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A CALL TO RECOMMITMENT

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A Call To Recommitment

Introduction

By Daniel Fleischer

In 1995, the Church of the Lutheran Confession will, by the grace of God, have existed for 35 years. By the same grace, there are many members of the church body who can still lay claim to something somewhat unique—they either were involved in, or at the very least observed the formation of a church body. As adults or youth, they were charter members of a church body born of the Spirit, and compelled by conscience, bound by the word of God.

As an active pastor in the pastoral ministry of the church, I feel both nostalgia as well as frustration. With a feeling of nostalgia, I recount the early days of the Church of the Lutheran Confession from the perspective of a seminary student. None of those who began in the seminary in the early days in Mankato at Immanuel Church can forget the walls covered with bookshelves, the drafty north windows in what had been an old coal bin, so drafty that on cold winter days the gas space heater worked overtime, not always successfully. Many were the times students studied with coats on, and even occasionally, if memory serves, with gloves.

It was a glorious time, because there was an understanding of the circumstances that brought us there, and an appreciation of the fellowship with the Spirit had created in and around His precious word. Before us sat professors who, being the first to acknowledge their own weaknesses and laying claim to no personal merit, nevertheless had been compelled by conscience to take their stand upon the word. They, together with all our fathers, would shrink from the reference, yet we who serve in the church today are here because they "endure[d] hardship as [a] good soldier[s] of Jesus Christ" (2 Tim. 2: 3). They would be the first to say it was the Lord who energized and supported them. Nevertheless it was they who, as many others did, testified to the truth and who bore the heat of the day. They faithfully committed their knowledge of scripture, as well as their experiences in the field, to their students. Those of us who sat at their feet, whether in classroom or church pew, as well as all since, need to examine ourselves continually to see whether we be "the faithful men who [are] able to teach others also" (2 Tim. 2: 2). I love to tell the history of our church because it reminds me of a time that those of us who have been here from the beginning remember the fondness, in spite of the difficulties, some which we experienced and others which we observed.

The beginning of the CLC was most certainly a testimony to the grace of God, without whom nothing is possible. To Him be glory, and honor, and praise!

I am sure that many lay people of the Church of the Lutheran Confession, who remember the history, can recall the reasons for the stand they took, and can further remember the fervor and commitment that characterized the beginning of the new church body. But herein also lies a source of frustration. As I teach, I realize that I am teaching children, some of whose parents were infants when the Church of the Lutheran Confession was begun. It is so difficult, at least for this pastor, to instill in those parents and children an understanding of the history, an appreciation for the stand that was taken, and the passionate resolve and commitment, under God, that moved the hearts of pastors, teachers, and lay people to do what had to be done under and for the truth, and the witness of our Lord Jesus Christ. We wish that we could re-create that passion and resolve without the attending circumstances that necessitated it.

Then the realization strikes. One cannot recapture the past. We must deal with matters as they are today. The fact is that in these days when "evil men and impostors [will] grow worse, deceiving and being deceived" (2 Tim. 3: 13) and when every conceivable evil is being advanced in the name of religion and even Christianity, God has preserved in the world in general, and among us specifically, the blessed gospel. With no merit or worthiness in us, our gracious Father has preserved to us the gospel of reconciliation. It can be said among us yet at this late date, that the sinner, troubled and burdened by his load of sin, can still enter into any one of our churches, and be comforted with the blessed words of absolution through the word of the everlasting gospel of which Jesus Christ, our Savior, is the heart and life. Such an one can find the comfort of forgiveness, hear the promise of life eternal from our pulpits, and receive the same in the sacraments. Through the proclamation of the gospel, we know that the present is ours, and so is the future. "For me to live is Christ, to die is gain" (Phil. 1: 21).

Our Lord Jesus Christ is our life. He sums up all that we are. He is the life of our souls. As Christ is our life, then to die is gain. "He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live, and whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die" (John 11: 25, 26). Only the gospel can speak something so meaningful, though to the unregenerate it remains a riddle. Only they who are in the gospel can, by the Spirit, believe what is otherwise so profound. By the power of the gospel, frustration is overcome, and in the preaching of the gospel lies the power for a forward-looking ministry of the Church, as well as for a confident hope for the future, both here in time and hereafter.

However, if we are to continue to enjoy the blessings of the gospel, it behooves us to continue to preach the whole counsel of God, and specifically the gospel, pure and unadulterated. For only when the gospel captures the heart will there be the understanding and love for it, as well as passion and fervor to defend it, at whatever cost. We cannot live in the past, but our reason to exist may well be meaningless and our future questionable if we forget the past. Our future is worthwhile, not for the perpetuation of the Church of the Lutheran Confession for its own sake, but only as God is pleased to bless us and others through the gospel entrusted to us, as we preach it for

the reason He has given and preserved it, namely, for the winning of lost hearts for salvation.

Charles Porterfield Krauth, in his *Conservative Reformation* (page 20), helps us to understand the importance of not forgetting the past: . . . The evils of which the Reformation was the occasion have passed away. We must go to the page of history to know what they were. The blessings of which the Reformation was the cause, abide; we feel them in our homes, in the Church, in the State; they are inwoven with the life of our life. Once feeling them, we know that this would be no world to live in without them. And how instructive is this to us in the struggle of our day for the perpetuation of the truth restored by the Reformation. Not alone by Rome, but also by heretical or fanatical Pseudo-Protestants, is it still assailed—and when we see the guilty passions, the violence and odious spirit of misrepresentation excited, and feel them directed upon ourselves, we may be tempted to give up the struggle. But we are untrue to the lessons of the Reformation, if we thus yield.

Our witness and cause is not as broad as that which came by the Reformation. But, under God, it is as noble, for our witness is witness to the word of God in a day when among the "Pseudo-Protestants" are numbered elements of those who, though they deny fundamental Lutheran teachings drawn from scripture, still identify themselves by the name "Lutheran."

In the spirit of self-examination, as well as in recognition of the necessity to remind ourselves who we are and why we are, with prayer that there will be rekindled among us the flame of love for the Truth and recommitment to the declaration of that Truth, we have chosen as the theme of this convention: "A CALL TO RECOMMITMENT. "

In keeping with this call, one of the assigned essays is an encouragement to RECOMMIT OURSELVES TO REMEMBERING THE PAST. We ourselves, as well as the generation to follow, need to know what gave us birth, lest the gospel so wonderfully preserved to us, not without cost or heartache to our fathers, be lost to later generations by reason of a lack of will to stand as they stood.

Remembering the past serves a purpose if it increases our resolve to RECOMMIT OURSELVES TO HOLD FAST TO SOUND DOCTRINE. Paul told Timothy, "Guard what was committed to your trust . . . " (1 Tim. 6: 20). That charge is no less necessary today. We will not ever want to shrink from being known as a "doctrinal" church, remembering that the doctrine of the apostles and prophets with Christ at its center is the message of salvation, and further remembering that, for life to be right and good, doctrine must be preached, "for life is fathered and fashioned by doctrine" (What Luther Says, vol. 1, p. 417, 1229).

Yet, as a church body, our past is meaningless, and our doctrine drawn from scripture hidden under a basket, if we do not declare it. So the third essay at this convention will remind us to RECOMMIT OURSELVES TO THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH.

An excerpt from the CLC "President's Report, " presented at the 21st Convention of the CLC, June 20-24, 1994, at Immanuel Lutheran College, Eau Claire, WI. (Editor.)

I. We Recommit Ourselves to Remembering Our Past

By Elton Hallauer

O Lord God, whose mercy is from everlasting and whose truth shall endure to all generations, we acknowledge with shame and trembling that we are "not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which You have shown Your servant[s]." We are unworthy because we have sinned: we have often failed to do what You would have us do, done what You would have us not do, failed to go where You would have us go, gone where You would have us not go, remained silent when You would have us speak, and spoken when You would have us remain silent. Forgive us, O Lord, our many transgressions according to

Your loving kindness, for "against You, You only, have [we] sinned and done this evil in Your sight."

Although we are worthy of none of the things for which we ask, yet we do not despair, O Lord; for we acknowledge with deep gratitude and full assurance that You have washed us clean in the blood of the Lamb, whose spotless life and innocent death have made Him the "propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world." By raising Your Son from death, You have declared before all men that this is so; and in Your word You have promised "that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

Grant to us, dear Lord, as Your individual children and as the Church of the Lutheran Confession, the continuance of Your grace, so that we may strive ever more zealously to do Your will and daily rededicate ourselves to Your cause. Hold us up that we may not falter along the way that lies before us, guide us in the paths of Your Truth that we may not stray from the fold, guard us that we may "be saved from this perverse generation," protect us from an evil and unbelieving death, and grant us a glorious entrance into the mansions of eternal rest. All this we ask with firm confidence and faith in the merits and atoning death of Your Son, Jesus Christ, whom we wholeheartedly acknowledge and confess to be our only Savior and Lord. Amen.

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What has passed is gone; it is behind us; it is history. History need not be forgotten, however, nor should it be. Especially among us, who recognize history as "His Story," will there be great benefit in remembering how our gracious God worked in us and through us and among us to establish a church body which, like none other, confesses and clings to the Triune God as the only true God and to the whole of His holy word, verbally inspired and therefore inerrant, as the sole authority and norm for faith and life. Especially among us, therefore, should none think of our history as a church body apart from our gracious and merciful God with whom we have to do. If anyone fails to give glory to God, he also deserves to be eaten by worms and die.

Others have remembered the past over the years, and their writings surely would be of interest and benefit to those who, because of their youth or for other reasons, were not involved in the demise of the Synodical Conference (SC) and the rise of the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC). These would best be read in their entirety for the sake of completeness and continuity. Parts of them will be cited here in review of the first twenty-five years of our existence. Some of these writings are:

"Mark . . . Avoid," Origin of the CLC, prepared by Paul F. Nolting, authorized by the Coordinating Council of the CLC and approved by the Praesidium and the Board of Doctrine.

Ten Years of Grace, an essay written by M. J. Witt and presented to the 1970 convention.

A History of the CLC, written by C. M. Gullerud in 1978 and presented to the CLC Teachers' Conference.

This Is Your Church, originally written by Gilbert Sydow and published by the Board of Education in 1981 "to provide our children with a history of the" CLC.

Our Anniversary Memorial to the Lord, an essay written and delivered at the 1984 convention by Egbert Albrecht, focusing particularly upon the twenty-fifth anniversary of ILC.

Reflections/Projections, by various writers, originally appearing at various times during our twenty-fifth anniversary year as bulletin inserts and now in booklet form.

Most, if not all, of the above are available from the CLC Book House. Besides these, there are many items in past issues of the Lutheran Spokesman and the Journal of Theology, some purely historical and others that necessarily touch on matters of history while they may focus upon matters of doctrine.

Early Beginnings

God in His grace and through His holy word has convinced us that there is nothing more precious than the salvation He has given us in connection with His Son, Jesus Christ. By the same means He has engendered a love for Him in our hearts which, in turn, has responded with the resolve to be obedient to that word in all things. It was because that word was being violated by the synods of the SC—they were continuing in a fellowship which God forbade—that caused us to separate from the church bodies with which we were formerly affiliated. These separations were precipitated especially by the convention actions of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) in 1953, 1955, and 1956. I attended the 1955 convention in Saginaw, not as an expenses-paid delegate, but as a concerned Christian. Because I remained with the synod until April of 1960, however, I did not participate in most of the meetings that took place during the previous four years. For this reason, I am obliged to rely upon others who have written about the early beginnings.

