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150 Reasons to Sing!

John Reim

Finding the psalms.

That's easy, of course, when one is looking in the Bible. Even those who are barely old enough to read the Scriptures can find the Psalms with little difficulty. The trick, taught early on, is to open the Bible at mid-point. You're there!

But what about finding the psalms in the worship service?

That's not so easy. Even the most attentive worshiper might have trouble detecting the psalms in our standard liturgical forms. The pastor is likely to be aware of their whereabouts. But what about the parishioners?

The use of psalms. The prominence of psalms. The placement of psalms. The voicing of psalms. These are topics which deserve careful consideration by all who lead the people of God in the praise of God.

Using Psalms – Why?

Those who are led by the Spirit to believe that "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God" recognize that all the words of the Bible are equally holy, pure, trustworthy and true. As a result, one is careful to avoid statements which would suggest that certain sections of God's Word are more important than others.

At the same time, it's legitimate to give greater emphasis to certain passages or principles, in as much as they serve to capsule the central messages from God. St. Paul does this. In 1 Corinthians he writes, "I determined to know nothing among

you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (2:2) Our pericopal system also does this. It isolates certain sections of Scripture to be used as the saints assemble. Those passages, chapters and books which summarize or emphasize key concepts are brought to the fore with great benefit to all hearers.

The Book of Psalms has long been recognized as such a section. From the moment the Spirit inspired them, the psalms have informed and enlivened God’s people. And Jesus Himself made frequent reference.

The Lord quoted passages from the psalms in a variety of ways and in a variety of situations: as a weapon of choice in His struggle with Satan (Matt. 4:6 / Ps. 91:11,12); as the basis for a beatitude in His sermon on the mount (Matt. 5:5 / Ps. 37:11); as a form of identification during a debate with the scribes (Luke 20:43 / Ps. 110:1); and as a means of spiritual encouragement just moments before His trials (Matt. 26:30).¹

The apostle Paul placed great emphasis on the psalms in his Ephesian and Colossian directives concerning Christian assemblies. Believers are to teach and admonish one another by means of the psalms, along with hymns and spiritual songs (Col. 3:16). Broader yet, the entire New Testament looks frequently to the psalms with highest regard. “Of the over 300 Old Testament passages quoted in the New Testament, more than a third are from the psalms.”²

The psalms played a significant role in Old Testament worship, and they retained a prominent place after the birth of the New Testament Church. “Most early Christians had been members of Judaism and continued to worship in the temple at Jerusalem (Acts 2:46; 3:1; 5:12) and in the synagogues of Palestine and the Diaspora after they became Christian (Acts 6:9; 13:14; 14:1). Psalms were appointed for different days of the week, particular festival occasions, and there is some indication that the 150 psalms were read over a three-year period on the Sabbath.”³

The frequent use of the psalms by Christians, in fact, remained in place during the many centuries of the Middle Ages. “The musical rendition of the Psalter in monasteries, cathedrals, and college churches became a noteworthy feature. The entire Psalter was chanted antiphonally during the course of the week to nine psalm tones, or melodies. . . The chanting of the Latin Psalter to these fine melodies for a millennium or more is one of the most impressive features in the liturgical and musical history of the church.”⁴ A council in Toledo felt particularly strongly about the use of the psalms.⁵ And their value was not lost on the leaders of the Reformation.

The Psalter ought to be a dear and beloved book, if only because it promises Christ’s death and resurrection so clearly and so depicts His kingdom and the condition and nature of all Christendom that we may well call it a little Bible. Most beautifully and briefly it embraces everything in the entire Bible; it is made into a fine enchiridion, or handbook. Therefore it seems to me that the Holy Spirit wanted to take the trouble of compiling a short Bible and a book of examples of all Christendom or of all saints, with this purpose in mind that whoever could not read the whole Bible would here have practically an entire summary of it, comprised in one booklet.⁶

The Reformer couldn’t recommend the book of Psalms enough. “It is proper for every Christian who would pray and be devout to let the Psalter be his book. And no doubt it would be well if every Christian used it so diligently and became so well acquainted with it as to know it by heart, word for word, and constantly to have it on his tongue whenever called on to say or to do something.”⁷

It is impossible to improve on the psalms when considering textual material for corporate worship. They are words which God Himself has written, and for which use God’s Son has given a perfect example. They reveal the Spirit’s own summary of all that is necessary for our salvation, and are presented in a way that addresses every human need.

Using Psalms – When?

The psalms have been a part of New Testament worship services for nearly 2000 years. Within that time period, however, there has been great variation with respect to the placement of the psalms in the service and in the amount of the texts that are used.

Some of this variation was due to differences in the places of worship. Services designed for the monks in a monastery were different from those developed for the cathedral. It was not unheard of in earlier centuries for monks to sing psalms for hours on end (at times, no doubt, with meritorious motives in mind). We in the CLC, on the other hand, might be accurately described as those on the opposite end of the spectrum. In the customary services of page 5 and page 15 of *The Lutheran Hymnal*, there is material from the psalms, but relatively little. And that which does exist tends to be highly fragmented. “Lutheran liturgy has long retained the historic fragments of Psalmody in the Eucharist – Introit and Gradual (and sometimes Offertory) – and has called for the use of Psalms in Matins and Vespers.”⁸ One wonders, however, if using “fragments” is the best way to go.

Most likely the process of extracting verses here and there from various portions of the Old Testament was born of the need for brief texts to function as Introits and Graduals. It’s fairly easy to find passages which can be used to accentuate the theme of the day. But since it is no longer our custom for the officiant or choir to enter the sanctuary during the singing of a psalm [Introit] or for the lector to “graduate” from one reading location to another [Gradual], it seems rather meaningless to maintain such a fragmented use of the psalms. A process which extracts elements from a variety of psalms (or other books) can quickly result in a lack of cohesiveness.

Considerable improvement can be found in the concept of the “Psalm of the Day,” which involves several verses taken from a single psalm.

Particularly suitable positions for the Psalm of the Day are at the beginning of the service and between the lessons. The manual which accompanies *Lutheran Book of Worship* explains, “The fragmentary Introids are abandoned in favor of the use of larger portions of a Psalm or a whole Psalm as a possible entrance hymn. A Psalm or a portion of a Psalm is also used as a bridge between the First and Second Lesson in the Holy Communion.”⁹ This practice has good precedence. “Public worship from the days of the synagogue to the present has always provided a chant form of some sort, choral or congregational, as an interlude between liturgical readings. This is not only a refreshing variation in the Service, but provides a musical echo to the passage already read and a transition to the next.”¹⁰

Using Psalms – Which?

With 150 psalms available to us, there’s no shortage of material for the Christian service. Simple division reveals that a different psalm can be used on every Sunday for nearly three years. And such three-year cycles for lessons and psalms are widely used.

Systems which use a one-year lectionary, of course, make use of fewer psalms. In *The Lutheran Hymnal*, for example, only eight-eight psalms are listed as part of “A Table of Lessons for the Sunday, Feasts, and Chief Festivals of the Church Year.” In the section of the hymnal which prints psalms in their entirety, there are ninety-three in all.

It’s easy to be critical of *The Lutheran Hymnal* for printing only part of the psalter and of *Christian Worship* for printing only selected verses from many of the psalms it uses. Yet there seems to be little, if any, difference between the practice of printing portions of psalms and that of selecting portions of the Gospels or Epistles as lessons of a pericope, or of selecting certain hymn stanzas from the original number, or of preaching on a single Bible verse.

The reason for using selected verses from selected psalms is a liturgical one. The desire is to reinforce and emphasize the theme of the Sunday with those portions of the psalm that are particularly in tune with that theme. In explanation of the procedure followed by the editors of *Christian Worship*, the accompanying *Manual* states, “The psalm section in *Christian Worship* contains fifty-nine psalms carefully selected from the 150 in the Psalter.”¹¹ Among the reasons given for using so few is that of the liturgical goal. “They were. . .selected to fit the Sundays and festivals of the three-year lectionary. It was thought more desirable to have a smaller number of the psalms learned and loved by people than a larger number that would be sung once a year or less.”¹²

Perhaps one reason that partial printings of the psalms strike some as improper is found in the format of the hymnals. When the psalms are printed in a format that is similar to that of a Bible (as is the case in *The Lutheran Hymnal*), the omissions appear rather glaring. (It might make one think of the ridiculous attempt of Reader’s Digest to produce a condensed version of the Bible.) Instead of printing liturgical psalm sections in chronological order (which only invites the observation that some psalms are missing), there might be value in printing the chosen sections of psalms in the order of the church seasons to which they apply most directly. The portion of the hymnal containing liturgical psalmody could begin with those segments most fitting for services in Advent, followed by those appropriate for Christmas, and so forth. By doing so, it would be clear that the psalms in print are included, not because they are superior and others are inferior, but because they are uniquely suited to certain Sundays of the church year.

When there is need for a psalm in its entirety, of course, the full text can be printed in the service folder or reference can be made to the Bibles in the pews.

Using Psalms – How?

A marvel of the human voice is found in the fact that it can speak as well as sing. Likewise, a marvel of the psalms is found in the fact that they can be spoken as well as sung. And both are done.

For the most part, the tradition in the CLC is to speak the psalms. Generally within the framework of the Matins or Vespers services, psalms are read responsively between the pastor and the congregation without any musical element. Confident of the power which the Lord has placed in His written word, we know that the spoken psalm enlightens our eyes and strengthens our faith regardless of the presence or absence of music.

Nevertheless, we have good reason to believe that there are definite advantages which come with the addition of music. That “good reason” is found in the Spirit’s own reference to music in connection with the psalms. “Fifty-five psalms have the heading, ‘For the director of music.’ Other details speak to the musical rendition of the psalms, such as titles which seem to indicate the melody and that mysterious word, *Selah*.”¹³ “The word ‘Selah,’ which occurs seventy-one times within or at the end of thirty-nine psalms, seems to be another musical direction.”¹⁴ Paul’s references to the psalms in Colossians and Ephesians are presented in the context of singing. “Without being legalistic, one can say that the biblical norm is for psalms to be sung. One editor puts it this way: ‘The Holy Spirit and the various psalmists intended from the first that their psalms should be chanted in the corporate worship of God.’”¹⁵

No one can say, with absolute certainty, exactly why the Spirit encourages the use of music in connection with His psalms. But many advantages have been observed and experienced.

One such advantage is seen in the mysterious and powerful ability of music to imprint words on the mind and heart. Whether lyrics are sacred or secular, it’s a known phenomenon that the words will be absorbed more readily when married to music. Since a primary objective is to absorb God’s pure word, any such means which makes that objective all the more easily achieved will be utilized enthusiastically. “God’s Word can reach us not only through the cognitive means of hearing it read or preached; it can

also reach us through the combined impact of words and music.”¹⁶

“Musical settings of psalms can interpret or amplify the meaning of the psalm. A penitential psalm sung to a somber psalm-tone is more effective than the same words simply spoken or read. A serious refrain heightens the spiritual impact of the psalm. In the same way a jubilant refrain for a psalm of praise makes the words or praise more joyful and more personally felt and intended by each worshiper.”¹⁷

The observation has been made that the pace with which one verbalizes a psalm is improved when one sings instead of speaks. “One advantage of chanting the psalm verses is that the text goes by a little more slowly than in choral reading, allowing the words to imprint themselves on the mind for better understanding. Often our congregational reading is too fast to allow much thinking, e.g., the Lord’s Prayer and Nicene Creed.”¹⁸

Singing psalms is certainly not *easier* than speaking them. The extra component requires some additional effort. “There is no doubt that chant has certain disadvantages: it is less familiar, it can have unfortunate associations, and it is not easy to learn quickly because its lack of meter means that important memory cues are missing. But its aesthetic compensations are inestimable. Its style can be as modern as one would wish, and yet chant will always have the weight of tradition behind it. It will never be confused with the secular; it always sounds sacred.”¹⁹

Singing Psalms – Who?

The Christian community enjoys a variety of entities which can provide singing in connection with the liturgy. The congregation and choir are the most obvious. But in some assemblies there are also those who can serve as cantors – those who sing as a “one person choir” in the course of worship.

For the singing of music which is not a hymn (or a fixed portion of the liturgy) our custom is to look, primarily, to the choir. Typically, church choirs meet apart from the formal worship service to prepare special music which will accent the theme of the Sunday or of the season.

For this reason the choir is in the best position to sing settings of the psalms which cannot be easily read on the spot. And such settings of the psalms are abundant. Scores of compositions have been written for specific psalm texts, representing every level of musical difficulty. Unison chanting of the Gregorian style can be learned rather readily. Anglican chant, with its four-part writing and organ accompaniment, can also become a part of a choir’s repertoire with practice.²⁰ Octavos of a more complex nature have also been written by many composers and are available for those who wish to meet the challenge.

