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Out of Necessity: A History of the Church of the Lutheran Confession

David Lau

Editor's note: As announced in the March issue of the *Journal* (cf. 50:1, p. 52), David Lau's history of the CLC has been completed and published under the title above. With the book now available in print, the *Journal* series entitled "The Church of the Lutheran Confession—Fifty Years" will be concluded in this issue with the final two chapters. As done in the previous installments of this series, quotations are cited per MLA guidelines. The Works Cited section covering both chapters is at the end of Chapter 22.

Chapter 21: At Fifty Years

The 2008 CLC convention resolved to encourage the congregations of the CLC "to hold local celebrations of the [50th] anniversary on Sunday, May 16, 2010" and to "engage in a Synodical Celebration on the Wednesday evening of the 2010 Convention" (*Proceedings* 74). If our Lord so willed, these celebrations took place.

We who were present at the organizing convention of the CLC in 1960 and have witnessed the events of the last fifty years may well wonder what the next fifty years will bring. It is evident that many younger CLC members have a certain kind of loyalty to the CLC as the church of their family and friends. But are they as concerned as their fathers about loyalty to the Word of God? Are they as willing to give up earthly advantages in order to remain faithful to the Lord? The sad fact of history is that religious institutions tend to deteriorate over time. It is difficult for church bodies to maintain their confessional position in practice. What is written on paper may remain, but the convictions that led to putting the confession into writing may weaken and finally disappear.

We think of the days of Joshua followed by the days of the judges. **"Israel served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had known all the works**

of the LORD which He had done for Israel” (Josh. 24:31, repeated in almost the same words in Judg. 2:7). But then comes Judges 2:10: **“When all that generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation arose after them who did not know the LORD nor the work which He had done for Israel.”**

We think of that once-sound orthodox confessional Lutheran church body, the Ohio Synod, a member of the Synodical Conference in 1872, but now swallowed up in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), an organization hardly recognizable as Lutheran. The once-stalwart Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, blessed by the Lord in its history with strong confessional leaders and talented Biblical scholars, still produces some excellent doctrinal and devotional materials from time to time, but it is no longer the doctrinally unified and confessional synod it once was.

The other synods that were once members of the Synodical Conference, the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, have not changed their basic doctrinal platform. In *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, a history of the Wisconsin Synod published in 1992, Edward C. Fredrich wrote: “On the larger Lutheran scene, it seems, the years ahead will not bring all that much change for the Wisconsin Synod. The synod will remain a small minority of the Lutherans in the land. Its theological position of faithfulness to the Scriptures and to the Lutheran Confessions will keep it in that minority position” (268). The author appears quite certain that the Wisconsin Synod will remain faithful to the Scriptures and to the Lutheran Confessions.

The reviewer of Fredrich’s book wrote in the *Journal of Theology*:

Since the author of this history is a student and teacher of church history, it is somewhat surprising that he is so optimistic concerning the future of the Wisconsin Synod. . . . Will the future be like the past? . . . Someone might have said similar things about the Missouri Synod in 1932. But think how quickly the departures from Scripture occurred when once the first doctrinal deviation took place. . . . Don’t say this can’t happen to the Wisconsin Synod or to the CLC, for that matter. Of course it can, because none of us is orthodox or confessional or Scriptural by nature. Our observations of the Wisconsin Synod from the outside indicate that a change in attitude has already begun to take place. There is a tendency now to want to be noticed by the world and to make an impression on the world rather than to be humbly obedient to Scripture. This tendency is in the CLC as well, but if and when it takes hold, we can say good-bye to confessional Lutheranism as we have known it in the past. May God graciously prevent it! (Lau Rev. 41-42)

In his report to the 2008 CLC convention CLC President John Schierenbeck said: “Our anniversary celebration needs to focus on self-examination and repentance.” He also referred to August Pieper, a Wisconsin Synod theologian of the past, who wrote:

Whoever has more carefully observed the anniversary celebrations held among us and has more closely examined the anniversary literature must have noticed, if he is not entirely lacking the spirit mentioned in 1 Corinthians 2:15f., that much of the praise and thanks expressed had to do with externals and vague generalities. Often it did not even touch on the real content of the great spiritual essentials. In fact—what is just as bad—self-criticism, which must accompany all thanksgiving if it is to be pleasing to God, was restricted to the superficial and general confession of the personal helplessness and unworthiness which is usual on such occasions. We are guilty of a lack of spirit, vigor, and faithfulness. Dangerous evils have consequently penetrated our entire church life. . . . What have we, the members of the Synodical Conference, received? How much of it do we still have left? In what respect do we need a renewal? How do we pass on to coming generations our spiritual treasure? These are the questions we need to go into honestly and thoroughly in the present times of transition. (Pieper 230-231)

The Lord has not promised in His Word that the Church of the Lutheran Confession will endure until He comes again. The Lord has not promised in His Word that if the CLC endures, it will remain a confessional Lutheran church body. The scarcity of young children in many of our congregations seems

to indicate that these congregations will decrease in size and finally disappear from the scene. In our history we have not gained many members from among those who were professing unbelievers. Much of our growth in this country has come from persons who already professed to be Christians but became convinced that their former congregations or denominations were unfaithful to God's Word. In all honesty we must recognize that those leaving our congregations and going elsewhere for various reasons are about as many as those who are joining us. The total membership of the CLC in this country has not increased much since 1960. It seems that there is a more promising future in store for our sister church bodies in other countries of the world, particularly in India.

Our Lord Jesus has loved us, suffered for us, and risen again for our salvation. He now is seated at the right hand of His Father with authority over heaven and earth. As He has in Christ chosen those who are His from eternity, we can be sure that He will work all things together for the good of His children. If our church body in the future turns away from its orthodox doctrine or practice, those who are members of it at that time should not feel compelled by history or emotion to remain members of the CLC or to maintain the CLC as an organization, but should leave it in obedience to God's Word regardless of the cost. There is a sickness called "synoditis" that places the "beloved" synod above the Word of God. We are quite confident that there would have been many more joining us in our cause in the 1950s and 1960s if they had not been afflicted with "synoditis." We must not encourage such sickness, no matter how much we love our synod.

At a time when the CLC was troubled by doctrinal controversy that threatened to destroy our church body, *The Lutheran Spokesman* assured its readers:

God has not made any promises about any visible church organizations. What He said was this: "**The gates of hell shall not prevail against My Church**" (Mt. 16:18). Christ's Church is not to be equated with any visible church organization. What is Christ's Church? "The holy believers and lambs who hear the voice of their Shepherd" (*Luther's Smalcald Articles*). Whoever we are, wherever we are, let us ever strive to be sheep that listen to their Good Shepherd and follow Him. If our Lord wants to bless us by giving us an influential, united, orthodox Lutheran church body, He will see to it that we have one, and He will bless our continuing efforts to attain one. But if not, we still have Christ, the Holy Spirit, forgiveness, justification, the means of grace, and eternal life. And by faith in Christ we remain members of the indestructible and everlasting Holy Christian Church. (Lau "Self-Destruction" 14, emph. added)

As we observe the trends in our world today, and particularly also in the church world, it seems as though darkness is about to descend on us. The Bible is found among us in myriads of translations, but few there are who are willing to consider it the clear inerrant Word of God and accept and follow its teachings. The doctrine of a six-day creation is denied by many who want to be known as Christians. The teaching that Jesus Christ is absolutely the only Savior of the world is apparently being denied by the majority of those calling themselves Christians, if we are to judge from recent surveys of the religious beliefs of American "believers." Some form of synergism in the doctrine of conversion is the predominant view among American "evangelists." It is sad that with the ready access to the Word of God that is available there should be such a scarcity of the true teaching and hearing of God's Word.

In the infancy of the CLC in 1962, Pastor Egbert Schaller spoke at an area Reformation service at Turner Hall in New Ulm, Minnesota. He spoke words that seem to be even more fitting now than at that time:

Today—3000 years after Samuel, 2000 years after Christ, and less than 500 years after Luther—we are once more living in a time when the Word of the Lord is exceedingly scarce. Here, in a land settled after the Reformation by such who had benefited from the great blessings of that Reformation, men have now drifted so far from the true God that millions hardly know what it is like to hear His voice and obey His will. Even some who claim to be searching complain that they are unable to find Him, and certain students of history have dared to call ours a "post-Christian" era.

Surely this is not because the Word of God is inaccessible to man, for the Bible is the most widely distributed book in the world. But they do not know what is in it. They quote from it but do not understand it. In truth, they do not believe it—and so, in a sense, they do not actually have it, do they?

Is not the explanation this, that wolves have multiplied and have invaded the churches and have spoken perverse things? It is no secret that many religious leaders of today do not accept the Bible as the inspired and infallible Word of God, and they say that the doctrines of the Bible belong to an unscientific past. Is it not true that many ministers do not preach the gospel at all? Is it not true that the Lutheran name has been besmirched by modernist and liberal theologians who pay lip service to Luther but undermine his greatest contribution at every opportunity?

And what has that to do with us? Need we explain to members of the Church of the Lutheran Confession? We have stepped out from others over what many call “minor differences.” How few there are who understand that we have severed former fellowships not because of minor differences but because the doctrine of the Word of GOD is at stake. When He speaks, we listen! And if we will not listen to His whispers, we shall soon not be able to hear His shouting.

SOLA SCRIPTURA is the very source of life to us, for where it is lost, grace and faith are next to go. That we be a little flock is not important; what is important is that there BE a flock in which the sheep that hear the Shepherd’s voice can find company and comfort and shelter. Are there not enough who have forsaken Luther’s Savior? In these days of crisis and confusion, does His voice not come back to us, saying, **“Will ye also go away?”** Let us turn our faces to the four winds of heaven, look carefully, and then reply, **“Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.”** (Schaller 103)

Chapter 22: The Grace of God

Three confessions of corporate sin in the Old Testament are found in the ninth chapters of their respective books: Daniel 9, Ezra 9, and Nehemiah 9. In these confessions the emphasis is on the continuing sins of God’s people in spite of all the good things their God had done for them. No appeal is made to God on the basis of the goodness or righteousness or loyalty of the people. The only basis for appeal is the grace of their God.

As we conclude this historical record of the Church of the Lutheran Confession, it is fitting that we meditate on these three chapters and make the confession of God’s people in those days our own confession. For, as Martin Luther has taught us in his Small Catechism, “we sin often every day and indeed deserve nothing but punishment” (Sydow 197).

Daniel spoke his confession at a time when, according to God’s promise, the seventy-year-long Babylonian Captivity was about to come to an end. Daniel knew that God’s people did not deserve to be allowed to go back to their homeland. God’s people never deserve anything good from God. For we are never able to respond to God’s goodness in perfect gratitude or thanksgiving. Even though the Bible does not describe any specific sins on the part of Daniel himself, we notice that Daniel included himself among the sinful people.

Daniel confessed: **“We have sinned and committed iniquity, we have done wickedly and rebelled, even by departing from Your precepts and Your judgments. Neither have we heeded Your servants the prophets, who spoke in Your name. . . . O Lord, to us belongs shame of face. . . . We have not made our prayer before the LORD our God, that we might turn from our iniquities and understand Your truth. . . . We do not present our supplications before You because of our righteous deeds. . . .”** (Dan. 9:5-6, 8, 13, 18).

Yet Daniel dared to ask the Lord to forgive His people and to return them to their homeland. On what basis could Daniel make such a request? He trusted entirely on God’s mercy and appealed to His

grace: **“To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, though we have rebelled against Him. . . . O Lord, according to all Your righteousness, I pray, let Your anger and Your fury be turned away from Your city Jerusalem. . . . Hear the prayer of Your servant, and his supplications, and for the Lord’s sake cause Your face to shine on Your sanctuary. . . . We do not present our supplications before You because of our righteous deeds, but because of Your great mercies”** (Dan. 9:9, 16, 17, 18).

