by the Lutheran confession regarding communion fellowship and its boundaries. It is a burning question for all Lutheran Churches.³⁷ But the LWF would not answer according to the *norma normans* or the *norma normata*. Therefore, for all the good the LWF can do with charitable work and other external acts of Christian kindness, it finally fails as a truly Lutheran assembly.

Conclusion

Surprisingly, Sasse's pastoral approach is revealed in the very way by which he expects the antitheses to be part of Lutheran theology and practice:

Something else belongs in our instruction of the congregation about the Sacrament of the Altar according to Article 24 of the Augsburg Confession: "The people are also given instruction about other false teaching concerning the sacrament." That is not to be avoided. The condemnations cannot be separated from the positive explanation of the doctrine. Even in Barmen one can not get away from this, although one might try to ignore the Scriptural condemnations of false doctrine in the Confessions of the Reformation. The "*damnamus*" is not a loveless judgment against other Christians but the rejection of false doctrine that is commanded in the New Testament, a duty of pastoral care for those who are straying no less than for those who are endangered by error.³⁸

Here we see that the issues of church union and ecumenism were not mere scholarly debates for Sasse, but he had very real concern for the souls involved, even unwittingly, in the striving for unity among Christians.

The *satis est* of AC VII was cherished by Sasse because the fullness of the Gospel was thereby confessed and proclaimed for the sake of sinners. Sasse clung to the real presence of Christ's body and blood as confessed in AC X because thereby Christ Himself, the Savior, was confessed. The sacrament is the Gospel.

The Lutheran World Federation was given the benefit of the doubt during Sasse's lifetime, although he could not in good conscience encourage the LC-MS (or other confessional church bodies) to join it. However, I believe that the past decade would have seen the complete disregard by Sasse for the LWF. It continued allowing the erosion of the confession of the Lord's Supper. And in its agreement with Rome on justification the LWF has really demonstrated the theological emptiness of a federation only nominally Lutheran. Because of the LWF's lack of understanding AC VII, both AC IV and X have now been officially eviscerated. How would Dr. Sasse conclude a current assessment of the LWF? In his usual way, by confessing: *Ach bleib bei uns, Herr Jesu Christ*.

Lord Jesus Christ, with us abide,
For round us falls the eventide;
Nor let Thy word, that heav'nly light,
For us be ever veiled in night.

In these last days of sore distress
Grant us, dear Lord, true steadfastness
That pure we keep, till life is spent,
Thy holy word and Sacrament.³⁹

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Appendix A

Selected Events in the Life and Times of Hermann Sasse which Pertain to Ecumenism

- 1920-1933** Sasse ordained and pastor in Prussian Union Church
- 1925-1926** study in Hartford, CT, USA
- “In America I understood that the Lutheran Church cannot exist unless it takes seriously the borderline drawn by our confession over against other Christian denominations.” (Quoted in “Hermann Sasse and the Path of Confessional Lutheranism in the Mid-20th Century.” By Dr. Ronald F. Feuerhahn. *Lutheran Synod Quarterly*, Volume 35, No 4 (December 1995), 7.)
- 1933-1948** Sasse a member of Lutheran Church of Bavaria (Erlangen)
- 1933** formation of Deutsche Evangelische Kirche (DEK)
- 1934** Barmen Declaration – the Bekennende Kirche (“Confessing Church”)
- 1948** formation of the Evangelisch Kirche in Deutschland (EkiD)
- “The foundation of the EkiD in Germany was the logical end of a process that began with the German unions of the years 1817-1830. When after 1866 — some Lutheran territories like Hanover, Schleswig-Holstein, Kurhessen, Frankfurt/Main had been annexed by Prussia — the question arose whether [or] not the union should be extended over all Prussia and even over all Germany — the Lutheran Churches of Germany founded in 1868... — the first pan-Lutheran organisation: ‘Die Allgemeine Evangelisch-Lutherische Konferenz’ (later called Lutherisches Einigungswerk), one of the roots of the Lutheran World Convention of 1923. The purpose of this Conference was to help to preserve the Lutheran Church as church and not only as a party within an evangelical Church” (Feuerhahn, 39)
- 1949** Sasse joins “Old Lutheran” Breslau Synod
- 1949** Sasse joins United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Australia (Immanuel Seminary, North Adelaide, South Australia)
- 1966** merger of Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia + United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Australia = Lutheran Church of Australia
- 1973** Leuenberg Concord

Appendix B

Selected World Lutheran Ecumenical Movements in the 20th Century

Lutheran World Convention

- 1923, Eisenach, Germany — post WWI devastation (the theme of Morehead's address: "Let us help one another")
- 1929, Copenhagen, Denmark — Germany marked the 10th anniversary of the Treaty of Versailles, and many at the assembly insisted on a resolution of protest against the treaty
- 1935, Paris, France — the *Church Struggle* in German received attention
- 1940, Philadelphia, USA, cancelled

Selected VIPs of the Lutheran World Convention:

- Bishop Ludwig Ihmels (1858-1933), Church of Saxony
- Bishop August Marahrens (1875-1950), Church of Hanover
- Rev. John Morehead (1867-1936), 1st president of LWC, United Lutheran Church in America (1918-1962)

Lutheran World Federation conventions

- 1947, Lund, Sweden
- 1952, Hanover, Germany
- 1957, Minneapolis, MN, USA
- 1963, Helsinki, Finland
- 1970, Evian, France
- 1977, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania
- 1984, Budapest, Hungary
- 1990, Curitiba, Brazil
- 1997, Hong Kong, China
- 2003, Winnipeg, Canada

Selected VIPs of the Lutheran World Federation

- Bishop Anders Nygren (1890-1978), Bishop of Lund, 1st president of LWF
- Bishop Hanns Lilje (1899-1977), Bishop of Hanover, 2nd president of LWF
- Sylvester Clarence Michelfelder (1889-1951), ALC, 1st Exec. Secretary of LWF
- Bishop Mark Hanson, president of the ELCA and president of the LWF

Faith and Order

“focused on the beliefs and organization of the churches and the problems involved in their possible reunion” (*New Encyclopædia Britannica*, volume 12, Micropædia, page 756). This is the group of which Hermann Sasse was an active member.

1927, Lausanne, Switzerland

1937, Edinburgh, Scotland

Life and Work

“concentrated on the practical activities of the churches” (*New Encyclopædia Britannica*, volume 12, Micropædia, page 756).

1925, Stockholm, Sweden

1937, Oxford, England

1938 Joint Committee of Faith and Order and Life and Work

World Council of Churches

1948, Amsterdam, Netherlands

1954, Evanston, IL, USA

1961, New Delhi, India

1968, Uppsala, Sweden

1975, Nairobi, Kenya

1983, Vancouver, Canada

Endnotes

¹ Hermann Sasse, “Confessional Churches in the Ecumenical Movement with Special Reference to the Lutheran World Federation,” *The Springfielder*, 31, no. 1 (1967): 29.

² “... we must absolutely refuse the ideal of a future reunited church, which we can create or at least bring to a fuller reality through diplomatic negotiations, through agreement on mutual recognition, of office, through unification on a minimum of confession and a maximum of tolerance. All these ideals only darken the essence of the church and her unity.” Hermann Sasse, “Church and Churches,” *The Lonely Way: Selected Essays and Letters*, Vol. I, trans. Matthew C. Harrison and others (St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 2001), 86.

³ Dorris A. Flesner, *American Lutherans Help Shape World Council: the Role of the Lutheran Churches in the Formation of the World Council of Churches*, (Dubuque, Iowa: Wm. E. Brown Company Publishers, 1981), 310-311.