When a choir supplements the spoken parts of the liturgy with musical settings of the psalms, several objectives mentioned above are achieved. The ancient tradition of singing is preserved. A musical interpretation of the psalm is supplied. The pace of the text is reduced, so as to allow for greater contemplation. And the aesthetic impact of coupling words with music is felt. Nevertheless, if the singing of psalms remains solely in the domain of the choir, the congregation will not benefit as fully as it could. It’s the difference between being passive and being active. And the Lutheran Church has always sought to involve the people in worship as much as possible. “Psalm singing is a helpful addition to the musical participation of the congregation in worship.”²¹

One who hears the text of a psalm being sung by a choir will be able to absorb those words, especially if they are heard frequently. But the one who does the singing will absorb them all the more readily and deeply. The challenge, therefore, has been to set psalms in a way that will make them musically accessible to the assembly.

One of the most far-reaching responses to this challenge has its roots in the Swiss reformation. John Calvin developed very strong feelings about what was and what wasn’t acceptable as music in the Christian worship service. “As Calvin saw it, the New Testament scriptures only recognized psalms as material suitable for Christian song. Accordingly, the Calvinists absolutely forbade any texts to be sung in church except the Book of Psalms and one or two canticles.”²²

This perspective led to the task of making psalm verses more compatible with the rhythmic norms of western music. The result was what is known as “metrical psalmody.” “Ironically, it was Calvin (1509-64) who, though opposed to the use of much music in worship, provided the impetus for the development of metrical psalmody. Calvin’s insistence on using only scripturally based texts resulted in the writing of metrical psalm paraphrases, texts that were set to music by composers of the day.”²³ This concept caught on quickly in the Reformed churches of Europe (and later, America). “Psalter” (hymnbooks of metrical psalms) were written in abundance. But many of the original versions were poetically very crude. It took Isaac Watts and others, centuries later, to provide more gracefully written metrical versions of the psalms. And we are the beneficiaries of such work. *The Lutheran Hymnal* contains several fine examples of metrical psalmody.²⁴

Many of these highly poetic versions, however, bear only modest resemblance to the psalm on which they are based. Few would recognize, for example, that “Joy to the World” is actually Watts’ paraphrase of Psalm 98. Luther, too, paraphrased rather loosely. Though there are many similarities between “A Mighty Fortress” and the psalm on which it was based (# 46), there were also many liberties taken in the course of the transition.

Metrical psalms and paraphrases are wonderful additions to the song of the church. But singing such hymns is not quite the same thing as singing the actual words which God inspired. Hence, there has been an ongoing effort to develop a musical form which will enable broader participation on the part of the congregation and which will also preserve the actual texts of the psalms.

Nearly a generation ago, in 1978, Concordia Publishing House published “A Handbook of Church Music.” In it, one of the

authors presents this challenge.

When the people's song in the liturgy is logically extended to include congregational involvement in the psalmody, problems of practicality in learning and performing become quite real. Since the appointed psalms for the day are 'proper,' variable from day to day, they require for their singing or chanting numerous and variable musical settings. The same is true of the proper canticles and offertories. Whether these may be performed with musical formulary systems or with through-composed settings, they constitute musical and practical problems for the congregation. It is doubtful that these have yet been or will soon be easily solved. The problems of devising truly congregational musical settings of the psalms and propers in English may not be impossible to solve, but could well occupy the attention of a whole generation of worship leadership. An impeccable scholarship will be required and a thoroughly informed appreciation of tradition, together with an understanding of the potentialities and limitations of congregational worship in its contemporary context.²⁵

The question now is whether that challenge of the 70s has been met.

Current trends in Lutheran hymnals and supplements suggest that a viable method of involving congregations in the chanting of psalms has, in fact, been developed.

By way of introduction to that method, it might be of benefit to look briefly at a collection of psalms called "Gelineau Psalms." These are named after a French priest and composer named Joseph Gelineau, who was particularly active in the composing of church music during the 1960s. "It was Joseph Gelineau who gave a new impetus to psalmody. In advance of Vatican II by ten years, he published a booklet entitled *Vingt-quatre Psaumes et un Cantique*, which proposed a way of singing the psalms in translations close to the original Hebrew and yet simple and tuneful enough for congregations. Unlike Gregorian or Anglican chant, it is based on the provision of regularly accented syllables (even though the number of syllables between them may vary). The provision of antiphons allowed for the psalms to be sung responsorially. These antiphons might be sung as a preface and conclusion to the psalm, or alternated with the verses, following the time-honored practice of interlacing psalm-verses with a refrain. The music is of extreme simplicity, requiring only the most straightforward pitch-changes from one accented syllable to the next."²⁶

It appears that the Gelineau Psalms provided a type of springboard from which Lutheran musicians have developed the method now used in such service books as *Christian Worship* and *Worship Supplement '98*. A brief explanation of that new method of psalm singing is presented in *Christian Worship*.

Each psalm includes a refrain and a psalm tone. The psalms may be sung with or without the refrain. If the refrain is sung, it should be sung at the beginning of the psalm and then repeated at the appointed places. The text of the psalm may be sung to the psalm tone. Each verse of the psalm is divided into two parts. The (*) marks the division. Each psalm tone also is divided into two parts marked by the (*). The first note of each half of the psalm tone is a reciting tone. One or more syllables of the text are sung on this tone. The point (#) indicates the syllable where the singer moves from the reciting tone to the last three notes of the psalm tone formula. Two or three syllables are sung on these three tones.²⁷

This form allows for a variety of uses. The music, of course, can be omitted in those situations where a spoken recitation is desired. But where congregational singing is preferred, various approaches can be followed. The easiest and most accessible approach is to have the congregation sing only the refrain.²⁸ In such cases, the psalm verses are sung by a cantor or the choir. Congregational involvement can be expanded slightly by involving the assembly also in the singing of the doxology. And, naturally, it is also possible to include the congregation in the singing of the entire psalm text. Some reports suggest that the latter has become the favorite approach of many worshipers who have become familiar with this form.

It is difficult to know if this approach to psalmody is the best that will ever be devised for congregations in this day and age. At the very least, it seems worthy of trial, as the people of God look for ways to fulfil His own directive to "let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord" (Col. 3:16).

“The psalms have long been one of the great poetic treasures of the Church. Their inspired content, their portrayal of life as it really is, and their ability to lift people from the depths and restore faith, trust, and joy account for their favored place in the lives of Christians. The progress made in the authentic presentation of the psalms in today’s English, along with the attractive musical settings, predict a growing place for them in corporate worship as well as in the hearts of today’s worshipers.”²⁹

NOTES

¹ Scholars believe that the ‘hymn’ which Jesus and the disciples sang on Maundy Thursday was part of the “Hallel Psalms” (#115-118).

² Carl Schalk, *Praising God in Song* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1993), 12.

³ Schalk, 12

⁴ Luther D. Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1947), 393.

⁵ “The medieval church used large portions of the Psalter in its liturgical and musical enrichment of the Mass. As it developed the hour services into a great system, it arranged that the Psalter be recited in its entirety once a week, because it regarded the book of Psalms an inexhaustible mine of devotion. Priests and monks soon came to know the Psalter by heart. An early council at Toledo ordered that no one ‘should be promoted to any ecclesiastical dignity who does not perfectly know the whole Psalter,’ and similar statements can be found in the eastern churches.” Reed, 393

⁶ Ewald M. Plass, *What Luther Says – An Anthology* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), 999-1000.

Luther continues: “Where do you find words more beautifully expressive of joy than in the psalms of praise and thanksgiving? There you look into the hearts of all the saints, as into fine and pleasant gardens, nay, as into heaven, and note what fine and pleasant flowers spring up in them, all kinds of beautiful and happy thoughts rising to God because of His benefits. On the other hand, where do you find deeper, more sorrowful, more pitiful words of sadness than in the psalms of lamentation? There again you look into the hearts of all the saints, as into death, nay, as into hell. How dark and gloomy it is there, with all kinds of depressing views of the wrath of God! So, too, when they speak of fear and hope, they use such words that no painter could so depict fear or hope and no Cicero or orator could so portray them. . . This is the reason why the Psalter is the book of all saints, and everyone, whatever his situation may be, finds psalms and words in it that fit his situation and apply to his case so exactly that it seems they were put in this way only for his sake.”

⁷ Plass, 1000.

⁸ Philip H. Pfatteicher and Carlos R. Messerli, *Manual on the Liturgy: Lutheran Book of Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1979), 19.

⁹ P/M, 19 .

¹⁰ Reed, 295.

¹¹ *Christian Worship: Manual*, ed. Gary Baumler and Kermit Moldenhauer (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1993), 148.

¹² *Christian Worship: Manual*, 149.

¹³ *Christian Worship: Manual*, 269.

¹⁴ Schalk, 10.

¹⁵ *Christian Worship: Manual*, 270.

¹⁶ *Christian Worship: Manual*, 268.

¹⁷ *Christian Worship: Manual*, 268.

¹⁸ *Christian Worship: Manual*, 149.

¹⁹ Joseph Swain, “The Practicality of Chant,” *The Diapason*, August 1992.

²⁰ “Anglican chant was of course only an elaboration of Gregorian chant and had been in use since Elizabethan times in the Chapel Royal and intermittently in cathedrals. But now it was being proposed for the first time as a vehicle for corporate worship. The problem of this type of chant, unsolved to this day, is that it requires prose verses of varying length to be fitted to a musical formula that feels as if it should proceed in strict rhythm. Classical music in general creates a very clear association of chord progressions with a regular beat.” Andrew Wilson-Dickson, *The Story of Christian Music* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 135.

²¹ *Christian Worship: Manual*, 151.

²² Wilson-Dickson, 65.

²³ *Lutheran Worship History and Practice*, ed. Fred L. Precht (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1993), 472.

²⁴ “The Man is Ever Blest” (TLH # 414) serves as a fine example. This metrical version of Psalm 1 retains the many vivid images of the Biblical text.

²⁵ *A Handbook of Church Music*, ed. Carl Halter and Carl Schalk (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1978), 239.

²⁶ Wilson-Dickson, 225.

²⁷ “Singing the Psalms” by Kermit G. Moldenhauer. From *Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal*, © 1993 Northwestern Publishing House, 63. Used by permission.

²⁸ “The texts of the refrains are sometimes drawn from the psalms themselves, but more often from elsewhere. The words are chosen to relate closely to the content and mood of the psalm.” *Christian Worship: Manual*, 151.

How The Word 'Fear' Is Used In Scripture And The Lutheran Confessions (Specifically, Luther's Explanations To The Commandments)

Paul Fleischer

PEDAGOGICALLY

Last Fall we began a "teacher enrichment" class with Sunday School teachers in the congregation I serve. For discussion purposes we used a little volume which speaks to our subject at some length. In the first chapter called "*A Purpose of Christian Education*" this is said:

In Psalm 34:11 David offers this invitation: "Come, my children, listen to me"; then he explains why he wants their attention: "I will teach you the fear of the Lord." To teach learners to fear their Lord is a purpose of Christian education. This purpose is not only good and beneficial, it is also basic and profound. That simple statement -- "I will teach you the fear of the Lord" -- epitomizes our Christian philosophy of education. (*Teaching From a Scriptural Viewpoint*, Richard Grunze, NPH, 7)

The writer then refers to how Psalm 34 uses the word "fear" in obviously different ways:

We are told in verse 9 to "fear the Lord" and in verse 11 children are invited to learn to "fear" the Lord. But in verse 4 the psalmist speaks of being *delivered* from all his "fears." Since, on the one hand we are urged to "fear" the Lord, and on the other hand there was a deliverance from "fears," there obviously are different meanings involved. Regarding verse 4, the New English Bible speaks about deliverance from *terrors*. We can conclude that the "fear" of verse 11 does not mean fright or terror or apprehension.

The context provides further evidence that the "fear" of verse 11 does not have a negative connotation . . . A child of God, such as David, who was filled with joy over his many deliverances, would not want his fellow believers to be terrified by the Lord. David would want them to have the same positive attitude toward the Lord that he had. (Grunze 7-8)

This line of thinking is developed in a number of pages which follow in the booklet. In a paragraph titled "*The Source of Fear*" the author shows that the Lord's purpose in giving His *words* was to have people revere Him (cf. Deut. 4:10). He adds that it is specifically by the gospel that the Lord inspires people to fear Him and engenders in them the ability to stand in awe of the Lord (cf. Mal. 2:5). It is said: "Pedagogical principles and psychological prescriptions do not bring about the fear of the Lord. Only the gospel can do that. This does not mean, however, that methodology is unnecessary in teaching students to fear the Lord. As believers come to a deeper comprehension of God's Word, the Holy Spirit will instill in them a greater fear of God" (9).