In search of mutual encouragement and edification, seven pastors, one teacher, and several laymen gathered for a free conference at Lyons, Nebraska, in October 1957. At this meeting it was mutually agreed that, because of twenty years of confused thinking in the SC, there was a need for an article to be drawn up on the doctrine of fellowship. This was the initial move toward the framing of the document we now know as Concerning Church Fellowship. This document was carefully revised and amended at successive meetings until it has reached the final form as we have it today.

By December of 1957, when another free conference was held at Mankato, Minnesota, about 12 congregations and pastors, one professor, and a number of teachers had withdrawn from synods in the SC. Again, this meeting was held for mutual strengthening of the participants, whose major concern was that a clear and simple confessional statement should be the basis for any organizational form that might follow. It was decided here that there was need also for a statement on "The Church," since conflicting statements had arisen in the SC over the years. Also at this meeting provisions were made for the support of the Japan mission whose pastor and members had severed relations with the WELS in January 1957.

Five of those 12 congregations were in the Pacific Northwest. These also held meetings for mutual edification by studying God's word, one in Spokane, Washington, in November of 1957, and one in Opportunity, Washington, in January of 1958.

Another free conference was held at Cheyenne, Wyoming, in May of 1958. The Lutheran Spokesman, which came into being at this conference, reported: "They came from varied and far-flung sections of the country: The Northwest and the Southeast; from Wisconsin to Colorado. . . . They came from different synods, from different ethnic groups. . . . They knew that this meeting was of God, for it was dedicated to the task of keeping God's word in its purity. Yes, the love for God's truth drew all to Cheyenne and was the common denominator of this group." Much time was spent in discussing and working out a confession on the issue of Church Fellowship. Also the work of missions was on the agenda with considerable time spent on the problems confronting the Japan Mission.

The next meeting was held about two months later in Spokane. It was here that a paper was delivered on Church and Ministry. Again, the document on Church Fellowship was discussed and revised. After this series of free conferences, when it became apparent in which direction things were going, the group called itself the "Interim Conference," by which it was known until the constituting convention in August 1960.

At the first meeting of the Interim Conference at Mankato in January 1959, 21 pastors, 7 teachers, 16 lay people and 4 seminary students registered as participants. The emphasis here was on missions at home and abroad, the two doctrinal documents, and especially Christian education. From the discussions it became evident that here the seed was sown for the eventual establishment of Immanuel Lutheran College, although the group thought it unwise to enter into joint action to do so until the work of framing a confessional statement was concluded. But the Lord has His ways to make things happen. Four men from the Mankato congregation formed an association for the purpose of founding a school to

fulfill what everyone agreed was a most pressing need, and that September Immanuel Lutheran College was dedicated to the blessed work of training our youth.

A committee was appointed at the conference in Red Wing, Minnesota, in August of 1959 to write a constitution which would lead to the organization of a new church body. The meetings here were filled with zeal and enthusiasm, so much so that the neighbors remarked about the loud and vigorous singing at devotions. The conference pledged its moral and financial support to the proposed new school at Mankato, discussed its mission program, heard and discussed the latest revisions of "Concerning Church Fellowship" and "Church and Ministry," evaluated the actions of the conventions of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS) and the WELS, and pledged "full support and encouragement to those who have severed or [are] in process of severing their membership in the above bodies in obedience to God's Word."

The last meeting of the Interim Conference was held at Mankato in January 1960. More work was done on the confessional writings and the constitution. The name, "The Confessional Lutheran Church" was suggested by a committee; further suggestions were to be referred to the constitution committee. Reports were heard from the mission committee, from the Spokesman staff, and from the heads of the departments of Immanuel Lutheran College. It was hoped that the committees that were editing the confessional statements would be able to complete their work to the extent that they could be formally adopted at the next meeting at Watertown, South Dakota.

One of our eminent historians summarized the early beginnings as follows: "Upon examining the records, reports and minutes of the above-cited conferences and meetings one is impressed with the careful and conscientious deliberations on the part of the participants as they, under God, were moving toward the establishment of a sound and scripture-grounded church body which might serve as a truly united fellowship-assembly dedicated to the Lord's work in the widening field of activity which the Spirit of God was opening in those formative years. The meetings which brought together brethren of united mind and heart during days of trial and testing served to strengthen and comfort those who were in need of such healing balm from the Holy Word of God."

Formal Organization

Under Article II: Purpose, the constitution of the CLC states the following: "This church body is organized and dedicated to serve the following scriptural purposes: A. To aid its members so that all things may be done decently and in order.

B. To afford its membership additional opportunities for the proclamation of the Gospel and for the exercise of Christian stewardship in the service of the Lord Jesus Christ, in accordance with the commands and promises of His Word.

C. To facilitate the exercise of true Christian fellowship and to help maintain the same through mutual strengthening and fraternal vigilance, in keeping with the will of God.

D. To protect this fellowship against the encroachment of error and unionism through united testimony and doctrinal discipline."

Those who had been meeting together during those early years, seeking out people of the same mind and heart for mutual encouragement and fellowship, met again at Watertown, South Dakota, at what was to become the organizing convention of the Church of the Lutheran Confession. Statements such as the above were discussed article by article, point by point, carefully scrutinized, honed and polished until the constitution was finally adopted on the afternoon of Friday, August 12, 1960. Those who were present were given the opportunity before the afternoon was over to record their individual acceptance of the constitution by signing their names to it. Eighty-nine names were recorded and filed with the secretary.

Vital to the constitution and the church body are the items included under Article III: Confession. For this reason much time was devoted to the discussion of the three confessional statements: Concerning Church Fellowship, Theses on the Relation of Synod and Local Congregation to the Holy Christian Church, and Theses on the Ministry of the

Keys and the Public Ministry. Two doctrinal essays were presented, whose scripture-based content served to guide the thinking of the delegates and lead them to discuss gainfully the reports of the committees that had been working with these documents for some months and even years. Concerning Church Fellowship was adopted unanimously; the report of the committee working with the theses on Church and Ministry, likewise, with the provision that formal confessional documents concerning these doctrines be prepared and presented at the next regular convention.

Encouraging were the reports of the committees on missions, publications and ILC. New congregations had been organized, others were able to secure property, and one congregation had opened a new Christian Day School. The convention resolved that the newly-organized CLC would assume responsibility for ILC and made provision in the constitution for a board that would supervise running it. The convention at Watertown resolved to accept a committee recommendation to start a theological journal, with the seminary faculty and others whom they might appoint serving as editorial staff. It was also here that the first CLC Teachers' Conference was announced; it was to be held at Jamestown, North Dakota, in the latter part of October.

Not all of the work could be completed at the Watertown convention. Concerning Church Fellowship had been accepted unanimously, but it was felt that the doctrinal statements on Church and Ministry needed more work. Furthermore, the convention tabled action on articles of the constitution and by-laws. The delegates decided, therefore, to continue the convention on January 24-26, 1961, at Sleepy Eye, Minnesota, in order to complete the work of organizing the CLC. The recessed convention was held as planned in what is normally the coldest week of Minnesota's often severe winters. The meetings at Watertown and Sleepy Eye should be considered a unit.

An important essay dealing with excommunication and termination of fellowship was delivered and discussed at Sleepy Eye, giving valuable insight and direction to the delegates with regard to our scripture-based separation from former affiliations. In order to complete the work of organization, much time was devoted to electing officers, boards and committees, much as we still have them today. The articles and by-laws of the constitution that had been tabled were adopted. The Lutheran Spokesman and the Journal of Theology became official publications of the church body, the former retroactively to its first issue in June 1958. The convention report listed 34 congregations, 67 pastors and professors, 21 teachers, and six seminary students as charter members of the CLC. Eight more congregations and three more pastors were added as charter members at the Spokane convention in 1962.

Under the Lord's blessing, mission activity had increased considerably since the first meeting of the Interim Conference, although monetary assistance was very small because the 36 contributing congregations no doubt had financial problems of their own. Receipts for the third and fourth quarters of 1960 were just over \$15, 000. Nevertheless, progress was being made. The convention resolved to take over the entire financial responsibility for the Japanese Mission and allocated funds for the support of about 10 other mission congregations and Immanuel Lutheran College at Mankato.

Between Watertown and Sleepy Eye, in September 1960, 350 people from 10 congregations gathered in Mankato to dedicate the new Immanuel Lutheran High School building. At the Sleepy Eye convention it was reported that 84 students were enrolled at ILC who were being instructed under sometimes very difficult conditions by five full-time and four part-time hard-working and dedicated teachers. Because there were no dormitories then, most of the students were housed in the private homes of members of Immanuel Congregation. At the recessed convention, the Board of Directors of ILC offered to transfer the physical plant to the CLC at cost. The offer was accepted with gratitude to the founders and supporters of ILC for making it possible to provide for the educational welfare of our youth and for workers in the public ministry of the Church.

Much more than doctrinal and organizational concerns was involved in the formation of the CLC. This is Your Church has these comments: Getting started called for a great deal of personal effort and sacrifice. Many congregations were small, for in separating from their former synods they often gave up church property and had to begin congregational life with little or nothing-no buildings nor furnishings. They used make-shift

arrangements and worshiped in homes, basements, store-fronts, or whatever was available and served the purpose.

Pastors were also affected by the lack of money, for many congregations could not pay adequate salaries nor provide parsonages. Quite a few pastors had to find secular employment to support themselves and their families and often had to live in inexpensive rented quarters or even in church basements.

In order to get to the many meetings that were held, those who attended had to pay their own way. Some used all their vacation time from secular employment for church purposes. Being careful with time and money became an urgent necessity. For some, going to conferences meant loading a car and driving day and night to the place of meeting.

To paraphrase the apostle Paul: "We are what we are by the grace of God." As the CLC came into existence, individuals were brought to certain convictions by the power of the Holy Spirit working in the word. But the Holy Spirit does more. The psalmist says of the Lord: "He setteth the solitary in families." The individual believer is not left to abide sorrowfully alone.

Thus we have seen how the gracious Lord of His Church provided a safe refuge for those whom He had moved to the conviction to remain faithful to His will and word at all costs. We believe also that all of the successes and joy we have experienced since our beginnings are due solely to His patient guidance, providence and protection. May we never forget and ever praise His loving-kindness. We now turn to some of the more prominent happenings that have come to pass in and through the Church of the Lutheran Confession since its early beginnings and its formal organization. A methodical listing of dates, names and places could become a very uninteresting and perhaps tiring exercise. It would seem to be more profitable, therefore, to review the past in a topical manner rather than in chronological order. The following is a humble effort to recount some of the more salient events of the past three decades. Some events and their attendant details surely will stand out for some of us as being more noteworthy than others. If anyone has a desire to supply what appears to him to be an omission of great importance and interest, he is by all means invited to do so. The compilation of all of the events of each of our congregations and of all of the activities of each of our boards would already fill a book of considerable size. Perhaps it is time, if there should be a desire for such a book, for someone to undertake the task.

Doctrine

It was because of a difference in the doctrine of church fellowship as it was being promoted in synods of the SC that the Church of the Lutheran Confession came into being. The Lord God had given the founders of the CLC the grace to recognize "the little leaven" that threatened to dim and hide the truth of the gospel. It was for this reason that so much time and effort were spent in formulating a document that would spell out in unequivocal language what scripture says regarding the subject, with particular reference to the termination of church fellowship. While the matter is settled for us, having become a plank in our confessional platform, the topic has been the subject of several meetings with representatives of our former affiliations. Within a year after the Wisconsin Synod finally severed relations with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS) in 1961 by virtue of a majority vote, correspondence began between the presidents of the WELS and the CLC. This was followed by a series of meetings that continued until the summer of 1972, after which no further meetings were scheduled and Wisconsin expressed regret "over the failure . . . to reach agreement on the doctrine under discussion."

