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CONTENTS

SERMON FOR ADVENT – ISAIAH 7:10-14	Paul G. Fleischer
THE GIFT OF PROPHECY: A STUDY PAPER	John K. Pfeiffer
THE PASTOR AS SPIRITUAL PHYSICIAN	Stephen C.F. Kurtzahn
A STUDY OF 1 CORINTHIANS 10:14-22	John Schierenbeck
PANORAMA:	
ONCE MORE UNTO THE BREACH: WELS AND ROMANS 16:17-18	John Lau
ORDAINED WOMEN PASTORS	Robert Dommer
BOOK REVIEWS:	
A HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY IN ASIA	David Koenig
BOOKS OF INTEREST	David Lau

SERMON FOR ADVENT

Paul G. Fleischer

Text: Isaiah 7:10-14: *Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz, Ask the Lord your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights. But Ahaz said, I will not ask; I will not put the Lord to the test. Then Isaiah said, Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of men? Will you try the patience of my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.*” (NIV)

In the name of our coming Savior-King, dear fellow-redeemed:

In this meditation for Christmas Eve morning, we want to try to recapture a little bit of the true wonder of Christmas – the wonder of what it is we are planning to celebrate again this evening and tomorrow morning in our Christmas services. What is that “wonder”? The “*great and mighty wonder*” of which we shall be singing after the sermon is that “*The Word becomes incarnate.*” The Word – a name which the Bible uses for the Lord Jesus Christ, the infinite, immortal Son of God – becomes flesh and dwells among us finite, mortal creatures. As often as you and I have heard that message over the years, as often as I have preached it, do we truly grasp the wonder of it? Most likely we do not, which is why it is well for us to ponder it anew every year.

Luther is quoted as saying that “*after the article of the Trinity, the one of the incarnation of the Son of God is the sublimest*” (What Luther Says, Ewald Plass, ed. St. Louis: Concordia, 1959. I, 150). Sublime means “majestic, awe-inspiring.” Truly nothing can inspire more awe and wonder in our hearts than does the mystery of the Holy Trinity – the great three-in-one and one-in-three. If any doctrine approaches that holy wonder, it would be that the second person of the Trinity became a Man according to the divine plan of the Father, the first person in the Trinity. Says Luther again: “*Reason stumbles at this article when it tries to measure and comprehend it with its wisdom. It says: In the Godhead only one indivisible Essence exists; how, then, can the middle Person alone become Man and not all three? I would probably be as shrewd as any heretic (he says) if I wanted to criticize these words: The Word was made flesh. Here one must believe, not see, measure, or comprehend*” (WLS, I, 150). Think of it: “Here one must believe, not

see, measure, or comprehend (understand).”

Compounding and increasing the wonder of the incarnation are two other facts closely related to it. First, the reason behind it, which was and is the eternal salvation of unworthy, undeserving sinners. And secondly, the agency or instrumentality God used to bring it about! And what was that agency or instrumentality? We know and confess it as “the virgin birth.” Our sermon meditation this morning includes the classic Old Testament text which teaches the virgin birth. On the basis of this text we would focus attention upon

The Virgin Birth –A Demonstration of God’s Grace

1. The Setting of the Prophecy and the Fact of the Virgin Birth

The setting for this prophecy is not very well-known. It was spoken by Isaiah about 700 years before the birth of Christ. The king of Judah at the time was Ahaz. Ahaz was wicked and unbelieving. In fact, Ahaz had provoked the Lord to anger for promoting idolatry in the land. This caused the Lord, in turn, to raise up hostile forces to encamp against Judah. The big question was: Would Ahaz seek the Lord’s help in his need, in defense of his country? Would he put his trust in the Lord?

This is where our text comes in. To the unbelieving Ahaz God offered to give a revelation or a sign that God would deliver him and his country of Judah. The Lord told him: “Ask the Lord your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights” (v. 11), that is, on the earth or in the sky. But how did Ahaz respond? He said: “I will not ask; I will not put the Lord to the test” (v. 12). On the face of it, that sounds good. But the king is actually being hypocritical. It’s not tempting God when it is the Lord who is asking you to do something, even if it’s contrary to reason! In reality, then, by refusing to request a sign which the Lord asked him to request, Ahaz was showing a lack of faith and trust in God. And where did the king then turn, instead of to the Lord? He proceeded to make a league with another unbelieving king, the king of Assyria, thinking that would be a better way to guarantee his country’s deliverance from its enemies. In other words, Ahaz thought he had a better way than trusting in the Lord God, and it proved to be to his ruin.

“Then Isaiah said, Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of men? Will you try the patience of my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign . . .” Since Ahaz refused to ask for a sign of his own choosing that would be his guarantee of deliverance from his enemies, the Lord took over. The Lord said He would give a sign of His own choosing! This would be a sign of an even greater deliverance in the future. What was the sign? “The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.” This was a sign of something truly extraordinary, truly miraculous. It was a sign which was intended to strengthen the faith of the believing remnant who – in spite of Ahaz and his idolatry – still remained in Judah. At the same time, it was and is a sign to confirm the faith of God’s spiritual Israel, the Holy Christian Church, of all future ages. It was a promise that a virgin would give birth to a child. The sign was that a woman who had never had carnal intercourse with a man would bear a child.