In a subsequent paragraph called "*Growth in Fear*" the author writes:

Read Deut. 5:29, 10:12; Prov. 23:17. Because of their new man, Christians want to do God's will. And it is God's will that His people fear Him. His great love for His people moved the Lord to plead with them ("Oh, that their hearts would be inclined . . .") to fear Him, for He knew that they would benefit greatly. As the Christian matures spiritually, he will become "zealous for the fear of the Lord." That is, believers will seek to grow in their fear of God. (10)

In Catechism classes, Bible classes, and sermons, *where I may assume I am addressing Christians*, I have never taught that Luther uses the term "fear" with a negative connotation, either in his explanation to the first commandment itself or in his introducing the other nine with the words "We should fear and love God that we . . ." Indeed, in Psalm 34:11 preachers as well as teachers are invited to instill a positive attitude toward their Savior-God, not the negative connotation of an angry Christ such as young Luther was brought up to know. God's believing children--as such--do not need to be coerced into "*keeping God in sight*," into "*honoring His Word*," into "*worshipping God*" (terms Luther uses to define true fear of God--cf. Appendix Ib). Indeed, says Luther, the believer's "whole life is bound by the fear of God. Such a man needs no code of conduct. He wants to have all his life directed according to God's will. And if at times he forgets God in the weakness of his flesh and stumbles a little, he does not remain in the mire but turns to God and says: 'Oh God, cover it up, be gracious! I should have done better, but I am sorry to say I did not'" (*Luther's Works*, American Edition, Vol. 13, 397).

Whenever Christian sanctification is under discussion it is crucial for teachers (preachers) to keep in mind the "dichotomy" of the child of God. If and when one is speaking to the "old man" in the regenerate, or to the unbelieving world in general, there it will be necessary to instill what Luther called the *horror Dei*--terrors or dread of God. More on this in the following pages.

For much of what now follows I am (we are) indebted to Pastor Arthur Schulz. Knowing he keeps index for both the

Lutheran Spokesman and the *Journal of Theology*, I wrote him for anything he might be aware of on the subject. What were provided were two very helpful articles from the archives of the *Concordia Theological Monthly*.

LINGUISTICALLY

One of the two pithy articles is a linguistic study of the term "fear of God." The author points out that the Hebrew has a number of words for fear: **פחד** **יראה** **ירא** **ירא**. Most interestingly the word **יראה**, he says, can refer to all kinds of fears, but it takes on a more specific meaning when it has the name of God as the object, that is, in expressions such as: **אלהים יראו יראה יראה יראה**. **יראת שדי יראה**.

A careful study reveals that such fear of God is not ascribed to everybody, but only to a distinct class of people. A number of cases will serve to establish this significant truth. Abraham was a man of whom God Himself said that he feared God (Gen. 22:12). Obadiah, the man who protected the Lord's prophets while Ahab and Jezebel were persecuting them, said: "I, thy servant, fear the Lord from my youth" (1 Kings 18:12). By the mouth of His Prophet Jeremiah the Lord says of those who shall be His people: "I will put My fear in their hearts that they shall not depart from Me" (Jer. 32:40). The midwives of the Israelites in Egypt, who refused to carry out the murderous command of Pharaoh, are described as those who feared God (Ex. 1:17). Job is pictured as the man who was perfect and upright and one that feared God (Job 1:1). Joseph, in dealing with his brothers, assures them that he fears God (Gen. 42:18). Israel is distinguished from all the people of the earth by having the fear of God (1 Kings 8:43). "The eye of the Lord is upon them that fear Him, that hope in His mercy" (Ps. 33:18). They that fear the Lord are the same as those who are the object of His mercy (Ps. 103:11,17), His pity (Ps. 103:13), His blessing (Pss. 115:13, 112:1). His angel camps round about them that fear Him (Ps. 34:7); He takes pleasure in them (Ps. 147:11). The Psalmists frequently express their delight in having this fear: "Stablish Thy Word unto Thy servant, who is devoted to Thy fear" (Ps. 119:38); "In Thy fear will I worship" (Ps. 5:7). Even the coming Messiah is described as having this fear, for the Spirit of the Lord shall make Him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord (Is. 11:3). It is to be noted again that in all these cases this fear is a *fear of God* expressed in the original by any and regularly is an attitude ascribed *only to a child of God*. (*The Term "Fear of God" in the Old Testament*, H.O.A.Keinath, Concordia Theological Monthly, Febr. 1948, 93f.)

By way of contrast, it is pointed out that those who are not children of God are frequently described as lacking this fear. The author references Pharaoh (Ex. 9:30); some foreigners in Israel (2 Kings 17:25); the Amalekites (Deut. 25:18); the Philistines (Gen. 20:11); sorcerers, adulterers, false swearers, and oppressors (Mal. 3:5); cf. Prov. 1:29, 10:27). This conclusion is drawn: "Lack of the fear

(**יראה**) of God, then, is regularly the characteristic of the heathen, the ungodly, the gross sinner." It is also pointed out that there are a few cases in the Old Testament where the fear (**יראה**) of the Lord seems to be attributed to those who are not children of God (cf. 2 Kings 17:24-41). This interesting and plausible explanation is given: "...It should be noted that this does not refer to *individuals*, but to *nations* (vv. 26, 30, 31, 41). In these nations there were individuals who truly feared the Lord and also those who practiced idolatry, and the writer of Kings is simply describing this mixed worship" (Keinath 93f.).

A few examples are then given (from the KJV) of when the term "fear of God" is a translation of a Hebrew word other than **יראה יראה** is generally used to denote "terror" or "dread" (Job 13:11, Jer. 2:19). Also, most of the few times **אימה** is used, it is translated "terror" (Exod. 23:27).

Both Keinath and Grunze show an interesting correlation between the terms "fear of God" or "fear of the Lord" and Christian conduct (sanctification), something that Dr. Luther surely noted before them--witness the copious quotes from his writings (cf. Appendix I; especially Ia.), as well as the fact that he prefaces the meaning of each commandment with the "we should fear . . . God that we . . ." do, or don't do, something consistent, or inconsistent, with the will of God.

Consider how each of the following passages tells us something significant about "fear of the Lord" as that holy fear touches on the Christian life:

- 1) Deuteronomy 4:10 -- Parents who fear the Lord will teach God's Word to their children.
- 2) Deuteronomy 5:29 -- The Lord associates fearing Him with obeying His commands.
- 3) Deuteronomy 10:12 -- There is a connection between fear of the Lord and walking in His ways, loving Him and serving Him.
- 4) Joshua 24:14 -- Fear of the Lord is associated with faithfulness to the Lord. (also Jer. 32:40)
- 5) Job 2:3 -- Fearing God is connected with shunning evil. (also Prov. 3:7)
- 6) Psalm 22:23 -- Fear of the Lord is associated with praising Him.
- 7) Psalm 40:3 -- Fear of the Lord is connected with trusting Him. (also Ps. 115:11)
- 8) Psalm 112:1 -- He who fears the Lord finds great delight in His commands.
- 9) Psalm 118:4 -- Fearing the Lord is associated with openly acknowledging His love.
- 10) Psalm 119:63 -- Synonymous parallelism: They who fear the Lord follow His precepts.
- 11) Proverbs 8:13 -- Fear of the Lord is associated with hating such evils as pride, arrogance, evil behavior and perverse speech.
- 12) Proverbs 16:6 -- They who fear the Lord avoid evil.

- 13) Proverbs 23:17 -- Being zealous for the fear of the Lord is the antithesis of envying sinners.
- 14) Ecclesiastes 5:4-7 -- They who stand in awe of the Lord fulfill their vows.
- 15) Malachi 4:2 -- They who revere the Lord rejoice in their salvation through Christ.
- 16) Acts 10:2 -- They who fear God are devout.
- 17) Acts 10:35 -- Fearing the Lord is associated with doing what is right.
- 18) 1 Peter 1:17 -- Reverent fear and living the Christian life are connected.
- 19) 1 Peter 2:17 -- Fearing God is associated with loving fellow believers and honoring rulers.
- 20) Revelation 14:7 -- Fearing God is related to glorifying Him.

(Grunze 10f.)

Grunze goes on to state that, rightly understood, there are "degrees in sanctification" and therefore there can and will be growth in the fear of the Lord. That growth will be equal to one's use of the Word of God.

Here is how Keinath puts it at the close of his word study:

. . . One characteristic connotation of this term (יִרָא) remains to be examined. This is the implication of moral and ethical *conduct* which is so unmistakably connected with the terms יִרְאֵה יְהוָה, יִרְאֵה יְהוָה, and other expressions in which יִרָא is associated with the name of God. This association of fear and conduct is so common that it can safely be termed a constant, and the conclusion is warranted that this fear of God is never without moral implications. Of the very large number of instances, only a few will be listed to furnish the proof.

Job is described as a man who feared God and *eschewed evil* (Job. 1:11). Abraham's obedience to the will of God proved him to be one that feared God (Gen. 22:12). Nehemiah mentions his fear of God as the motive for being considerate of his fellow men (Neh. 5:15). Moses tells Israel that the fear of God should be before the nation "that ye sin not" (Ex. 20:20). Because the Israelite midwives feared God, they refused to kill the children (Ex. 1:17). Ye shall walk after the Lord, your God, and fear Him, and keep His commandments, and obey His voice (Deut. 13:4). The Book of Proverbs rather frequently refers to the close connection between this fear and conduct: "Fear the Lord, and depart from evil" (Prov. 3:7); "The fear of the Lord is to hate evil" (Prov. 8:13); "By the fear of the Lord men depart from evil" (Prov. 16:6); "He that walketh in his uprightness feareth the Lord" (Prov. 14:2). The fear of the Lord is to control men in the everyday conduct of life: "Take thou no usury of him, or increase; but fear thy God, that thy brother may live with thee" (Lev. 25:36).

A fear of God which is expressed by Hebrew terms other than יִרָא may result in terror (2 Chron. 20:29; Is. 2:10; 2 Chron. 17:10, 2 Chron. 14:14, where פָּחַד is used), but not in really God-pleasing conduct. (Keinath, 96f.)

Immediately thereafter the author closes his study drawing these conclusions:

1. When "fear of God" is ascribed to a person, such fear being expressed by יִרָא, then this is consistently an attitude which *only a child of God* can have.
2. Non-Christians may have a fear of God, but such fear is expressed by terms other than יִרָא.
3. "Fear of God," if expressed by יִרָא and a name of God, is an attitude which connotes godly conduct. (Keinath 97)

THEOLOGICALLY

Another article from *Concordia Theological Monthly* (authored by J. Theodore Mueller, 1885-1967; Prof. at Conc. Sem., St. Louis, 1920-1964) is equally interesting and helpful. The article's thrust is to show the difference between what theologians have termed *servile fear* (*timor servilis, horror Dei*) and *filial fear* (*timor filialis*) {cf. first quote in the "Lutheran Confessions" Appendix II}, and then to show decisively that Luther's use of the term "fear of God" in the Catechism is *filial fear*.

The article begins with a description of servile fear:

...In his still very useful *Handkonkordanz*, G. Buechner aptly defines *servile fear* as "apprehension in view of punishment." According to this definition a person's fear is *servile* if he does or omits an act because of God's threatened wrath and punishment. Servile fear is therefore fright, or terror, arising from the consideration of the threats of the Law. It is found especially in the heart of natural man, in particular, when he is troubled by an awakened conscience that charges him with transgressing God's Law. In Scripture, God makes use of fear in this sense, for pedagogical purposes, threatening and warning also His children inasmuch as they still are flesh and therefore rebellious. To the Old Adam of His followers He, for example, addresses the words of the Law: "I, the Lord, thy God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me," Ex. 20:5. In his explanation of these words Luther rightly says: "Therefore we should fear His wrath and not act contrary to them" (the commandments). (Cf. also Deut. 27:7; Gal. 3:10). When God thus inculcates fear, or apprehension, upon His children He does so as their omnipotent, sovereign Judge, whose vindictive justice is urged upon them, inasmuch as their corrupt nature, too, is carnally secure, stubborn, and disobedient. By thus instilling the fear of punishment in the Old Adam, the divine Law serves as a curb, checking the gross outburst of sin, which the flesh, because of its habitual perverseness and depravity, constantly desires.

That also Christians, inasmuch as they still are flesh, need such fear-compelling admonitions, warnings and threats of the Law, Scripture teaches us in many clear and emphatic passages, Rom. 7:14-25, 1 Cor. 10:21,22; etc.