In His great mercy and according to His own righteousness the Lord answered Daniel’s prayer favorably. The Babylonian Captivity came to an end. The people were permitted to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple and the city. One of those who returned was Ezra, the priest and scribe. Soon after his return he was informed that the people had disobeyed God’s command not to intermarry with the heathen people in the land. Ezra was overcome with grief and confessed the sins of his people, joining his own confession with theirs: **“O my God, I am too ashamed and humiliated to lift up my face to You, my God; for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has grown up to the heavens. . . . We have forsaken Your commandments. . . . Here we are before You, in our guilt. . . .”** (Ezra 9:6, 10, 15).

Israel’s sin demonstrated a lack of appreciation that God in His mercy had permitted them to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple. He had blessed them in spite of their sin and guilt, and they repaid His mercy and grace by repeating the sins of their fathers. Ezra lamented: **“Our God did not forsake us in our bondage; but He extended mercy to us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to revive us, to repair the house of our God, to rebuild its ruins, and to give us a wall in Judah and Jerusalem. . . . After all that has come upon us for our evil deeds and for our great guilt, since You our God have punished us less than our iniquities deserve, and have given us such deliverance as this, should we again break Your commandments, and join in marriage with the people committing these abominations?”** (Ezra 9:9, 13-14).

A few years later Nehemiah arrived on the scene and made it his aim under the Lord’s guiding hand to rebuild the broken down walls of Jerusalem. The Lord was with him in this endeavor and the walls were rebuilt in a very short time. When the work was finished, the people held a great celebration. Did they rejoice in their own righteous obedience? **“They stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers”** (Neh. 9:2). The Levites led them in a long song that recounted Israel’s history: the record of their sins and God’s merciful forgiveness. They praised the Lord for His goodness to them in spite of their unworthiness.

After the Levites had recounted all of God’s merciful dealing with His sinful people, they concluded: **“In Your great mercy You did not utterly consume them nor forsake them; for You are God, gracious and merciful. Now therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and awesome God, who keeps covenant and mercy: do not let all the trouble seem small before You that has come upon us, our kings and our princes, our priests and our prophets, our fathers and on all Your people, from the days of the kings of Assyria until this day. However You are just in all that has befallen us; for You have dealt faithfully, but we have done wickedly”** (Neh. 9:31-33).

As we celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of our church body, we must confess that we are unworthy of all the blessings showered on us in the past fifty years. What can we say? We confess our sins. What are our sins? Pride? Selfishness? Ingratitude? Laziness? Lack of love? Failure to pray? Worry? Littleness of faith? Littleness of joy? Self-pity? A failure to open our mouths to confess our Savior when God gave us the opportunity? A failure to use the gifts God has given us to spread His Word? A despising of others? An unwillingness to forgive those who have sinned against us? A tendency to trust in ourselves rather than in our God? A lack of appreciation for the means of grace? A lack of confidence in the power of God’s Word? A weariness in repeating the same old truths because of an apparent lack of fruits? Finding our greatest joy and comfort in the pleasures of this world rather than in the gospel of God’s forgiveness in Christ? Wasting our time, talents, and money on that which has little value? Take your pick. Surely we must further confess: **“Who can understand his errors? Cleanse me from secret**

faults” (Ps. 19:12).

Our God, however, has dealt faithfully with us. He has been good to us. The history we have reviewed has revealed His providential care, as well as His long-suffering and merciful kindness toward us. The Gospel of Christ is still being proclaimed in our midst. The means of grace are in use in our churches and schools. Orthodox doctrine and practice are still valued among us. These are among God’s greatest blessings, and He has given them to us. We would be blind indeed if we did not recognize the grace of God in our history and in our present circumstances.

We conclude with the prayer that our Lord Jesus has taught us: **“And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation. But deliver us from evil.”**

We pray in this petition that our Father in heaven would not look on our sins or deny our prayer because of them. We are not worthy of things for which we are asking, neither have we deserved them. However, we ask that our Father would **by His grace** give us what we ask, even though we sin often every day and indeed deserve nothing but punishment. We, too, will from our hearts gladly forgive and do good to all those who sin against us.

God indeed tempts no one; but we pray in this petition that He would guard and keep us so that the devil, the world, and our flesh do not deceive us or lead us into misbelief, hopelessness, or any other shameful or sinful acts; and, although we are tempted by them, we ask that we win in the end and keep the victory.

We pray in this petition that our Father in heaven would deliver us from every evil to body and soul, property and reputation, and finally, when our last hour comes, give us a joyful end and **graciously** take us from this valley of sorrows to Himself in heaven. (Sydow 12, emph. Lau)

Pastor Otto J. Eckert wrote the following hymn for an anniversary of Gethsemane Lutheran of Saginaw, Michigan [sung to the melody of “Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Thy Word,” *The Lutheran Hymnal*, #261]:

[1] Thy Word is truth, O Christ, our Lord!
To us, Thy children, help afford
Against the wiles and guiles of foes,
Who in these days its truths oppose.
[2] Give us the strength, so we may stand,
When we’re assailed on every hand.
Without Thee we cannot prevail;
But with Thee we will never fail.
[3] Let not Thy little flock lose heart,
Nor ever from Thy Word depart.
When others turn from it aside,
Let us in all its truths abide.
[4] If we but in Thy Word remain,
Thou wilt us in our trials sustain
And bless us still when all seems lost.
Therefore in Thee we’ll put our trust! Amen. (Eckert 15)

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The Role of Men in the Christian Home: "Save" the Wife and Children Vance Fossum

Editor's note: Part III below concludes the essay originally presented to the October 2009 meeting of the CLC Southeastern Pastoral Conference. A companion study guide will also be made available to congregations and clergy some time this year. Wherever noted, the writer's own translation of Scripture passages has been indicated parenthetically with his initials *vf*. In addition to the endnotes, parenthetical citations are provided per MLA guidelines. Cf. the March issue for parts I and II on pages 33-47.

Part III: Practical Applications of the Principle from Other Scripture Passages

As the head of his wife the husband is not to be bitter, but understanding and considerate toward his wife.

Colossians 3:19 "*The husbands, love (ἀγαπάτε pres. inv. = keep loving!) the wives, and do not be bitter (πικραίνεσθε) toward them*" (trans. *vf*).

The entire third chapter of Colossians is parallel to Ephesians 5:1-6:9, as we might expect, since they were both written while Paul was under house arrest in Rome sometime between AD 60 and 63. Lenski astutely points out the difference between the respective contexts of these parallel sections:

Compare Eph. 5:22-6:9. Yet in Ephesians the whole section is dominated by the great conception of the *Una Sancta* in which the family relation is placed. In Colossians the true Christian family life is placed in opposition to the Judaistic misconceptions which do not find the Christian τελειότης or completeness in obedience to the Word of Christ (v. 16), not in doing all things in the name of the Lord Jesus (v. 17) but in obedience to the philosophy (2:8) and show of wisdom (2:23) embodied in Judaistic decrees (2:20). Over against such silly notions Paul here places what the Lord in his wisdom and his grace bids wives, husbands, etc., do in their connection with him. (180-181, *emph. added*)

Paul wanted to counter whatever, more or less, the Judaizers were attempting to foist upon the Colossian Christians. So he emphasizes their freedom in Christ to keep on fulfilling their obligations to one another with the same *Agape*-love and self-submission they learned as "fitting" (v. 18) and "well pleasing" in connection with the Lord (ἐν κυρίῳ). Whatever fits our gracious connection with Christ is what we are to do "in His name" (v. 17).

As detailed in Ephesians 5:22 and following, so also here in Colossians 3 the *Agape*-love which the husband is to have for the wife is based on and motivated by Christ's thoughtful and purposeful love for a world of sinners, the love with skin on it (the Word made flesh) that moves the One loving to sacrifice Himself to save the skin of the loved one. However, we believe that Paul is entering into a very practical aspect of the marital relationship: the ups and downs experienced by two sinners who must deal with each other on a day-to-day basis as they live together under the same roof. "Familiarity breeds contempt" also in marriage, for no matter how much "in love" they claim to be, neither partner is perfect in the exercise of the *love* they are to practice *in connection with the Lord*.

The husband, as the head of the wife, must take the lead also here. As Christ did not love us once, but keeps on loving us in spite of our many sins, our whining ingratitude, and our discontent, so also the husband is to *keep on loving* his wife. As long as the charcoal is hot, the grill produces no dusting of ashes; but with the cooling of the coals the ashes fly everywhere and into the eye with the slightest wind. In early marriage when all forms of love may be white hot, the husband is directed only by our Lord to exercise the *Agape*-love. That's because only this love makes a marriage what God intends it to be. And while passion (*eros*) and affection (*philia*) may arise quite naturally, the *Agape*-love finds its source only in the believing husband's Christ-connection, as Scripture teaches.

As a marriage continues, the husband must continue to love his wife as Christ has directed him through command and by example. But what do we see so often in marriages, perhaps even our own? The husband begins to take his wife for granted and does not go out of his way to win her as he used to do. He no longer opens the door for her as he once did. When the children arrive, the mother is instinctively there for them, but the husband-father is sometimes too scarce. Because of the stress of the workaday world, he may feel a personal need to get away from it all. But when he chooses to spend more time with the guys—and less with his wife—she begins to feel that he doesn't love her as much as before. Their marriage was once played like a symphony with her husband directing, and she was his *first* violin; now she plays second fiddle! Although she knows the part the Composer intends for her to play, even the best musician can lose respect for her conductor (Col. 3:18, Eph. 5:33).

When this cooling takes place—whether periodic or protracted—it is often, though not always, the fault of the husband-head. He is to *love her continually*, even if (dare we say it?) the passion and the affection are not what they used to be! If the *doing* of this *love* fails, the dustiness of a marriage between two sinners flies up. Even the slightest wind can bring an irritating ash to the eye of the husband. If the wife of such a husband begins to blow back at him, the husband is not to assume automatically that the fault lies with her (whether it is or not). Rather, it may be that the *Agape*-love he is to have for her is cooling.

When his wife blows back at him or even appears to be, the husband ought *not respond with bitterness* toward her. In Ephesians 4:31 Paul uses the same noun, πικρία (a bitter frame of mind), in connection with the words “wrath, anger, clamor (loud quarreling), and evil speaking.” He then follows up with the contrary admonition: “*Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you*” (Eph. 4:32). In the Colossians passage before us, whether the husband is justifiably angry with his wife or reacts to her words and actions out of a sense of personal guilt makes no difference. He is to *be loving her and not be bitter toward her*.

To keep such love for his wife, the husband must remain in touch with the Composer of the music that he and his wife are to play together without even an occasional discord. Again and again the husband must return to His Savior's side to be warmed by His Word of grace and forgiveness so that his love for his wife does not grow cold. Only then will he be enabled to keep on drawing his own beloved close to himself, “cherishing” her with warm words of love and forgiveness (Eph. 5:29).

1 Peter 3:7 “*Husbands, likewise, dwell with them according to understanding,¹ as with a weaker vessel, a woman, giving honor to her as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered*” (trans. vf).

This passage, like Colossians 3:19, puts more skin on the activity of the *Agape*-love that is to rule in the Christ-connected marriage. This verse comes at the end of a long section in which Peter encourages his Christian readers to be *submissive to one another* (ὑποτάσσομαι – a military term regarding rank, here to *put oneself under*). Just as the wives are to be “submissive to their own husbands” (3:1-6), so “likewise,” Peter has something to say to the husbands about submitting themselves to the needs and service of their wives.

To begin with, we want to pay special attention to the command to “dwell with them according to understanding.” *To dwell with* one’s wife means much more than living under the same roof. Many husbands and wives carry on in this way, appearing to have a happy marriage, while doing great harm to one another. Peter is laying the responsibility for holding down the fort at home with the husband, first! He is to be in a *participating and understanding role with the wife* when it comes to their life together in the home. Just think of the possibilities as we consider the template of Christ to His bride, the Church!

Does not our Christ as the Bridegroom of His Church always deal with us according to an understanding that treats us with love and patience as weaker (earthen) vessels? Truly our Savior is always patient with us and considerate of our weakness; “*a bruised reed He will not break, and dimly burning wick He will not extinguish*” (Isa. 42:3 NAS). So husbands ought to take their cue from their Savior in the manner in which they deal with their wives. Husbands understand (or ought to) that their wives are tender, easily hurt, and therefore are to be cared for by their husbands.