Prior to the 1986 convention, meetings between pastors of the Pacific Coast Conference and some pastors of the WELS gave rise to an expression of agreement called "The Separation Principle of Church Fellowship." In June 1987, sub-committees of the doctrinal commissions of the two church bodies met to set up an agenda for a future meeting at which discussion of the fellowship principle would be resumed. Meetings continued with representatives of the WELS and the ELS as time and circumstance permitted until the WELS Commission on Inter-Church Relations stated in a letter, dated August 8, 1990: "We do not believe there was a real difference between us in doctrine but a difference in regard to the question: Has Missouri been conclusively shown to be persistent in its error?" Since

the justification for conducting these more recent meetings had been removed by this denial of a doctrinal difference, our Board of Doctrine was encouraged "to terminate the present discussions with the representatives of the WELS/ELS, unless such discussions address this specific doctrinal difference from the outset." No doubt, the next scheduled essay will treat these matters in much greater detail.

There were other testings, too, doctrinal disagreements that arose among members of the CLC and that called upon our membership to delve into God's word for solutions and to allow for time and opportunity for full discussion by all concerned. These testings pertained to such matters as "The Kingdom of God," "The Third Use of the Law," "The Polygamy Question in Connection With the Practice to be Followed in the Nigerian Mission Field," "The Matter of Involvement in Unionistic Fraternal Life Insurance Organizations," "The Status of Those Who Hold Membership in AAL/LB With Regard to Communion Attendance," "The Role of Women in the Church," "The Divine Call and Termination of the Call." There has never been an indication to ignore any of these problems. We turned to the word for solutions. When agreement was reached, we rejoiced that the Holy Spirit had shown us the way. When agreement could not be reached, we were saddened by the departure of those who felt constrained to leave our fellowship. Perhaps the highest hurdle for many to master was the realization that continued involvement with fraternal benefit societies rendered them guilty of promoting error. After long hours of discussion in conventions, conferences and congregations whereby the membership was made aware of the unionism involved, we as a body resolved to "all speak the same thing," and obedient to instruction and admonition in the word of our Lord, in an evangelical manner eliminate the leaven of unionistic fraternal benefit societies from our midst." Again we were saddened when some left our fellowship with the charge that we were legalistic and others with the charge that we were not being faithful to the gospel.

In spite of the sad experiences that often accompany such testings, the fact that we were forced to search the scriptures in order to find solutions to the problems and to assure ourselves that our convictions in these matters rest firmly on God's word can only serve to our good. This is the only source upon which we can rely to decide the doctrinal issues that arise from time to time. It is God's word that we need in order to keep us united in confession and strong in the faith. Let us never depart from it.

Missions

To us as individuals and, therefore, to us as a church body the Lord has given the directive to take His gospel and carry it to the ends of the earth. This is our great privilege as children of God and heirs of eternal salvation. There is no one who will say that we have done all that we could to spread the message of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. One of the reasons we gather at conventions and conferences and congregational meetings is to hear reports of what the Lord has accomplished through our efforts in various areas and to encourage and exhort and spur each other on to greater and more dedicated involvement in this soul-saving undertaking.

When the CLC was but a fledgling with severely limited resources, our cords didn't stretch very far. For a time we had all we could do to support our newly-acquired school and to care for the needy congregations in our own country. Even so, many of the pastors and missionaries were forced to find secular work in order to supplement their meager salaries. Yet, relative to our resources, more was accomplished than many ever dreamed possible. Our bountiful Lord always provided the means to fulfill the needs as they arose. To God alone be glory! At the first annual convention, the delegates resolved to assume the financial responsibility also for the Japanese mission. From the records it appears that no less than ten home missions were being supported at any given time. In fact, it is estimated that about half of our congregations were mission stations at one time. Some of these have grown to become flourishing and sometimes large congregations, such as Redemption, Lynnwood; Holy Cross, Phoenix; Grace and Berea, Twin Cities; Gethsemane, Spokane; Messiah, Eau Claire; and others. As these congregations became self-supporting, the Board of Missions was able finally to reach out with the light that God had entrusted to us to other groups that needed help or were searching for God's truth. Some have come and gone, and many of us will not even remember their names: Christ, Montevideo; Trinity, Broomfield; Bethlehem, Neenah; Grace, McIntosh; Grace, Carlsbad; Redeemer, Tucumcari; Servant of Christ, Los Angeles; Emmaus, Portland; and others. Yet,

the seed of the gospel has been sown in these locations, and who but God knows how many souls have been rescued from the fires of hell and have not departed from the Lord.

The Japanese congregation, which came to us early in our history, left us at the time of "The Third Use of the Law" controversy; however, the Lord was already opening doors in other directions. A dedicated layman from California had been sending materials to Nigeria which prompted several individuals from Nigeria to ask whether ILC could accept students to train for the ministry. A visitation team was sent to explore the field. The Board of Missions reported to the 1974 convention: "As of this date 27 congregations in Nigeria (some 2, 000 souls) agreed with the limited doctrinal presentation of our representatives and requested us to serve them with the truth of the Gospel." Thus the Nigerian Church of the Lutheran Confession (NCLC) came into being. The convention resolved to bring one of the Nigerian members and his family to ILC for training and to authorize the calling of a resident spiritual advisor as soon as possible. The latter was not to become a reality until some 10 years later. In the meantime, the number of souls in the NCLC dwindled to only 12 churches by the time the CLC was able to send its called foreign missionary into the field. Even the student we trained in the States did not keep his promise to serve in the NCLC. With the advent of the missionary, an intensive program of instruction was begun by means of conventions, seminars, and visitations to strengthen and educate the pastors and congregations in the word. With the establishment of a Bible Institute, the NCLC was beginning to train future pastors and leaders. The ILC-trained student returned to the NCLC and was ordained on Easter Sunday, 1987. Our first missionary accepted a call in the United States after serving in Nigeria for four years. Another man was called to fill the vacancy and began work in Nigeria in January 1991. Via the Mission Newsletter, he told us that at the end of that year the second and largest class of men had completed their studies in the Bible Institute and accepted calls into the field. Because of a power struggle resulting in the defection of seven congregations, there remain only five congregations and 11 preaching stations. A third man has now been called to replace the second, but because of the unstable political situation in Nigeria, he has not been able to enter the field. We wait upon the Lord to show us what to do and when to do it.

The Lord opened another door for us through yet another layman who had spent a number of months in South India teaching the people basic agricultural techniques. There he met with an independent Lutheran pastor who had left his former affiliation for reasons of religious liberalism and church politics. As time passed, other pastors and congregations followed. When the Board of Missions was made aware of their request for spiritual guidance, it sent a visitation team to explore the field, to consult with the head pastor, and contact a number of the other pastors. The team found that approximately 3, 600 souls were being served by about 20 pastors. On the basis of the team's report, the Board authorized the purchase of a Mission House as a residence for the head pastor and as a meeting place for the Church of the Lutheran Confession of India (CLCI). Recognizing the need for further instruction as the pastors and people in the CLCI grow in faith, the 1984 Convention recommended that a man be called as missionary to India as soon as feasible. A man accepted the Lord's call, but he never entered the field because the request for a visa was denied. (When the call was expanded to include any foreign field, the missionary began to do the Lord's work in Nigeria.) In seeking to assist the CLCI in the training of future pastors and leaders, the head pastor's son began a course of training at ILC. Upon completion of his training, he returned to become a most valuable assistant to his father. He continues to work on his dream of establishing both a pastoral training program and a Christian Day School for the orphans and other CLCI children. Presently there are about 30 congregations and 8, 000 members in the CLCI.

Some 400 miles to the southwest, the visitation team met with another independent Lutheran pastor who was serving about 300 souls in that area. He also has shown that he is determined to share the Word of Life with as many of his countrymen as possible. The Christians in this part of India chose for themselves the name, "Bharath Evangelical Lutheran Church (BELC), which now numbers about 2, 000 souls. The pastor, in addition to preaching and pastoring, teaches daily in the Martin Luther Bible School (high school and college age), oversees a small orphanage (10 children), and is writing and translating catechism, hymnal, and liturgical materials into several dialects.

Advertising in the newspapers in these two regions of India has done much to promote a Bible correspondence course that had been prepared by one of our stateside pastors and has met with excellent response. Recent reports indicate that the Christians in both of these areas are being subjected to growing forms of persecution, not only from the Hindus, but also from other "Christian" churches in the area. Let us, who are relatively free from the problems that our brothers and sisters in Christ are made to endure for His name's sake, storm the gates of grace in their behalf and beseech the Lord that He may keep them in the faith unto their end. By the way, if the statistics are accurate, there are more souls of our fellowship in India than there are in the CLC. It is also interesting to note that the budgeted amount for the two mission groups in India amounts to only \$9, 000 for this fiscal year.

After one of our men, whose God-directed conscience caused him to seek our fellowship, gained extensive experience working with the Hmong in the Twin Cities area, the opportunity arose for him to explore some reported mission opportunities among various refugee camps in Thailand. In May 1989, funds were made available from the Mission Development Fund so that he could spend a month pursuing contacts in these refugee camps. There were some encouraging results. Early this year another visitation team traveled abroad for the purpose of visiting the brethren of the NCLC, the CLCI, and the BELC. Part of this trip included the investigation of mission possibilities in Thailand and China. We await the reports of the men who represented us in these foreign lands.

There is another aspect of the work in India that needs to be mentioned, and that is Project Kinship. This project was begun in order to help the leader of the CLCI support seven orphans who had lost their parents in a hurricane. The Board of Missions decided to ask a committee to contact the Ladies' Aids and other groups or individuals who might be willing to take an active role in this labor of love. The response was overwhelming! Eighty-seven people offered to support an orphan for at least a year; 56 offered their support of the project in general; and four others offered to help build an orphanage. In June of 1983, the president of the CLC decreed that the committee continue with the orphan project under the supervision of the Board of Missions. The 1984 and 1986 conventions set the guidelines for Project Kinship, notable among which are these: The project is to be a project under the Mission Development Fund (MDF); an estimated budget is to be submitted to each convention for approval; any new phase of the project involving the expenditure of funds must be approved by the convention; the Kinship Committee is authorized to circularize the CLC for the program; monies needed to administer the project should be derived from extra-budgetary offerings. In 1986, the goals of Project Kinship were spelled out: "The long range goal of Project Kinship is to provide the CLCI with a 100-child orphanage in Nidubrolu, India, and to assist, as much as possible, in the ongoing costs of the program." In the period of only a few years, the orphanage has been built next to the Mission House, the adding of a second story to the building is already being considered, and eight acres of land have been acquired for the raising of crops to help support the orphans and the needy pastors of the CLCI. At present about 25 otherwise homeless children reside at the orphanage. The Lord certainly has blessed this humanitarian effort with the generous responses of our people.

For the past twelve years, the Board of Missions has supported an endeavor known as the "Video Tape Ministry." Literally hundreds of church services conducted by congregations in and around Eau Claire have been recorded and made available to several families who are living away from their home congregations and at a distance from any of our CLC congregations. Since the services coincide with the Sundays of the church year, an isolated family with a television set (and most have at least one) is able to worship remotely with people of like mind every week for the cost of a few pennies return postage. Most local libraries have VCRs for loan at no cost to the user. Mission congregations who have not the privilege of a "live" pastor in their midst every Sunday are able still to hold services every week. This may be an important consideration in some areas. Some of our pastors make use of the VTM for their own congregations when they are on vacation or absent for some other reason.