Nevertheless, such fear of wrath and punishment, though necessary for the flesh, produces only "works of the Law" and not "fruits of the Spirit," that is to say, not good works done in true faith and love, with proper joy and willingness, and according to God's holy Law, Ps. 1:1ff, 119:1ff, 110:3; Rom. 7:25b; etc. (Cf. Formula of Concord, VI:4,5). But it is just the "fruits of the Spirit" which God demands of His children, and therefore it cannot be servile fear which He requires of His children, whom He addresses in the Decalog (cf. "I am the Lord, thy God"), but *filial fear*, that is to say, *loving, joyous, willing reverence and respect for His authority and will*. Works done in *servile fear* are not good works at all; however, in His Law God asks of His children truly *good works*, that is, works done in such holy fear as is joined with, and is the fruit of, love and trust. **Hence, when Luther writes: "We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things," and again: "We should fear and love God that," etc., he can only mean filial fear, as our Lutheran teachers have invariably taught.** (C. T. M., 1938 [mth?], The Meaning of "Fearing God," J.T. Mueller, 935f.) {emphasis added}

The author continues by further describing filial fear as the fruit of saving faith and the gospel. Then given is the following interpretation of the distinction between filial and servile fear in the Apology (Triglot, p. 261--cf. Appendix II):

...When the *Apology* says that filial fear is such *anxiety* as has been connected with faith, it, of course, uses the term *anxiety* in an improper sense; for where faith "consoles and sustains the anxious heart," there, properly speaking, is no longer any anxiety but only joy and happiness, Rom. 8:31-39. From the wording of the statement it must not be argued that also filial fear is anxiety (*pavor, Furchten, und Entsetzen*), just as is servile fear. (We say this here because that very argument has been used.) But the Apology uses a *modus loquendi* which lends emphasis to the matter, just as if some one would say: "A cured toothache is such a pain as is connected with full relief." That is, it is no pain at all. Certainly, if servile fear is "nothing but wrath and doubt," then filial fear, according to our Confession, is the very opposite of that, namely, nothing but love and certainty." Thus this famous passage in the *Apology* must be interpreted. (Mueller 936f.)

A few sentences later Mueller shares a pertinent quote from Luther and shows, from Scripture, where filial fear leads -- along the same lines as was pointed out earlier about godly fear being associated with a sanctified Christian life.

Luther very fittingly defines the filial fear of God as follows: "To fear God is nothing else than to serve God with the heart inwardly and with the conduct outwardly; it consists in this, that we hold Him in honor, revere Him, and do or omit nothing but what we know pleases Him." (Cf. Meusel, *Kirchl.Handl.*, sub "Furcht Gottes"; Erl. Aug. 34, 174.) According to Scripture filial fear leads to the fleeing of sin, Gen. 39:9; 2 Cor. 7:1; Eph. 5:21, and is the beginning of all true, spiritual wisdom, Ps. 111:10; Eccl. 12:13. It has the promise of *salvation*, Ps. 85:9: "His salvation is nigh unto them that fear Him"; of *God's love*, Ps. 147:11: "The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear Him"; of His *pity*, Ps. 103:13: "The Lord pitieth them that fear Him"; and of His *gracious protection*, Ps. 33:18: "The eye of the Lord is upon them that fear Him." Such consoling promises, which all ultimately have in view the *sootaeria*, or eternal salvation, certainly are not meant for those who merely are afraid of God, or have servile fear, that is, who fear because of God's punishment. No indeed; filial fear, as Luther declares time and again, is the fruit of love, *fructus amoris*, and is the gift of the Spirit of adoption, Rom. 8:15, through faith in Christ. **According to Scripture the person who fears God also trusts in Him, so that Luther's explanation "We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things" is truly Scriptural. Ps. 115:11: "Ye that fear the Lord, trust in the Lord: He is their Help and their Shield." How could those who have slavish fear trust in the Lord when in their hearts there is nothing but wrath and doubt?** (Mueller 937) *{italics emphasis original; bold emphasis added}*

In the following words a distinction is made between those who fear men and those who have a true, filial fear of God: Where there is true filial fear of God, there is freedom from the servile fear of the flesh, the *horror Dei*, as Luther calls it, which is incited in man by the threats of the Law and the accusations of the aroused conscience. 1 John 4:18: "There is no fear in love [no slavish fear]; but perfect love casteth out [servile] fear, because fear hath torment. He that feareth [slavishly] is not made perfect in love." Blessed indeed is the person in whose heart the Holy Spirit through the means of grace has engendered true filial fear with love and trust in God, Heb. 2:15. He certainly works out his salvation with fear and trembling, Phil. 2:12; that is, he seeks after salvation in true faith and with earnest desire; but his "fear and trembling" is nothing else than "reverence and godly fear." Heb. 12:28: "Let us have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear." His fear is the *fruit of forgiveness*; Ps. 130:4: "There is forgiveness with Thee that Thou mayest be feared." It is marked by willing obedience to God's will, Ps. 119:63: "Of all them that fear Thee and of them that keep Thy precepts"; by true praise of God, Ps. 135:20: "Ye that fear the Lord, bless the Lord"; by avoiding sin, Prov. 3:7: "Fear the Lord and *depart from evil*"; by walking in uprightness, Prov. 14:2: "He that walketh in his uprightness feareth the Lord"; in short, by a truly Christian life. (Mueller 937f.)

Next the author expands on servile fear, showing that it flows from the "spirit of bondage" (Rom. 8:15, 2 Tim. 1:7, Heb. 2:15) and is, in fact, a fear even the devils have (Jas. 2:19). Referring to the third use of the law, it is brought out that there is a servile fear that must at times be applied to Christians *because of the flesh*:

Hence Luther's dictum "*Horror Dei est seminarium odii*"* is genuinely Scriptural. Truly, it is not such miserable fear that is demanded in the divine Law, which to Christian believers is a "fixed rule according to which they are to regulate and direct their whole life" (*tertius usus legis*; Formula of Concord VI:1). If the Law threatens such fear to the rebellious Old

Adam, it is only for the reason that this "intractable, refractory ass" (Formula of Concord, VI:24; *Triglot*, 969) cannot be coerced by anything else than by the severest threats of punishment. (Mueller 938)

*(Cf. Appendix Ia. "The Fear of God is Not Fright"; also Appendix Ib where Luther in commenting on Ps. 147:11 addresses the fact that "modern theologians have disputed a great deal about servile and filial fear...")

Apparently there was some discussion at the time (AD 1938) regarding the proof-texts quoted in what is called "our Synodical Catechism." Says Mueller: "We readily agree that more fitting (proof texts) might be offered to bring out more clearly the idea of filial fear, which is always joined with love and faith." He adds: "The array of passages given above will make the choice very simple and easy."

The Mueller essay concludes with some interesting "corollaries" which, it is said, will "impress the Scriptural truths regarding filial fear of God more lastingly upon the mind":

1. To our stubborn, rebellious Old Adam the Law says: "Fear God, or He will punish you." To our humbled, but believing heart the Gospel says: "Fear not, for Christ has redeemed you."

2. We are afraid of God inasmuch as we are "Old Adamites." We are not afraid of God inasmuch as we are His children in Christ Jesus.

3. Just as the Law and the Gospel are more than contradictory (*plus quam contradictoria*; Luther) so also the Scriptural "Fear!" and "Fear not!" are contradictory, and each must be understood in its peculiar sphere. The Law cries: "Fear, O sinners!" The Gospel cries: "Fear not, O ye redeemed!"

4. We must not say that the threatening appendix of the Law is meant only for the ungodly who transgress God's commandments; for it is meant also for believers, namely, inasmuch as they are still Old Adam-ridden. The Old Adam of believers is just as corrupt as the Old Adam of unbelievers.

5. While the proper use of the Law by Christians is that of a rule and of a mirror, it is to them also a curb, namely, inasmuch as they still are flesh. It is as a curb that the Law addresses Christians in their natural corruption: "Fear His wrath."

6. The difficulty which faces the Christian theologian whenever he distinguishes between the Law and the Gospel faces him also when he inculcates the Ten Commandments with their demand for true, godly filial fear. Only that minister can teach the Ten Commandments rightly who can rightly distinguish between Mount Sinai and Mount Calvary. (Mueller 938f.)

CONCLUSION

The overriding calamity of the fall is every sinner's *natural* lack of fear of God whether servile or filial. ". . . There is no fear of God before their eyes" (Romans 3:18) leaves none excepted. Were it not for God's grace all would be left condemned, temporally and eternally. The apostle Paul's stated indictment is in the context of justification. We can never sufficiently thank God that, void of His fear as we are by nature, He has not left man to himself in the matter of attaining the righteousness of God (cf. Rom. 3:21ff.).

When the same apostle shifts gears to the subject of the work of the Spirit of God in the heart (sanctification), he writes: ". . . you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs--heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ . . ." (Rom. 8:14f.) What a glorious standing. Born anew, we have a filial fear towards our heavenly Father. Yet I am sure we will confess we are, as Luther suggests, only "progressing" in proper fear of God (cf. Appendix Ia. *Reasons Why People Fear God*).

Here is one man's assessment of our day: "*The sense of awe and mystery that could drop believers to their knees is mostly absent. A fearful respect that once meant removing shoes or reverencing a symbol of divine presence is rarely observed. Today, many believers have homogenized the Holy One. They conceive of God in ways that don't require their humble obedience or patient trusting in adversity. That way, their spiritual digestive systems aren't upset*" (*Lost: Our Sense Of Awe*, Table Talk. Official Publication of the LMS-USA, Vol. 3, No. 3, 1)

I doubt that any would dispute what is said. No one is surprised that the unbelieving world is without the fear of God; witness how God's laws are increasingly challenged and flaunted. Yet how about among those who number themselves among God's believing children?

As those called to stand in the breach, we have no higher calling than, while remaining in God's holy fear ourselves, helping those who hear us to know and remain in that same holy fear, beginning with the children entrusted to our care: "*If (young people) are not instructed, they are ruined and lost even before they get their bearings. Therefore young people need and must have teachers and rulers who will exhort, warn, rebuke, and chastise them, who will hold them constantly to the fear of God and to his commandments in order to ward off the devil, the world, and the flesh. . .*" (Luther, Preface to the Books of Solomon, p. 258; Appendix I)

Blessed Jesus . . .

Let our hearts and souls be stirred

Now to seek and love and fear Thee,

By thy teachings, sweet and holy,

Drawn from earth to love Thee solely. (TLH 16:1)

APPENDIX I -- Luther Himself

(All emphases added)

a) From 'WHAT LUTHER SAYS'

Reasons Why People Fear God Some people fear God for the sake of God alone; they do the best they can and very conscientiously avoid evil. Others fear God for the sake of God and, at the same time, for the sake of the threatened punishment; their works are less good and perfect. Still others fear God only for the sake of the threatened punishment; these only seem to do good. The first are children of God; the second are a mixture of children and bondmen; the third are slaves. The first are perfect; the second, progressing; the third, beginning. (#1522, 508)

Fearing God Yet Glorifying in Him There are those who know of no other fear of the Lord than the fear of punishment. This scares them away from committing gross sins and indulging in lusts. But they know nothing and will never learn to glory in the Lord; for the true fear of the Lord consists in fearing to arrogate to ourselves anything that belongs to the Lord, that is, His virtue and His name, and thus to desecrate them; just as we hesitate to touch sacred things lest we defile them. (#1523, 208)

The Fear of God Is Reverential Awe The fear of God is reverence and the spiritual worship of God. In this sense Scripture everywhere uses the expression "the fear of God." For the worship of God in its truest form does not consist in works, however great and holy, but in true and genuine reverence. (#1524, 208)

The Fear of God Is Not Fright Being afraid of God is different from fearing God. The fear of God is a fruit of love, but being afraid of Him is the seed of hatred. Therefore we should not be afraid of God but should fear Him so that we do not hate Him whom we should love. . . . Therefore the fear of God is more aptly called reverence. For example, we revere those whom we love, honor, esteem, and fear to offend. (#1525, 509)

Luther begins his brief explanations of the Commandments by saying that we should fear and love God. According to Veit Dietrich (1533), he once spoke as follows about the deep reverence and the firm reliance we should have.

"We Should Fear and Love God" Fear God. Do what is right. Trust in Him. Hope for grace. That is: We must fear and trust at the same time, not successively. Do not sin, for you may suddenly die; and do not despair, for grace is still available. The Law is to warn us against future sins, the Gospel is to comfort us for past sins. (#1527, 510)

The Christian Is Filled with Filial Fear to Offend Therefore St. Peter goes on to say: Since you have a Father who judges impartially, pass the time of your pilgrimage in fear, that is, stand in fear of the Father, not because of threatened pain and punishment -- as the Christless and also the devil do -- but lest He forsake you and withdraw His hand, just as a pious child dreads to provoke his father and to do aught that displeases him. God seeks within us a fear that keeps us alert against sin and moves us to serve our neighbor as long as we live here on earth. (#1528, 510)

b) From Select Volumes of Luther's Works

Volume 12--Selected Psalms I

Psalm 2:11 "Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling" . . . The prophet describes this servitude eloquently indeed when he demands that they serve this King with fear. As I said before, this serves to emphasize the persons with whom the Holy Spirit is speaking. Kings are inflated with power, rulers or teachers with wisdom, and, in general, all are work-righteous, that is, they retain the belief in their own holiness and seem to themselves to be righteous. These are the men whom the Spirit says, "Serve with fear." For the others, who are afflicted, who lack human supports, who do battle not only with hunger, but with sins and their conscience, have already been put under the fear of God. And so this sermon does not apply to them, but rather that message about believing in the forgiveness of sins through the Son of God, who was made a sacrifice for us; about this the psalm immediately speaks further and says, "Rejoice with trembling." For the Holy Spirit does not wish us to fear in such a way that we are overwhelmed by fear and despair. But just as He wishes presumption abolished and for that reason commands that we should fear, so He also wishes despair abolished, and commands that we should travel on the royal road, fearing and hoping at the same time. (74f.)