⁴ “Such questions have occupied the author for more than forty years since the preparation of the World Conference on Faith and Order at Lausanne, 1927. As a delegate from Germany to this Conference he is one of the survivors of that great gathering. For years he belonged to its Continuation and Executive Committees. He was a member of the British-German Theologians’ Conference and took part in the first official conferences between Roman Catholic and Evangelical Theologians in Germany after World War II. He has translated and partly edited thousands of pages of ecumenical documents. He was active in the Lutheran World Convention. He had a share in the union negotiations between Lutheran Churches in several parts of the world. He remembers the great leaders of the Ecumenical Movement in Sweden and Germany, England and America, Greece, Russia, the Near East and India. This is mentioned to ward off the suggestion of ignorance, ill will, and confessional narrowness.” Hermann Sasse, “Confessional Churches in the Ecumenical Movement with Special Reference to the Lutheran World Federation.” *The Springfielder*, 31, no. 1 (1967): 3.

⁵ Theodore G. Tappert, trans. & ed., *The Book of Concord: the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), AC V, 32.

⁶ “True ecumeny, which sees the one church of Christ wherever the means of grace are yet preserved—through which the Lord calls to His church—even beyond the boundaries of one’s own ecclesiology, stands opposed to false ecumeny, which treats Christians of all denominations as brothers in faith. This false ecumeny tries to make visible and tangible that which we humans cannot see and touch, the church as the people of God, as the Body of Christ, as the temple of the Holy Spirit. This false ecumeny changes the ‘article of faith’ about the church into an ‘article of sight.’ It understands the unity of the church, which only the Holy Spirit can create and maintain, as something which we humans can produce. And it tries to produce this unity, in that it works to realize the one faith, the one baptism, the one sacrament of the altar as a compromise of various forms of faith, various interpretations of baptism, and various understandings

of holy communion. In so far as it does that, this false ecumeny overlooks [the fact] that the various understandings of the means of grace are not only different possibilities of understanding the truth, but rather that soul-murdering errors and church destroying heresy also hide among them. True ecumeny sees this. Therefore, it is able to recognize the true unity of the church only there, where it recognizes the one correct faith, the one correct baptism, the one communion of the Lord Christ. True ecumeny asks, therefore, not first about unity, but rather about truth. It knows that where the true church is, there, and there alone, is also the one church. In this sense it understands the high priestly prayer of the Lord, too, in which the ‘that they may all be one’ is linked inseparably with ‘sanctify them in Your truth; Your Word is the truth’ (John 17:17, 21)”. Hermann Sasse, “Concerning the Unity of the Lutheran Church,” Letters to Pastors, No. 25, trans. Matthew Harrison (n.p., n.d).

⁷ “Article VII of the Augsburg Confession in the Present Crisis of Lutheranism,” 1961 (*We Confess the Church*), page 49. As early as 1930 Dr. Sasse had written, “Christ’s indwelling of our hearts is hidden, just as his presence in the Word and in the Sacrament is hidden. This is the truth in the erroneous proposition of the invisible church. But the church itself, the one church of Christ, is not hidden, it is recognizable in the world in all denominations in the preaching of the pure Gospel, in Baptism and the Holy Supper.” Hermann Sasse, “Church and Churches,” *The Lonely Way: Selected Essays and Letters*, Vol. I, trans. Matthew C. Harrison and others (St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 2001), 85.

⁸ Hermann Sasse, “Altar-fellowship, Church-fellowship and Ecclesiastical Federation.” Letters to Lutheran Pastors, No. 28, trans. Matthew Harrison (n.p., n.d.).

⁹ Hermann Sasse, “The Deconfessionalization of Lutheranism? Remarks on the Present Situation of the Lutheran Churches,” Letters to Lutheran Pastors, No. 22, trans. Matthew Harrison (n.p., n.d.).

¹⁰ Hermann Sasse, “Article VII of the Augsburg Confession in the Present Crisis of Lutheranism,” *We Confess the Church*, trans. Norman Nagel (St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 1986), 41-42.

¹¹ “Men can and must accept also the Talmud or the Tridentium *quatenus*, ‘insofar as,’ they interpret Scriptures correctly. The *quatenus* pledge is really no pledge at all.” Hermann Sasse, “The Confessional Problem in Today’s World Lutheranism,” *The Lutheran Layman*, 27, no. 4 (April 1, 1957): 16-20.

¹² Hermann, Sasse. “On American Lutheranism.” *Logia* 4, no. 4 (Reformation/October 1994): 50.

¹³ Hermann Sasse, “Church and Confession,” *We Confess Jesus Christ*, trans. Norman Nagel (St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 1984), 85.

¹⁴ Hermann Sasse, “The Results of the Lutheran Awakening of the 19th Century,” Letters to Lutheran Pastors, No. 15, trans. E. Reim, *Quartalschrift Theological Quarterly* 48, nos. 3 & 4 (July & October 1951): 167-85, 231-347.

¹⁵ Hermann Sasse, “Union and Confession,” *The Lonely Way: Selected Essays and Letters*, Vol. I, trans. Matthew C. Harrison and others (St. Louis, Missouri:

Concordia Publishing House, 2001), 280.

¹⁶ Sasse emphasizes the crucial role of the Lutheran confessional documents in contrast to the confessions of other churches: “The Lutheran confession, understood in this sense, belongs indeed to the essence of the Lutheran church. It alone makes it into that which it is. Our church is essentially a confessional church in a sense in which neither the Catholic nor the Reformed churches are – because all these churches have, in addition to their confession, something else, which characterizes them in their uniqueness and holds them together: their constitution, their liturgy, their discipline, or whatever else. The Lutheran Church does not have all that. It is part of its understanding of the divine Word, of the distinction between Law and Gospel, that it finds no laws in the New Testament about church constitution, church discipline, and liturgy. It can live with presbyteral, episcopal, or congregational forms of constitution. Its liturgical possibilities reach from Swedish high-churchliness to the liturgy-lessness of Württemberg. It has only its confession. If Gospel and sacrament are the *notae ecclesiae*, by which we recognize the presence of the church of Christ, then the *notae ecclesiae Lutheranae*, the trait by which we recognize whether a church is Lutheran or not, is the Lutheran confession. Inasmuch as we determine this, we do not need, after all that has been said, to protect ourselves primarily from the misunderstanding, that we would place the *notae* of the invisible church of God on the same level with the traits of earthly historical ecclesiologies. We believe the church of God to be in, with, and under the earthly ecclesiologies, because we see the Gospel and the sacraments there, and insofar as we see the Gospel and the sacraments there. The confession, by which we recognize the Lutheran church, is for us nothing else than the ‘Yes!’ to this Gospel and to these sacraments.” Sasse, “Concerning the Unity of the Lutheran Church.”

¹⁷ Tappert, *The Book of Concord*, 34.

¹⁸ Sasse, “The Deconfessionalization of Lutheranism?”

¹⁹ Sasse, “Confessional Churches in the Ecumenical Movement with Special Reference to the Lutheran World Federation,” 28. Sasse made a similar point in a letter one year earlier to Dr. John Behnken, president of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod: “This is the reason why [the LWF] can receive into full membership churches like that of the Batak [an Indonesian Church] whose confession is not Lutheran and which never has accepted the Augsburg Confession and Luther’s Catechisms as their confession. In contrast with Luther’s Catechism it clearly teaches that infants do not believe and gives a different doctrine on the baptisms of adults and infants. It does not teach that the body and blood of the Lord are present in, with and under the elements, but only in the act of eating and drinking. The Fourth and Fifth Part of the Catechism have never been in use in this church, a daughter of the Barmen Mission [sic.] which is United with a strong Reformed element....” “Inclusive Lutheranism,” *The Lonely Way: Selected Essays and Letters*, Vol. II, trans. Matthew C. Harrison and others (St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 2002), 343.