A recently viewed episode of *Everybody Loves Raymond*, a popular TV series, provides an excellent example of how men so often do not treat their wives according to an understanding that considers their special needs. Apparently, Raymond had been taking his wife for granted—not hanging up his clothes, or helping her around the house, or taking charge of the children, or even showing her affection in the little ways that wives appreciate. When his wife began to let her frustration show by her words and actions, Raymond suggested that *her* problem was PMS and even bought some over-the-counter remedies for her to try.

This may seem funny to some in the context of a comedy series on television, but in real life wives are not laughing. When a man immediately attributes his wife’s negativity toward him to her hormones, he runs afoul of a *considerate, understanding love* in two ways: he fails to look to himself *first* for the cause of her behavior, and he sends the message to his wife that she has no legitimate reason for her behavior, except her hormones. The latter is most demeaning to the wife. She may feel as if she is being treated like a crying child whose parents make no attempt to discover the painful rash on its bottom, but merely jam a bottle into its mouth.

In two sermons on 1 Peter 3:7 Luther has much to say about how husbands should treat their wives as “weaker vessels.” We consider his words at length:

The husband should take the initiative and contribute toward keeping unity and love in the marriage relation. But he does this by using reason and not force and by letting things pass without reproving his wife. This he should do because woman is a frail creature and does not have the courage and the stout heart of a man. They are easily disturbed, take something to heart quickly, and are moved to joy and sorrow sooner than men. A man should bear this in mind and not be hard on his wife for it; at times he should overlook what she does and says, help and indulge her with a kind word. But the world considers this discretion an effeminate attitude and rather imagines that it befits a man to be angry and use his fists. Come now! Holy St. Peter well sees what best befits a man and what he should most diligently strive to do. He does not enjoin the use of fists. Use reason, he says. And what is more, he asks a husband to give honor to his wife, that is, to indulge her and make concessions because she is a weaker vessel, with a small, weak, sensitive heart, letting herself be moved and stirred to anger by one word. Learn this and be indulgent. By so doing you will not only keep unity but will also win her heart. (qtd. in Plass 903)

Again Luther:

A wife is indeed to live according to the direction of her husband; what he bids and commands is to be done. But he is also to see to it that he treats his wife with tenderness and reason, so as to spare her and honor her as God’s weaker vessel. The husband, too, is an instrument of God; but he is stronger, while the wife is weaker bodily as well as more timid and more easily dispirited. Therefore you should so deal with her and treat her in such a way that she may be able to bear it. You must act here as you do with other instruments with which you work. For instance, if you want a good knife, you must not hack on a stone with it. Naturally, in this matter no rule can be laid down. God makes

the individual responsible for treating his wife with reason, according to the character of each woman. For you are not to use the authority which you possess just as you please. You are her husband in order to help, support, and protect her, not to destroy her. (qtd. in Plass 904)

Does the man, even the Christian, feel justified in getting on his high horse from time to time, despising the little pony at his side? Then let him hear the warning Peter gives! For if he is so high and mighty that he will not show proper tenderness toward the weaker vessel God has given him, then let him repent and start *“giving honor to her as a fellow heir of the grace of life”* (cf. Gal. 3:28) *so that his “prayers may not be hindered.”* How can he disregard her special needs, kick dust in her face, or trample on her because she is weaker than he, and then expect that God who is truly greater and stronger than he is will have regard for his prayers? Why should God so honor him when he does not honor his wife? Are they not equal heirs of grace before Him and do not the Holy Scriptures reveal our God as the One who looks down from heaven to hear the faint cries of his little ones *above* the outbursts of those who are strong and mighty in their own eyes?

Remember that Peter was married and so understood from experience what he writes in regard to the proper treatment of one’s wife. In a sense the married apostle is writing here as a divinely inspired husband. It is important to emphasize that when he speaks of the wife as being the “weaker vessel,” he is not putting the woman down, even as Christ does not belittle the Church by reminding us that we are weaker than He is and also that He is always with us to be our Savior and our Champion. Even as Christ deals patiently with us every day and honors us with His precious gifts in this world and in the world to come, so the husband is to deal patiently with his wife and treat her with the highest regard, that is, as someone so precious that he would gladly give his life a thousand times for her protection, welfare, and eternal joy.

Man’s role as the head of the house for the “saving” of his family

Hebrews 11:7 *“By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household. . . .”*

Noah listened to God and saved his family. The man of his own household today, who himself has taken to heart the warnings of his great Savior God and knows the blessed escape by the ark that God has designed for all, will not only desire the salvation of his own flesh and blood; he will dedicate himself to it. He will make diligent use of the materials God has provided.

Ephesians 6:4 *“And fathers, stop provoking your children to anger; rather care for them in the chastisement and the admonition of the Lord”*² (trans. vf).

Taking the Word of God seriously, the Christian father will take the lead in “caring for” his children “in connection with the chastisement and admonition of the Lord.” He will begin with the “ark” of baptism and not delay the application of the “washing of water by the word” (Eph. 5:26). He will *“train up the child in the way he should go”*—God’s way, no less (Prov. 22:6). Recognizing that *“unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it”* (Ps. 127:1), the head-man of his Christian family will build his home on the Word of his Savior God. His children ought to see in their father a man who defines his own life and the life of his loved ones by a living relationship with the Savior of sinners and by frequent feasting on this “Bread of Life” in word and sacrament. He will insist on home devotions where the Bible is read (whether by father or mother), the children are catechized, and the law and gospel are rightly divided so that all may grow in the knowledge of Christ.

In his role as head of the two who are to *“care for”* their children, the husband/father will also take the lead in demonstrating the love of Christ to his family. He will exercise great care that he does not “provoke” his children “to anger” by punishing harshly or unfairly. Generally speaking, he will not punish in self-righteous anger, or impatience,² or because he has been put out by the sin. On the one

hand, he will not make arbitrary rules for the sake of tripping up his children; on the other, he will strive to explain the household rules clearly and be consistent in his enforcement of them. Neither will he purposely belittle his child in front of his siblings or his friends. Above all, he will not look upon his own child according to the fleshly deed and define him as a “bad” child or a “wicked” person; rather, he will regard the fleshly deed according to his child’s standing as a redeemed and baptized fellow Christian and admonish him accordingly in love.

Indeed, he will even use “the rod” when necessary, according to the inspired wisdom of Solomon: “*He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly*” (Prov. 13:24). Although the whole world screams against this passage and corporal punishment of any kind, we must say, “*Let God be true but every man a liar*” (Rom. 3:4), for it is our God who is *Love*, and He alone defines *love* for the Christian and for the world, whether the world accepts it or not.³

Christ’s love for His little ones is first seen in the man Christ has appointed as their father. As a believing child of God, who knows and is impelled by the self-sacrificing love of Christ for him, the man is to “be walking in love” at all times, as Paul says in Ephesians 5:2. He shows love to all family members at all times, even (or especially) when discipline is necessary, because his ultimate goal for his wife and children is *not* that they toe the line for his sake, but that they may be saved eternally. He ought to include the operating principle of Martin Luther, “Let the apple lie close to the rod,” when caring for his children. There are and must be those moments when a father kindly encourages good behavior in his children and is not constantly harping at them and discouraging them. In this way his children will learn that from the God who loves them perfectly comes the father who *re*-presents God for their well-being, who strives to *love* them always and unconditionally and therefore also for their sakes chastises the sin that He, their heavenly Father, hates.

It ought to go without saying that the man’s role in the home includes not only *re*-presenting God to his wife in terms of self-sacrificing, unconditional love for her, but also *re*-presenting God in the same way to his children. So we choose not to interpret Luther’s expression as “Let the bribe lie close to the punishment,” but in terms of the gospel lying close to the law—the *admonishing/encouraging word lying close to the chastising rod*. Even as our heavenly Father chastises His believing children only to draw them closer to Him and will not despise “the broken and contrite heart” (Ps. 51:17), but rejoices in heaven over the sinner who repents (Luke 15:7), looking forward to the “peaceable fruit of righteousness” for their “profit” (Heb. 12:9-11), shall not the earthly father chastise his children so that they may also receive his word of forgiveness and encouragement?

Surely by his *re*-presenting of God’s *love* by gospel-word and by example, the Christian father will make himself known to his children as one who chastises them that they may be cared for in their Savior’s *love*. In his heart he will look past the unpleasant task of chastising his children to the genuine contrition and repentance which the encouraging words of the gospel produce and “the peaceable fruit of righteousness” for which he yearns in their lives.

The Christian father will not be satisfied when his children say, “I’m sorry,” because they are merely afraid of further chastisement. Rather, for the glory of God and the salvation of his offspring he will rejoice to find that they have been “*made sorry in a godly manner. . . . For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted . . .*” (2 Cor. 7:9-10). What father or mother does not delight in a child’s first words? But, without doubt, the sweetest moments are those times when our children show the work and love of God in their hearts, because they know and feel that they have sinned against their Savior who loves them and against their parents who have *re*-presented Him in their parental care for them.

Caring for one’s children as our Lord cares for us requires the father truly to know his children. He should know them intimately, not only by hugging and holding them close, but by relating to them, becoming familiar with them. As the Christian father attempts to bring up his children in the “*chastisement and admonition of the Lord*,” he will give attention to his children as often as possible.

Don't our Lord's loving thoughts attend to our daily needs, and are they not directed toward us more often than we can count (Ps. 139)? In fact, God's love for us "has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (Rom. 5:5). What can fathers give their children that will cause them to feel loved by their dads? His attention, surely, but giving his attention takes time.

Thinking of them on their birthdays or giving them special treats from time to time is important; but children feel loved, above all, when *fathers give them time*. Our God knows our every need because He knows all things. But the father has to spend time with his children to know them and their needs well. Furthermore, when a father takes of his own time to listen and pay attention to his children and shows that he enjoys their company, they feel *special to him*. This becomes increasingly important as the tot becomes a teen and needs not only a good father figure, but a father who figures in to the many trials of adolescence. If there is one area where undoubtedly most of us fail our children, it is here. Many pastor's kids (PKs) have suffered because their fathers spent so much time providing for the needs of their congregations and so little time with their wives and children. But isn't this a necessary part of managing "our own household well" (1 Tim. 3:4)?

Finally, one of the most important things a father can do to care for his children "in the chastisement and admonition of the Lord" is to let them know how much he loves his wife, their mother. How is it that we individual members of Christ's spiritual body learn to love the other members of the body and all people, that is, not only in word but to *love in deed (Agape)*, even when they seem to us to be unworthy? Answer: *We see by faith in the gospel that Christ's love extends to them also*, especially when they are at their worst, as it does to us when we are at our worst. True, Christian children, especially those blessed with a good mother, will naturally love her for all that she does for them. But when they see that their father also cares deeply for her by doing for her, the love of the children for their mother *is encouraged to act by the father's teaching example*.

Thus it is true that when a father does not belittle his wife (nor the mother her husband) in front of the children, they will not be encouraged to do the same in disobedience to the Fourth Commandment. If the father is wise, he will not ignore but include the thoughts and opinions of his wife before making and enforcing the rules of the household. Father and mother will stand together when administering discipline to their children and exercise great care not to let their children use one parent against the other. Such active, exemplary love for his wife sends an important message from the father to his children: "Respect and obey your mother, or you will answer to me!" Furthermore, the tenderness of the husband-father toward his wife, their mother, promotes the children's sense of security and safety in the home, as well as providing to each son a husband model to emulate, God willing, in his future marriage.

Joshua 24:15 "And if it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."

By the grace and faithfulness of the great *I AM*—the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—Moses and Joshua had brought the children of Israel to the promised land. The LORD God had defeated and dispossessed "great and strong nations" so that no one was "able to stand against" His people (Josh. 23:9). But Joshua knew the danger that remained for the children of Israel. For in spite of the great blessings and security they had enjoyed in the LORD, their Savior, they were still surrounded by an ungodly world, and they had not entirely put away "the foreign gods" from among themselves (Josh. 24:23).