Christian Education

The need for Christian education became a topic of discussion already in the days of the Interim Conference. Discussion of an essay entitled, "There is No Excuse," emphasized how

important it is for us to take upon ourselves the responsibility for educating our young, both in the elementary years when they are so susceptible to the evil influence of the world around them and in those years when they are beginning to think about and plan for their future vocation. Particularly, if as a church body we hoped to remain faithful to the fellowship principle, our young people could not attend schools of false-teaching church bodies. Besides, since the Lord has placed the task of preaching and teaching the gospel into the hands of believers, we need to train teachers and pastors who shall carry on the work. There must be others who will step into the gap and lift up the cross of Christ before the eyes of the world when those of us who are weak and weary no longer are able to press forward. History has taught us that church bodies which failed to establish schools usually disappeared. The latest statistics show that the Lord has made it possible for 20 of our congregations to fulfill their dream of establishing and maintaining Christian Day Schools. The total enrollment at the end of 1993 was 538 pupils who were being taught by 36 full-time and 34 part-time teachers. The Mankato congregation also supports a Christian high school of 44 students with three full-time and two part-time instructors.

The early beginnings of Immanuel Lutheran College have already been recounted. The Lord so blessed our efforts to offer Christian education and professional training to our young people that it soon became evident that more space would be needed in order to carry on the work. Already in 1961 the convention selected an Expansion and Relocation Committee to confront the problem. As the needs arose, the Lord provided. Late in 1962 the committee was made aware of the availability of the Ingram Estate in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, comprising 75 acres, a large mansion with an annex, a large stable-carriage house, a cow barn, and a custodian's house. At the special convention that was held a month later, the delegates resolved to purchase the property for a mere \$85, 000 and move the institution to Eau Claire. Much work needed to be done before the school could be opened for business that fall. "When [the Lord] had made sure that the new campus was ours, He stirred up a mighty spirit throughout the Church of the Lutheran Confession for remodeling it to suit our needs." Volunteers from the membership of the CLC came out in force and remodeled the carriage house into classrooms and a boys' dormitory and converted the cow barn into the Seminary House. Changes were also made to the mansion to provide kitchen and dining space for the students, while the upper floors and the annex became girls' dormitories. Over the years other buildings were added to fulfill the needs as they arose: two classroom buildings (1965 and 1970), the field house in which you sit today (1970), a girls' dormitory (1976), a boys' dormitory (1981), and 11 professorages. Upon completion of the boys' dormitory, it was decided to remodel Northwest Hall for the purpose of housing the CLC Book House, the president's office, the business manager's office, the school secretary's office, a classroom, and offices for some of the professors. At the meetings this week we shall be considering yet another significant addition to our campus.

More important, of course, than the buildings are the student body and the faculty that use them. From the very first, in spite of the school's humble beginnings, the students were filled with a wonderful spirit of enthusiasm, joy and Christian fellowship. For the most part this spirit has continued to the present day. This is, no doubt, part of the reason for the continued increase in enrollment during the first 15 years of the school's existence. The peak was reached in the middle 1970s when as many as 178 students attended classes on campus. Thereafter the enrollment figures dropped considerably until the present decade when, it seems, they have turned upward again. We can hope that this is happening because more and more of our parents, after comparing the philosophy of secular education with the Christ-centered instruction that is offered at ILC, are becoming convinced that this is the place for their children to be. In order that none be hindered from attending ILC because of rising costs in tuition, room and board, the "ILC Student Aid Fund" was inaugurated in 1986, providing loans and grants for those who needed them. Since that time nearly one-half million dollars in grants, loans, and scholarships have been distributed.

The kind of education our young people receive on this campus is unique partly because of the faculty which the Lord has given us over the years. Here, unlike anywhere else, we have instructors who in everything that they teach and do are committed to and bound by the word of God and by the Confessions of our Lutheran Church. It is unique also in that the Lord, who has given us this precious jewel, has kept it under His protecting wing for

all of its 35 years. Yes, even when He pruned the pines by means of a tremendous windstorm during the convention of 1980, He allowed only a small amount of harm to come to the buildings. Cars were demolished, but all human life was spared. Properly, the convention paused to give thanks to God for His merciful kindness.

Publications

The Lutheran Spokesman is older than the CLC, having been launched at the conference in Cheyenne in May 1958. The first editor, reporting the conference's action, commented: "Hereby pastors and congregations will find opportunity to exhort one another in the Word." The first issue of 200 copies appeared in mimeographed form. After only a year the subscription list increased to 1, 000. Today the number is near 2, 500. This official organ of the CLC has supplied us with timely editorials, an abundance of spiritual meat for hungry souls, informative news reports about our congregations and missions, items of interest regarding synodical activities and inter-synodical meetings, announcements of conferences and conventions, changes of address, and the like.

A publication of a slightly different nature is the Journal of Theology, intended especially, but not exclusively, for those who are engaged in the teaching and preaching ministry. Many of the original 80 subscribers were laymen. Readers now number about 275, among whom are also those outside our fellowship. At first the Journal, which was inaugurated in 1961 as another official publication of the CLC, appeared five times a year but later became a quarterly because of the increase in the cost of printing and shipping. The first editor listed the aims of the Journal: to explain to interested parties the reason for the existence of the CLC, to touch on the questions in controversy from time to time; and "through the positive study of scripture and its saving doctrines," to widen the range of interest, deepen the measure of understanding, enrich the store of knowledge, and cultivate the practical skills of its readers.

"Ministry by Mail" came into being early in the history of the CLC because of the need to supply our isolated members, who for reasons of distance could not attend regular church services, with sermons and other worship materials. Some contacts with people outside our fellowship have been made by this means. This program of weekly mailings took shape under the direction of the pastor at Sleepy Eye, Minnesota, and his congregation. At present 232 sermons are being sent out in bulk and 70 individually.

The Directory is published biennially, complemented by a list of roster changes in the following year. It includes the location and time of services of all congregations along with the names of their pastors; the congregations that have Christian day schools and high schools along with the names of their teaching staff; the names, addresses, and telephone numbers of all pastors, professors and teachers; the names of the officers of the CLC; the personnel of the various boards and committees; information about our publications, the Book House and ILC, including a listing of the faculty and the administration.

After the CLC decided in 1978 to establish a self-supporting Printing Division under the control of the CLC Book House and the Board of Regents of ILC, other publications began to appear, some on a regular basis and others as they were prepared for publication. The Printing Division was self-supporting as long as one does not factor in the cost of labor; for those who were involved in managing, maintaining and operating the equipment and producing the materials, first a special student at ILC and then a member of the faculty, volunteered their valuable services and accepted help from others when help was needed. This arrangement continued for about a decade when it became evident that we could no longer compete in today's market, even with volunteer help. We owe all of them the debt of our sincere gratitude for the work they have done on our behalf. Among the first publications to appear were the Prospectus and the Proceedings of the 1978 Convention. Other items that followed were The Journal of Theology, Ministry by Mail, timely newsletters from the various CLC boards and from ILC, reports from the CLC Statistician, some of the essays that were delivered at conventions, our two doctrinal documents, the CLC Constitution, teaching materials for ILC, the ILC Beacon, and other CLC pamphlets as they were needed and authorized.

In conclusion, a summary statement by one of the writers of Reflections/ Projections seems to be in place. In part he wrote:

We believe that it was this same kind of motivation [Luther's wish to be faithful to his Lord Jesus Christ and faithful to his calling as a teacher of Bible truth] that brought about the formation of our church body in the late 1950s and the early 1960s. Lutheran Christians were concerned by the inroads the ecumenical movement was making in Lutheran circles. They saw their whole Lutheran heritage slipping away from them by compromises, concessions, and delays in dealing with what they knew to be contrary to Holy Scripture. . . . So in great distress and with fear and trembling they withdrew (or were forcibly removed) from the Lutheran synods and fellowships they had previously cherished. They did not know what the future held in store for them.

But the work of preaching the Gospel had to continue. The work of supporting missionaries had to continue. The work of training pastors and teachers and the new generation had to continue. For these reasons the Church of the Lutheran Confession was organized. It was not an end in itself, but only the means to an end. . . .

May our Lord help us see the folly of pursuing greatness for ourselves and the importance of faithfulness to our Lord and faithfulness to our calling whatever the costs may be.

From the same publication, a final Litany: "For these and all other undeserved blessings showered upon our Church of the Lutheran Confession . . . We Thank Thee, Lord."

II. We Recommit Ourselves to Hold Fast to Sound Doctrine

By John Lau

Introduction

A former pastor of the CLC recently wrote, "In my years in the CLC I observed that the Gospel is present, but it is not central. The primary message coming from them is the doctrine of church fellowship in one form or another." At the same time, a pastor member of the CLC writes, "If a poll were taken to determine the least popular teaching in the CLC, the consensus would likely indicate the doctrine of Church Fellowship."

These two statements appear to be in contradiction to each other, as is natural, since they are observations from without and within the fellowship of the CLC. The former writer is basing his comment on the historical development of our church body only, whereas the latter writer is considering the positive, evangelical effects of a strong doctrinal position. In a sense, the three-fold division of this convention's essay, designed to be A CALL TO RECOMMITMENT, needs to consider both of these two aspects: our history and our mission. But the validity and worth of these aspects depend upon the message we proclaim, namely, the doctrine. That is why we present, as that which ties our history to our mission, the theme: "We recommit ourselves to hold fast to sound doctrine." It is the present writer's prayerful intent to demonstrate from several portions of the word of God the vital importance of such a recommitment.

1. Christ warns against false prophets.

"Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits" (Matt. 7: 15-16a). This warning of our Lord is just as appropriate in our day as it was when He spoke it—and false prophets can be just as difficult to detect today also. We cannot complacently say to ourselves, "Why should we worry? When a false prophet denies God we simply won't listen to him!" Christ was not speaking of someone who openly denies Him, or, as we might say, one who

comes in wolves' clothing; rather, He described a false prophet as coming in sheep's clothing. That is to say, he gives the appearance of being a true member of the flock of Christ, a necessity for the false prophet. He must disguise himself, or else all Christians would flee from him instantly, and he would succeed in trapping no one. Therefore we are not surprised, for example, if a false prophet bears the name of Christian, or even Lutheran, for that matter.

A false prophet may preach in a way that is most attractive; he may use music and liturgy that has a modern beat; he may conduct himself in a manner that portrays his message as just like that of the fathers. A hunter also uses decoys and calls to give the unwary wild duck the impression that all is serene down below; but when the duck has fallen into the trap, then he leaps out of the blind with gun ablaze, and reveals himself as he really is. Thus it is with the false prophet, for Christ tells us his true nature: inwardly he is a ravening wolf! Yes, false prophets are wolves whose nature it is to rend, tear, and kill with their cruel fangs. Vividly Jesus pictures their destructive work: it rends and tears the spiritual life of the Christian like the fangs of a wolf. How sad it is that in spite of this strong warning many still persist in thinking of deviations from the true word of God as being quite harmless! How much better it would be to accept this warning as we accept warning signs surrounding areas in which bombs are tested! After all, bombs are able only to destroy the body, whereas the deception of the false prophet can cause the soul to be lost.

In spite of this deception, however, the Christian can detect false prophets and beware of them. Christ tells us simply that we can know them by their fruits. But what are the fruits of false prophets? Here again, let us not make the mistake of thinking only of their external lives or works. At first glance they may appear to have great success, like "televangelists" or "church growth" enthusiasts, and thus many may be tempted to think that God is blessing their efforts. This appearance may deceive all the more because, as scripture warns, there are so many false prophets! But this is not the fruit of which Jesus speaks. Their fruit is their doctrine, or teaching. We cannot judge their hearts; only God is able to do that and to distinguish hypocritical from genuine works. Nor can we judge the sincerity of false prophets, for they may be ever so sincere! Then, too, they themselves may have been deceived by Satan, the greatest false prophet of all. But we can judge their doctrine!