...He wills that you should fear and so escape pride or presumption, and that you should rejoice and so escape despair. Those who do not wish to fear Him, He threatens with blows, for He has a rod of iron. Those, however, who fear Him in such a way that they rejoice at the same time, that is, who believe they are justified by the mercy of God alone and by the favor of Christ, they are truly the children of God. They fear God not as a tyrant, but as children fear their parents, with respect. For they temper the fear of God with joy and hope. And yet they remain in humble reverence, lest their spirit grow too big and pass over

into presumption. (75)

Psalm 147:11 joins these two ideas in this way: "The Lord takes pleasure in those who fear Him, in those who hope in His steadfast love." Why does he add: "in those who fear Him"? Doubtless on account of the proud who trust in their own wisdom and righteousness. In them He cannot take pleasure. But **only those please Him who fear, that is, who acknowledge themselves to be sinners and for that reason do not hold aloft their plumes but humbly bow their heads.** But you must lift up your eyes and behold Christ, who has placed Himself as Mediator before God, has taken our sins upon His back, and for them has suffered the punishment of death on the cross. Like the sight of the bronze serpent, this will mitigate fear, lest it become too much and result in despair. (75f.)

For to fear and rejoice are two entirely contradictory moods. And yet, if we wish to be Christians, it is necessary that we should both fear and rejoice. Modern theologians have disputed a great deal about servile and filial fear. And it is surely easy to see the difference between a father punishing his child and a jailer. For when a father punishes his son, the son does not give up all hope, for he sees an end to the chastisement. That is, he feels that the anger will be put away with the whip. And so, even if he suffers pain and fears his father's anger, he still retains the hope for mercy. A thief is not of such a mind when he is punished and the jailer seizes him. For he knows that the jailer will not be satisfied until he has strangled the thief with a noose. And so he despairs, because he sees no end to the punishment. This illustration taken from the household is a very excellent one. But when we are being punished, it is impossible to persuade us that God is our Father. And so we fear Him, not with filial fear, for we do not see His plan for teaching us, but with a servile fear, for we are convinced that God is angry without an end . . . **It is, therefore, easy to say that the true fear of God is a filial fear, that is, a fear mixed with joy or hope.** . . . (77f.)

As a young man I hated this verse, for I did not hear with pleasure that God had to be feared. This came about, however, because I did not know that fear had to be mixed with joy or hope. That is, I did not know the difference between our works and the works of Christ. Our works are corrupt, just as all nature is spoiled. Therefore we ought not to be secure, but fear the judgment of God. In contrast Christ's works are holy and perfect. Therefore we ought to hold fast to hope for mercy. Certainly it was not for His own sake that He was born, put under the Law, and finally fastened to the cross. . . . We should, accordingly, fear in such a way that joy is not entirely excluded. . . . In short, we who are Christians are not entirely fearful nor entirely happy. Joy is joined with fear, hope with dread, laughter with tears, so that we may believe that we shall then at least be perfectly joyous, when we have put away this flesh. For just as the flesh cannot rid itself of fear, so it serves a purpose for it to be in fear, in order that it may not become smug. In this manner the present psalm has described the service of God. **For to fear God and to trust God is alone true religion. Where these two are in correct balance, there the whole life is righteous and holy.** . . . (80f.)

Volume 13--Selected Psalms II

Psalm 111:20 "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." -- **...If one would begin to become wise, one must fear God.** One must truly regard it as God's Word; then everything can be learned easily. This is the one mistake, that many people hear God's Word, which is the pure wisdom of God, but learn nothing from it, because they regard it as a word, not as the Word of God. . . . The coarse and brazen hearts think: "Oh, why should I listen. I already know it much better than He who is saying it. I have heard it all long ago." These are the despisers of God, who do not fear Him or regard His Word as God's Word. Therefore they cannot learn anything or become wise. Whoever earnestly regards God's Word as God's Word knows very well that he will forever remain its pupil and disciple. The others become masters of God's Word at first flight, and brashly render opinions and person judgments on it. Finally they stray so far from it that they condemn it as heresy. As the fear of God is the beginning of all wisdom, so the contempt of God is the beginning of all folly. Thus the prophet would teach us in this verse that we should hear His Word with fear and earnestness. Then we shall become wise and understand His psalm. **To fear God is the same as to fear and honor His Word, for without God's Word we can have no God.** (385)

Psalm 112:1 "Blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who greatly delights in His commandments!" -- This is an excellent verse, in which is contained this thought of the Spirit: If you desire to be great, begin with God! **First we must understand the words. He says: "Blessed is the man who fears the Lord!"** As if he wanted to say: "Let us not imagine that those are fortunate, rich or highly honored who think they have wealth, fame, and pleasure. They are not. It may seem so. But consider their heart and the end of it all, and you will find it to be otherwise. Even if they had no other misfortune than their lack of contentment with their wealth, that would be misfortune and heartache enough." . . . (395)

What does it mean to fear God? To fear God is true worship, as he says in the psalm immediately before this (Ps. 111:10): **"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." It is really nothing else than to keep God in sight.** Whoever does this has enough for time and eternity. For he keeps His commandments, gives God His honor, exalts God as He should be exalted. Then God cannot but exalt him in turn, as He says (1 Sam. 2:30): "Those who honor Me I will honor, and those who despise Me shall be lightly esteemed." We know from experience that this is true. If we fear and honor God, then the way is prepared for us to become rich and blessed and to have enough. Such a person can rightly use riches and fame and pleasure. But the children of the world cannot do this. They meddle into God's business and seek only their own advantage. **Those who fear God, however, do not lay hold of possessions without His will. That is the difference between those who fear God and those who do not fear Him.**

True worship is not that you sacrifice calves to God, for He does not want them; or that you give Him a groschen or three,

for He does not need them. He will not let Himself be bribed with alms, and He does not value such sacrifices; for He demands the whole heart. **Thus the fear of God is nothing else than the worship of God. We lay hold on the heart of God by fearing Him, standing in awe of Him, and honoring Him in all things. We fear because He sees all we do, and we think of nothing else than the fact that His eyes rest on us.** I do nothing except with this thought in mind: "O Lord, let it not displease Thee." Such a heart wants to do nothing that might displease God. And even if such a man were to stumble from time to time, he turns back and says; "Alas, O Lord God, I have done wrong!" Such a man always stands in fear and awe of God. **His whole life is bound by the fear of God. Such a man needs no code of conduct.** He wants to have all his life directed according to God's will. And if at times he forgets God in the weakness of his flesh and stumbles a little, he does not remain in the mire but turns to God and says: "Oh God, cover it up, be gracious! I should have done better, but I am sorry to say I did not."

...The godless person, who does not fear God, imagines that God does not see him or that God has gone to Ethiopia or is busy with other things. He does not ask where things come from, nor does he consult God or even bid Him "Good morning"; But everything goes ram-cram into his sack. But it will not last. God does see it, and finally it collapses and cannot endure. . . . (396f.)

The Jews were experienced in these matters. David speaks of this when he says: Those who fear God, their "descendants will be mighty in the land," and their affairs will make progress. They did not seek wealth and fame without the will of God. Thus they are blessed; and so are their children, who become much greater and mightier than their fathers. Why? Because they gave honor to God (398) . . . (399) Why do the descendants of those who fear God become mighty in the land? They have the blessing of God; they will be blessed; the blessing of God will rest on the house of him who fears God. Therefore the father will be blessed, and the son, and the son's son (399) . . . (400) Thus God has always exalted those who fear Him and who delight in His commandments. But there are so few of them! This is the first blessing given to those who fear God (400) . . . Thus **Christ also says (Matt. 6:33): "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well"; as though He would say: "You need not look for the other things. They will be brought to you, and they will come right now. Only fear Me and stand in awe of Me."** . . . (401) Therefore let us look up in fear and keep Him before our eyes, and He will give us enough. But if we make light of the fear of God, we will enjoy nothing, even if we were worth a hundred thousand guildens. (403) . . . **A righteous man, however, who fears God and stands in awe of Him, looks upon God as the One who beholds all his words, works, and thoughts.** In turn, he is also kind and merciful to his neighbor, as God has been gracious and merciful to him. (407) . . .

Volume 25--Lectures on Romans

(On Rom. 3:18 -- "*There is no fear of God before their eyes*") -- . . . **But they nevertheless imagine that they have as much fear of God as possible. For what virtue will proud men not arrogate to themselves.** Just as they consider themselves righteous in their search for God, so also they believe they have the fear of God and all the things which the apostle here denies to them, these they presumptuously believe are as far away from them as possible. Therefore, unless one believes with faith in these words of the Holy Spirit in this psalm (Ps. 12:3), that they are true and that no one is righteous before God, he will never think this about himself so long as he seems righteous in his own eyes. Hence, **it will always be necessary to realize that these things are true about us and that it can be said of each of us that he is unjust man, without fear of God, so that being thus humbled and confessing ourselves to be ungodly and foolish before God, we may deserve to be justified by Him** (233) . . .

(On Rom. 4:7-8 "*Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; Blessed is the man to whom the LORD shall not impute sin.*") . . . **For this reason nothing in the Holy Scriptures is so often described as the cause of pride and laid at the door of hypocrites and those who think themselves holy as this smugness, by which they cast aside the fear of God. Prov. 1:29-10 says; "Because they have hated instruction and did not choose the fear of the Lord, and would have none of My counsel, etc."; Ps. 36:1 "There is no fear of God before their eyes"; and Hos. 10:3: "We fear not the Lord."** This misery follows from the fact that they do not seek to purge out that inner sin but recognize only the sin in deed, word, and thought, and when these have been purged by confession they go their way, smug and in no way anxious to cleanse also this inner sin through crying to God that it might not be imputed to them (269) . . .

(On Rom. 14: 1) **...And this is the reason why the apostle Peter also commands "Fear God" (1 Peter 2:17) and Paul says: "Knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men" (2 Cor. 5:11), and again: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12). And in Ps. 2:11 we read: "Serve the Lord with fear, and with trembling rejoice unto Him."** Now how can one fear God or his own works unless he regards these things as evil or suspect? For fear comes from evil. **Thus the saints are concerned about constantly imploring the grace of God. They do not place their trust in their good intention or their general diligence, but they are always still afraid that they are doing something wrong. And humbled by this fear, they seek and sigh, and by this humility they cause God to be favorable toward them.** And thus the most pestilent class of preachers today is that group which preaches about the signs of present grace, so that it makes men secure, when in fact the **very best sign of grace is that we fear and tremble, and the surest sign of God's wrath is to be smug and self-confident.** And yet everyone pants for this with marvelous ardor. For in this way grace is found through fear, and through grace a man is made willing for good works, and without grace he is unwilling. And yet through this unwillingness (if I may say so) he is fearless, strong, and secure, because he accomplishes outwardly the works which are good in his own eyes and in the eyes of men. (497f.) . . .

Volume 35--Word and Sacrament I

(Preface to the Books of Solomon) He pays special attention to the young people. In fatherly fashion he instructs them in God's commandments, with reassuring promises of how well things shall be with the righteous, and threats as to how the wicked will have to be punished. . . . **If (young people) are not instructed, they are ruined and lost even before they get their bearings. Therefore young people need and must have teachers and rulers who will exhort, warn, rebuke, and chastise them, who will hold them constantly to the fear of God and to his commandments in order to ward off the devil, the world, and the flesh.** This, then, is what Solomon does abundantly and with all diligence in this book (258) . . .

(Preface to the Prophets) **...The prophets show us many great examples and experiences which illustrate the first commandment. They explicate it in masterly fashion, in both words and examples, so as to drive us powerfully to the fear of God and to faith, and to keep us in them.** For after they have prophesied of Christ's kingdom, all the rest is nothing but examples of how God so strictly and severely confirmed his first commandment. So to read or hear the prophets is surely nothing else then to read and hear how God threatens and comforts. God threatens the godless, who feel proud and secure. And if threatening does not help, he backs it up with penalties, pestilence, famine, war, until they are destroyed. Thus does God make good his threat in the first commandment (Exod. 20:5). **But he comforts those who fear him, who are in all sorts of need, and backs it up also with aid and counsel, by means of all kinds of wonders and signs, against all the might of the devil and the world.** Thus does God make good also his comfort in the first commandment (Ex. 20:6). (266) . . .