As the God-appointed leader of God's children Joshua faithfully spoke the word of the LORD. He encouraged them with many reminders of God's love and grace toward them to "fear the LORD" and "serve Him in sincerity and in truth" (Josh. 24:14), while warning them of the terrible "harm" (Josh. 24:20) that God would bring upon them if they turned away from Him in unbelief.

Although Joshua stood in the midst of a great multitude of God's chosen people, he must have felt quite alone! So also, the Christian father may often feel alone as he strives faithfully to serve and to save his own family in the midst of an increasingly godless environment. But let each Christian husband and father look to the example of Joshua. Instead of joining the crowd of fainting fathers, let him find courage in the LORD to take a stand and be the man God has appointed over his household!

Let him first lead by example in his own service of the LORD. Let him not only say, "I choose to serve the LORD"; let him also do so, even when his church-going neighbors do not. Let him not join the crowd of good-time-Charlie fathers who are so self-indulgent that they won't bring their families to Sunday School, Bible Class, and the worship service. Let him not teach his children to be hypocrites by demanding that they make it to Confirmation, while he never makes it to church and never opens the Bible at home!

Let him not be unfaithful to his wife, as did the adulterous Baptist in our area who tried to excuse himself by saying that he heard "the men at his church sit around and talk about the affairs they were having." When other fainting fathers fail to discipline their children because the permissive gods of humanism have convinced the multitude that to do so violates the rights of children, let the Christian father stand with Joshua. When his child is in danger of falling under the influence of teenage friends and their parents who choose not to lead or to teach a "chaste and decent life in word and deed," let the Christian father say, *"As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."*

HELP! Being a hands-on father who seeks to save also the children God has provided for "his quiver" (Ps. 127:5) in order that these arrows may not grow crooked but fly straight to heaven is surely difficult work! However, *"All Scripture is God-breathed and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be completely fit for every good work"* (2 Tim. 3:16-17, trans. vf). Faithfully and diligently performing his role as a Christian husband and father is also a "good work," without doubt. And all Scripture provides every grace and helpful hint to equip such a man for the saving of his household.

Imagine how challenged, even lost that man of faith, Noah, must have felt in trying to save his family from the evil environs of the pre-flood world! The challenge for the man of the house may be just as great today. A husband and father will often feel inadequate in carrying out his role as the divinely appointed head of his family. Indeed, if he takes his God-given responsibilities seriously, he *ought* to feel lost so that he then finds his way in His Savior's Word and in prayer.

The man's role as the chief provider for his family

Genesis 3:16-19

To the woman He said: "I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; in pain you shall bring forth children; your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you." Then to Adam He said, "Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat of it': Cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return."

Before the Lord gave man his wife, He placed the man in the garden to tend it. After the fall into sin man's great privilege became man's outside job; the "tending" became a real task to be performed with sweating brow and tiring toil. The woman would continue to bear children, but with painful labor. Yet by the sanctifying power of God in the marriage and the home, the marvelous description of the ruby-rare wife in Proverbs 31 was to be an apt portrayal of the role of the woman in Genesis 1 as child-bearer and "helper" to her man for the sake of her family.

Generally, we may conclude from Holy Scripture that the direct care and supervision of the children, especially when they are young, is the specific calling of the wife/mother as indicated in Proverbs 31, 1 Timothy 5:14, Titus 2:3-5, and other passages. The husband/father, on the other hand, is charged with the task of bringing home the bread. This is not to say that he need not be as concerned and involved in the training of their children as she is, but rather that he does so as the head of the whole household and in correlation with his responsibility as the primary provider. In this connection we consider the strong emphasis Paul places on the man's responsibility in 1 Timothy 5:8.

1 Timothy 5:8 *"Now (δέ as connective, not adversative) if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever"* (trans. vf).

I have chosen to consider the Christian man's role in providing the physical needs of his family (food, clothing, shelter) toward the end of this essay, not because it is the least of his headship responsibilities (it is not!), but because it is arguably the most natural of all his duties, one that even the unbeliever carries in his heart. So Paul strongly warns that if *"anyone does not provide . . . for those of his own house, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever."* In his commentary Albert Barnes writes:

Few things were inculcated more constantly by heathen moralists than this duty. Galgacus, in Tacitus, says, "Nature dictates that to everyone, his own children and relatives should be most dear." Cicero says, "Every man should take care of his own family" . . . ; see . . . also numerous examples of the same kind quoted from Apuleius, Cicero, Plutarch, Homer, Terence, Virgil, and Servius. . . The doctrine here is . . . that the duties which are taught by nature ought to be regarded as the more sacred and obligatory from the fact that God has given us a better religion; and . . . that a Christian ought never to give occasion to an enemy of the gospel to point to a man of the world and say, "There is one who surpasses you in *any* virtue." (177)

Barnes charges the neglectful "Christian" with the sin of giving "occasion to an enemy of the gospel" to point him out as a failure in this "virtue" of providing for his household. However, the wording of Paul's warning emphasizes a greater offense: a denying of *"the Faith"* (τὴν πίστιν).⁴ His poor behavior does not merely cause the unbelieving world to put down such a man for failing to live up to the power of the gospel in the living of his life. Rather, Paul indicts him as one who actually rejects the body of Christian doctrine, namely, all that it speaks as the truth to be believed! The unbeliever has no *objective faith or teaching* revealed to him by God, and yet he provides for his own. However, the man who has professed his allegiance to *the faith* of Christ and yet does *not* provide for his own has thus *denied* the one true faith so graciously revealed to him. Such a one is truly *"worse than an unbeliever"*!

Perhaps it is significant that whereas Paul says, *"If anyone does not provide for his own, . . . he is worse than an unbeliever,"* in 2 Thessalonians 3:10 he says, *"If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat."* In the latter passage the concern is the sin of self-chosen laziness (cf. Paul's indicting of "lazy gluttons" in Titus 1:12-13), to which Paul attaches a penalty that most thinking persons would consider quite appropriate, even natural. He will not work; why should he get to eat? But in 1 Timothy 5:8 Paul's concern is not for the individual, but for those who depend on him, raising the whole matter to a new level. Thus the indictment holds true: he has *"denied the faith"* and shown himself to be *"worse than an unbeliever."*

As Lenski notes, the connective δέ indicates a continuation of Paul's concerns about the care of the widow in the previous verse: "They, together with all other dependents, belong to a family, for all of whom the head of the house must provide and not cast off or abandon a single one to shift for himself or herself or to be cared for by the congregation" (662-663). Thus our Lord lays a great burden upon the man of the house, which he is to perform without slighting his responsibilities in the other important areas of his headship.

The verb “provide” is προνοέω (προ *before* + νοέω *think*), literally meaning “to take thought for” (cf. also Rom. 12:17 and 2 Cor. 8:21). So to “provide for” means to care for someone or something by “taking thought ahead of time.” In days gone by a young man would not take a wife until he had made plans to care for her. At times today we see very little of this forethought on the part of the man before marriage, who is surely tempted by our culture to fly by the seat of his pants, with his head in the clouds, rather than to ground himself with serious and sober thought beforehand.

This is not to say that there is no thinking going on at all. There is the thought that since a young man and woman have become so physically desirous or attached to each other, they ought to be joined in marriage as soon as possible to prevent further sins against the Sixth Commandment. There is also the *afterthought*, when physical relations between them have gone too far and the man suddenly realizes that he has put himself and his partner into a “family way,” that marriage is the appropriate next step. While neither Paul nor the rest of Holy Scripture forbids a man to take a wife until he has made plans to care for her and a potential family, every young man should have this great responsibility pressed upon him sooner than later.

One trusts that the Christian man will realize his responsibility as the primary breadwinner and assume that responsibility willingly and gladly because of *Christ’s Love* for him, which promises to carry out God’s eternal plan to “freely give” him “all things” (Rom. 8:32, Matt. 6:25-34). Nevertheless, even the Christian husband/father can fail in this regard; and no matter how gradual or steep the fall, Paul’s strong words are surely meant to put a stop to it.

Now what shall be said of the wife/mother supporting the family instead of the father? It has happened throughout the ages, as also today, that the wife has had to become not only the bread baker, but also the breadwinner. Although the husband may wish it could be otherwise, for the sake of his family it must be so, unless there is some other means available to support the family. If the couple has been blessed with children, especially young children, it is usually better for them if their mother can work inside the home, unless the father also has those nurturing gifts that are usually the possession of the mother.

Although we believe it is generally not to be preferred, it is not wrong for the wife to work outside the home. It can be, however, if the motivation is purely selfish, or it is due to an anxious concern that the extras in life cannot be provided by the father’s income. It can be wrong for the children if it means that they must be nurtured by those who are poorly qualified. We have seen families suffer a great deal, even total breakups, largely because a wife/mother insisted that she do her own thing. In such cases the children may be shuttled off to a daycare facility at a very young age, where others “bring up the child,” that is, where those formative years may pass by under the influence of emotionally and morally malformed adults and other children.

We have witnessed love-starved children become spoiled, overfed TV-junkies, because their mothers were so busy trying to be among the highly touted “super-moms” that they had not the time to spend with their children. Young children, shuttled here and there during the week and then shuffled off to bed in the evening with a kiss and a pat from mom (and/or dad), are silent sufferers in the beginning. But it isn’t long before they reveal to discerning eyes that they may indeed be suffering emotionally and academically from a sense of insecurity.

Sad to say, we have also seen marriages break up because husband and wife are no longer dependent on each other, but are increasingly independent, ready to go their own ways with their own money, and with or without consideration for their children. Even when the parents stay together in spite of the stress that is placed on the marriage by their work schedules, the child may easily feel that he or she is in the way.

In part we have our *me-first* culture and the Women’s Liberation Movement of the past forty years to thank for whatever encouragement a woman receives to sacrifice her family on the altar of *self-fulfillment*. And to the extent that the husband/father is quite content to put his wife to work, only to be

relieved of the burden or to bring in more money to buy the things he enjoys, he also is guilty of selfish concerns that are often detrimental to the family. However, we must look to Holy Scripture and so be careful not to make hard and fast, unevangelical rules in regard to the wife and mother working outside the home. This decision is to be made by the Christian husband and wife after much prayer to God and according to the love (think *Agape*) and wisdom that He provides.

Evaluating such a decision begins with a survey of the chief assignments our Lord gives to the wife. The Scriptures present the direct management of the children and the household as the main area of responsibility for the wife and mother. 1 Timothy 5:14 says that wives are “to manage their homes” (NIV). The Greek word οἰκοδεσποτέω, translated “manage,” is a strong term. Proverbs 31 gives a general and glowing picture of the many ways in which the wife and mother carries out her responsibilities as the manager of her home. For example, “*She opens her mouth in wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue. She looks well to the ways of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness*” (vv. 26-27 NAS). Verse 30 sums up the way she fulfills that role in the home: as one carried out by “*a woman who fears the LORD.*”

We believe without reservation that within the context of her awe-filled respect for her Savior God, the Christian woman will keep in mind and heart her *first* assignment as the God-created “*helper*” of her husband. All that has been previously said regarding the role of the man in giving love and encouragement to his wife will work in her, by the grace of God, a willingness to be a *helper* to her husband. The husband must strive, also by the grace of God, to recognize and appreciate this calling and grant her the necessary and appropriate freedom of operation, ever trusting her not to hinder but to help him in his task as the head and leader of his household. He ought not, for example, take grocery items chosen by his well-meaning wife out of the cart at the checkout! After doing such a thing more than once many years ago, this witless writer was finally and gently corrected by his wife, who forgave him and accepted his invitation to lunch.