As a professional fruit grower judges his fruit by comparing the fruit of excellent varieties with that of worthless varieties, so is the Christian able to judge the false doctrine, the fruit, of the false prophet, by comparing it with the pure doctrine of the word of God. The people of Berea are praised in the Bible because even when St. Paul taught them, "they searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so." If the Bereans had not learned the truth from scripture, they would not have been able to judge whether St. Paul was a false prophet or not! It must be added that the amount of false doctrine taught is not the proper basis for judging it. An apple that has only one small worm in it is still a wormy apple! So it is with doctrine: even the slightest deviation from the complete truth of God's word is false doctrine. Jesus is extremely narrow-minded when it comes to His word. When He gave the commission to His disciples to go into all the world, preaching and baptizing, He told them to teach "all things whatsoever I have commanded you." Therefore, when we hear any preaching, no matter who the preacher may be, let us habitually compare it with God's pure word. If what we hear is not in complete and full agreement with God's word, then it is false doctrine, and the one who keeps on teaching it is a false prophet, a causer of divisions and death traps, who must be avoided, lest we be taken in by him and deceived.

2. Disunity in confession may arise among Christ's followers.

"Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them" (Acts 20: 28-30). When one looks back over the centuries since the Lord Jesus first founded His church on earth among a handful of disciples, one cannot help being plagued by a question which has arisen again and again: How did it happen that a once confessionally united group of believers did not stay

unified, as time went on? As we look about us in the world today, we are deeply saddened by the fact that so many who call themselves Christians nevertheless have such widely divergent confessions of faith (or virtually no confessions at all).

This distressing state of affairs is not according to God's will and desire. St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1 Cor. 1: 10)—that is God's will! And the unity of confession which God desires is to be a unity based upon Him and His holy word, nothing else! He is against all those who introduce something different from His pure word into their doctrine. The prophet Jeremiah, inspired by the Holy Ghost, described the will of God thus: "'Behold, I am against the prophets,' saith the Lord, 'that use their tongues, and say, "He saith." Behold, I am against them that prophesy false dreams,' saith the Lord, 'and do tell them, and cause my people to err by their lies, and by their lightness; yet I sent them not nor commanded them; therefore they shall not profit this people at all,' saith the Lord" (Jer. 23: 31-32).

In chapter 20 of the book of Acts we read that St. Paul had called together the elders of the congregation in Ephesus to meet with him at Melita, on his way to Jerusalem, where he would be taken captive by his enemies and eventually transported to Rome for trial. Under such circumstances, Paul wanted to give to these Christian leaders what might well be a last word. His words were a warning to them and to us that disunity in confession may arise among followers of Christ when they are attacked both from without and within. Those who attack from without Paul calls "grievous wolves," the same vivid term that Christ used in His warning against false prophets. The Ephesian elders were urged to provide the strong shepherding that was needed to protect the flock. No doubt, Paul was thinking of such attackers as the so-called "Judaizers," who taught that belief in Christ was not sufficient for salvation, but that one must also still observe all the Old Testament ritual and ceremonial laws. But, in a larger sense, Paul spoke of all who come with doctrines different from those taught in the sacred scriptures. One must surely be on guard against all such.

Even more urgent, however, is the additional warning: "Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them." Bringing in destructive false doctrines from heterodox churches or even from unbelievers is bad enough, but still worse are those who arise within an orthodox church or congregation and teach false doctrines! Wolves which enter from the outside, not sparing the flock and destroying souls, are easier to recognize and identify; however, perverse men who arise from within, especially when they are pastors or teachers, may conquer by dividing; they draw poor, deluded disciples after them and cause great schisms and sects. The historical review included in the first part of this three-part essay surely reveals that the birth of our own CLC was the result of grievous error which was permitted to enter a formerly orthodox church body and synodical conference. May that experience serve to remind us again and again to recommit ourselves to hold fast to sound doctrine.

This is not to say that the recommitment is only for the elders of the church; it is not to say that the flock should merely follow blindly in whatever directions it is led! All too often, however, a congregation's doctrine and practice are guided almost solely by the individual called to be the pastor. If his doctrine and practice are sound and biblical, theirs are also likely to be; but if his doctrine and practice go astray, all too often so do theirs! What a great responsibility rests, then, on the shepherd! And what a tragedy it is when he misleads the flock! But it has also happened in church history that the flock has refused to follow the shepherd. Of course, when they refuse to follow a false leader, they are pleasing their Lord; but if their pastor is pointing out the right paths, if he is feeding them with the pure word, if he is trying with all his might to protect them from the wolves without and false teachers within, and they refuse to follow him: then he is helpless, for the kingdom of God is not governed by force, after all. In such a case, it must simply be said that disunity in confession and life has been caused by the failure of the flock itself to be on its guard against the temptations and dangers that surround it.

3. All Christians are to judge doctrine.

"These" [the Bereans] "were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. Therefore many of them believed; also of honorable women, not a few" (Acts 17: 11-12). As we examine the teachings of scripture, it is evident that God wants His church to present a united testimony and that he wants disunity to be prevented. This is a very serious matter, because it is the truth of God's word that is at stake.

In view of this, there is an incontestable thought that becomes more and more fixed upon our consciousness, as we meditate upon these things: namely, that our Lord expects us to judge doctrines as they come to our attention from this side and that in this world of change. Quite often it seems that there are just as many different doctrines taught as there are individuals to teach them! What are we simple Christians to do, when so many different and conflicting doctrines come to our ears? How are we going to know what is true and what is false? With whom are we to fellowship, and whom are we to avoid? All too often, sadly enough, many people (perhaps most) have decided to leave such matters to the clergy. Quite often it has become the practice of a particular church body to turn over all problems of doctrine to the judgment of a seminary faculty. However, this is a dangerous practice, for it lulls people into a complacent attitude. More than that: it is actually the selling of a birth-right, given by the Lord Himself, for a mess of pottage! For God has given to each individual the right and privilege to read for himself the precious word of life and behold with his own eyes and ears the great gospel mercies of the Lord. How tragic it is when a Christian casts that privilege away as though it has no value; how tragic it is when a Christian puts his trust in another human being and neglects his own personal privilege of judging doctrine!

Luke, the inspired writer of the book of the Acts of the Apostles, describes the Bereans as being nobler than those in Thessalonica for two reasons: (1) they receive the word of God with readiness of mind, and (2) they search the scriptures daily (to determine) whether those things (they heard from Paul and Silas) were so. The Greek word for "noble" means "well-born" or "high-born," but also has the connotation of "high-minded." The nobility of the Bereans lay in the way they regarded the word of God. It certainly was not an attitude which they had by nature, for man's nature hates God and all His works, including His word! It was an attitude which the gospel itself worked in them. Beyond that, it does not behoove us today to ask why the Bereans were different from others; rather, let us pray that God would grant us a measure of their "nobility" also. What a blessing to receive God's word with all readiness of mind! What a blessing to search the scriptures daily, verifying that what we hear from our pulpits and lecterns or what we read in our bulletins and church publications is truly in agreement with pure doctrine!

The Bereans did not know it, but they have occupied a shining place in the New Testament scriptures for nearly 2, 000 years. What they did is exactly what God desires of the CLC today, as we recommit ourselves to hold fast to sound doctrine: namely, that we daily examine, truly examine, the scriptures. The Bereans' examination could result in only one verdict, regarding what they had heard from Paul and Silas: "These things are so!" Such faith could only result in holding fast to the doctrine they learned, for it rested solidly on the word of God. What a great gift of God it is, that doctrines are based upon what are called, in Latin, "sedes doctrinae" ("seats of doctrine"), that is, specific passages of scripture which are so clear and so precise that they need no interpretation whatever to be understood.

Can all Christians judge doctrine? Indeed they can, for the Holy Spirit has come, as Jesus promised, to create faith and grant enlightenment. Surely we desire that those who are called to proclaim the gospel publicly, as pastors and teachers, shall be solidly trained in theology and, as much as possible, in the original languages of the scriptures. But, especially in our day, when the Bible is so readily available for everyone to read, there are many opportunities for all Christians to read their Bibles and grow daily in knowledge and understanding—and then to testify to others. One is reminded of the golden opportunity that came to a married couple named Aquila and Priscilla, who were living in Ephesus when an eloquent preacher named Apollos came to town. Apollos was bold and diligent, but his knowledge of the gospel was incomplete. When Aquila and Priscilla had heard Apollos speak, they took him home with them and "expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly" with the wonderful result that when Apollos went

on to Achaia he "helped them much which had believed through grace, for he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, showing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ" (Acts 18: 24-28). We cannot predict when such a glorious opportunity may come our way! Therefore, let us pray that we may be ready and prepared to hold fast to sound doctrine when the time comes!

4. All Christians are to be united in doctrine.

"Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1 Cor. 1: 10). There was once a flourishing and healthy congregation of people who had joined together in the common worship of the Lord Jesus Christ. This congregation had many advantages. First of all, it was located in a city that was growing rapidly and was filled with ever-increasing commercial development. Secondly, this congregation had the advantage of having a succession of pastors who were eloquent and well-trained in the scriptures and preached God's word faithfully and well.

Into this wonderful situation, however, crept a disease that was threatening, finally, to force this congregation to dissolve in the worst sort of disunity. Some members of the congregation boasted that they had been baptized by a certain one of their ministers; others responded with a boast of their own, namely, that they were followers of another great minister. Still others stood proudly apart from this bickering and claimed to be the real leaders of the congregation because they followed only Christ! Other problems arose, a long list of them, to be sure: worldly wisdom as opposed to God's wisdom, envy, strife, division, fornication, unrebuked incest, law suits against each other, eating meat offered to idols, idolatry, marital problems, problems over the Lord's Supper, problems with Christian liberty, the headship of the man in church and marriage, heresies, problems over spiritual gifts, problems with worship practices and women preaching, problems with resurrection! - What a sad state of affairs!

This sad story of a Christian congregation is not fiction. It is the true account of what actually occurred in the early church in the city of Corinth, in the southern part of Greece. Our hearts go out to the people of that congregation in their distress. But we also cannot help thinking with pity of the ministers who had brought the gospel to them; particularly, we think of St. Paul, who had founded the congregation. When he heard of the situation, though absent, he did not desert them in their distress; inspired by the Holy Spirit, he sent them a marvelous letter, in which he brought to them the sound doctrine of the word of God, which alone could help them. Paul's words have a deep meaning for us also, as we recommit ourselves to hold fast to sound doctrine, for they give us a true insight into the doctrine of the church. All members of the Holy Christian Church (the communion of saints, believers) are truly united by the common faith in Jesus Christ bestowed on them by the Holy Spirit through the means of grace; the Lord desires that the visible assemblies (congregations, synods, church bodies) of individuals gathered around the preaching of the gospel be perfectly united and of one voice in confession, doctrine, and practice. Though Paul gave the Corinthians counsel in all their problems, he began at their underlying difficulty (disunity) and admonished them to seek unity in the only way possible, namely, on the basis of sound doctrine, the word of God.