²⁰ Sasse, “The Deconfessionalization of Lutheranism?” (New Year 1952),

(emphasis added). Sasse noted later in that same year: “If one wants to interpret the confessional article of the LWF in such a way, that even churches which reject as error the doctrinal content of those confessions not named in this article—especially the Smalcald Articles, the Large Catechism, and the Formula of Concord—can be members of the LWF, then the LWF is not actually a Lutheran federation, and it should find another name for itself. Moreover, the conscious rejection of the Formula of Concord usually goes hand in hand with the denial of the real presence in the sense of Lutheran doctrine. There should be no doubt about this, that for Luther and for the Churches of the Lutheran Reformation, the article about the Lord’s Supper is similar in importance to the article about justification, a fact which Michael Reu has many times pointed out, especially in connection with his works for the Lutheran World Convention.” Sasse, “Concerning the Unity of the Lutheran Church (Pentecost 1952).

²¹ Sasse, “Concerning the Unity of the Lutheran Church.”

²² Hermann Sasse, *This Is My Body: Luther’s Contention for the Real Presence in the Sacrament of the Altar*, rev. ed. (Adelaide, South Australia: Lutheran Publishing House, 1977), 329 (emphasis original).

²³ Sasse, “Altar-fellowship, Church-fellowship and Ecclesiastical Federation” (Christmas 1952).

²⁴ Sasse, *This Is My Body*, 271 (emphasis original). It is interesting to compare Sasse’s understanding of church fellowship with that of a major figure in the history of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, Dr. Sigurd Christian Ylvisaker:

“To say that Sigurd Christian Ylvisaker was a proponent of church unity and to say that the underlying motif of his theology and churchmanship was Christian unity is, to say the least, paradoxical. At nearly every point in his theological career, he allied himself with ideas, causes, and groups which would seem to bespeak the very opposite of church unity. But Sigurd Ylvisaker was not a shallow man, and was probably never in his life what he seemed to be on the surface. He knew that to sight he was a sinner, but that to faith he was a righteous saint before God. If the church was fractured before men, it was united before God and one to the eye of faith. The true reality of the church is its oneness by faith. No visible, outward unity can hide the realities of sin, error and division from the Almighty. But where outward unity is achieved through an honest, pure confession of God’s Word, that is a gift of God and not a result of the strivings of men. Only that unity, Ylvisaker maintains, is pleasing to God. Of that unity he was a champion” (emphasis added). Peter T. Harstad, ed., *Sigurd Christian Ylvisaker, 1884-1959* (Mankato, Minnesota: Lutheran Synod Book Company, 1984), 88.

²⁵ Sasse, Hermann. Letters to Lutheran Pastors, No. 28, “Altar-fellowship, Church-fellowship and Ecclesiastical Federation” (Christmas 1952).

²⁶ Sasse, “Inclusive Lutheranism,” *The Lonely Way*, II, 344-345.

²⁷ Sasse is not unsympathetic to the plight of multiple confessions confusing the

work of missions. “How can the Christian mission call the peoples of the world to the one truth of the one gospel, if its bearers themselves are not unified on what the gospel actually is? There is perhaps nothing that has given such impetus to the ecumenical movement and its theological, practical, and ecclesiastical work as this question.” Sasse, “The Question of the Church’s Unity on the Mission Field,” trans. Matthew Harrison, *Logia* 7, no. 3 (Holy Trinity 1998): 54.

²⁸ Sasse, “The Question of the Church’s Unity on the Mission Field,” 59.

²⁹ However, note the change from the 1964 Article II of the LWF, and the 1990 version. The key word “infallible” is deleted from the 1990 version.

1964: “The Lutheran World Federation acknowledges the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the only source and the infallible norm of all church doctrine and practice, and sees in the three Ecumenical Creeds and in the Confessions of the Lutheran Church, especially in the Unaltered Augsburg Confession and Luther’s Catechism, a pure exposition of the Word of God.” Erwin L. Lueker, *Lutheran Cyclopedia* (St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 1975), 506.

1990: “The Lutheran World Federation confesses the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the only source and norm of its doctrine, life and service. It sees in the three Ecumenical Creeds and in the Confessions of the Lutheran Church, especially in the unaltered Augsburg Confession and the Small Catechism of Martin Luther, a pure exposition of the Word of God.” Document downloaded from the LWF website.

With the removal of “infallible,” Sasse’s comments here are apropos: “Here lies the reason why modern Protestants, even modern Lutherans are ashamed of the Reformation, ashamed of Luther who allegedly broke the unity of the Church which actually was already broken for some centuries. Modern Protestantism no longer understands the doctrine of the Reformation of the clarity and sufficiency of Holy Scripture because it no longer believes in its inspiration.” Sasse, “Confessional Churches in the Ecumenical Movement - With Special Reference to the Lutheran World Federation,” 31.

³⁰ Sasse, “Article VII of the Augsburg Confession in the Present Crisis of Lutheranism,” 62.

³¹ Sasse, “Altar-fellowship, Church-fellowship and Ecclesiastical Federation,” (Christmas 1952).

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Sasse would allow theological discussion within a federation of churches, but not a joint confession or other evidence of a unity that was at best partial, and therefore no unity at all. “An alliance of churches cannot evangelize, just as it neither can administer the Sacraments. But that means it can have no joint celebration of the Supper. An alliance of churches can indeed concern itself with doctrine, but only as a forum for serious doctrinal discussion among member churches.” Sasse, “Altar-fellowship, Church-fellowship and Ecclesiastical

Federation” (Christmas, 1952).

³⁴ Sasse, “Altar-fellowship, Church-fellowship and Ecclesiastical Federation” (Christmas, 1952).

³⁵ “You will understand that when I hear the word ‘Lutheranism’ I think of the Lutheranism that I know personally – and know only too well – that is, German Lutheranism. And now I am afraid, that if I were to handle the theme [Dialogue with Luther and Lutheranism] I could hardly avoid that the tone would be sharp and bitter. I have so much against the German Lutherans (from Meiser to Schlink, from Althaus to Asmussen, from Gogarten to my old friend Georg Merz—with the exception of a few individuals like Iwand, Ernst Wolf, and Heinrich Vogel); their stubborn confessional romanticism, their obstinate connection with political reaction, their unenlightened ritual Romanising, their poor showing in the time of the Church Struggle, and now last of all their sabotage of the unity of the EKID through their separation into the VELKD” [*Vereinigte Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche Deutschlands*, the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany, founded 1948]. Letter from Karl Barth to Michelfelder explaining why he refused to participate in a *Festschrift* for Anders Nygren, quoted in: Jens Holger Schjørring, Prasanna Kumari, and Norman A Hjelm, editors, *From Federation to Communion: the History of the Lutheran World Federation* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1997), 25-26.

³⁶ Sasse, “The Deconfessionalization of Lutheranism” (New Year, 1952).

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Sasse, “The Lord’s Supper in the Lutheran Church” *We Confess the Sacraments*, trans. Norman Nagel (St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 1985), 110.

³⁹ “Lord Jesus Christ, with Us Abide,” *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary*, The Evangelical Lutheran Synod (MorningStar Music Publishers, Inc.: St. Louis, Missouri, 1996), Hymn 511.

Poisoning the Reservoir

by *John A. Moldstad*

Theologians have used interesting motifs to illustrate the sublime truth of all truths, that Jesus Christ's atoning sacrifice at Calvary's cross objectively enacted the redemption of all sinners and the full justice payment for every sin. One word picture this writer personally appreciates is the reservoir.¹ The reservoir seems to symbolize appropriately key facets of the doctrine of objective justification, including the ample supply of forgiveness, the obvious comparison with the "washing of regeneration," the need for a conduit system (means of grace), and the importance of purification for the survival of the beneficiaries.

If it is true that every illustration limps, especially depicting things divine, the reservoir too may have its leaks. Storage pools often involve a man-made component; the doctrine of justification has no sinner-cooperative aspect. Yet despite any potential deficiency, the reservoir word-picture can serve as a great teaching aid in conveying what God would have us know about his superabundant grace for a sinful, dying world: "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them" (2 Corinthians 5:19).