There is, we think, no better summary of the assignments of the wife in the home than that given by Paul in his directions to Titus, in which he sets forth what the older Christian women are to teach the younger married women, namely, “that they may make sober-minded the young women to be devoted to husbands, devoted to children, sober-minded, chaste, housekeepers, good, subjecting themselves to their own husbands, in order that the word of God may not be blasphemed” (2:4-5, trans. vf). The woman who “fears the LORD” will not want her actions or inactions as wife and mother to give occasion for *the word of God to be “blasphemed.”* As Lenski puts it: “If the women fail in what Paul here asks, he fears ‘lest the Word of God be blasphemed,’ lest the whole gospel be vilified. So much depends on the women, in great part on the young women, of the church. The world will to a great extent judge the churches by the character which the gospel produces in the women” (913).

Helper of her husband and manager of the home they share—such is the role of the wife in the home then and now. “*She does him good and not evil all the days of her life*” (Prov. 31:12). In the old days not so long ago, women were devoted to husband and children in such ways as these in Proverbs 31. “*She considers a field and buys it; from her profits she plants a vineyard*” (31:16). “*She makes linen garments and sells them, and supplies sashes for the merchants*” (31:24). Luther’s Katie and countless wives, Christian or not, have done the same: become hired out, while staying in. Depending upon the needs of her husband and her children, a wife/mother may work also outside the home. Proverbs 31 does indicate that the wife and mother worthy of praise also bought and sold outside her house. The Christian woman will try to keep her work at home as the priority and seek a job with flexible hours. She will, of course, need help and encouragement from her husband to manage both.

Now permit a baseball analogy as we prepare to watch another World Series. Having touched the bases laid out for us on God’s field of family team-play, we may properly consider a *pinch hit* for the good of the team. Surely, there is nothing amiss if a wife is called in to pinch-hit for her husband, even if he is already in the batter’s circle, willing to do his part in the lineup. He may be in a temporary slump,

unable to hit the ball as well as his wife for a number of reasons. If such is the case, he will not throw the bat at her in disgust and tell her to go back and cheer from the bench. Rather, for her sake and for the sake of the team, he will graciously hand her the bat and become the cheerleader in the dugout. In good economic times as well as bad, there are those slumps when the go-to guy can't get it done; he needs help, and so does the team.

Of course, every analogy limps. The so-called game of life, played by our families on God's field, is played for keeps and is far more important than any World Series. There is only one who always serves as captain of the team in every game, and he only has one pinch hitter. The proper call to let the wife/mother pinch-hit for the husband/father does not come from the spectators in the stands. Neither friends nor family nor the watching world should make this call. In reality the husband is the team captain, who ought to be in touch with his Coach so that by prayer and careful consideration of the their Savior's Word, husband and wife may strive to make such a decision *together*. The same game plan should be followed if a wife wants to step up to the plate, even though her husband is swinging the bat. "Batters_u up" is never heard on the ball diamond; yet it is possible on God's field if He is directing the play.

If the husband is providing the needs of the family, even if he isn't bringing home *all* the extras his wife and children would like in terms of material things, he should not yield to any pressure from the team. Rather, he ought to encourage them and put them in mind of God's words and promises, found in Matthew 6:24-34, Romans 8:32, 1 Timothy 6:6-10, and other such passages. Generally, the husband's work should take precedence over any work outside the home his wife may desire to do, especially if their children are not yet in school. And a wife should be willing "*in the fear of the Lord*" to *help* her husband perform his calling, warming the bench for him, even if it means giving up a sought-after career. Rather than serving as a pinch hitter, it may often be better for the captain and the team if the couple simply feels the pinch of doing without some material things in order to help one another in winning the game.

In this matter, as in all others, the husband-head will strive by God's grace to show his wife the "honor" that is due to her "as a fellow heir of the grace of life," and "be considerate" of her, as Peter enjoins (1 Pet. 3:7-8). He will consult her and consider her wants and needs with *Agape-love* and with the respect for her feelings and opinions, which His Lord would have him show toward the woman He has provided as "helper" in the marriage. He will also discuss with her their mutual strengths and weaknesses. All this he ought to do in *love* without surrendering his God-given leadership to her or allowing her to seize it from him. For this too is the will of the Savior for the good of the husband's wife and family, as He has taught us.

Men often fail to lead and save because they listen when they should be speaking. The cursing of the ground "because of man," God says, was on account of the fact that Adam abdicated his role as leader when he listened to his wife. God does not say first "because you have eaten of the fruit of which I told you not to eat, the ground is cursed," but rather "because you have heeded the voice of your wife" (Gen. 3:17). It can also happen that *men may fail to save when they lead because they speak when they should be listening.* But perhaps the greater problem for the family in our day is that many men are being bullied to step back when they ought to step forward and be the leaders God desires them to be for their wives and their families.

May the Lord Jesus, without whom we can do nothing good and who always hears the prayers of His believing people, grant every Christian father the *Agape-love*, grace, wisdom, and strength through Word and Sacrament to perform his role as the head and savior of his wife and family. For surely a man who has been given such a role by his Lord and Savior must succeed here *first and above all*. So very much is at stake that he should think and pray often:

I can do no greater good in this world than that which Christ would have me do for my wife, my children, my household. God help me that I may always be His blessing to them. Amen.

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Endnotes

¹ γνώσις we see here, not οἶδα, since the latter implies that an object has come within the scope of one's perception, whereas γνώσις implies knowledge based on a personal relationship. In this context the word suggests not only the husband's knowledge of his wife, but an *appreciative understanding* of her in recognition of God's blessing bestowed on him through her.

² In regard to Ephesians 6:4 (*“And fathers, stop provoking your children to anger; rather care for them in the chastisement and the admonition of the Lord”*), a few grammatical comments are in order:

- Translating μὴ παροργίζετε as *“stop provoking”* is justifiable since μὴ with present imperative is linear and can express the sense of *“stop”* what you are doing. The alternative sense of this construction is to express a constant prohibition of the act, i.e., *“don't ever provoke your children to anger.”* Lenski says that the syntax here *“refers to iterative action: do not again and again provoke to anger”* (650), which also catches the linear action of this construction.
- ἐκτρέφετε (pres. imp. of ἐκτρέφω) is rendered *“care for”* rather than *“nourish,”* which is commonly understood today as *“providing food for,”* whereas τρέφω by itself means to *“rear”* or *“feed.”* This basic meaning is intensified by the prefix ἐκ, in my opinion.
- We take the παιδεία in the same sense as it is used in Hebrews 12:5, i.e., *“chastisement,”* and νοουθεσία as *“admonition.”* Thus rather than provoking his children to anger, the father *“cares for”* his children by *“chastisement and admonition”*—both in *actions* and *words*.
- κυρίου, *“(the) Lord,”* is in the genitive case. Paul is describing/defining the kind of chastisement and admonition the father is to employ in order not to provoke but rather to care for his children. It is the chastisement and admonition that comes from the Word of the Lord and is taught by Him.

³ Many years ago we heard a woman connected with the Children's Hospital in St. Louis correct a mother who called into the radio station. When the mother quoted this passage to justify the spanking of her young child for repeatedly running onto a busy street, she was told that *“rod”* does not mean *“stick”* or any such thing, not even the hand. She said *“rod”* referred to *“The Golden Rule.”* When we called to confirm that, in fact, the Hebrew word means *“stick,”* not the *“The Golden Rule,”* the woman on the panel responded: *“Well, that's your opinion.”* Of course, in the abusive climate in which we live, where everyone is looking out for the children of others, the *“rod”* can be applied in many discreet ways by our Christian parents when they must discipline their children promptly in public, e.g., pulling the hair on the back of the neck.

⁴ Ed. While the subjective sense is possible (and even prominent in New Testament usage), the writer prefers the objective sense of πίστευ in this context. The subjective sense would either mean that the man denies that he believes (unlikely here) or that he denies in his heart the faith confessed with his mouth.

Gnadenwahlstreit: The Predestinarian Controversy of American Lutheranism

(Leading to the Formation of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod)¹

Peter Reim

Sola gratia! Intuitu fidei! “The Anti-Missourian Brotherhood.” “*This [report] is an open declaration of war . . . !*” “*You want war? Then war you shall have!*” If ever there have been any sleepy periods in American Lutheranism, the last part of the 19th century was probably not among them.

Gnadenwahlstreit, a controversy (*Streit*) about the election (*Wahl*) of grace (*Gnaden*), often known as the Predestinarian Controversy, could arguably be called the most significant controversy among Lutherans in America prior to the 1970s. It addressed head-on one of the three pillars of the Lutheran Reformation, the doctrine of *sola gratia*—grace alone. But there were other significant results. From a historical perspective it dramatically changed the face of confessional Lutheranism in the United States. Theologically it opened the door for attacks on the doctrines of election, conversion, and fellowship. It introduced a flawed hermeneutic into biblical studies and doctrinal discussions. But it also clarified the orthodox, scriptural understanding of the doctrines under discussion and led to a smaller yet harmonious confessional fellowship in the Synodical Conference during the first decades of the 20th century.

I. The players: A brief survey of those who were prominent in 19th century confessional Lutheranism.

Walther and the Missouri Synod: C. F. W. Walther was an early protégé of the disgraced Pastor Stephan, who had organized the original Saxon settlement in Perry County, Missouri. Trained in Germany and originally mentored by pietists, Walther through the advice of one pietist came to read not only Luther, but also the Confessions. Here he found the true spiritual comfort offered in Lutheranism’s salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, as taught in Scripture alone. When he became a chief teacher and organizer of the Saxon Lutherans in Missouri, he continued on this path and was soon giving faithful witness to all Lutherans in the westward-spreading United States. His trenchant articles and honest criticisms of the American Lutheran scene as found in *Der Lutheraner* and *Lehre und Wehre* were widely read by Lutherans west of the Allegheny Mountains.

Under Walther’s leadership the Missouri Synod was organized in 1847, eight years after the Saxons had arrived. During this same period other fledgling groups of Lutherans in America began to show a desire for a more confessional Lutheranism than had been practiced by Lutherans in Colonial times (i.e., the Muhlenbergs, the Pennsylvania Ministerium, and the General Synod). During the 1850s the Missouri Synod had called for free conferences of confessionally minded Lutherans. These did not often conclude in successful relationships with Missouri, but they definitely led to clarity about the issues that needed to be addressed. In 1872 the Missouri Synod became one of six founding members of the Synodical Conference, a federation of confessional Lutheran bodies that by God’s grace had come to complete agreement on the doctrines of Scripture.

The Ohio Synod: One of the other founding members of the Synodical Conference was the Ohio Synod (the Minnesota Synod, Illinois Synod, Norwegian Synod, and Wisconsin Synod completed the original set of six). The Ohio Synod was formally organized in 1854. At the turn of the 1800s it came on the scene as a district of the Pennsylvania Ministerium, but from the start the Ohio Synod was more confessionally minded than its parent body. It founded Luther Seminary, first located in Canton, Ohio, then Columbus (in the 1900s it moved again to St. Paul, MN). W. Lehman and M. Loy were prominent members of its faculty. In the 1850s it began publishing *The Lutheran Standard* as an English language church publication. Walther looked favorably on its content.

The Ohio Synod was among the first to call for a confessional body as a haven for those troubled by the liberal General Synod. This effort resulted in the General Council, but Ohio ended up not joining the General Council (1868) due to its inability to commit itself on what was known as “The Four Points.” Instead, it found common ground with Missouri and joined the Synodical Conference.

The Norwegian Synod: Early Norwegian immigration brought to America a broad range of

Lutheran perspective. One was represented by the pietistic and anti-clergy Eilsen (later, Hauge) Synod. Many Norwegian Lutherans ended up joining with Danish Lutherans in the Norwegian and Danish Lutheran Synod. But large settlements of Norwegians near Muskego and Koshkonong, Wisconsin, contributed to the birth of the Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church ("Norwegian Synod") in 1853.

The Norwegian Synod immediately sought an American seminary at which their pastoral candidates might be trained. The choice landed on Concordia, St. Louis. The Missouri Synod had a seminary-sharing policy that admitted students from other synods and also invited a representative professor from those synods, such as the Norwegian Synod and the Wisconsin Synod.

In 1861 the Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church formed Luther College in La Crosse, Wisconsin. The second member of the faculty was Friedrich August Schmidt. Schmidt had been trained at St. Louis under Walther. In 1872 Schmidt was called by the Norwegian Synod as its representative professor at St. Louis.