We do not perceive Paul's admonition to be the approach of legalism. "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" is an evangelical approach, and at the same time we realize that it is the apostle of the Lord speaking inspired words from Christ Himself. All Christians are to speak the same word of God's truth, and there are to be no divisions among them. When the word of God is taught and practiced in its truth and purity, there will be doctrinal unity and no doctrinal divisions. We cannot stress this point too much, for in our own times there is much discord and disagreement among churches and church bodies that identify themselves as Christian, let alone the many religious organizations that cannot or do not desire to make that claim. Even among the "Lutheran" church bodies it does not require much research to observe that the vast majority of their members seem to be willing to have a great variety of false theological opinions, doctrines, and practices carried on together with what remains of orthodox doctrine and practice, to say the least. Some Lutheran theologians in ELCA seminaries, for example, are even willing to deny that Jesus arose physically from the dead! Sad to

say, there are many who defend this wide variety of doctrines and practices, saying that, after all, "no one has all the truth, and therefore we need the differing testimony, with each one presenting truth as he sees it." Thus they deny the verbal inspiration, inerrancy, and infallibility of scripture!

When our Lord Jesus Christ once declared that "the scripture cannot be broken," He was saying that every word of the inspired scriptures combines with every other word to form a complete unity. There simply are no contradictions in the Bible; apparent contradictions are due to human lack of understanding. Scripture is its own interpreter and guide. The word does not teach contradictory doctrines; rather, it is "a lamp unto our feet, and a light unto our paths." God has caused it to be written that He is against the prophets who proclaim their own dreams and claim that "He (God) saith"; He added that He did not send them! (Jer. 23: 31f.)

When there is unity in confession, doctrine, and practice, then no doctrinal divisions will be suffered (allowed) among Christians, unlike the Corinthians who suffered the case of incest in their midst. "Schismata" is the Greek term that Paul used for "divisions," meaning "factions" or "parties that disrupt." The natural consequence of permitting two or more differing and opposing doctrines to stand on an equal basis within a congregation or church body is that each will attract its followers. The result can only be that, instead of a group with unified doctrine, there will soon be factions, separate parties, each insisting that its teachings are correct. Many would then be tempted to try to effect some kind of compromise, as we are accustomed to do in politics or labor relations. Compromise has become "the name of the game" in modern church negotiations. Two examples come to mind: (1) the 1950 so-called "Common Confession," adopted by the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS) and the American Lutheran Church (ALC) as "a settlement of past differences" which were actually not settled, as was amply pointed out: ". . . the adoption of the Common Confession by the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod involves an untruth and creates a basically untruthful situation, since this action has been officially interpreted as a settlement of past differences which are in fact not settled"; and (2) the extensive negotiations leading to the formation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) in the late 1980s, in which it was recognized by the three merging church bodies that many doctrinal matters remained unresolved. What happened in both of these instances is what always happens when an attempt is made to compromise opposing doctrines, namely, wordings and phrases are eventually found and used which are at least partially acceptable to everyone, with the doctrine becoming so vague and indefinite that everyone can read into it whatever he wants. Dr. Franz Pieper wrote concerning this: "(St. Paul) clearly says that Christians are to use the same words also in the same sense. Agreement in words with disagreement in meaning is altogether contrary to the unity God calls for, and to seek such a 'unity' ('we agree to disagree') is immoral, a trifling with sacred, divine things, which is unseemly for Christians."

How tragic it is that the admonition of Paul that all Christians are to be united in doctrine is not taken to heart by so many, in the past and also in our day! How it must grieve the Savior to behold those for whom He laid down His life to be in such lack of agreement concerning His teachings! Let us most earnestly pray that the Holy Spirit may rest upon us and abide with us always, so that we in the CLC may hear and heed the Lord's admonition to remain united in doctrine and practice.

5. God's word shows us when to terminate existing fellowships.

"Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple" (Rom. 16: 17-18). Historically speaking, it is indeed true that the CLC would not have come into existence if the church bodies of which we were formerly members had been obedient to the sound doctrine contained in Romans 16: 17-18. For nearly two decades the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS) had taken note of the fact that their sister synod in the Synodical Conference, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS), had drifted away from sound doctrine and had become deeply involved in the sin of unionism (joint worship and work among churches and church members who are not united in doctrine and practice). In 1955 the convention of the WELS had unanimously declared that the LCMS was causing divisions

and offenses which were "of long standing." Nevertheless, in spite of the Lord's admonition to avoid such causers of divisions and offenses, the WELS and ELS postponed such an action. In 1959, in another WELS convention, the false doctrine which lay at the heart of such postponement was revealed, when the WELS accepted the following incorrect doctrinal statement as correct: "Termination of church fellowship is called for when you have reached the conviction that admonition is of no further avail and that the erring brother or church body demands recognition for their error."

The CLC was formed, then, in obedience to God's word, by those who knew that they had no other choice, under God, than to avoid the WELS and ELS also, for these church bodies by their disobedience and false doctrine had become causers of divisions and offenses contrary to sound doctrine. A review of our past reveals this, as a view of our mission demonstrates that we exist for a larger purpose than to protest and avoid! Throughout, as a commitment to hold fast to sound doctrine was the foundation of our past, so a recommitment to hold fast to sound doctrine is the keynote of our mission.

"Holding fast" includes the awareness of how precious sound doctrine truly is. All the doctrines of scripture are the handmaidens of that most precious good news, the gospel, which tells the world of its redemption through the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus. We are grieved whenever such doctrines are denied, or altered, or disobeyed, for it is the truth which sets us free. It is, therefore, an extremely serious matter when an individual, or a congregation, or a church body, causes divisions and offenses contrary to the pure doctrine which we have learned. It is not enough merely not to listen to such causers; they are to be spiritually avoided; that is, we are not to worship or do church work with them in any form.

It is wrong to avoid in this way only when we come to some sort of subjective judgment that admonition will never be heeded (as the WELS and ELS falsely teach), for that judgment is not in our power to make (only God reads the heart). When, then, do we terminate the practice of fellowship? God's word shows us. "Mark" means "keep on watching out for" or "keep your eyes open for." "Them which cause" or "causers" is a present participle in the Greek, indicating an on-going activity, rather than a temporary lapse which is soon corrected. "Divisions" are the very opposite of that confessional unity which God asks of His people (1 Cor. 1: 10). "Offenses" is a very serious term; it literally means "death traps." The seriousness is emphasized by describing divisions and offenses as being "contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned." "Avoid" means to terminate fellowship relations, as already indicated. Therefore, the CLC has rightly stated the doctrine: "When it has been ascertained that a church body is causing divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine of Holy Scripture, the directive to avoid is as binding as any word addressed to us by our Savior God in Holy Scripture. The apostle's peremptory ekklinatē ("avoid") is the voice of the Good Shepherd Himself, as He lovingly protects His sheep and lambs from the deception of error and as He graciously gives warning to the false teacher. . . . We reject any interpretation of Romans 16: 17-18 which, in the name of Christian love, would make the avoiding of causers of divisions and offenses contingent upon the subjective judgment that admonition is of no further avail and that an impasse has thereby been reached." We earnestly pray that our Heavenly Father would enable us to hold fast to this sound doctrine.

When this CLC statement is viewed side-by-side with the 1959 WELS statement, it is easy to see that there is a clear doctrinal difference between us. We have been told that some members of the WELS do not recognize that there is a doctrinal difference, even though the WELS did recognize that such a doctrinal difference exists, in its 1973 convention. How this can be is very difficult to understand. The recent meetings in the late 1980s and the former meetings in the 1970s, between representatives of the respective church bodies, resulted in the same conclusion on our part: the WELS and the ELS still retain their false doctrine. Their doctrinal statements and their practice reveal that to be the case. In addition to the two series of joint meetings with the WELS and the ELS, the CLC has presented discussions of the doctrinal differences in at least 49 articles in our Journal of Theology; the Lutheran Spokesman has also contained numerous articles on the subject. While we have no access (nor should we have) to the general membership of the WELS and the ELS, their leaders have had ample occasion and opportunity to read what we have written. There can be no doubt that testimony has been given and received, though not accepted. One is reminded of the church father who once said that when two

individuals disagree over whether or not the sun is shining, there is nothing more to say!

We ought not to discount the fact that avoiding is in itself a very great testimony against those whose on-going doctrine and practice are contrary to the word of God. Testimony that involves a continuing contact presents a certain risk, even though there is no practice of fellowship. That is laid out for us in that part of God's word in Romans 16: 18 which should serve as a serious warning: "For they that are such (i. e. , causers of divisions and offenses) serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple." It may seem harsh and judgmental to speak so of former brethren; yet it is not our judgment, but God's! Though their false doctrine and practice may please themselves, they certainly do not serve Jesus! And their pleasant words and expressions, whether or not sincere, do deceive the unwary, whether or not that is the intention! This warning of our Lord is for our good; may God grant that we heed it as we recommit ourselves to hold fast to sound doctrine!

6. A final exhortation.

"Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all. Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee" (1 Tim. 4: 13-16). Paul addressed this message to a pastor and mentioned some matters of particular importance for Timothy as such. But the chief exhortation contained in the words applies fully to all Christians, and they should take it to heart: "Give attendance to doctrine; take heed unto the doctrine!"

Doctrine is what the word of God teaches regarding law and gospel, sin and grace. It points out the sin of lost mankind and proclaims salvation through the death and resurrection of Christ. When Paul exhorts to give attendance and heed to doctrine, he is pointing to the means by which the Holy Spirit calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies us. How are we to follow Paul's exhortation? First of all, we are to read, and continue to read, God's word. That was the way in which Martin Luther finally arrived at the firm convictions which led him to the Reformation. He read the scriptures, and there he found the clear presentation of doctrine. Through his reading he realized that the church of his day was not teaching the doctrines of God but man-made laws and ordinances proclaiming man's work-righteousness rather than the righteousness of God.

We, too, in the face of all the modernistic trends in theology, need to become immersed in the word of God, for it is our only defense. As we read God's word, our concern for the word of man fades away. That is why we read the word of God at home and in our church services. That is why we are concerned that our children are trained up in schools where every subject is taught in the light of the word of God.

We are also to give attendance to exhortation, that is, to preaching. We are to see to it that God's doctrines are not only read and studied, but also proclaimed among us by word and deed. Let us pray that our lives and practices also are proclamations of doctrine, both at home and abroad.

True doctrine is the precious gift of God, for, as Paul concludes, Christian doctrine is saving knowledge; through it we are brought to know Christ as our Redeemer, and whoever believes in Him shall be saved! May our gracious Lord keep us in the faith He has granted to us. We pray that He will lead us and be with us, as we recommit ourselves to hold fast to sound doctrine. Amen.

Speak, O Lord, Thy servant heareth,
To Thy word I now give heed;
Life and spirit Thy word beareth,
All Thy word is true indeed.
Death's dread power in me is rife;
Jesus, may Thy word of life

Fill my soul with love's strong fervor
That I cling to Thee forever.

Lord, Thy words are waters living
Where I quench my thirsty need;
Lord, Thy words are bread life-giving,
On Thy words my soul doth feed.
Lord, Thy words shall be my light
Through death's vale and dreary night;
Yea, they are my sword prevailing
And my cup of joy unfailing.

Precious Jesus, I beseech Thee,
May Thy words take root in me;
May this gift from heaven enrich me
So that I bear fruit for Thee!
Take them never from my heart
Till I see Thee as Thou art,
When in heavenly bliss and glory
I shall greet Thee and adore Thee. (TLH 296)

III. We Recommit Ourselves to the Mission of the Church

By Bruce J. Naumann

Ours is a day of instant communication. History-making events happening a world away appear in our living rooms as they are taking place. Pagers and cellular phones provide instant communications to common citizens and heads of state alike, wherever they may be. When important events occur, people who need to know are just a call away. Such was not always the case, of course. Before the days of cellular phones, satellites, and even radio transmission, important information had to be delivered personally. In some cases this led to tragic circumstances. Consider, for example, the end of the "Great War"—World War I, in the early part of this century. Brutal trench warfare had been fought on the front lines of central Europe between the Allies and Germany. Neither side could afford to show any lack of determination to win the war, right up until the very end. When an armistice was signed on November 11, 1918, the war was over—but many were not expecting the war's end, and did not find out about it for some time. Communications simply did not travel very fast in those days. Sadly, many men became casualties of World War I after hostilities had officially ceased! Can you imagine the tragic irony of losing one's own life—or losing a loved one—to a war that was already over?