Water of life for all

A woman drawing from a well at a tiny village named Sychar was greeted with a stranger's question leading her into a life-changing conversation. In that conversation you recall our Lord Jesus remarked to the woman, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would give you living water" (John 4:10). Jesus used water – a necessary staple for existence in this physical world – to speak of a greater need and a greater gift for an eternal existence. "Whoever drinks the water I will give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (John 4:14).

What is this special water of life? It is none other than the message of salvation from sin through faith in Jesus Christ as the Messiah-Savior. "Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him," said our Lord at the Jerusalem temple courts on the Feast of the Tabernacles (John 7:38). The living and ever-sustaining water gift for all parched souls is found only in Jesus. This message is one of transformation. It is a message that gives new life where life did not previously exist. Alluding to the desperation of all fallen humanity, it is interesting that David (Psalm 9) and Paul (Romans 3) describe our spiritual condition as dry throats that are open graves – graves yielding an eternally destructive bottom. But in the Giver of Life (2 Timothy 1:10), the Lord Jesus, there is a reservoir ready to pour vitality into every spiritually arid throat. The forgiveness of sins is this pristine reservoir, and what a large one it is!

“He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:2).

The reservoir’s dimensions

The theological dimensions of God’s reservoir of living water transcend our imagination (Philippians 4:7). The reservoir is large in the sense of volume in order to ensure that the vast numbers of people, races, tribes, and languages on this earth may wash their robes and make them white in the blood of the Lamb (Revelation 7:9, 14). But its dimensions speak volumes in a more profound way. This reservoir is enormous in the sense of a powerful, penetrating healing for covering and obliterating the guilt and punishment for each sin, no matter the sin’s severity. Picture this: a large reservoir with an extended ringed border. Yet, this one has no east or west boundaries because of the salvific work of the God-Man: “As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us” (Psalm 103:12). No sin is so great that the blood of God’s Son cannot and has not overcome its damnatory effects. Christ’s holy life, substitutionary death, and glorious resurrection so eviscerated the spiritual malady caused by each transgression that this reservoir of love overflows with a cleansing fountain. “[W]here sin increased, grace increased all the more” (Romans 5:20). And check out the depth of this vast body of living water! We are told that God hurls all our iniquities into the depths of the sea (Micah 7:19), even as the depth of his wisdom and love defy human measurement (Romans 11:33).

The aqueduct system

Christ’s reservoir of redemptive grace is for the world, so much so that this universal redemption translates *objectively* into a declaration of forgiveness for every inhabitant, regardless of whether it is believed or not (Romans 4:5). The resurrection of our Lord sealed this fact (Romans 4:25).² “Even he who does not believe that he is free and his sins forgiven shall also learn, in due time, how assuredly his sins were forgiven, even though he did not believe it.”³

Luther often spoke of “salvation won” and “salvation distributed.” In his treatise “Against the Heavenly Prophets” (1525), he stated:

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 at the cross. He has not won it in the supper or sacrament. There he has distributed and given it through the Word, also in the gospel, where it is preached. He has won it once for all on the cross. But the distribution takes place continuously, before and after, from the beginning to the end of the world.⁴

If God indeed has a reservoir of redeeming love for the world, it also

is the case he has ordained and put into action an aqueduct system: the means of grace, Word and sacrament. The gospel – whether preached, taught, or read; whether connected with water baptismally or attached to the simple elements at the Lord’s Table where the Savior’s flesh and blood are tendered – is potent in conveying the water of life, Christ’s forgiveness of sins. God the Holy Spirit has bound himself to his dealing with us sinners this way. He has revealed no other way for piping the water of life. “[O]ur gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit, and with deep conviction” (1 Thessalonians 1:5). Using a conduit for bringing forgiveness and the promise of eternal life in Christ, the Spirit takes from the reservoir and goes to work in the houses of the world community: he effects faith in the hearts of sinners as he so desires (Isaiah 55:11). Not all who hear the gospel believe the message (Romans 10:16), but for those who do – entirely by God’s grace – the reservoir yields its blessed *objective* results in a *subjective, personal* manner! Peter explained to those gathered at the home of Cornelius, “All the prophets testify about him (Christ) that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name” (Acts 10:43). Earlier the same apostle told the Pentecost crowd how “water and the word” were *conversional*: “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sin. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38).

Protective purification of the reservoir

Historically, attacks on the Christian faith have been leveled primarily at predictable focal points: the deity and humanity of Christ (the Trinitarian and Christological controversies), the doctrine of justification (the *sola gratia* and *sola fide* of the Reformation), the verbal inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture (vs. rationalism), and the means of grace (vs. enthusiasm). Since God’s Word, Holy Scripture, is a unit and as a unit provides the protective encasing for highlighting the reservoir described above (justification), an assault on any portion of that word cannot help but introduce poison for the well. Whatever is anti-scriptural is inimical to Christ. An attack on the book cannot help but be an attack on the reservoir and its aqueduct system. No wonder Scripture itself urges us “to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned” (Romans 16:17). How else can the reservoir remain pure in transmitting the life we all need?

Now, think of an earthly reservoir with a protection rim or barrier or filtration plant. To what degree would you feel it important to keep the body of water free from poison as the water eventually finds its way into houses, faucets, and stomachs of the citizens of any city? Let us be more personal. What if this were the reservoir and aqueduct system bringing water to *your* home? What if it were the reservoir from which your own children and grandchildren and succeeding generations of your family were to drink? How particular would you be? We are not simply talking H₂O. Life or death for eternity is the issue.

God, of course, will make sure that his gospel is preserved until the end of time. “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away” (Luke 21:33). The gospel confession is the rock that sustains the church, and it is the church of which we have this divine assurance: “[O]n this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it” (Matthew 16:18).

But *how* that reservoir of Christ’s love for sinners is protected and conveyed in relation to a particular group of people at a particular point in time living in a particular country or locale is not revealed. We have the general promise of God’s providential security of the reservoir for the world, but we do not know if, through purposeful or non-purposeful intrusion of error and/or hardening of hearts, the “gospel” water leaving the reservoir carries less (maybe much less!) life-potency than should be expected. Here we see how important it is for church bodies and their leaders to proclaim accurately what God’s Word says, to teach accordingly and to practice in its worship life accordingly.

Although the gospel of Christ obviously is pure (the reservoir), you recall in Galatians how Paul deemed it absolutely essential to rebuke in no uncertain terms the Judaizers who were preaching a compromised “gospel.” “Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!” (Galatians 1:7-8) What was Paul’s concern? Poisonous teachings (e.g., insistence on circumcision for salvation, as well as forbidding the eating of certain foods, etc.) were affecting the way the gospel was being presented. No longer was the work of Christ alone set forth as the sole necessity for one’s eternal salvation. In its place, the works of sinful man – law works – were held up as a contributing factor for assuring heaven. Paul hit this hard: “I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!” (Galatians 2:21)

Lutheran theology and the reservoir

A hallmark of Martin Luther’s theology was his emphasis on both the preservation of the reservoir, justification, and the vital aqueduct, the means of grace. Universal redemption and its corollary, objective justification,⁵ formed the basis for Luther’s strong insistence on saving power in the means of grace. Many examples from Luther’s writings could be cited, but here we will provide just one. In his Large Catechism the great reformer speaks of baptism’s sacramental power: “Thus you see plainly that baptism is not a work which we do but is a treasure which God gives us and which faith grasps, just as the Lord Christ upon the cross is not a work but a treasure comprehended and offered to us in the Word and received by faith.”⁶

Dr. Luther also contended tenaciously for the truth of God’s Word, the written scriptures of the apostles and prophets. Without upholding the written Word, one inevitably will lose Christ. In other words, poison will have entered the reservoir and its life-giving system.