(Preface to the Prophet Daniel) **...The first chapter brings us a fine example from Daniel's life. We see how holy, how God-fearing, and how possessed he was of a great and noble faith in God;** and all this in the very midst of the wild and pagan life and the abominable offenses which he had to listen to and look upon every day at Babylon. In spite of it all, he remains firm and steadfast, and conquered all these temptations in his heart. For this reason there follows almost immediately (the account of) how God showed him great mercy, first highly honoring him in things of the spirit by granting him wisdom and understanding beyond that of other men, and then by elevating him also in worldly affairs and doing nothing but **great and mighty deeds and miracles through him. God did this to show us all how much he loves and cherishes those who fear and trust in him; with such an impressive example he prods us in a kindly way to faith and the fear of God.** (294f.) . . .

APPENDIX II -- The Lutheran Confessions

Fear of God

filial and servile

And thus filial fear can be clearly defined as such anxiety as has been connected with faith, i.e., where faith consoles and sustains the anxious heart. It is servile fear when faith does not sustain the anxious heart [fear without faith, where there is nothing but wrath and doubt]. {Apology, Art. XII. Of Repentance, Trig. 261}

innate absence of true fear of God

They condemn the Pelagians and others, who teach that without the Holy Ghost, by the power of nature alone, we are able to love God above all things; also to do the commands of God as touching "the substance of the act." For, although nature is able in a manner to do the outward work, (for it is able to keep the hands from theft and murder,) yet it cannot produce the inward motions, such as the fear of God, trust in God, chastity, patience, etc. {Augs. Conf., Art. XVIII Of Free Will, Trig. 53}

It is further taught that since the Fall of Adam all men who are naturally born are conceived and born in sin, i.e., that they all, from their mother's womb, are full of evil desire and inclination, and can have by nature no true fear of God, no true faith in God . . . we say that those thus born have concupiscence, and cannot produce true fear and trust in God . . . when we mention concupiscence, we understand not only the acts or fruits, but the constant inclination of the nature. {Apology, Art II. Of Original Sin, Trig. 105}

(1) These were the reasons why, in the description of original sin, we made mention of concupiscence also, and denied to man's natural strength the fear of God and trust in Him. For we wished to indicate that original sin contains also these diseases, namely, ignorance of God, contempt for God, the being destitute of the fear of God and trust in Him, inability to love God. These are the chief faults of human nature, conflicting especially with the first table of the Decalog.

2). . . Now, in the Scriptures, righteousness comprises not only the second table of the Decalog [regarding good works in serving our fellow-man], but the first also, which teaches concerning the fear of God, concerning faith, concerning the love of God. Therefore original righteousness was to embrace not only an even temperament of the bodily qualities [perfect health and, in all respects, pure blood, unimpaired powers of the body, as they contend], but also these gifts, namely, a quite certain knowledge of God, fear of God, confidence in God, or certainly the rectitude and power to yield these affections . . .

3). . . Scripture testifies to this when it says, Gen. 1:27, that man was fashioned in the image and likeness of God. What else is this than that there were embodied in man such wisdom and righteousness as apprehended God, and in which God was reflected, i.e. to man there were given the gifts of the knowledge of God, the fear of God, confidence in God, and the like? . . . {Trig. 109}

. . . We, therefore, have been right in expressing, in our description of original sin, both, namely, these defects: the not being able to believe God, the not being able to fear and love God; and, likewise: the having concupiscence, which seeks carnal things contrary to God's Word . . . {Trig. 111}

. . . False also is this, that reason, by its own strength, is able to love God above all things, and to fulfill God's Law, namely,

truly to fear God, to be truly confident that God hears prayer, to be willing to obey God in death and other dispensations of God . . . {Apology, Art II. Of Justification, Trig. 127}

[. . . For the Law unceasingly accuses us, since we never can satisfy the Law.] All Scripture, all the Church cries out that the Law cannot be satisfied. Therefore this inchoate fulfillment of the Law does not please on its own account, but on account of faith in Christ. Otherwise the Law always accuses us. For who loves or fears God sufficiently? . . . {Apology, Art III. Of Love and the Fulfilling Of the Law, Trig. 169, cf. also 215}

belongs to the divine image

{cf. above, Apology quote #2, Trig. 109}

is a work of the Holy Ghost

. . . Then we learn to know how flesh, in security and indifference, does not fear God, and is not fully certain that we are regarded by God, but imagines that men are born and die by chance . . . But when, on hearing the Gospel and the remission of sins, we are consoled by faith, we receive the Holy Ghost, so that now we are able to think aright concerning God, and to fear and believe God, etc. From these facts it is apparent that the Law cannot be kept without Christ and the Holy Ghost. {Apology, Art. III. Of Love..., Trig. 159; cf. 239}

a consequence of regeneration

Therefore when we have been justified by faith and regenerated, we begin to fear and love God, to pray to Him, to expect from Him aid, to give thanks and praise Him, and to obey Him in afflictions. We begin also to love our neighbors, because our hearts have spiritual and holy movements [there is now through the Spirit of Christ a new heart, mind, and spirit within] . . . {Apology, Art. III. Of Love..., Trig. 157}

grows under terrors of conscience

We are regenerated and receive the Holy Ghost for the very end that the new life may produce new works, new dispositions, the fear and love of God, hatred of concupiscence, etc. . . . And while we are cheered in the midst of the terrors and receive consolation, other spiritual movements at the same time grow, the knowledge of God, fear of God, hope, love of God; and we are regenerated, as Paul says, Col. 3,10 and 2 Cor. 3,18 in the knowledge of God, and beholding the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, i.e., we receive the true knowledge of God, so that we truly fear Him, truly trust that we are cared for, and that we are heard by Him. . . ." {Trig. 217}

children to be trained therein

Behold, thus we might train our youth in a childlike way and playfully in the fear and honor of God, so that the First and Second Commandments might be well observed and in constant practise. . . {Large Cate., 2nd Com. Trig. 601}

For I the Lord, thy God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me, and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love Me and keep My commandments.

Although (as we have heard above) this appendix was primarily attached to the First Commandment, it was nevertheless (we cannot deny that it was) laid down for the sake of all the commandments, as all of them are to be referred and directed to it. Therefore I have said that this, too, should be presented to and inculcated upon the young, that they may learn and remember it, in order to see what is to urge and compel us to keep these Ten Commandments. And it is to be regarded as though this part were specially added to each, so that it inheres in, and pervades, them all.

Now, there is comprehended in these words (as said before) both an angry word of threatening and a friendly promise to terrify and warn us, and, moreover, to induce and encourage us to receive and highly esteem His Word as a matter of divine earnestness, because He Himself declares how much He is concerned about it, and how rigidly He will enforce it, namely, that He will horribly and terribly punish all who despise and transgress His commandments; and again, how richly He will reward, bless, and do all good to those who hold them in high esteem, and gladly do and live according to them. Thus He demands that all our works proceed from a heart which fears and regards God alone, and from such fear avoids everything that is contrary to His will, lest it should move Him to wrath (our emphasis) ; and, on the other hand, also trusts in Him alone, and from love to Him does all He wishes, because he speaks to us as friendly as a father, and offers us all grace and every good.

Just this is also the meaning and true interpretation of the first and chief commandment, from which all the others must flow and proceed, so that this word: Thou shalt have no other gods before Me, in its simplest meaning states nothing else than this demand: Thou shalt fear, love, and trust in Me as thine only true God. For where there is a heart thus disposed towards God, the same has fulfilled this and all the other commandments. On the other hand, whoever fears and love anything else in heaven and upon earth will keep neither this nor any. Thus the entire Scriptures have everywhere preached and inculcated this commandment, aiming always at these two things: fear of God and trust in Him. And especially the prophet David throughout the Psalms, as when he said (Ps. 147:11): The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear Him, in those that hope in His mercy. As if the entire commandment were explained by one verse, as much as to say: The Lord taketh pleasure in those who have no other gods. (Large Cate. Conclusion, Trig. 673f.)

Fear Of Punishment

. . . From contrition we separate those idle and infinite discussions, as to when we grieve from love of God, and when from fear of punishment. . . . But we say that contrition is true terror of conscience, which feels that God is angry with sin, and which

grieves that it has sinned. And this contrition takes place in this manner when sins are censured by the Word of God, because the sum of the preaching of the Gospel is this, namely, to convict of sin, and to offer for Christ's sake the remission of sins and righteousness, and the Holy Ghost, and eternal life, and that as regenerate men we should do good works. . . . In these terrors, consciences feels the wrath of God against sin, which is unknown to secure men walking according to the flesh. . . . {Apology, Art. XII. Of Repentance, Trig. 259}

. . . The words necessary, shall, and must are employed correctly and in a Christian manner also with respect to the regenerated, and in no way are contrary to the form of sound words and speech . . . Yet this is not to be understood otherwise than as the Lord Christ and His apostles themselves declare, namely, regarding the liberated spirit, that it does not do this from fear of punishment, like a servant, but from love of righteousness, like children, Rom. 8,15. {Form. of Concord, Epit. IV Of Good Works. Trig. 799}

. . . The difference, however, is in the works, because of the difference in the men who strive to live according to this Law and will of God. For as long as man is not regenerate, and [therefore] conducts himself according to the Law and does the works because they are commanded thus, from fear of punishment or desire for reward, he is still under the Law, and his works are called by St. Paul properly works of the Law, for they are extorted by the Law, as those of slaves; and these are saints after the order of Cain [that is, hypocrites]. {Form. of Concord, Thor. Decl. VI. Of the Third Use of the Law, Trig. 967; cf. 947,#31}

P A N O R A M A

A New “Call for Decision” . . .

The temptation will always exist for each new generation of Christians to follow blindly the traditions of their spiritual fathers. The dangers involved in so doing ought to be obvious. At best such indifference would soon rob us of our ability to "*give a defense to everyone who asks*" (1 Pet. 3:15). At worst it would lead to legalism, dead orthodoxy, and the perpetuation of anything false that might have insinuated itself into the theology of the previous generation. Despite such dangers, this blind acceptance of what was believed and taught by one's spiritual mentors has a fine pedigree. It came highly recommended already in the early Church. Painfully aware of the shortage of trained instructors and recognizing the spreading threat of false teachers, several early Church Fathers took up the mantra, "Obey the bishops!" This advice served the Church well – right up until the first bishop slipped from the ranks of the orthodox (which didn't take long). From that point on "Obey the bishops" became a recipe for disaster in the Church, culminating in the Papacy and Roman Catholicism.

The danger continues today. The mantra has changed a bit – from "Obey the bishops!" to "Do we know better than our Church Fathers?" – but the same warm, fuzzy appeal remains. It is powerfully appealing to our innate spiritual laziness to believe that our Lutheran Fathers have not only done all the work necessary, but that they can be trusted to have gotten everything exactly right. In fact there is but one way to avoid the path that once led the Church into Catholicism. Each generation, each individual Christian, must return to the original source and rediscover God's Word for himself. There may well come a time when our Fathers no longer walk the straight and narrow. The devil seems to take great pleasure in blazing alternate trails along our walk to heaven, and our Fathers do not always take the same path. Each time we must ask, "Which way, Lord?" We will never be sure which is the right path unless the Word of God is our compass.

From 1953 to 1959 our Fathers in the WELS and ELS stood at such a point. The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod had wandered from the path of orthodoxy. The ever-widening divergence of paths made it obvious that we could no longer walk arm-in-arm as though we were still "speaking the same thing." A call came for decision. The paths were obviously different. Which was the right course? Did those men who later formed the Church of the Lutheran Confession choose the right path?

The very fact that we are again asking these questions is a good thing. For this we owe a debt of gratitude, in part, to the WELS. WELS itself has prompted this review of history and study of the Word of God by again returning publicly to the position that the men who left their Synod and began the CLC did so on the basis of timing rather than doctrine. Fortunately nothing need be left to the imagination or argued from memory here. The Word of God is before us and the historic record has been preserved. Did the WELS and ELS choose a different path, or did the men who left and later formed the CLC choose to blaze a trail into the wilderness of sectarianism?

To answer this question we must first examine the actions of our fathers in the light of Holy Scripture and history, and thereby render an honest judgment of the course of action they chose in the years leading up to and following the break-up of the Synodical Conference. Secondly, we will examine where we stand today in our relation to the WELS/ELS, especially in light of the most recent attempt to find agreement (1987-1990).