In the eighty years since the end of the Great War, we have come a long way in the technology of advanced communications. It is now easy to send or receive a message—across town or across the world—in ways that were never imagined in 1918. And yet, a life-and-death tragedy of epic proportions still haunts the world every day -- because of a lack in communications! A far greater war than all of mankind's struggles has been waged and won, by our Savior Jesus Christ. In this war there are no innocent bystanders. All people since Adam are guilty, but through Christ all are redeemed, without exception.

Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous. (Romans 5: 18-19)

The Lord Jesus gained the victory over sin and Satan by dying for the guilt of our sins and then rising from the dead. The world's most dreadful foe lies defeated, and the news is ready to be proclaimed:

The strife is o'er, the battle done;
Now is the Victor's triumph won;
Now be the song of praise begun. Alleluia!
Death's mightiest pow'rs have done their worst,
And Jesus hath His foes dispersed;
Let shouts of praise and joy outburst. Alleluia!
He closed the yawning gates of hell;
The bars from heaven's high portals fell.
Let songs of praise His triumph tell. Alleluia! (TLH 210)

The objective fact of the end of hostilities between God and man is extraordinarily great news. We rejoice in these glad tidings! At the same time, we have the sobering realization that casualties continue to mount in this war-ironically, a war that has been officially over for nearly two millennia. Because of unbelief, masses of people are living and dying in a state of war with the True God, when He has already declared peace and forgiveness. Please consider carefully these estimated figures for the spiritual condition of our world population:

[Please Note: These figures are current as of 1988. Since different sources give different (and sometimes conflicting) estimates, these figures are for illustrative purposes only.]

We hear the words "million" and even "billion" so frequently that they do not make much impression anymore. But these are not just statistics, they are the SOULS of people for whom God gave His only Son, and for whom that Son died. God is not willing that any of them should perish, but that all should come to repentance and eternal life. God has shown the extent of His love and care by providing a completed salvation for each one of these billions. His care should be our own, as well. It has been said, "A missionary is one who never gets used to the sound of heathen footsteps on their way to a Christless eternity."

These numbers should produce a deafening roar of "footsteps" in our ears. Nearly two thirds of the souls in the world openly adhere to pagan beliefs and idolatry. Most of the remainder are being led in the teaching of self-salvation under the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox faiths. Only about 10% of the world's population belong to churches that claim the heritage of the Reformation. Sadly, the majority of these churches are falling prey to apostasy. Since they have abandoned the scriptures as the only authoritative rule of faith and life, they have abandoned the true gospel, or are in the process of doing so. The poet paints a somber but accurate portrait of the world in which we live:

Fearful scenes are flung our way;
Masses jostle to a judgment day,
Led by liars headed for fire;
Death they ignore and demons admire;
Helpless, hopeless, tricked, but proud-
Who will go and love this crowd?
He who bravely met the test leaves for us the scene impressed:

Who will die as Jesus died, calmly setting self aside?
-- Byron Harting

No one, of course, can die as Jesus died. He alone could selflessly take the guilt of the world on Himself and suffer on the cross for all. However, our Lord does call on us to take up our own crosses, follow in His footsteps, and be His ambassadors to the world. The mission of the Church is to act on Jesus' command which He gave in the Great Commission:

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. (Matthew 28: 19-20)

Fulfilling this commission involves setting self-interest aside. In view of the gift of eternal life that Christ has given us, and the tremendous cost that He paid to redeem us, what could possibly keep us from doing our utmost in this most urgent and blessed calling? Why should a recommitment to missions even be necessary? Unfortunately, a many things do get in the way, all of which have our sinful flesh as their common denominator.

The Lord's call to us, His disciples, can not be more clear: "You shall be witnesses to Me" (Acts 1: 8); "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16: 15); "Let your light so shine" (Matthew 5: 16). Surely, it is good and right to give glory and praise to our Lord for the ways in which He has worked among us toward these ends. We ought to take note of what the Holy Spirit has accomplished through us and thank Him for it. We see His active presence in our history, and the upbuilding of His Church through our witness, as our first essayist at this convention has reminded us. We see how He has preserved the pure teaching of His word in our homes, classrooms and pulpits, and the necessity for us to guard and treasure this sacred trust, as was the subject of our second essay.

However, if we make an honest appraisal of ourselves, our congregations, and our church body with regard to faithfulness to our mission, we will also see our many failures. We see neglect when it comes to recognizing the urgency of carrying out the mission of the Church, because we do not fully appreciate the dire consequences of God's judgment on unbelief. Every person with whom we come in contact-whether they are mean and surly or fine and friendly-will spend eternity in torment and separation from God, unless he comes to know the Lord Jesus as his only Savior from their sin! More than that, we see neglect when it comes to the full appreciation of the treasure we possess in the gospel of full and free forgiveness through Christ. This message has the power to change the eternal destiny of sinners bound for hell to saints bound for glory! It is surely a grievous sin to take the Lord's righteous wrath lightly and to take His forgiveness for granted. Martin Luther bemoaned the fact that so soon after the start of the Reformation his countrymen had lost their first love for the gospel:

When the Word of God first arose, twelve or fifteen years ago, people diligently listened to it, and everybody was glad that "good works" were no longer to plague them. They said: "God be praised that we now have water to drink." For then we were thirsty, and the doctrine tasted fine; we drank of it and found it a precious teaching. But now we are sated; we are tired of the drink and are surfeited with it, so that our Lord God must depart and let us die of thirst; for He remains only with those who feel their misery. But there are few who know this. The majority turn the gospel into liberty for the flesh. (What Luther Says, p. 1199)

Have we also lost our first love, like the Ephesian church addressed in Revelation chapter two? Has the day come that we are more interested in self-preservation than gospel proclamation? May the Spirit graciously work in our hearts to prevent these things! As we count on His strength, let us be aware of our own weakness. We regularly praise our God for His saving gospel message with our lips. But we often fail to show the fruit of our faith with regard to the Church's mission by our deeds. Why do we so often see a lack of willing eagerness to set self-interests aside and do what it takes to communicate the good news to others?

Like Moses, we may respond to our Lord's call to witness with misplaced modesty. Moses resisted God's call to be a witness to the Egyptians and to lead Israel out of slavery. His excuse was that he did not consider himself to be an effective speaker. The Lord corrected him by pointing out that his success depended not on his own talents, but on the sufficiency that God Himself would provide. He said, "Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes the mute, the deaf, the seeing, or the blind? Have not I, the LORD? Now therefore, go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say" (Exodus 4: 11-12). When we are in doubt about our own abilities, we need to be constantly reminded that God's strength is made perfect in our weakness.

Like Gideon, we may be overwhelmed by the task at hand and "underwhelmed" by our own resources. The Lord called on Gideon to rise up and deliver a leaderless and downtrodden Israel from the hand of the mighty Midianites. Gideon resisted at first because of he felt that he lacked the necessary qualifications. However, the Lord showed through him

that no task is too great, no foe is too powerful to stand before a believer who is acting on God's commands. The Lord assured Gideon, "Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat the Midianites as one man" (Judges 6: 16). With God fighting for him, Gideon completely defeated the enormous invading army of Midianites with a mere 300 men. Can the CLC ever hope to be fully faithful to its gospel mission, at home and abroad? The Lord has done more with less.

Like Elijah, we may become despondent when it seems that we are all alone and that our efforts to be witnesses for the true God are futile. Elijah was suffering from missionary "burn-out" when he asked the Lord to take his life. He was convinced that he alone had kept himself from idolatry in Israel, and complained about being persecuted for it. The Lord's answer? "Go, return on your way . . . I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him" (1 Kings 19: 15, 18). We often are not privileged to see the results that God produces from our service in His kingdom work. It takes a real exercise of faith to be certain of His promise that His word will not return to Him void, but will accomplish the purpose for which He sent it. Our God has never gone back on a promise!

Like Jonah, we may become so fed up with the wickedness of those to whom we are to witness that we would rather see them punished than forgiven. Jonah only went to preach in the city of Nineveh under duress, and became angry at the prospect of God sparing the city. Would we rather dismiss the dying souls around us with a vindictive "good riddance," instead of going out of our way to give them the good news of salvation in Christ? "Christ died for the ungodly," says Paul (Rom. 5: 6). As redeemed sinners, we should know that well! The Lord demonstrated his care and concern for all when he said to Jonah, "Should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left . . .?" (Jonah 4: 11). It takes a selfless kind of love to look at the worldly desert wasteland around us and see a field ripe for harvest-but that's what Jesus sees!

Like Jeremiah, we may be intimidated by the prospect of opposition to our witnessing. We should expect scorn and intimidation, for Jesus said quite plainly, "You will be hated by all for My name's sake" (Luke 21: 17). Jeremiah was insecure because of His youth, but the Lord urged him to have courage-not in his own strength, but in the strength of the Lord. "You shall go to all to whom I send you, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. Do not be afraid of their faces, for I am with you to deliver you," says the LORD" (Jeremiah 1: 7-8). We ought not be surprised when we meet with opposition to the gospel, but neither should we be afraid. We are bearers of God's word, which does not change and will abide forever. Because we have nothing to lose, we have nothing to fear. Christ has given us all things!

Like Peter, we may be hesitant to set aside our cultural preferences for the sake of the gospel. Peter needed special convincing from God before he would enter the home of Cornelius, a non-Jew, to preach there (Acts 10). He later compromised His gospel witness in Antioch by showing favoritism toward certain outward Jewish customs (Galatians 2). Here Peter found himself on the receiving end of a rebuke from St. Paul, who clearly saw that the defense of proper Christian liberty is finally the defense of the gospel itself. Are we sometimes guilty of demanding that prospects for the kingdom of God must fit our particular cultural mold before they can be considered truly Christian? We should rather take our cue from Paul, who would never budge an inch when it came to defending the truths of God's word, but who was eager to sacrifice anything and everything else-to "be all things to all men"-in order to have greater opportunity to plant the seed of God's word (1 Corinthians 9). Like our Lord, we are not in this world to be served by it, but to serve!

Christ has committed Himself to us by dying on a cross in our place. As believers, each of us is now committed to Him. We are disciples. That means that as individuals, congregations, and a church body we have responded to our Lord's command to work in His vineyard by saying "I go, sir." How often we have reneged! Satan wins a victory whenever we refuse to work, offering excuses like Moses' false modesty, Gideon's inferiority, Elijah's despondency, Jonah's distaste, Jeremiah's fright, or Peter's inflexibility. Where we have been unfaithful, let us honestly identify this inactivity in the work of God's kingdom for what it is: SIN. Let us fall on our knees, individually and

collectively, in repentance. And then, let us take great comfort in the fact that each of these men of faith, sinners though they were, found mercy and complete forgiveness from a loving Lord. So do we. Though they were weak and flawed in themselves, each of these men accomplished great things for the Lord's kingdom because of His power working in them. So can we!