St. Paul adduc[es] Scripture as his strongest witness and point[s] out that there is nothing stable to support our doctrine and faith except the material or written Word, put down in letters and preached verbally by him and others; for it is clearly stated here: "Scripture, Scripture." . . . Although the letter does not in and of itself give life, yet it must be there, must be heard and received, and the Holy Spirit must work through it in the heart, and in and through the Word the heart must keep itself against the devil and all temptation; for if it were to let the Word go, it would soon, entirely lose Christ and the Spirit. Therefore you had better not boast much about the Spirit if you do not have the visible, external Word; for it will surely not be a good spirit but the wretched devil from hell.⁷

“Lutheranism” carrying poison?

Could it be? As we said, a mark of Lutheranism is concern for the reservoir, and concern for the reservoir is concern for the aqueduct, and concern for the aqueduct is concern for the written, inspired, and inerrant Word. But what do people today see of Lutheranism in our land? How appalling that the largest body of Lutherans in America, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA), numbering 4.7 million members, now egregiously has given its official endorsement of ordaining practicing homosexuals and lesbians as pastors of the church. A euphemistic phrase, “chaste, monogamous and lifelong,” made its way into the final wording of this abominable resolution of the ELCA adopted by a 55% margin of voting delegates on August 21, 2009. “How low has the Lutheran church sunk!” was the immediate reaction from one of our own synod’s seasoned pastors. We talk of Luther rolling over in his grave. We should be talking of how such actions ultimately leave our Savior in his grave! How can the poison of blatantly embracing immorality clearly condemned in God’s Word not have even further deadly consequences for a church body as it seeks to present the reservoir of God’s love for sinners? Poison, once it enters a theological construct, drips its venom deeper and deeper into all aspects of the church.

The ELCA did not suddenly shift from being a confessional body to a heterodox church that some today would say is undeserving of inclusion under the umbrella of Christendom. In 1988 the three bodies (ALC, LCA, and AELC) that formed the ELCA were each known for already injecting poison into genuine Lutheranism through their adoption of higher critical hermeneutics in their seminaries.⁸ Shortly after its official formation, the ELCA advocated and accepted the ordination of women to the pastoral office, admitted avowed homosexuals to holy communion, and joined in altar and pulpit fellowship with churches of the Reformed persuasion. The decision now to admit practicing homosexuals as pastors of their congregation is a public pronouncement to society at large indicative of a church body bent from its inception on catering to political correctness at the expense of scriptural theology. A Lutheran leader surmised, “What has happened is very much akin to seeing a large, old, beautiful tree suddenly break and fall, and

upon examination, we see that inside, at its core, there set in years ago a rot that could not be overcome.”⁹

In 1985 a lead article appeared in the *Lutheran Standard* (the periodical of the ALC) and was viewed as a cutting edge for the acceptance of homosexuality among “Lutherans.” The article was entitled “Key Questions” and was written by Lawrence E. Holst.¹⁰ While Holst ostensibly intended “to distinguish homosexual *orientation* from homosexual *behavior*,” he did much more for the liberal cause. He laid the groundwork for the exegetical gymnastics needed to arrive at his desired conclusion: “Homosexual persons should be welcomed as responsible, voting members of a congregation with no requirement to change, or try to change, their sexual orientation.”¹¹ What was his line of reasoning? In summary, he argued: Since the church (in this case, ALC) already determined Paul’s role of women passages in the New Testament to be “culturally bound pronouncements,” why should not the same apply to his pronouncements on homosexuality? Holst stated, “Few would argue for a literal interpretation of those words today. So we filter that biblical injunction through the realities of our present situation.”¹² Notice the domino effect. If the role of women sections of Scripture, including those prohibiting women exercising authority over men in the church (1 Corinthians 14:33-38 and 1 Timothy 2:11-12), are intended only for a previous culture, then what should stop the church from doing the same with the New Testament prohibitions on homosexuality (Romans 1:26-27 and 1 Corinthians 6:9-10)? The hermeneutical principles employed by the interpreter of Scripture will show whether a doctrine stands or falls; and if it falls, get ready for a whole line of them to fall.

Felicitous inconsistency and our responsibility

We rejoice that believers still are found inside erring church bodies even when the theological departure is so conspicuous that those outside the pale of the Christian faith take notice. Personal faith in Christ for salvation is worked in the hearts of sinners *wherever* the gospel is proclaimed. This is true even when that gospel may be found in a fog of foreboding clouds proliferating tenets and practices diametrically opposed to Scripture. Dr. Franz Pieper repeatedly acknowledges in his *Christian Dogmatics* the recognition of a “felicitous inconsistency” where an individual’s personal faith is at variance with the published views of a church body, even at times involving authors themselves.¹³ This happy inconsistency, however, does not alleviate the responsibility of Christian love to correct error and to pray for those who are striving to resist the false doctrine. When the poison of false doctrine and practice is left unchecked, there is nothing to stop it from damaging the presentation to souls of what is in the pure reservoir. While some may feel that at least the gospel of Christ is intact, theological poison, especially the type that fails to call sin “sin,” will in the course of time result in nothing life-giving going forth from the reservoir of Christ’s boundless love for sinners.

So, the point is: Poison must be checked. Satan will not stop his onslaught against the church. Yet, the reservoir is too essential for our eternal

existence! The doctrine of objective justification upheld and stressed by Luther is a life-changer for us today and also for every future generation the Creator allows before judgment day. How we handle God's Word is consequential for the way God's reservoir is piped to the homes of our hearts. "If you hold to my teaching," says Jesus, "you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31-32).

May we pray for diligence for the sake of the reservoir, and may we lovingly assist those striving to resist theologically intoxicating influences.

Endnotes

¹ E. Kurth's instructional booklet, *Catechetical Helps* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1961), serves an example of this. On p. 98 he refers to a number of reservoirs supplying water to New York City.

² "He was delivered over to death for our sins [διὰ τὰ παραπτώματα ἡμῶν = *on account of* our sins] and was raised to life for our justification [διὰ τὴν δικαίωσιν ἡμῶν = *on account of* our justification]." Christ was raised as a result of the sinful world's justification being accomplished.

³ LW 40:366-367.

⁴ LW 40:213-214.

⁵ Some fail to make the distinction between these two. *Universal redemption* refers to the holy blood price paid to reconcile sinners to God. *Objective justification* deals with the *forensic act* of the Almighty Judge in declaring the world forgiven on account of the redemptive work of Jesus. His rising on the third day gave proof of such a declaration.

⁶ Tappert's edition, p. 441.

⁷ Ewald Plass, *What Luther Says*, vol. III (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), 1463, #4725.

⁸ Higher criticism can be defined as an unwarranted and arbitrary manner of dealing with Holy Scripture. It allows for the questioning of recorded miracles as historical facts, casts doubt on clear prophecies and their fulfillment, and ultimately sets man's reason as a judge over God's Word to determine which portions are true and relevant for today's society and which are to be regarded as "culturally conditioned."

⁹ Paul T. McCain's blog, <http://cyberbrethren.com>.

¹⁰ *The Lutheran Standard*, July 12, 1985, 3-6.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹² *Ibid.*, 5.

¹³ Franz Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, vol. 1 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), x, 72, etc.

Evangelical Lutheran Synod Disagrees with Homosexual Clergy Resolution Adopted by ELCA (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America)

MANKATO, MINNESOTA—Officials of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS), a church body based in Mankato, noted with concern and disappointment the decision of the national convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), held in Minneapolis August 17-23, to allow the ordination of practicing homosexuals and lesbians as pastors of the church.

The smaller ELS is not affiliated with the larger ELCA, even though the names of the two churches are very similar.