1. The Difference between the WELS/ELS and the CLC in 1961

That there was a *doctrinal* difference between the WELS/ELS and at least some of the men who left and eventually formed the CLC is beyond dispute to any honest student of Scripture and history. The WELS has rather consistently expressed confusion concerning the CLC position, as well as their belief that what the CLC considered a doctrinal difference was in reality a matter of timing only. In fact timing *is* an important consideration here, for the timing contributed to the confusion. Different men left at different times for different reasons. The following is taken from a 1992 *Journal of Theology* article by Professor David Lau:

Those who left the WELS in the years and months before the WELS 1959 convention did not leave the WELS because of a stated different doctrinal principle. At that time both sides still seemed to hold... the same principle... Those who left the WELS before the 1959 WELS convention felt conscience-bound to do so because the WELS was not following this principle.¹

This fact has contributed to the confusion. Not everyone who left WELS/ELS left for the same reason. Nor was the subsequent reason for continuing the separation from WELS always the same as the original reason for leaving. Though virtually everyone who left WELS/ELS agreed that their former church body was wrong for not severing fellowship with Missouri long before 1961, it was not until the resolutions of the 1959 WELS convention that a difference in doctrine was identified.

WELS was at first hopeful, and then baffled, when those who had left did not return after WELS split with LC-MS in 1961. That split, however, satisfied only those who left *and remained separate* solely because they could no longer remain in fellowship with the LC-MS. There *were* men who rejoined WELS after the 1961 resolution, but for the majority of those who left (in protest over the failure to split) their reason for not returning was not the same as their reason for leaving. The reason for *not returning* was the doctrinal difference brought to light in 1959. It was at this convention that WELS officially adopted a false and unscriptural position on church fellowship and the meaning and application of Romans 16:17. The new WELS doctrine was grounded in the idea that "*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.*"

Perhaps it is something of an oversimplification, but the two positions regarding how one is to deal with an erring brother or church body can be summarized as follows:

WELS Position: 1. Identify (skopein) the false teacher 2. Admonish him until an impasse is reached (having been convinced that admonition will be of no further avail) 3. Avoid (ekklinate) the false teacher.

CLC Position: 1. Admonish an erring brother, both to determine if he is indeed a false teacher (as opposed to a weak brother) and to turn him from his error.² If he fails to heed that admonition and thus identifies himself as a "causer of divisions and offenses" 2. Mark (take note of) him (skopein) 3. Avoid (ekklinate) the false teacher.

That there is a doctrinal difference between these two positions must be acknowledged. The WELS position (officially adopted in 1959) calls for continued fellowship with those who have been marked or identified (skopein) as causers of divisions and offenses (albeit an admonishing fellowship). The CLC position calls for a break with all such men once they have been marked or identified. The WELS position calls for loving admonition after a causer of divisions and offenses has been marked. The CLC position calls for loving admonition in the process of determining if a brother is causing divisions and offenses, but not after he has been so identified.

Nor can it be argued rationally that the above does not accurately reflect the official WELS position of 1959 and 1961. In their own 1959 Convention Proceedings they clearly marked (again³) the LC-MS as a "causer of division and offenses."

Whereas, Many of the offenses of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, which have brought about the troubled conditions in the Synodical Conference, and which are named in our 1955 Saginaw Resolution (page 85), have not been removed and have been aggravated by The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod's reaffirmation of their position on Scouting, and,

Whereas, These uncorrected offenses have caused many consciences to be troubled and have been the underlying cause for a serious breach of fellowship in our own Synod..."⁴

Having marked or identified LC-MS for at least six years (1953-1959) and five different conventions as a causer of divisions and offenses, WELS officially opted for continued admonition rather than the Scriptural "avoiding" (ekklinate).

Resolved... c) That we instruct our Church Union Committee to continue its efforts in the Joint Union Committees until agreement on doctrine and practice has been reached, or until an impasse is reached and no such agreement can be brought about."⁵

Whereas, Many of the offenses of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, which have brought about the troubled conditions in the Synodical Conference...have not been removed and have been aggravated by The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod's reaffirmation of their position on Scouting, and,

Whereas, These uncorrected offenses have caused many consciences to be troubled and have been the underlying cause for a serious breach of fellowship in our own Synod; therefore, be it,

Resolved, That in our vigorously protesting fellowship with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod we testify strongly against the offenses which are still prevalent and unresolved in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and request that body to remove them, and to refrain from causing a wider breach between members of the Synodical Conference."⁶

It cannot be denied that WELS had marked LC-MS, but refused the call of Romans 16:17 to avoid them; opting instead for

a "vigorously protesting fellowship." Whatever the reasons for leaving, those who left and formed the CLC did not *return* to WELS because of the adoption in 1959 of this unscriptural position. In 1959 this became WELS doctrine, and it was false.

The eventual split from LC-MS did not clear up this false position; it rather brought it into clearer focus. After about 60 pastors and 9,000 members⁷ left the synod, the WELS broke with LC-MS not because they had been marked as causers of divisions and offenses but because an *impasse* had been reached. This action was therefore fully in keeping with their 1959 false teaching that "*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.*"

Whereas, The 1959 Convention of the WELS... gave its Commission on Doctrinal Matters the directive 'to continue and accelerate the discussions in the Joint Union Committees to bring about complete unity of doctrine and practice in the Synodical Conference... until agreement on doctrine has been reached, or until an impasse is reached and no such agreement can be brought about'..., and

Whereas, The Commission has faithfully carried out this directive but now regretfully reports that differences... have brought us to an impasse, ... be it

Resolved, a) That we now suspend fellowship with The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod on the basis of Romans 16:17,18..."⁸

2. The Difference between the WELS/ELS and the CLC Today

It would be neither fair nor forthright for either side in this protracted dispute to speak or write as if nothing could have changed in the position of WELS since 1959-1961. At least one representative from the WELS has observed that the CLC today at times acts "as though the CLC-WELS-ELS meetings and agreements of 1987-1990 had never occurred."⁹ One wonders at this statement, because the CLC has spoken often and publicly concerning the meetings of 1987-1990.¹⁰ During the course of those meetings a joint statement on the doctrine of church fellowship was drafted and accepted by the doctrinal committees representing each of the three synods. This joint statement was never brought before a convention of the WELS, ELS, or CLC for official adoption. Because of this it would not be prudent of the CLC to speak of this joint statement as though it is the official doctrine of any of the synods involved.

What caused the foundering of the joint statement? The project was aborted when agreement could not be reached on a preamble. The CLC has been publicly blamed for this failure.¹¹ If the insinuation is that the CLC wants its pound of flesh, or that this insistence on a particular preamble is borne of some prideful need to be declared "right," we maintain with clear conscience that neither is true. What is at stake here is clarity of doctrine. The CLC representatives, mindful that both the Scriptures¹² and history speak of the need for not only accepting what is true but also rejecting what is false, suggested the following as part of the preamble:

The following statement, agreed upon by representatives of these two synods (WELS and the CLC) and of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod in a meeting on April 5-6, 1990, is presented as a Scriptural resolution of the aforementioned doctrinal difference. Any previous expressions or actions which may not be in conformity with it are hereby set aside and rejected.

The WELS representatives rejected this preamble because it used the term "doctrinal difference," and have since refused to acknowledge that there was ever a doctrinal difference between the CLC and the WELS/ELS. To the representatives of the CLC (using WELS' own terminology) it was as though the official WELS resolutions of 1959-1961 never occurred. All of the carefully worded WELS resolutions from those years are simply dismissed as having been misunderstood by those who left. Since many of the men who spoke or wrote the disputed statements and resolutions are no longer living, the leadership of the WELS "do not wish to sit in judgment on people who did what they did in all good conscience in that time of confusion."¹³ Yet the record stands on its own. Facts are stubborn things. We seek to judge doctrines, not men.

The WELS offered their own preamble that read, in part:

This joint statement was adopted... as a God-pleasing resolution to the differences in the matter of fellowship that have separated us for so many years. It is our firm conviction that it is in full harmony with the Holy Scriptures and expresses God's truth without reservation or compromise. This Joint statement, therefore, when accepted by our three bodies, supersedes any and every previous statement that might be or might appear to be in conflict with this document. Any and all such conflicting or possibly conflicting statements are herewith disavowed.

While this statement is not necessarily wrong in what it says, history has taught us that false statements of the past must be named and rejected, not simply brushed aside as if they never existed. The steadfast refusal in 1990 to admit that our church bodies had been separated by a doctrinal difference was probably best explained in a letter from the Chairman of the WELS Commission on Inter-Church Relations:

Your second question has to do with the implications we see in your preamble. As we explained at Eau Claire, the references to "the existence of a doctrinal difference between the two synods" and "a Scriptural resolution of the aforementioned doctrinal difference" inevitably raises the question: Who changed?¹⁴

President Mischke also wrote in 1992:

When we have stated that while "not in principle opposed to a preamble, we cannot agree to the one proposed by the CLC because of its implications," we intended only to underscore what we have frequently said orally, that we did not want to

sit in judgment on those who preceded us. Those were difficult days and what was said and written on both sides of the issue was done in good conscience, in many cases by people who are no longer here to speak for themselves. We believe the paramount question to be, "Are we agreed on the scriptural doctrine of fellowship today?"¹⁵

Here again what at first might sound good and right is in fact a most dangerous path. Ignoring the past seldom, if ever, contributes to a meaningful agreement in the present. A true agreement in the present should be accompanied by a ready and willing condemnation of even *specific* false statements of the past. Again, this is not a condemnation or judgment of men but of doctrine.

It would be less than forthright for anyone, given the clear and concise record that is available to us, to pretend that no change has to have taken place in the WELS/ELS if, in fact, the possibility exists that we are now agreed. If indeed the joint statement adopted by the WELS representatives is now a correct and accurate reflection of the current doctrinal position of the entire synod, then is it possible that WELS has changed since 1961? The following section of the joint statement is indeed not compatible with the 1959 "when you have reached the conviction that admonition is of no further avail" or "impasse" mentality:

The imperative *ekklinatē* calls for a clean break of fellowship with those who persistently adhere to error. When it has been ascertained that at person or church body is causing divisions and offenses... by teaching contrary to Holy Scripture, the directive to avoid is as binding as any word addressed to us by our Savior in his holy Word. Pleading a debt of love dare not serve as an excuse for putting off a break in fellowship with those who have shown themselves to be not weak brethren but persistent errorists... We reject the view that the decision to continue or discontinue admonitions and proceed to avoid is to be made on the basis of a subjective human judgment or conjecture about the possible outcome of the admonition... We reject the view that permits the use of human judgment to prolong fellowship with persistent errorists as contrary to the principles of Scripture.¹⁶

So then, finally, we are left today with something of a quandary. Though the joint statement was never officially adopted by the WELS, that synod's representatives declare that it is an accurate statement of their current doctrinal position. This to us in the CLC would seem to signal a doctrinal change in WELS from their position in 1961, but WELS refuses to acknowledge that any change has taken place, and therefore we must continue to judge them only on the basis of their 1955-1961 officially adopted statements. Both for the sake of doctrinal clarity and to preclude the charge of sectarianism, the CLC must refuse to adopt a joint statement on this doctrine without a preamble affirming that the statement is the resolution to a past *doctrinal* difference. If indeed we were now one in this area, then too the WELS would have no trouble endorsing the following, which was revised by the CLC Board of Doctrine in 1990:

A. 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.

B. We also reject any interpretation of Romans 16:17-18 which in effect states that when a person or church body with whom we are in fellowship causes divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which we have learned, we mark them immediately, then admonish, and if this proves fruitless, avoid them.

If indeed we might be one with the WELS/ELS in the area of church fellowship, we pray God the Holy Spirit to help both sides come to acknowledge any such agreement. On our part, a beginning of this would be aided greatly if the WELS/ELS could be led to clarify the matter by forthrightly disavowing, in plain language, and by synodical resolutions, the specific official resolutions of 1955-1961 that their representatives seem to be disavowing in the joint statement. We could then move on to a discussion of the other areas that perpetuate the division between us – most notably the unionism connected with fraternal insurance companies such as AAL and LB. – That is a goal for which we can all devoutly pray.

- Michael J. Roehl

NOTES

¹ Professor David Lau, *Journal of Theology*, September 1992, 23.

² "We do not believe that *skopein* in the context of Romans 16:17 specifically and directly enjoins admonition. This does not deny that admonition, as enjoined in other passages of Scripture, will normally take place concurrently with the watchfulness that is implicit in the *skopein*." CLC Theses and Antitheses on the Role of Admonition in the Termination of Fellowship with Church Bodies, Revised by the CLC Board of Doctrine, February 1, 1990.

³ The WELS had officially marked LC-MS as a "causer of divisions and offenses" in 1953 (Reports and Memorials, WELS 33rd Convention, August 10-17, 1955, 83-84), in 1955 (Reports and Memorials, WELS 33rd Convention, August 10-17, 1955, 85), and in 1957 (WELS Convention Proceedings, 143-144.)

⁴ WELS 1959 Convention Proceedings, 195-196.

⁵ WELS 1959 Convention Proceedings, 195.