The Iowa Synod: Founded in 1854 near Dubuque, Iowa, this synod sought to be confessional, but was severely criticized by Walther for its stand on church and ministry. It showed interest in the General Council, but refused to join because of the Council's weak stand on three of the Four Points (Iowa was weak on the fourth, Chiliasm). The Iowa Synod never joined the General Council or the Synodical Conference; it did form an alliance with the Buffalo Synod.

The Wisconsin Synod: The Wisconsin Synod was organized in 1850. In the 1860s it actually joined but quickly abandoned the General Council and then became a founding member of the Synodical Conference. Yes, its history is of importance and value to us, but it had little to do directly with the Predestinarian Controversy, that is, until the round of free conferences in the early 1900s. Throughout the controversy it supported the Missouri position.

Similarly, the Minnesota Synod, founded in 1860, had joined the General Council but later withdrew. It then joined the Synodical Conference, and in 1892 it became part of the Wisconsin Synod, which was renamed the Joint Synod of Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan, and Other States. The Minnesota Synod also consistently upheld the Missouri position.

II. 1870s: Missouri's stand on the Election of Grace

In the early 1870s, while weighing in on the false positions of many supposedly confessional Lutheran bodies in the Midwest, C. F. W. Walther in *Lehre und Wehre* criticized the Iowa Synod on its position regarding election. As noted in Armin Schuetze's history of the Synodical Conference: "Not all in Missouri agreed with Walther. There was need to gain further understanding and agreement on this doctrine so prone to error when human reason seeks to understand the inscrutable ways of God."² This doctrine took center stage at the 1877 convention of the Western District of the Missouri Synod, where Walther's six theses on the subject were the focus of thorough discussion. The result was general approval, with a glowing report of the results given to the 1878 convention of the Synodical Conference.

Opposition did arise from several quarters, including some who had been trained by Walther himself. One was H. A. Allwardt, a Missouri pastor in Lebanon, Wisconsin, and former Walther student. Another opponent was Prof. F. W. Stelhorn of the Fort Wayne seminary, who had previously been a Missouri Synod representative professor at Northwestern College, Watertown, Wisconsin. The third and most strident protesting voice came from F. A. Schmidt, at the time a seminary professor at the Norwegian Synod seminary in Madison, Wisconsin.

The issue at hand was the confessional Lutheran position on the election of grace as presented in Article XI of the Formula of Concord. This article clearly and repeatedly asserts that this doctrine is limited to the divine election and predestination of those who are ultimately saved. It maintains that this divine election has as its cause nothing more than God's gracious love and Christ's righteousness.³ The article maintains that there is no cause in man for divine election.⁴ Assurance of one's own election

is not to be sought in some hidden will of God, but solely in His gracious will proclaimed in the gospel of Christ, by which He earnestly calls upon all men to believe in the salvation procured for us through Jesus Christ.⁵ It repudiates Calvinistic errors such as limited atonement and double predestination⁶ and Pelagian and synergistic errors suggesting that also within believers is a cause of God's election.⁷

In the subsequent church period, the period of the orthodox Lutheran fathers such as Gerhard, Brenz, and Quenstedt, there was, at least in Gerhard, a statement opposing Calvinistic errors on double predestination that employed the term *intuitu fidei*. The unfortunate development of this term is noted in Schuetze's history: "John Moldstad in his book *Predestination* . . . points out how Gerhard used *intuitu fidei* over against Calvinism, which 'had so stressed the sovereignty of God in election that faith in Christ looked rather superfluous. Gerhard wished to connect election with faith. By using the 'in view of faith' expression, however, he muddied the waters for a controversy yet to come.'"⁸

That same view was also perpetuated among Norwegian Lutherans through a commonly used catechism by Eric Pontoppidon (1698–1764), who had done much to introduce the pietism of Spener and Francke to Norway. Pontoppidon had also been heavily influenced by the 17th century dogmaticians.⁹ That might explain, in part, Schmidt's opposition to Walther's theses and the 1877 Western District report.¹⁰

In 1880 Allwardt, Stellhorn, and Schmidt began publishing a journal primarily to carry on the debate about election. *Altes und Neues* claimed to uphold what they maintained was the original Missouri view over against a new view on the subject conceived by Walther. In its first issue Schmidt called the report of Missouri's view as received by the 1879 Western District conference "an official declaration of war." A year later Schmidt, rejecting Dr. Loy's suggestion of a cool-down period in which no one would publish anything until another conference could be set, proclaimed that "God had commanded him to carry on this war. Walther responded, 'Be it so! You want war; you shall have war!'"¹¹

Like Walther and the majority of Missourians, Schmidt and those who favored his position maintained their agreement with Article XI. But they also asserted that there was another way of "understanding" election. This alternate view is detailed in the Ohio Synod's "Confession Concerning Election" (Four Theses, 1881):

2. But if by election, as the dogmaticians generally do, we understand *merely this*, that from eternity God elected and infallibly ordained to salvation certain individuals in preference to others, and this according to the universal way of salvation, we believe, teach, and confess that election took place *in view of Christ's merit apprehended by faith*, or, more briefly stated but with the same sense, *in view of faith*. According to this understanding faith precedes election in the mind of God, as *the rule*, according to which one selects, precedes the *election* itself, and thus election properly speaking, is not the cause of faith.¹²

Those who held this position, particularly Schmidt, maintained that the Missouri Synod was guilty of Calvinizing errors.

The Thirteen Theses: As the year 1880 proceeded, President Schwan of the Missouri Synod called a conference of all Missouri Synod pastors to meet in Chicago. At this time two more significant voices in the Missouri Synod came forward in support of Walther's position—Franz Pieper and George Stoeckhardt. Pieper had Wisconsin Synod roots, but was trained at St. Louis and was now professor there, taking Walther's place as professor of Systemic Theology. Stoeckhardt had been trained in Germany and had come over from the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church, which was in fellowship with Missouri at this time. The Missouri Synod was largely agreed on the issue, but had not fully convinced others in the Synodical Conference. Within a year the Missouri Synod adopted at its 1881 convention the "Thirteen Theses," previously published in *Der Lutheraner* and establishing Missouri's view of election as an act of grace alone.

In its "Thirteen Theses" Missouri addressed the general will of God for the salvation of mankind,

drawing from the Formula of Concord, Article XI, to emphasize in Thesis IV that “no man is lost because it was not God’s will to save him . . . ; but that all men who are lost, are lost by their own fault, namely, on account of their unbelief. . . .”¹³

In Thesis V the “*subject of election of grace*” has been defined as believers “*who truly believe unto the end of their life or, at least, at their end.*”¹⁴

In Thesis X the issue at hand is stated most directly:

The *cause* which moved God to elect the elect, is only his grace and the merit of Jesus Christ, and not anything *good* foreseen by God in the elect, not even *faith foreseen* by God in them; and we, therefore, reject and condemn the contrary erroneous doctrines of the Pelagians, Semipelagians, and Synergists, as errors which are blasphemous and horrible, and which subvert the Gospel and, by consequence, the whole Christian religion.¹⁵

III. 1880s: Ohio withdraws

After attempts at bringing Schmidt and Walther to an agreement had failed, the Ohio Synod in 1881 publicly supported Schmidt’s view, maintaining *intuitu fidei* over against the Missouri position. Only three years earlier relations had been good between the two bodies. Ohio had conferred a doctorate on C. F. W. Walther; St. Louis had tried to call Dr. Loy to their own seminary. But things deteriorated rather quickly. Prof. Stelhorn was called away from the Fort Wayne seminary to the seminary in Columbus. Ohio publicly charged Missouri with crypto-Calvinism. Responding to Missouri’s adoption of the Thirteen Theses, Ohio called a special convention, June 4, 1881, at which they resolved to withdraw from the Synodical Conference because of Missouri’s adoption of the Thirteen Theses and because Missouri had instructed its Synodical Conference delegates “not to sit together and deliberate about church affairs with such as have publicly decried us as Calvinists”¹⁶—a specific reference to the Ohio Synod delegates.

Ohio’s Four Theses: At its special convention in 1881 the Ohio Synod adopted four statements titled “Our Confession Concerning Election.” In the first thesis Ohio affirmed the Formula of Concord’s description of election as “the entire ‘purpose, counsel, will, and ordination of God pertaining to our redemption, vocation, justification, and salvation.’”

The second thesis asserted, as quoted before, the other or second view, namely, that election occurred “*in view of Christ’s merit apprehended by faith.*”

The third thesis stated that “the mystery in election” is not that we don’t know by “what rule God proceeded” in the election, but “that no one except God *knows* who belongs to the elect.”

The fourth thesis asserted that “the *certainty* of the individual that *he* belongs to the elect is, before his hour of death, *conditional or regulated.* . . .”¹⁷

IV. 1880–1918: Tracing the Norwegian Lutherans

In its dealings with Missouri and by its own analysis and confession regarding election, the Norwegian Synod did not follow the same path as Ohio. According to Aaberg’s *A City Set on a Hill*, conscientious synod members under the leadership of Koren eventually would adopt an extensive document, “An Accounting,” which “did not acknowledge ‘election in view of faith’ as the presentation of Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, but it did acknowledge it in a limited way and stated that it did not regard anyone who used this phrase as a false teacher so long as he kept the doctrines of sin and grace pure.”¹⁸ G. Lillegard reports: “The pastors of the Norwegian Synod discussed the doctrine of election for the first time at a conference in Manitowoc, Wisconsin, in March, 1880, and again in LaCrosse, Wisconsin, in October. At the public synodical conventions, the matter was first broached by

Rev. B. Muus in his report to the convention of the Minnesota District in 1880, in which he went out of his way to attack the doctrine that a man may and shall be certain, by faith, of his salvation."¹⁹

Bear in mind that F. A. Schmidt was still a member of the Norwegian Synod. With an eye toward the upcoming Synodical Conference convention in 1882, one district had chosen Schmidt as one of its Synodical Conference delegates. The first order of convention business was to consider protests from the Missouri, Minnesota, and Wisconsin Synods against the seating of Schmidt. Besides being a vocal advocate of the *intuitu fidei* position, Prof. Schmidt had meddled in congregations in Wisconsin, even entering a Wisconsin Synod congregation in Oshkosh, against the pastor's written protest, and causing a split by which the pastor was ousted. The convention ruled against the seating of Prof. Schmidt.

At this convention the Norwegian Synod had assured the Synodical Conference that they had disciplined Prof. Schmidt and others for their views and that the Norwegian Synod was with the Synodical Conference. The majority of the Norwegian Synod leaders and pastors were in agreement with Walther on election. But Schmidt, in his position as seminary professor, had influenced much of the younger generation of Norwegian Synod clergy. In the 1903 assessment given by the Norwegian Synod's Church Council, Prof. Schmidt had gained "his greatest following . . . among the many unstable students who were under his influence (at the Theological Seminary) day after day and year after year. They did not understand that Dr. Schmidt departed steadily farther away from his earlier teachings and began to sponsor an ever more definitely synergistic teaching. . . ." ²⁰

Also at this convention ten of the eleven sessions were taken up by issues pertaining to the Schmidt case and the election controversy. Ultimately, the Synodical Conference did adopt the Thirteen Theses of Missouri. The unity of the Synodical Conference seemed to be under severe testing, however, for it had already lost one member (Ohio), with another member in grave turmoil. Yet it had, in fact, held firm in its orthodox position, a confessional position that left no room for ambiguity.