ELS President, Rev. John A. Moldstad, said, “Ordaining practicing homosexuals and lesbians to the ministry is a serious departure from the biblical standards of morality to which Lutherans and Lutheran pastors have historically been held.” Moldstad clarified that in contrast to the newly-adopted position of the ELCA, the position of the ELS on the matter of homosexuality and marriage is as follows:

We confess that Scripture condemns homosexuality and extra-marital relations (fornication and adultery) as sin. Nevertheless, when an individual caught up in such sins truly repents, the forgiveness of the Gospel is to be fully applied. We confess that the divine institution of marriage is to be heterosexual, in which, according to God’s design, a man and a woman may enjoy a life-long companionship in mutual love. We teach on the basis of Holy Scripture that marriage is the only proper context for the expression of sexual intimacy and for the procreation of children. See Rom. 1:26-27, 1 Cor. 6:9, 18 and 7:2-9, John 4:17-18, 1 John 1:9, Gen. 1:27-28 and 2:18-24, Matt. 19:4-6. (From *We Believe, Teach, and Confess*, adopted by the ELS in 1992)

Moldstad explained that ELS churches welcome into their midst those who may struggle with temptation toward a same-sex attraction, but who know in their conscience that this is wrong, and who seek God’s help in their struggle. Said Moldstad, “The ELS believes that in this world it is the duty of the church – as the body of Christ – to be a community of healing and reconciliation in the Gospel, and a beacon of hope to all humanity. And so, while the church is indeed called by the Lord to condemn as sin that which God condemns as sin, it is the church’s privilege also to offer and apply the grace, forgiveness, and acceptance of God, in Jesus Christ, to all who repent of their sins – whatever those sins may be.”

In addition to the similarity in names, the ELS shares a common heritage with some segments of the ELCA. The Mankato-based group was organized in 1918 by pastors and congregations that had declined to enter a merger that formed one of the predecessor bodies of the ELCA. The ELS has not participated in subsequent Lutheran mergers either – including the one that formed the ELCA in 1988 – because of what it saw as doctrinal compromises that these mergers represented.

President Moldstad may be contacted at the synod office in Mankato, by telephone (507-344-7354) or by email (elsynod@blc.edu). The synod's web site is **evangelicalluthेरansynod.org**

Editor's Note: This statement was published by Pres. Moldstad, with the encouragement of the ELS Doctrine Committee, in reaction to the ELCA resolution to allow gay clergy.

2009: A Year of Anniversaries

by Gaylin R. Schmeling

The year 2009 is a year of a number of different anniversaries. Some of these anniversaries are far more important than others. Some have local significance and others have universal significance. Some are political and some are religious.

For the people living in the Minnesota River Valley, this year is the two-thousandth anniversary of Arminius' defeat of the Romans. Arminius, more commonly known as Hermann, is familiar to us because his statue stands on the bluffs of the Minnesota River in New Ulm. A similar, though larger, statue exists in the Teutoburg Forest in northern Germany. He became a symbol of freedom and liberty for German freethinkers, and thus they erected his statue in the settlement they established on the Minnesota River. Hermann was a German warrior who defeated the Roman legions at the Battle of Teutoburg Forest in the fall of A.D. 9. Among Lutherans, the legend arose that descendents of the soldiers in Hermann's army were among the soldiers under the cross of Christ at Calvary.¹ This legend has been used by pastors to remind German Lutherans that we crucified the Lord. The historical significance of the Hermann history is that his defeat of the Romans and liberation of much of Germany from Roman domination kept Roman law and order from crossing the Rhine.²

The 480th Anniversary of Luther's Small and Large Catechism

The anniversary of primary significance for orthodox Lutherans is the 480th anniversary of Luther's *Small and Large Catechisms* produced in 1529. The complete works of Luther fill more than one hundred huge volumes in a library. This is considerably more than the great Englishman Shakespeare ever produced. Yet Luther once commented that if *Bondage of the Will* and the catechism were preserved, all the rest of his writings could be destroyed.

There was a great need for religious instruction among the common people at Luther's time. This became evident as a result of the Saxon Visitation in 1528. Concerning the situation, Luther wrote:

The deplorable conditions which I recently encountered when I was a visitor constrained me to prepare this brief and simple catechism or statement of Christian teaching. Good God, what wretchedness I beheld! The common people, especially those who live in the country, have no knowledge whatever of Christian teaching, and unfortunately many pastors are quite incompetent and unfitted for teaching. Although the people are supposed to be Christian, are baptized, and receive the holy sacrament, they do not know the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, or the Ten Commandments, they live as if they were pigs and irrational

beasts, and now that the Gospel has been restored they have mastered the fine art of abusing liberty.³

Seeing such religious ignorance, Luther began preparing his catechisms. There had been catechisms before his time, but none of the quality or popularity of Luther's catechisms. The *Small Catechism* was intended for the instruction of children in the chief parts of Christian doctrine. The *Large Catechism* was used for more advanced instruction.

The *Small Catechism* became the basic instructional manual of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. It is the laymen's Bible and a major devotional work for Christians. Luther said that he could never meditate on and study the catechism enough.

The catechism gives us the basic outline of the faith. Through the **Ten Commandments**, we see our sinful condition and our need for the Savior. The **Apostles' Creed** then tells us who that Savior is. He is the second person of the Holy Trinity who also became true man for our salvation. In the **Lord's Prayer**, we are shown how we can properly address and speak to our dear Father in heaven. **Baptism** is our entrance into God's kingdom by faith in the Savior and **Absolution and the Keys** are our daily return to Baptism. Finally, the **Lord's Supper**, together with the Word, is the spiritual nourishment needed for our faith-life born in Baptism.

The *Small Catechism* put the teachings of Scripture into a simple but elegant style so that these truths could be easily memorized and remembered. Where can one find a better summary of the Gospel than in the meaning of the second article of the *Small Catechism*?

I believe that Jesus Christ is true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the virgin Mary; and that He is my Lord, Who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood, and with His innocent suffering and death; in order that I might be His own, live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness; even as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity. This is most certainly true.⁴

The section of the *Large Catechism* on Baptism shows the great value of this Sacrament for the Christian's faith life. Our whole life becomes a daily Baptism, a daily dying and rising again in Christ (Romans 6). Luther writes:

These two parts, to be sunk under the water and drawn out again, signify the power and operation of Baptism, which is nothing else than putting to death the old Adam, and after that the resurrection of the new man, both of which must take place in us all our lives, so that a truly Christian life is nothing else than a daily baptism, once begun and ever to be continued.⁵

The section of the *Large Catechism* on the Lord's Supper causes every Christian to hunger and thirst for the Sacrament. It aptly expresses the benefits of the Supper.

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. The devil is a furious enemy; when he sees that we resist him and attack the old man, and when he cannot rout us by force, he sneaks and skulks about everywhere, trying all kinds of tricks, and does not stop until he has finally worn us out so that we either renounce our faith or yield hand and foot and become indifferent or impatient. 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.⁶

The purpose of our orthodox Lutheran Church is to continue the proclamation of the salvific message of Law and Gospel as taught in the Scriptures and summarized in the catechisms. This message of Law and Gospel cannot be better inculcated than through proper instruction with Luther's *Small* and *Large Catechism*. May the teaching of the catechisms always be treasured in our midst as the hymnwriter states:

Lord, help us ever to retain
The Catechism's doctrine plain
As Luther taught the Word of Truth
In simple style to tender youth.
(ELH 551:1)

The 500th Anniversary of Calvin's Birth

Of lesser significance for Lutheran Christians and of more interest to the Protestants around us is the anniversary of the birth of John Calvin in 1509. Next to Luther, he is probably the most well-known figure of the Reformation. For Lutherans, he tends to be more infamous than famous. This year is also the four-hundredth anniversary of the death of Jacob Arminius (1560–1609), the great rival of Calvin among the Reformed and the founder of Arminian Reformed theology.