⁶ WELS 1959 Convention Proceedings, 195-196.

⁷ These figures were taken from Prof. John Brug's Book, *Church Fellowship—Working Together for the Truth*, NWPH 1997, 91.

⁸ WELS 1961 Convention Proceedings, 197-198.

⁹ Op. cit., *Church Fellowship*, 95.

¹⁰ Professor John Lau, *Journal of Theology*, March 1988, 2-3; March 1989, 28; December 1989, 33-37; September 1995, 51-52; September 1996, 49-54; December 1996, 32-38; President Daniel Fleischer, *Journal of Theology*, March 1990, 26-28; Pastor David Schierenbeck, *Journal of Theology*, March 1996, 52-53.

¹¹ Op. cit., *Church Fellowship*, 92.

¹² Galatians 5:9; 1 Thessalonians 5:21-22

¹³ August 8, 1990 letter from Chairman Wilbert R. Gawrisch to Chairman Robert Reim.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Letter from WELS President Carl H. Mischke, February 17, 1992.

¹⁶ WELS Book of Reports and Memorials, 1993, 236-237 (Quoted in *Church Fellowship*, op.cit., 93).

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LCMS and Unionism in the Chaplaincy

The LCMS adopted its current practice regarding the military chaplaincy back in the 1930s, in the period leading toward World War II, despite the many warnings and pleadings directed toward it by its then sister church bodies in the Synodical Conference, WELS and ELS. There were two main aspects involved in the debates that went on during the 1940s and 1950s. These were presented very well in official WELS resolutions adopted in its 1941 convention: “The commissioning of Army and Navy chaplains by our synod would conflict with Scriptural principles and established Lutheran practice because . . . the application for, and appointment to, chaplaincy conflicts with our doctrinal stand on the divinity of the pastoral call. Also, the Training Manual of the War Department, entitled *The Chaplain*, specifies duties to the chaplain which are in direct violation of the divine call of a Lutheran pastor. . . . The spirit of doctrinal indifferentism pervades the regulations of the War Department pertaining to the office of chaplaincy and fosters unionism.” That the LCMS did not accept these judgments of WELS is plain from statements like the following by the former Military Chaplaincy Director of the LCMS: “. . . while of course there are problems and will be problems, it was a great joy to work with many orthodox, confessional, hard-wording [*sic*] Lutheran chaplains in the LCMS military chaplaincy program” (quoted in *Christian News*, Dec. 20, 1993). When one thinks about the statement, it is rather strange that the Director seems to acknowledge only that “many” LCMS chaplains were orthodox! He does not refer to chaplains of other denominations with whom he also had to work, at least not in the attributed citation. At any rate, this writer is not aware of any questioning within the LCMS of Editor Herman Otten’s “salute” to the former director “and *all other* military chaplains for their *faithful*, underrecognized *work in Christ’s mission*” (emphasis added) . . . until now.

In the “Theological Observer” section of the Fort Wayne *Concordia Theological Quarterly* (Vol. 64, No. 2, April 2000, 149ff.) there is a very revealing article titled “Needed: A Paradigm Shift in Missouri’s Mission Outlook,” by John C. Wohlrabe, Jr., Commander, Chaplain Corps, United States Navy. In recent years the term “paradigm shift” has become a popular expression which, like many another, tends to obfuscate rather than elucidate. It means to change the model you are using in your methodology.

Wohlrabe claims that a shift in Missouri’s mission outlook took place in 1962, at the time that WELS and ELS ceased fellowship practice with the LCMS. Because joint mission endeavors of the former Synodical Conference broke off, Missouri was obliged to look elsewhere, and the 1962 LCMS convention voted to work toward a new inter-Lutheran agency. The result was LCUSA (Lutheran Council in the United States of America). A great deal of joint mission work developed, involving “joint Lutheran international congregations supported by all participants in LCUSA.” “These congregations were neither identified as LCA, ALC, nor LCMS. They were simply ‘Lutheran,’ yet supported by all three church bodies, and pastors from all three would rotate in serving these ‘special’ mission congregations.” It is obvious that unionism was the common practice.

The same situation prevailed in the military chaplaincy. Joint work among Lutheran chaplains was carried on. “Lutheran military chaplains were to serve all Lutherans, regardless of their synodical affiliation. Cooperation in base-wide ‘Lutheran’ worship services was also encouraged. Furthermore . . . yearly Lutheran chaplain conferences were held as a combined effort among all members of LCUSA. Services of Holy Communion were conducted together at these conferences, even though fellowship between the members of LCUSA had not been established.”

Wohlrabe makes the point that since the ELCA has declared itself in full fellowship with the United Church of Christ, the Reformed Church in America, the Presbyterian Church in the USA, the Episcopal Church, and the Moravian Church in America; and has also declared its acceptance of the joint statement with the church of Rome on the doctrine of justification; “the LCMS cannot continue to operate under the old paradigm!” He also states that even before the ELCA made full fellowship agreements with the other church bodies there were readily identifiable doctrinal differences between LCMS and the ELCA such

as: inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture, confessional subscription, ordination of women, church fellowship, sanctity of human life, and membership in certain ecumenical organizations.

Yet in spite of all this, "... carry on under the LCUSA model is precisely what the Missouri Synod Board for Mission Services continues to do." Also, "The Ministry to the Armed Forces of the LCMS, which falls under the Board for Mission Services, continues to cling to the LCUSA model as well. LCMS chaplains are expected to provide word and sacrament ministry to all Lutherans. They are also expected to work with ELCA chaplains in providing a Lutheran worship service at military installations when stationed together. In addition, combined Lutheran chaplain conferences continue to be conducted." In spite of attempts by some to stem this blatant unionism, an agreement between ELCA and LCMS chaplaincy committees on October 14, 1999, stated: "Both committees remain strongly committed to the continuation of our cooperative Lutheran ministry in the military. As you know, chaplains of both church bodies agree to provide pastoral care to all Lutherans in their units or installations." Wohlrabe also declares, "The current agreement between the ELCA and the LCMS dealing with cooperative Lutheran ministry in the military is silent with respect to profound differences that exist between the two church bodies. It therefore gives the appearance of a unity of doctrine that unfortunately does not exist and implies that the differences between the ELCA and the LCMS are insignificant." Well, of course! That's what religious unionism does!

There is more in the article than can be included in this review. It is obvious, however, that Wohlrabe has legitimate complaints against the type of sinful unionism that the LCMS has been involved in for many years. But in reality it was the same back in the 1930s and 1940s! There was also then no scriptural justification for the LCMS to become involved in the military chaplaincy program, and all the information needed to recognize this was available to the LCMS, as was pointed out by their sister synods at that time. How sad! It is to be hoped that even at this late date, the LCMS will be led by pleadings such as those of Commander Wohlrabe, and that he himself will resign his commission and by example lead Missouri out of the swamp of sinful unionism it is still in.

- John Lau

What's in a name?

"What's in a name?" asked the bard. "That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet." But they were Juliet's words, and she wanted to change her lover's name from Montague to Capulet, hoping thereby to gain parental approval for her alliance. However, she failed. Romeo's name did matter, for he remained a Montague. A name does matter, for it represents what and who a person is.

In a sermon delivered by Wallace Schultz on a Lutheran Hour broadcast, aired in Eau Claire on Sunday, May 21, an observation was made concerning the rapid proliferation of religions in our country, also non-Christian religions. Many are welcoming this development, feeling that an increase of religiosity may have the beneficial effect of improving morality in our nation. Does the name of the god matter, if the external benefit might be good? Schultz's response was a ringing "Yes!" He quoted from the prophet Isaiah, "I am the LORD, that is My name; and My glory I will not give to another, nor My praise to graven images" (Isa. 42:8). What a great response! The only true God is the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as revealed in the Bible. "Thou shalt have no other gods," says this LORD to all people, for any other god is man-imagined and man-made. There also is only one Savior, Jesus Christ, and through Him we are united with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Jesus said of Himself, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). He also said, "All men should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him" (John 5:23).

There may be some who regard an increase in religions as being good in the sense that it is the result of man's natural knowledge of God, built into every human being by the Creator Himself. However, natural knowledge of God is but a yearning, a sense that there is a Creator-God who designed and built the universe, a seeking, if "haply" mankind might find God. But it is not a saving knowledge; it is not faith that lays hold on the gospel of Jesus Christ, which alone saves. By the grace of God, faith is wrought by the Holy Spirit's calling, gathering, and enlightening through the gospel in the means of grace. And when a believer thereby knows and believes in the true God, the Triune God, then he has the truth which makes him free of a reliance on natural knowledge of God. He indeed, then, has no desire to support or in any way encourage or appear to encourage an acceptance of any god other than the true God.

This is truly important in our day, for we are surrounded by temptations to do just that which we ought not to do, as Christians. For example, we may be invited or have the opportunity to band together with others "for God" in a voluntary association in which it is deliberately maintained that the god for whom individuals are banding together is not the Triune God revealed in sacred Scripture, but, rather, is a general god whom each can call by whatever name he chooses. If a Christian becomes a dues-paying member of such an association, what is the testimony he is thereby making? Would he not be giving tacit or explicit approval to the concept of a general god? Would it not be idolatrous to become as one with those who band themselves together for such a non-existent, nameless god? The true name of God is extremely important to God Himself, as Isaiah plainly revealed in the passage quoted above. It should be important to believers also. -- What's in a name? Much, in every way.

- John Lau

BOOK REVIEW

Complete Agreement in Doctrine and Practice (1 Cor. 1:10)
(The Scriptural Requirement for the Practice of Church Fellowship)

-or-

The Wisconsin Synod's Confession – What Is It?

by Joel N. Krafft

The following is from the introduction to the book and helps to explain its intended purpose.

"As a former member of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) who has family members and friends who are still members of the WELS, I am compelled to write this, my confession, as a witness and obligation to those who publicly accept WELS doctrine by virtue of their membership in that Synod..."

"It is not my intention to twist or distort the historical record or doctrinal statements in any way. It would be the height of dishonesty to present an issue for anyone's consideration using lies and half-truths or not to include pertinent facts which illuminate the situation. Having said that, I will also admit that the volume of material concerning the doctrinal controversy which led to the break up of the Synodical Conference (SC) is large and I will make no attempt to comment on all of it. The issue can be clearly delineated for honest, Christian consideration without being exhaustive."

Herein lies what I believe to be the strength of this work by Joel Krafft. When Mr. Krafft left the WELS a little under a decade ago he did so for all the right reasons. Nor was his decision made frivolously or with little consideration. He carefully documented all of the pertinent statements and documents that define the positions of WELS and the CLC, compared them with the Scriptures, and made his decision accordingly. He has now taken all of that material, distilled and organized it, and presents it in this book. He does so not so much as an attempt to justify his actions as much as to give a witness to those who remain in WELS. From an opening note to the reader he writes:

"Enclosed you will find a work that comes from the bottom of my heart... It deals with a matter which is very dear to me and which should be of the greatest concern to you also. It concerns the future of the Church and the very salvation of souls. I have made every attempt to speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15) and hope that you will prayerfully read and consider what is presented."

While it is most encouraging to see such devotion to the Word on the part of a Christian layman, and such zeal, honesty, and perseverance in searching out the truth, it is also very discouraging to note that so many pastors and laymen alike will demonstrate such disinterest in this work and the Scriptures on which it is based.

Several factors make this work a valuable addition to any library. The first is the careful, thorough, and forthright nature of the research that went into it. Mr. Krafft not only makes reference to all of the pertinent documents prepared before, during, and after the break-up of the Synodical Conference, he quotes them verbatim. Those references that are too long to be quoted meaningfully in the body of the book are quoted in full as appendices (including WELS Floor Committee Reports and Convention actions from 1955, 1956, 1957, and 1961, and the 1959 memorial "A Call for Decision"). Secondly, Mr. Krafft's motivation is thoroughly evangelical in nature. His motivation is love for our Lord Jesus and an appreciation for the danger posed by all false doctrine to the souls subjected to it. Some works of this kind can read more like a list of past grievances and a venting of pent-up frustrations rather than a loving, gospel-motivated witness of love. This book certainly qualifies under the latter. Finally, it becomes immediately clear to the reader that the evidence and testimony conveyed through this book are presented in a spirit of loving humility by the author. The final effect is a compelling and irrefutable indictment of the false doctrine that has perpetuated the separation of the CLC from the Wisconsin Synod. The tragedy is that so few will take the time to read it, and that almost no one today seems to care.

Joel Krafft works as an airline pilot for American Airlines. He and his wife Janet live in Pilot Point, Texas and are members of St. Matthew Evangelical Lutheran Church in Dallas. Those interested in copies of his book are invited to contact the author directly. His address is 19929 Dane Road, Pilot Point, TX 76258. Phone: (940) 365-3130 E-Mail: JKrafft1@aol.com

– Michael J. Roehl