Try to imagine, if you will, the group of believers that were gathered in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, following Jesus' ascension. There were fewer of them there than there are gathered here today in this Fieldhouse. They had no budget problems, since they had no budget. They had no buildings, and no building projects. They had no boards or committees. There were no salaries, retirement programs, or health plans. In short, they had none of the outward organizational assets that the Lord has blessed us with today. The issue of material means—or, more accurately, the lack of them—was completely overshadowed by the joy of the gospel and the compelling urgency to proclaim it. Those first New Testament Christians had tremendous assets! They had the abiding presence of Christ, the promise of the coming of "another Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost" (John 14: 26), and an incredibly powerful tool—the gospel in word and sacrament. This gospel was an unheard-of message: that God had already reconciled all people to Himself by sending His Son to pay the full price for complete forgiveness.

There are many things that are different between their world of the first century and ours that is nearing the twenty-first. But the essential things remain the same. God is reconciled alone through His Son, faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God, and the true gospel message is largely UNHEARD.

While it is true that the name of Christ has been spoken in nearly every corner of the globe, it hasn't reached them all. And a vital question to ask when speaking about the preaching of Christ at home and abroad is this: Which Christ is being preached? After all, Jesus told us to expect impostors in these last times. "Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There!' do not believe it." (Matthew 24: 23). Which Christ is reaching the world?

Is it the "Christ" of mythological development, a product largely of what his followers wanted to believe about Him after He died and stayed in the grave? Or is it the true, risen Christ of the inspired word, who said "the scripture cannot be broken" (John 10: 35), and "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away" (Matthew 24: 35)?

Is it the "Christ" who paid for the sins of only a few, but never intended for the vast majority to come to faith and be saved? Or is it the true Christ of scripture, who ". . . desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2: 4)?

Is it the "Christ" who offers a potential salvation, one that hinges on our right conduct or decision toward God? Or is it the true Christ of scripture, who doesn't merely give us a plan for salvation, but salvation itself—". . . not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy" (Titus 3: 5)?

Is it the "Christ" who excuses and accommodates sin, or the true Christ of scripture, who suffered to set us free from sin, who says "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more" (John 8: 11)?

Is it the "Christ" who enters the heart by signs, wonders, and surging emotions? Or is it the true Christ of scripture, who says "The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life" (John 6: 63), and "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10: 17)?

The Christ of history, True God, who redeemed all men without exception, who justifies ungodly sinners only because of His mercy and grace, who would have us live righteously, who comes to us in His word and sacrament—this is the true Christ of scripture.

Happily, He is the Christ who dwells in the heart of every true believer, regardless of his denomination. But this Christ is only officially and truly proclaimed by confessional Lutheran churches. In our harvest work of announcing the good news of God's grace, we

need not feel that we are only gleaning the "leftovers" behind many other harvesters. Your next-door neighbor may have heard a vague rumor that God is gracious and forgiving; you can assure him that it's true and show him why! Your community may have churches that preach about forgiveness; you are part of a congregation that actually bestows it in Jesus' name! Our foreign missionaries may not be the only Christians at work in their fields, but they are among the very few who bring the true Christ to heathen lands. Surely this is a cause that is worthy of our prayers, our personal involvement, and the thank-offerings from hearts that have been made clean by Christ's redeeming blood!

A truly Lutheran church possesses the richness of the gospel like no other. Unfortunately, in our day it is not enough to identify oneself only with the word "Lutheran." It is necessary to explain further by adding the word "confessional" or "conservative." We gladly identify with the word "conservative" when it comes to our teaching. A conservative is happy to have things remain the same. Since God's word does not change, we want to go right on "not changing" with it. But may the Lord prevent us from becoming "conservative" when it comes to our gospel outreach! We simply cannot afford to have things remain the way they are, while, as the hymn writer puts it, "the souls of men are dying, and the master calls for you!" Let us recommit ourselves to practicing liberality with the gospel. Let us continue steadfast in prayer, that the Lord of the harvest would send out laborers into His harvest. Let us be on guard against the worldly "wisdom" which would have us believe that our own striving and effort can somehow make God's word more effective. Let us place our confidence in the tremendous power of the message itself, for Lord says of His gospel that it is ". . . the power of God to salvation" (Romans 1: 16), ". . . living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword" (Hebrews 4: 12), and "the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe" (1 Thess. 2: 13). By His grace, the Lord has preserved the pure gospel among us. We've got the message straight. The time is right to get the message OUT. If we only open our eyes and look around us, we will see a field white for harvest. If we open our eyes and look within us, we will see sin and negligence in our calling. It is only when we open our eyes again to the cross that we see the solution for our own sins, and the compelling reason to recommit our lives for His service.

It is true that very often our labor will appear to be in vain. The true gospel will always be the aroma of life to those who believe, and the aroma of death to those who do not. But that should not dampen our joy in the service of our King. Remember the tragedy of war deaths that followed Armistice Day in 1918? There was mourning for all the dead, no doubt, but the joy of victory and peace was sweet regardless. The finest and happiest assignment that any soldier could have must have been that of going through the trenches to announce the good news: "Victory is won! Peace is ours! We're going home!" That is our work. In this life it will always be work in the "trenches." But it is a sweet vocation for believers of all ages and walks of life! Let us then be about our blessed duty with willing, eager hearts!

1. Oh, Christians, haste, your mission high fulfilling,
To tell to all the world that God is light,
That He who made all nations is not willing
One soul should perish, lost in shades of night.
2. Behold how many thousands still are lying
Bound in the dreary prison house of sin
With none to tell them of the Savior's dying
Or of the life He died for them to win.
3. Proclaim to every people, tongue and nation
That God, in whom they live and move, is love;
Tell how He stooped to save His lost creation
And died on earth that they might live above.
4. Send heralds forth to bear the message glorious;
Give of your wealth to speed them on their way;
Pour out your soul for them in prayer victorious;
O Christians, haste to bring the brighter day!

BOOK REVIEWS

**Reformed Reader, edited by William Stacy Johnson and John H. Leith,
2 vols. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993.**

These two volumes are subtitled "A Sourcebook in Christian Theology." The historical introduction explains what is meant by the term "Reformed." What we have here is a selection of writings from various Reformed theologians from the days of Ulrich Zwingli and John Calvin to the present time. The emphasis is on the so-called Swiss Reformation as contrasted with the Reformation as it developed in Germany or England or the Scandinavian countries.

The first volume of 397 pages presents the Classical Beginnings of Reformed Theology from 1519-1799. The second volume of 369 pages, entitled *Contemporary Trajectories*, takes us from 1799 to the present time. In each volume the quotations are grouped under the following general subject areas: Concerns and Methods of Theology; The Doctrine of God; Creation, Fall, Promise (Maker of Heaven and Earth in the second volume); Jesus Christ; The Holy Spirit and the Christian Life; The Church; Politics, Society, and Culture; Eschatology.

Some of the well-known persons quoted include, in the first volume, Ulrich Zwingli, John Calvin, Heinrich Bullinger, Theodore Beza, Francois Turretin, Jacob Arminius, John Owen, Richard Baxter, John Bunyan, Jonathan Edwards, and Samuel Hopkins. Some of the Reformed confessions are also quoted, such as the Heidelberg Catechism, the Westminster Confession of Faith, and the conclusions of the Synod of Dort. The second volume is heavy on quotations from Friedrich Schleiermacher, Charles Hodge, Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, Reinhold Niebuhr, H. Richard Niebuhr, Jürgen Moltmann, and Hendrikus Berkhof.

The value of these volumes for confessional Lutheran pastors lies in the ready availability of the actual statements of Ulrich Zwingli, John Calvin, and others, that led Martin Luther, Martin Chemnitz, and later confessional Lutherans to reject the Swiss reformers and their successors as false teachers. We have in these volumes, for example, John Calvin's presentation of double predestination, Ulrich Zwingli's defense of Alloiosis or exchange of attributes in Christ, Friedrich Schleiermacher's rejection of the historicity of creation and the fall, and Karl Barth's opposition to the concept that the Bible is the word of God.

If one feels the need to have material like this on hand, it is certainly better to buy an anthology like this rather than spend hard-earned money on the complete writings of John Calvin or Karl Barth. If we have a little extra money on hand, let us rather spend in on the works of Martin Luther or the writings of Martin Chemnitz that are now available in English than on the works of Reformed theologians.

The historical introductions to the various quotations make for interesting reading. For example, it is pointed out that "Luther lived and grew to maturity in the monastery wrestling with the profoundly religious question of guilt and forgiveness," whereas the Swiss reformers were "more concerned about the authority of scripture . . . than about the issue of forgiveness" (Vol. 1, pp. xix-xx). Note also the difference between John Calvin and Martin Luther, as summarized in this sentence: "Calvin never set the law and the gospel against each other; the law contains the gospel, and the gospel contains the law" (Vol. 1, p. xxv).

We do have reason, however, to be cautious in regard to some of the historical facts referred to here. A very limited reading of the first volume brought to light a factual error that really should have been discovered before publication. In connection with a

brief discussion of the Marburg Colloquy of 1529, the statement is made (footnote 7 in vol. 1, pp. 313-314) that "the Reformed and Lutheran participants in the Colloquy failed to reach agreement" (which is true) and that "Zwingli himself was absent" (which is not true). For a thorough presentation of the Marburg Colloquy see Luther's Works, vol. 38, or This Is My Body by Herman Sasse. The evidence clearly indicates that Zwingli and Luther faced each other in person at that important moment in history. Zwingli was not absent. In fact he was one of the ten men who signed the Marburg Articles.

The Metaphor of God Incarnate, by John Hick. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993.

We can give this heretic, John Hick, credit for telling us in plain words as the very beginning of this 180-page paperback what his intention is. This is how he begins his preface: "The traditional Christian understanding of Jesus of Nazareth is that he was God incarnate, who became a man to die for the sins of the world and who founded a church to proclaim this. If he was indeed God incarnate, Christianity is the only religion founded by God in person, and must as such be uniquely superior to all other religions. In this book I criticize this set of ideas and point to an alternative" (ix).

What an alternative! If we follow John Hick, we have no written revelation from God, no God-man on earth, no resurrection, no salvation from sin, no eternal life, no God other than that imagined in our minds. And yet John Hick considers himself a Christian theologian!

The devil is so bold in our time and he has so many so-called theologians under his thumb that he does not even bother to be subtle or cunning. Over and over again John Hick presents the traditional doctrine in traditional language and then says something like this: "It is hardly necessary today to criticize this. . . conception, so totally implausible has it become for most of us" (p. 119). So the test of truth is not what the Bible says but what most "Christians" or "theologians" today are thinking.

Heretic Hick knows what the Bible says. He says: "We are all familiar with such New Testament texts as (Acts 4: 12) and with the Catholic dogma *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* (no salvation outside the church) and its Protestant equivalent . . . no salvation outside Christianity" (p. 147). But he goes on to say: "We must reject the old exclusivist dogma." Why must we reject it? Because "Christian" people are rejecting it. "This has in fact now been done by most thinking Christians," he says, "even though exceptions remain with the large fundamentalist constituencies." Hick is happy to cite several influential Catholic and Protestant theologians to establish his point about thinking Christians. Hick wants us to "think" even more until we conclude that, logically, Christianity is just another human religion like all the others and in no way superior to them. And then he has the gall to say that his view is not a renunciation of Christianity.

Anybody daring to read this book should follow it up by reading Psalm 119 119 times. I confess that I read only a few selected pages beyond the preface. Who wants to listen to the devil for hour after hour? Have we not renounced the devil and all his works and all his ways? Rather let us say to our risen and living Lord and Savior Jesus Christ with Thomas: "My Lord and my God" (John 20: 28), and with Peter: "You have the words of eternal life" (John 6: 68).

David Lau