For the Norwegian Synod, however, troubles would go from bad to worse. On Good Friday in 1883 a congregation in Norway Grove, Wisconsin, influenced by Schmidt, had deposed its pastors, H. V. Preus and C. K. Preus. By that summer all three of its districts were recommending that the Norwegian Synod withdraw from the Synodical Conference. To that turn of events Schuetze concludes: "There was general agreement in the Norwegian Synod that it might be able to solve its internal conflict more readily without a direct connection with Missouri through membership in the Synodical Conference."²¹

The Norwegian Synod controversy came to a head at their General Pastoral Conference in the fall of 1884. District President Ulrik Koren had prepared a document called "An Accounting" (*En Redegjoeelse*) that sought to identify and take a firm position on the doctrinal issues involved and do so in such a way that the congregations would know clearly what the pastors were teaching and confessing. Lillegard offers this assessment of "An Accounting":

It is an important historical document which presented the teaching of the Norwegian Synod clearly and summed up all the arguments on both sides in the long drawn-out debate, rejecting both the Calvinizing errors of which the Norwegian Synod had been falsely accused and the synergistic errors of Prof. Schmidt and his followers. It constitutes the confession on which the Norwegian Synod took its stand in the 1880's and on which we today still stand, since it gives the answer to the mistaken concessions and false teachings in the union documents of 1917 as well.²²

The number of its signers grew to 107 within a few months, and the document became the Norwegian Synod's public confession, dividing the orthodox from the heterodox. Schmidt, of course, rejected it, maintaining that "'salvation in a certain sense does not depend on God alone."²³

Within the synod a party loyal to Schmidt had developed that came to be known as the Anti-Missourians. In October of 1885 they met at Red Wing, Minnesota, and resolved that all who had signed "An Accounting" should be deposed. They called for the removal of two district presidents, Ulrik Koren and B. Harstad, and two seminary professors at Madison, H. G. Stub and Joh. Ylvisaker. Within another

year the Anti-Missourians had established a seminary at St. Olaf's in Northfield, Minnesota.

The synod responded by condemning the establishment of an alternate seminary and admonishing those involved to withdraw from the project. Instead, the Anti-Missourians withdrew from the synod. In all, about one third of the Norwegian Synod pastors and congregations withdrew and formed the "Anti-Missourian Brotherhood." In 1890 they united with the Augustana Synod and the Norwegian-Danish Conference to form the United Norwegian Lutheran Church. Lillegard notes: "It is no exaggeration to say that the only bond of union between these three groups was their common hatred of the Norwegian Synod and its uncompromising adherence to 'the Word Alone and Grace Alone.' For Dr. Schmidt had been a leader in the controversy on Absolution, the Gospel, Justification, etc., on the side of the Norwegian Synod. Yet nothing was done to reconcile the differences between him and the Augustana Synod and the Conference on these and other points."²⁴

The remaining Norwegian Synod went on to maintain brotherly relations with the Synodical Conference over the next few years. In 1894 representatives of the Norwegian Synod assured the Synodical Conference that "two delegates of the Norwegian Synod have come to testify that its heart is one with the Synodical Conference and to express its willingness to do what it can to support the work of the Synodical Conference."²⁵ Still, for various reasons—language differences in particular—they did not yet seek readmission to the Synodical Conference.

From 1905 to 1912 the Norwegian Synod held meetings with representatives of the Hauge Synod and the United Norwegian Lutheran Church, attempting to resolve doctrinal issues between them, including the doctrine of election. According to the research of Robert Edwards, the Norwegian Synod convention of 1905 "brought the first signs of the coming disintegration of that body. Dr. Koren was 79 years old at this convention and was in failing health." Edwards continues: "The Vice President, who would obviously be stepping in shortly, was Stub. . . . The part which bode no good was the slogan of the backers of Stub, 'Let's break the Decorah ring!' Luther College in Decorah had become the citadel of the Synod confessionalism just as St. Olaf in Northfield had become a stronghold of the United Church. Stub was clearly the candidate of the more liberal element in the Synod."²⁶

In 1910 a meeting between the three Norwegian bodies failed to produce agreement on the matter of election, with the representative of the United Church declaring the Norwegian Synod's theses, authored by Stub, "unbiblical and un-Lutheran."²⁷ The idea of union might have died, but a couple of factors provided impetus for renewed efforts. In 1911 committees of the United Church and the Norwegian Synod met in St. Paul. This meeting was composed mostly of parish pastors, and an effort was made to avoid polemics. In the end a committee was appointed to draft a proposal for another meeting, February 12, 1912, in Madison, Wisconsin. In 1912 representatives of all three bodies agreed on the "Madison Settlement," also known as the *Opgjør*. The key feature of the Madison Settlement is, as Edwards notes, that "it accepts without reservation the second form (*intuitu fidei*) as being of equal authority with the first form (election unto faith) of election."²⁸

President Stub and Prof. J. Ylvisaker brought the Madison Settlement to the 1912 Synodical Conference convention for its review and approval. The Synodical Conference assessment found (in the kindest terms possible) the Madison Settlement to be unacceptable, first of all, because it perpetuated two views of the election of grace—one orthodox, the other supporting *intuitu fidei*. Secondly, the Synodical Conference response desired the removal of a phrase in a statement that rejected "every doctrine which . . . would deprive God of His glory as only Savior or . . . weaken man's sense of responsibility in relation to the acceptance or rejection of grace."²⁹ The second phrase, about man's responsibility, raised a red flag of concern with the suggestion that conversion occurs when man omits "willful resistance" to the call of the gospel. The Synodical Conference resolved to appoint a committee (W. H. T. Dau, F. Pieper, and J. Schaller, who was later replaced by T. Schlueter) to address its concerns to the Norwegian Synod. Meanwhile, the reaction of other major Lutheran bodies was, not surprisingly, more favorable. At the General Council convention in Toledo, for example, it was declared, "The Gospel

of Christ appeared, to teach men that they were all of one blood and all had one God as their father. Divided at Babel, they were united by love and humility at Zion.”³⁰

The Synodical Conference’s counsel did not make much official headway in the Norwegian Synod, whose officials were still skittish about how direct influence from the Synodical Conference would be received. But a “considerable minority” of the Norwegian Synod did object to the Madison Settlement “for the same reasons as the Synodical Conference.”³¹ Still, the merger of Norwegian bodies was going forward. In 1914 Articles of Union were approved. In 1916 a proposed constitution was adopted by a vote of 520 to 203.³² But it was clear that, should the Norwegian Synod join in the proposed union under the Madison Settlement, a significant number of members would withdraw and form their own group. In Austin, Minnesota, the Madison Settlement was revised to allow dissenting members to “join the Merger on the basis of their own doctrine, but with ‘mutual fraternal recognition.’”³³ This found greater acceptance in the Norwegian Synod, and in June of 1917 in St. Paul, the unionistic merger went into effect. In regard to the actual impact of the Austin Settlement, Lillegard concludes:

It is, then, passing strange that any of the Synod “Minority” who in 1916 showed that they understood what the errors in the *Madison Settlement* were could have entered the Merger in 1917. The so-called *Austin Settlement*, though an improvement on the *Madison Settlement*, was never accepted by the three synods as a supplement to the doctrinal agreements on which the union was based. On the contrary, it was made very plain that, while the Minority was invited to enter the Union with their own peculiar views as to the controverted doctrines, the *Madison Settlement* and the other theses must remain unchanged as the legal basis for union. In other words, the *Austin Settlement* made it possible for some “Minority men” to enter the Union on a *unionistic* basis, but it in no way removed the objections that these men had earlier raised to the union documents.³⁴

V. The Evangelical Lutheran Synod is born

At the same time of the merger in St. Paul, a small remnant of dissenters also met in St. Paul at the Hotel Aberdeen. Synodical Conference representatives were there to encourage them to remain steadfast in their opposition to the unscriptural and unionistic position their synod had taken.

One year later, June 14, 1918, this remnant met in a tent in Minnesota, just over the border from Iowa and north of the Lime Creek Church. It was a location necessitated by wartime regulations in Iowa that prohibited the holding of public assemblies which used any other language than English. The group consisted of thirteen pastors and a larger number of congregation delegates, who formed the Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church and declared: “We, members present of the Synod for the Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, ministers, delegates of congregations, and members of congregations, join together for this purpose of continuing the work of the Synod on the old basis and according to the old principles.”³⁵ One year after its founding the new church body resolved to seek admission into the Synodical Conference. Numbering thirty pastors and twenty congregations, their request for admission into the Synodical Conference was granted in 1920.

VI. 1900–1929 Making the good confession: *Sola gratia* vs. *Intuitu fidei*

In twenty-two years or so, from 1878 to 1900, the *Gnadenwahlstreit* had brought on the loss, first, of the Ohio Synod, then the Norwegian Synod from the Synodical Conference. It had compelled the confessional church bodies to study and clarify their confessions, which led to shifts in membership, both away from and toward the orthodox position. It caused deep distress in the Norwegian Synod and finally led a remnant to withdraw and form a small, new confessional body that then joined the Synodical Conference.

Also during this time the Election Controversy would test the orthodox in yet another way as they faced new doctrinal concerns in the discussion of “the analogy of faith” and of man’s role in conversion. In the years 1903-1906 a series of five free conferences took place, the first of which invited “all Lutherans who subscribe to the Book of Concord” to take part. Held at Watertown, Wisconsin, the initial conference was attended by 250 pastors and professors from eleven synods. It was assured that “participation in the conference . . . did not comprise any kind of acknowledgment of an opponent’s doctrinal position.”³⁶ Dr. Franz Pieper presented a paper on “Fundamental Differences in the Doctrine of Conversion and Election.” In the course of discussing that paper, which monopolized the conference sessions, “an Ohio Synod spokesman referred to the ‘analogy of faith’ as a method of interpretation that needed consideration.”³⁷

While attempt was made in the next few conferences to have constructive discussion of the election issue, it became clear to many that the differences in that issue were now determined by how one approached the interpretation of Scripture. While those from the Synodical Conference viewpoint developed their doctrine *solely on what is revealed in the clear passages of Scripture*, the Ohio approach maintained that difficult passages or doctrines might be clarified by making assumptions according to what they called “the analogy of faith.” They found support for this approach also from members of the Iowa Synod.

At the third free conference, which was held in Detroit (April 6-8, 1904), the Ohio-Iowa description of the “analogy of faith” was expressed as follows:

In explaining a passage of Holy Writ, especially a difficult one, first, indeed, the parallel passages that treat of the same matter must be consulted, and every doctrine of the Bible must be taken from those passages that treat of it; but that no explanation of these passages and no doctrine can be considered correct that evidently is in conflict with any one of the fundamental articles of faith, i.e., those that are necessary unto salvation.

In this approach they spoke of the “analogy of faith” as the *Schriftganze*, the “aggregate of Scripture.”³⁸

These free conferences resulted only in more divergence of views about election and also the added infusion of an improper method of hermeneutics. Toward the last conference more attention was given to conversion, as well as to the question of man’s resistance to conversion. This was a natural consequence of the *intuitu fidei* error. If God based His divine decree of election on the ability of some to believe, what would determine, among the population of fallen man, those who would believe over against those who would reject the gospel?

The free conferences concluded in 1906 with little enthusiasm for more talks. It was clear to the Synodical Conference people that little was being accomplished.

Another effort aimed at effecting unity among confessional Lutherans was a series of intersynodical conferences, first taking place at Gaylord, Minnesota, in 1915. Motivated by the approaching 400th anniversary of the Reformation (in 1917), this was the first occasion where the Minnesota and Wisconsin Synods played a major role (Minnesota was soon to become a district of the Wisconsin Synod). From the start the input of parish pastors was given priority. At some meetings seminary professors were not allowed to speak. The focus of discussion was on scriptural testimony, not on published papers. It was agreed to use the Madison Settlement as an outline. This was revised, corrected, and eventually known as the St. Paul Theses, a document subscribed to by 555 pastors from seven synods. A central committee was then assembled, and in 1917 the various synods were asked to review the theses and appoint committees for further discussion. By 1920 ten theses on conversion were accepted by all the committee members involved (belonging to Missouri, Wisconsin, Ohio, and Iowa Synods).³⁹

While these conferences were going on, however, different synods had other agendas. In particular, the Ohio, Iowa, and Buffalo Synods were in the process of uniting into the American Lutheran Church in 1929. That group, in turn, would quickly unite with the Norwegian Lutheran Church in America

and other bodies to form the American Lutheran Conference, forerunner of the ALC.