John Calvin was born on July 10, 1509, in Noyon, Picardy, France, fifty miles northeast of Paris. He was barely eight years old when Luther posted his 95

Theses on the Castle Church door at Wittenberg. As a young man he began to study for the priesthood at Paris, but later transferred to law. He came into contact with humanism and Luther's writings which resulted in his conversion to Protestantism no later than 1533. Calvin was aware of his indebtedness to Luther. The first edition of his great work, the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* in 1536, was modeled in its structure, as well as in many details, after Luther's *Small Catechism*. While passing through Geneva the same year, he was asked by the local Protestant leader, Guillaume Farel, to assist him in reforming the city. In 1538 Calvin and Farel were driven out of Geneva when the city council turned against them. As a result, Calvin fled to Strasbourg where he was profoundly influenced by Bucer (1491–1551). It was during his stay at Strasbourg that he signed the Augsburg Confession in its *Variata* form. Meanwhile, in 1541 Calvin was invited back to Geneva because Farel's Protestant party had regained control of the city. Here he remained the undisputed leader of the Protestant Reformation in contradistinction to the Lutheran Reformation until his death in 1564. From Calvin one can draw a direct line to the Reformed and Presbyterian traditions of Protestant Christianity.

Both Luther and Calvin desired to bring reform to the medieval church. Their methods and attitudes, however, were considerably different. Luther functioned with the concept that only those things in the medieval church should be changed that were contrary to Scripture. Calvin, on the other hand, maintained that only those practices of the medieval church should continue that were commanded in Scripture.

The Sovereignty of God: Calvin's theology centered in the sovereignty of God and His glory, while Luther emphasized the grace and mercy of Christ. How do we have a merciful God? The Lutheran asks, "What has the gracious God revealed in the Bible for my eternal salvation?" He therefore searches the Scriptures to find Christ. (John 5:39) The Calvinist says, "What does the sovereign Lord expect man to do for His glory?"

Holy Scripture: Both Luther and Calvin maintained the verbal inerrancy of Scripture, that the Bible is errorless in every detail. For Lutherans, Scripture is primarily the power of God unto salvation. The Calvinist, on the other hand, thinks of the Bible largely as God's law book, in which God has set down the rules according to which all men, Christians and unbelievers alike, are to live. As a result Calvinistic churches tend toward legalism and literalism in their interpretation of the Bible.

Reason and the Bible: Calvin held that the doctrines of the Bible must be brought into harmony with reason. As a result of this view of reason Calvin comes to his doctrine of predestination, the person of Christ, and the Supper. True, Scripture does not teach anything which is contrary to reason. But many things in Scripture are beyond human reason.

Double Predestination: Calvin taught double predestination, the horrible decree (*decretum quidem horribile*). This means that God chose some from all eternity to be saved and He chose some to be damned. Lutherans do not accept this teaching. Scripture teaches that our salvation is totally dependent upon the grace of God. He chose us from all eternity to be saved, He sent His Son for our salvation, and brought us to faith through the means of grace. Our salvation from beginning to end is the work of God. At the same time, Lutherans maintain, contrary to Calvin, that it is our own fault if we are damned, not the fault of a decree of God.

The Person of Christ: Calvin's theology was influenced by the rational presupposition that the finite is not capable of the infinite (*finitum non est capax infinitum*). In Christology this meant that the finite human nature of Christ is not capable of participating in the infinite divine nature.⁷ The human nature of Christ was not capable of participating in the divine attributes of omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence. Therefore the human nature of Christ, which is finite, can only be in one location at a time. Since the ascension Christ's human nature is in one location in heaven. He is not present with us always (Matthew 28:20) as our compassionate human brother, but only in the fiery deity before which we do not dare to stand. This removes all the comfort of Christ's presence. Also, because Christ's human nature is now only in heaven, his true body and blood cannot be present in the Supper. Calvin rejected the biblical doctrine of the omnipresence or ubiquity of Christ's human nature, referring to this doctrine as the "monstrous dogma of ubiquity."⁸

The Work of Christ: Calvin's emphasis of God's sovereignty compelled him to denigrate the significance of Christ's work.

While Scriptures say that God loved us in Christ, and only in Christ, Calvin says that God loved us by an act of His "sovereign grace" and could therefore as the sovereign Lord of the universe forgive man his sins even though Christ had not died; however, God has willed to show His love in Christ's death. Calvin's doctrine is responsible for the denial of Christ's atoning work found among so many of his modern followers.⁹

It should also be noted that Calvin held that the Father restricted the redemptive work of Christ to the elect, teaching limited atonement.

Justification and Sanctification: Calvin correctly understood justification in a forensic sense. We are declared righteous on the basis of Christ's redemptive sacrifice. However it is not the center of theology as is the case in Lutheranism. Calvin's teaching almost made justification a preliminary to sanctification with sanctification as the center.

Means of Grace: Luther taught that the Holy Spirit has chosen to use means to bring us the blessings of salvation and work faith in the Savior to receive those

blessings. These means, or channels, are the Word and the Sacraments. The means of grace are God's gracious activity toward us. Calvin and the other Reformed did not believe that God chose to bind Himself to external means, but rather the Holy Spirit works directly. The Sacraments for the Reformed are not God's gracious activity, but are works of man where he shows that he has been born again and is a member of God's kingdom.

Lord's Supper: Joachim Westphal, a Gnesio-Lutheran pastor of Hamburg (1510–1574),¹⁰ was the first to question publicly Calvin's doctrine of the Lord's Supper. He correctly pointed out that Calvin did not maintain the real substantial presence of Christ's body and blood in the Sacrament. At best, Calvin taught a spiritual presence as is shown in his criticism of the Lutherans.

They could not have been so shamefully deluded by the impostures of Satan had they not been fascinated by the erroneous idea, that the body of Christ included under the bread is transmitted by the bodily mouth into the belly. **The cause of this brutish imagination was, that consecration had the same effect with them as magical incantation.** They overlooked the principle, that bread is a sacrament to none but those to whom the word is addressed, just as the water of baptism is not changed in itself, but begins to be to us what it formerly was not, as soon as the promise is annexed.¹¹

The 900th Anniversary of the Death of Anselm of Canterbury

An individual known even less among Lutherans than Calvin is Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109). However, he is important in the history of the church and theology. He became a monk in the abbey of Bec in Normandy and eventually became the head of the monastery. After William the Conqueror of Normandy obtained the English throne in 1066, Anselm became archbishop of Canterbury. He was the first who clearly set forth and successfully employed the principles of scholasticism. He may rightly be called the father of medieval scholasticism. In the Augustinian tradition he emphasized, "I do not seek to understand so that I may believe; but I believe so that I may understand" (*credo ut intelligam*).

He is well known for two writings: his *Monologion* (Soliloquy, 1078) and his *Cur Deus Homo?* (Why did God become man? 1098). In his *Monologion*, he discusses the proofs for the existence of God and especially the ontological argument for the existence of God. This asserts that since God is the highest Being that can be conceived, and since to exist is higher than not to exist, God by definition must exist. (God is that than which nothing greater can be conceived; what exists in reality must be greater than what exists in the mind, therefore God exists.)

In his book *Cur Deus Homo?* he expounds the scriptural doctrine of atonement. In contrast to the view held by Origen that Christ died to pay a ransom to the devil, he argued that Christ offered Himself willingly as the only one who

could satisfy the Father's just anger over sin. Only a man could repay a man's debt. Yet only God could merit by that payment the forgiveness of God. Therefore, God Himself became a man in order to give satisfaction for the great mass of sin which man had committed. This is the classic expression of the biblical doctrine of satisfaction and the atonement which Anselm explicated.

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Endnotes

¹ W. Schmidt, *Sieghardus: Der Hauptmann, der beim Kreuze stand* (Cincinnati: Jennings & Pye, n.d.).

² Peter S. Wells, *The Battle That Stopped Rome* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2003).

³ Martin Luther, *Preface to the Small Catechism*, found in *An Explanation of Dr. Martin Luther's Small Catechism* (Mankato: Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 2001), 9.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁵ LC IV 65, *Triglotta*, 749.

⁶ LC V:23–26, Tappert, 449 (emphasis added).

⁷ This view rejects a true communication of attributes and virtually destroys the personal union.

⁸ John Calvin, *Institutes* IV, 17:30 (MacDonald edition), 742.

⁹ F.E. Mayer, *American Church: Beliefs and Practices* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1946), 28.

¹⁰ See also Wim Janse, “Joachim Westphal’s Sacramentology,” *Lutheran Quarterly* Vol. 22, No. 2 (Summer 2008), 137–160. This is the Westphal that taught the error that Christ’s descent into hell is part of his humiliation.

¹¹ Calvin, *Institutes* IV, 17:15 (MacDonald edition), 731 (emphasis added).

Book Review:

A Lutheran Looks at the Assemblies of God

Feuerstahler, Michael T. *A Lutheran Looks at the Assemblies of God*.
Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2008. 128 pages. \$12.99.

by Rev. Gregory Harstad Schmidt

You cannot fully understand your own language until you have studied someone else's language. - Anonymous

Sitting in Mrs. Fulton's fifth-grade English class wasn't the greatest but it was tolerable. Then one cold winter's day we began a unit on something called parsing. We had to find the verbs, adjectives, direct and indirect objects, etc. in sentences. It was very confusing to me. The language I thought I knew began making very little sense. I sought solace in the idea that, "I can speak and write English just fine. I don't need to understand this parsing stuff." Was I happy when that unit ended.

When I entered ninth grade I was able to take a class I really thought would be interesting: German. I couldn't wait to speak the language of half of my forefathers, and be able to appreciate "Hogan's Heroes" at a higher level. But after learning "Guten Tag," and "Wie geht's?" I quickly found out that there was much more to foreign language study than phrase memorization.

In order to understand German well I had to do what Mrs. Fulton taught me years before: I had to parse. Then the light bulb went off and Mrs. Fulton went from sadist to saint. It was then the above axiom sank in. I began the lifelong journey of understanding and appreciating my own language at an entirely new level.

The same can be said of many things in life, not the least of which is one's faith. The study of other faiths leads to a greater understanding and appreciation of one's own faith. Michael T. Feuerstahler's *A Lutheran Looks at the Assemblies of God* will help pastor and layman alike do those very things.

Origins

"The rise of modern Pentecostalism is one of the greatest religious phenomena of the past century. The Assemblies of God is the largest and fastest growing Pentecostal denomination in the world" (1). The first two chapters of the book are devoted to the origins and history of the Assemblies of God (AOG). Feuerstahler shows the influence on the AOG of men such as John Wesley, the

18th-century English theologian and founder of Methodism; Charles Finney, the 19th-century preacher credited for moving the fervor of outdoor revivalism into the churches; Charles Parham, regarded as the father of the modern Pentecostal Movement; and William Seymour and E.N. Bell, the organizers of what is now called the Assemblies of God. Feuerstahler concisely describes the AOG's complicated history. In his endnotes the author provides references to the historical resources that one could investigate further to gain a deeper knowledge of the AOG's history.

Distinctive Teachings

As would be expected, the bulk of the book (chapters 3-8) is dedicated to the AOG's teachings and how they compare to clear teachings of Scripture. In each chapter Feuerstahler gives an easy to understand overview of a particular AOG teaching. He then follows with what the Bible says and occasionally with what the Lutheran Confessions state on the subject. By doing so he exposes many inconsistencies and paradoxes within AOG theology.

What is refreshing is Feuerstahler's tone when comparing and contrasting AOG and confessional Lutheran theology. He is not deprecatory. He is not presumptuous. He presents the facts, thereby not getting in the way of God's beautiful truth and making it easier for the reader to grow in his understanding of the AOG and his own faith as a confessional Lutheran. Feuerstahler presents himself as a *Seelsorger*, someone who has a genuine concern for his fellow man.

What follows is a brief overview of each of these key chapters.

Chapter 3: The Assemblies of God and Confessionalism

One of the reasons the AOG exists is that it desires to be free from "form." The AOG did not want to be bound by synodical or organizational constraints since these were viewed as detrimental to the Spirit's working. Yet the AOG does have confessional statements. In this chapter Feuerstahler examines the AOG's "16 Fundamental Beliefs." He also directs the reader to the AOG's web page for additional statements of belief.

Chapter 4: Its Distinctive Teaching

The distinctive teachings of the Assemblies of God insure that for them, the spotlight remains focused not on Christ's work for us but on Christ's "special gift" to us, the baptism in the Holy Spirit, which manifests itself with speaking in tongues....It is not an overstatement to assert that in Pentecostalism, the desire for the baptism in the Holy Spirit sweeps every other doctrine into its vortex. (21)

In the first half of this chapter Feuerstahler explains the significance of the AOG's peculiar teaching known as "Spirit Baptism." He shows how the AOG

has misunderstood and decontextualized the Pentecost account in the book of Acts. He proceeds to explain what the Acts account truly meant to the young Church at the time it occurred and what it means to the Church today.

Chapter 5: The Assemblies of God and the Bible

In this chapter Feuerstahler exposes one of many contradictions within the AOG. On the one hand the AOG firmly believes the Bible to be the true Word of God. He states that the AOG is ranked first among religious groups in the percentage of their membership who believe that the Bible is God's literal Word. On the other hand the AOG holds an individual's subjective revelations, emanating from "Spirit Baptism," to be equal or even superior to the Bible's authority.

Chapter 6: Conversion and the Sacraments

According to the AOG, the sacraments are merely traditions containing no divine power. Conversion is essentially an individual's decision but with a twist. According to the AOG the Holy Spirit "initiates" the conversion process. In this chapter Feuerstahler includes an interesting section on the AOG's teachings on the Holy Spirit. He says, "It is incredibly ironic that the Assemblies of God, which showers an inordinate amount of attention on the Holy Spirit's postconversion gift of Spirit-baptism, gives minimal attention to the Holy Spirit's main work of creating and sustaining saving faith" (46).

Chapter 7: What is the Spirit-filled life?

The Spirit-filled life is not necessary for salvation, according to the AOG, but it is a sign that the individual has a fuller relationship with God. The signs of a Spirit-filled life are the bearing of the fruits of faith listed in Scripture. But one isn't truly Spirit-filled unless he speaks in tongues. Feuerstahler then asks an interesting question: "Are we Lutherans, who have not experienced the Pentecostal 'baptism in the Spirit,' not filled with the Spirit or capable of living a Spirit-filled life until we do?" (54) The bulk of this chapter is the author's answer to this question.

Chapter 8: Other Notable Assemblies of God Teachings

The AOG identifies itself as a Protestant church body. In this chapter Feuerstahler shows other ways in which AOG doctrine and practice move outside of mainline Protestantism. He touches on their stance on such issues as divine healing, prophecy, end times, and marriage.

Subsequent Chapters

Chapters nine and ten concern such topics as organizational characteristics of the AOG, the public ministry, and the many ministries within the AOG. In chapter ten especially Feuerstahler shows that the AOG is a very active church body involved in many aspects of service to the church and community.

The worship style of the AOG is the subject of chapter 11. Worship is very free and unstructured for the most part, but it does have some form. Feuerstahler breaks down the AOG worship service into its essential parts and analyzes each part. He also comments on what is missing from the AOG service.

In chapter twelve Feuerstahler gives good advice on how to connect with an AOG friend or acquaintance in order to apply law and gospel.

Overall this book is comprehensive, easy to read, and relevant. The Rev. Feuerstahler is to be commended for providing a valuable resource.

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