Meanwhile, the St. Paul Theses, still being discussed through the 1920s, morphed into the Chicago Theses. These were presented to the five participating synods (Wisconsin, Missouri, Buffalo, Iowa, and Ohio) in 1928. Missouri, having studied them more thoroughly in 1929, resolved in convention that they were not adequate in resolving the differences and needed further work. Other synods took no action, and the intersynodical effort was dead in the water. Missouri's resolution, however, would lead to the production of the *Brief Statement* in 1932.

VII. Concluding observations

The Predestinarian, or Election, Controversy was indeed a *Gnadenwahlstreit*, a controversy about grace. It involved questions regarding the cause of election for those who are saved—specifically, whether God's foreknowledge of one's faith is a motivating factor in one's election. Controversy arose, from a human perspective, because of incautious statements made in the writings of a few of the orthodox Lutheran fathers. But from a divine perspective it arose mainly because of man's predisposition to obscure *grace alone* by seeking some sort of cause for salvation in man himself. It might have been the most significant doctrinal controversy to impact American Lutheranism. For while it disrupted the Synodical Conference, it also clarified the orthodoxy of its position. While it shattered one synod, it led to the formation of another confessional group, rightly separate from the compromising spirit of the body from which it was born.

One may also observe a sort of confessional fatigue over the course of many drawn-out attempts at union. It would appear that a laudable desire for church union eclipsed the necessary conviction on all sides that union based only on full agreement in the teaching of Scripture can truly be God-pleasing. In regard to the problems that arose with the Norwegian Synod and the Madison Settlement, one can readily agree with Lillegard's assessment:

The fact that there was a growing number in all of the conferring synods that wanted union at almost any price affords the chief explanation for the manner in which union was eventually effected. For the new Union committees elected in 1911 were able to prepare an *Opgjør* (*Settlement*) which satisfied most people in both parties that their doctrines were expressed in it to the exclusion of the doctrines against which they had contended so bitterly for over thirty years.⁴⁰

It seems that the controversy might well have been perpetuated, at times, by the proud and meddlesome activities of a few. Thus we pray that the Lord preserve all of us from such harsh and obstinate dealings with confessional brethren and with those who inquire of our doctrine, as were apparent during this period.

Nevertheless, from this controversy we can trace the true scriptural position, which upholds *Sola Gratia, Sola Fidei, Sola Scriptura* that we now enjoy in our own church body. We can also trace the faulty hermeneutic that permitted error to stand in the Ohio and Iowa Synods. We can be thankful for the study and struggles of confessional men whose labors are still evident among us today, familiar as we are with the works of Walther, Hoenecke, Pieper, Stoeckhardt, to name a few. The controversy whetted their appreciation of solid scriptural exegesis and their diligence toward confessional clarity. May that Spirit-worked heritage prevail among us today in all that we teach and confess as the truth of Scripture.

Endnotes

¹ Pastor Reim originally presented his essay to the September 2007 meeting of the West-Central Pastoral Conference of the CLC. What appears in this issue is a revised version of that essay. Citation of source material is provided throughout in the form of MLA endnotes.

² Armin W. Schuetze, *The Synodical Conference: Ecumenical Endeavor* (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 2000) 92.

³ Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., Article XI: “Concerning God’s Eternal Foreknowledge and Election,” *The Book of Concord* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2000) 640-656.

⁴ Kolb and Wengert 642 §8 and 654-655 §88.

⁵ Kolb and Wengert 648 §43, 650-651 §65, and 652 §75.

⁶ Kolb and Wengert 642 §9 and 645 §28.

⁷ Kolb and Wengert 648 §48.

⁸ Schuetze 418-419, footnote 25.

⁹ Robert Edwards, “The Selling of the Madison *Opgjør*” (Senior Church History paper 1979) 8-9, <http://www.wlsessays.net/node/461>.

¹⁰ As reported by G. O. Lillegard in *Grace for Grace* (Mankato: Lutheran Synod Book Co., 1943), p. 169, the following are the charges of Schmidt against the Missouri Synod and their “Norwegian sympathizers”:

1. That God does not will the conversion, faith and perseverance (in the faith) of all men in the *same way*.
2. That God has determined to provide for the conversion, faith, and perseverance of only some by foreordaining them alone to salvation and excluding the rest.
3. That we affirm God’s universal will of grace in words, but offend against it in reality, if we do not actually annul it.
4. That we do not let the merit of Christ, appropriated in faith, be the real foundation of salvation for all those who are saved.
5. That we teach that the certainty, by faith, of salvation must be based on that secret foreordination of God instead of simply on faith in Christ.
6. That, according to our teaching, God’s revealed will that whosoever believes and is faithful to the end shall be saved is not sufficient.
7. That the main thing is to be certain that we from eternity have been foreordained to be without fail faithful to the end and thus infallibly to gain salvation.
8. That there are two essentially different counsels of grace.
9. That the ordinary counsel of grace is not the only foundation we must build upon.
10. That there is a two-fold will of grace in God.
11. That we teach an essentially irresistible grace.
12. That, according to our teaching, faith is entirely excluded from the concept of election.

¹¹ Quoted in Schuetze 94 (“official declaration of war”) and 96.

¹² The quotation here is the entire second thesis of Ohio Synod’s Four Theses of 1881, as printed by Richard C. Wolf in *Documents of Lutheran Unity in America* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), p. 203, emphasis original.

¹³ Wolf 200.

¹⁴ Wolf 200, emphasis original.

¹⁵ Wolf 202, emphasis original; all of the theses can also be found at www.lcms.org/ca/www/cyclopedia: Thirteen Theses.

¹⁶ Quoted in Schuetze 97 (from Missouri Synod *Proceedings*, 1881).

¹⁷ The Four Theses of Ohio, 1881, are given in translation by Wolf (Document 90), pages 203-204, emphasis original.

¹⁸ Theodore A. Aaberg, *A City Set on a Hill* (Mankato: Board of Publications Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1968) 35.

¹⁹ S. C. Ylvisaker, Chr. Anderson, and G. O. Lillegard, eds., *Grace for Grace* (Mankato: Lutheran Synod Book Co., 1943) 170.

²⁰ Quoted in *Grace for Grace* 167.

²¹ Schuetze 109.

²² *Grace for Grace* 172.

²³ *Grace for Grace* 172, emphasis original. Pages 172-173 also contain Schmidt's elaboration of "how salvation depends on man":

When only one of two ungodly men is converted, there must have been a difference in their resistance; for, if not, they would both have been converted. (*Lutherske Vidnesbyrd*, 1882, p. 60.)

Whether a man comes to a determination in the one way or in the other, he always keeps his full freedom and his own power of choice to come to some other determination. All have their free, personal, independent choice between the two usable possibilities: either to follow the drawing of grace or to resist it. (*Luth. Vid.*, 1886, p. 552.)

By the fact that God's saving call of grace makes it possible for the called person really to let himself be brought to repentance, God places him in a certain choosing position. . . . It is the called person himself who here must make a certain choice between the two possibilities, whereby it is decided whether he will let himself be helped and saved or he will refuse to let himself be helped. (*Luth. Vid.*, 1887, p. 259.)

²⁴ *Grace for Grace* 190.

²⁵ Quoted in Schuetze 111.

²⁶ Edwards 4-5.

²⁷ Quoted in Edwards 5.

²⁸ Edwards 6.

²⁹ Quoted in Wolf 234; cf. *Grace for Grace* 111 for more background.

³⁰ Quoted in Edwards 7.

³¹ Schuetze 126.

³² Aaberg 62; Schuetze 126.

³³ *Grace for Grace* 110.

³⁴ *Grace for Grace* 198-199

³⁵ Quoted in Edwards 12 (G. Orvick, *Our Great Heritage*, p. 34).

³⁶ Quoted in Schuetze 180 (*Der Lutheraner*, 1903, p. 150).

³⁷ Schuetze 180.

³⁸ Quoted in Schuetze 182 (*The Lutheran Standard*, April 16, 1904, p. 242) and in Schuetze 183.

³⁹ Schuetze 193-198.

⁴⁰ *Grace for Grace* 194.

Book Review

***Singing the Gospel: Lutheran Hymns and the Success of the Reformation.* Christopher Boyd Brown. Harvard University Press, 2005, hardcover, 298 pages.**

Every so often computers will get something right. While browsing the online bookstore at Amazon.com, this particular title was suggested under "books you may also like." Not only was the topic of interest to me; I was also a little curious to see if anything truly Lutheran would come out of today's Harvard University Press.

The early Lutheran hymns are such a treasure of our heritage (as much as the Catechism itself) that it is sad to observe them at times falling to the wayside as more modern music takes its place. Not that there aren't good hymn writers today too—some just as good as Luther and his contemporaries—but we would be shallow indeed not to recognize the importance and value of those cornerstones in Lutheran church music such as Speratus' *Salvation unto Us Has Come* and Luther's *Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice*. Of the latter it has been said that this hymn has done more to spread the gospel of Christ throughout the world than all of Luther's other writings combined.

In this excellent and accessible study Christopher Boyd Brown shows how the Lutheran hymns were essential to the success of the Reformation in Germany. He clearly presents and then details two major ideas throughout the book, the first being that the song which Luther and his contemporaries brought to the

church was a type that had to this point been unknown. It was the type of song written both to *teach* and *comfort* the people. The Catholic leaders had not been particularly interested in the laity being able to study and learn the Scriptures for themselves; so they saw little need for music which would present the doctrines of the Bible in clear and memorable ways. Catholic hymns (what few there were) were typically focused on the lives of the saints, man's praise of God, or a person's subjective feelings about God. This kind of music did little to teach the range of biblical truth or to comfort the troubled soul who felt the press of guilt and sorrow.

The Lutheran hymns brought both the true gospel teaching and a powerful ability to comfort souls which had been lacking in the hymns of that time. They presented sin and grace from the fall of Adam to eternal glory in heaven, with Christ's death and resurrection at the center. Music was finally being used as a vehicle for *preaching the gospel*. This, in fact, was why the Lutheran hymns were so effective. They were not just songs *about* the good news. They *were* the good news in musical form!

The second major point made by Brown is that these hymns were not just for church. In fact, first and foremost they were intended for use in the home, and in the homes they were used. Fathers and mothers sang them to their children. Children sang them to their parents. Hymnals were sold by the thousands in many, many editions. Through this accessible music the gospel came to the homes and therefore to the hearts of the people. As it taught and comforted the households in Germany, the Spirit led the people to cling to these truths re-discovered by Luther and others, truths such as salvation by grace through faith for Christ's sake. Because these hymns were in the homes, the people learned the simple gospel and clung to it fiercely, even in the face of the Counter Reformation in the mid 1600s.

After the introductory chapter the author takes the reader on an extended case study of the town of Joachimsthal. Joachimsthal was a mining community on the other side of the Saxon border to the south of Wittenberg. At its height in 1533 it numbered some 18,000 people. Joachimsthal became a Lutheran town primarily through the music of the church. It was the hymns that made an impression on these working class folk and led the town to be a singing town. The people sang with their families. They sang in their schools. They sang in the mines. They sang "From Depths of Woe I Cry to Thee." They sang "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God." They sang the Creeds and the Commandments. They met for an hour before church to sing together. They sang the Bible, and it took its hold in the homes and in the hearts of the people.

The pastor and the cantor of the city church were especially influential in Joachimsthal during the course of the Reformation. The pastor was Johann Mathesius (1504-1565), and the cantor was Nicolas Herman (1500-1561). Herman wrote hymns and played the music. Mathesius preached on the hymns, brought them into the worship, and encouraged the people to use them in their homes. Herman's well known hymn on private confession and absolution ("Yea, as I Live, Jehovah Saith," *The Lutheran Hymnal* #331) is used in our congregations today. Another of Herman's familiar hymns is the sung Christmas gospel, "Praise God the Lord, Ye Sons of Men" (*TLH* #105).

Christopher Boyd Brown's book, *Singing the Gospel*, makes one excited to explore again the rich beauty of the gospel expressed in the Lutheran hymns and to seek ways to use this music in the home today as it was used in 16th century Germany. To this reviewer it is highly recommended reading.

-- David Schaller