“. . .And will call him Immanuel.” This statement does NOT mean that the Wonder-Child would actually have this name. By calling her child Immanuel the mother would indicate WHO He was and WHAT He was to be for all people. He would be “God with us” – God in person among us men. So who, then, is the mother and the child in whom this ancient prophesy was fulfilled? It is Mary, the virgin mother, and Jesus Christ, the virgin-born. Our Gospel reading this morning leaves no doubt when, 700 years later, speaking of the birth of Jesus, we read: “Now all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, Behold a virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel, which is translated, God with us” (Matt. 1:22-23). Each Sunday we confess in the Creed: “I believe . . . in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived of the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary . . .” We cannot “see, measure, or comprehend” this miracle. We cannot explain or understand, but we believe, simply believe, the virgin birth of the God-Man, Jesus Christ.

This Bible doctrine is one which we must firmly confess and maintain against all liberals, skeptics, and Bible doubters. Once the virgin birth of Jesus Christ is denied, the “domino theory” follows! One Bible doctrine after another falls. If Jesus is not virgin-born, then He had human parents like us and was a sinner like us. Then too He deserved to die, which means we have no Savior, for He did not rise from the dead, and neither shall we, but we are hopelessly lost forever.

Oh, fellow-believers, let us hold fast our holy faith, while keeping our human reason in subjection. Not unlike wicked King Ahaz, the unbelieving world thinks it knows better than God. Why is the virgin

birth of Christ denied by so many, even by liberal Bible scholars? Because to them if anything runs counter to scientific observation (as does any birth without a human father), it is not only improbable, but must in fact be impossible. Listen to Luther on the subject: *“In our Christian Creed we confess that Christ was conceived and became man or was incarnate, that he became a real human being by assuming a body. We confess that he assumed a genuine flesh and blood from the Virgin Mary, that He did not pass through her as the sun shines through a glass but brought her virgin flesh and blood with Him. If this had taken place only with the co-operation of Mary, the Babe would not have been pure. But though Mary has been conceived in sin, the Holy Spirit takes her flesh and blood and purifies them; and thence He creates the body of the Son of God. This is why it is said that ‘He was conceived by the Holy Ghost.’ Thus He assumed a genuine body from His mother Mary, but this body was cleansed from sin by the Holy Spirit. If this were not the case, we could not be saved”* (WLS, I, 152).

2. The Virgin Birth – A Demonstration of God’s Grace

We spoke at the beginning of the two great wonders which accompanied the wonder of the incarnation. The one was the agency or instrumentality by which God brought it about – the virgin birth. The other was the reason for which God chose to have His eternal Son become incarnate, human flesh and blood – to save sinful, fallen mankind. Here too, not unlike unbelieving King Ahaz, many question God’s ways. For example, couldn’t God have found another way to save sinners than by having His eternal Son become flesh and blood, and then dying a cruel death on a cross?

What such people fail to understand is the marvelous grace of God. Surely God COULD have found other ways to save sinners, but the divine plan from the time of the fall into sin in the Garden of Eden was that salvation would be by grace. After our first parents fell into sin, God told Satan: “I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her Seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise His heel” (Gen. 3:15). God there foretold the coming of a Deliverer, a Serpent-Crusher. This Deliverer would be a woman’s Off-spring, already implying the virgin birth of Jesus Christ, Immanuel, God with us.

Yes, if God had wanted to, He could have sent a fully-grown Messiah into the world. He could have had the prophets predict that the Savior would miraculously appear in the Temple one day. But no! God’s way was different, and it was perfect. His way was to have His unique Son dwell on earth like one of us, walking “in our shoes,” sharing our humanity, sharing our skin and bones, wrapped in diapers, and cradled in a manger. “In Christ,” writes St. Paul, “all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form” (Col. 2:9). The big difference between us and Christ was that, as the virgin-born, He lived a sinless life, and died an innocent death. The God-man bore the curse and penalty of our sin so that, by faith in Him, we might be saved. When we realize this we can only join with the Christmas angels in singing, “glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men!” (Luke 2:14).

Alas, to their own eternal hurt and ruin, many poor sinners seek to be God’s master, rejecting the “sign” first given to wicked King Ahaz in our text. Listen to one more quote of Dr. Luther. It is on the subject of the offense the incarnation and virgin birth is to mankind: *“[God] has hidden His majesty in humanity, does not appear with lightning, thunder, or angels, but as one born of a poor virgin and speaking with men of the forgiveness of sins. But this makes men mad and irrational, and they nail Him to the cross. What shall we do? If God were to come with His angels, no one could listen to Him. Now He says: I will come in a simple and humble form, in the person of a man; therefore believe Me now. But we want to hear Him still less and despise Him. We hold He should by all means come in majesty, and yet we are unable to bear Him in this form. This we CANNOT bear, and that we do not WANT to bear. When He comes as the son of a poor virgin we say: Alas, THIS is to be the Messiah?”* (WLS, I, 154).

Dear Christian friends, rather than – like King Ahaz – foolishly questioning God’s ways and methods, let us pray to see how the virgin birth demonstrates God’s wondrous grace toward otherwise lost and condemned sinners. Let us bow in humble awe and wonder before God’s gracious way of saving sinners.

A great and mighty wonder,
A full and holy cure:
The Virgin bears the Infant
With virgin honor pure!
Repeat the hymn again:
To God on high be glory

And peace on earth to men!

Since all He comes to ransom,
Be all be he adored,
The Infant born in Beth' em,
The Savior and the Lord.
Repeat the hymn again:
To God on high be glory
And peace on earth to men! (TLH 76:1 & 4)

THE GIFT OF PROPHECY: A STUDY PAPER

John K. Pfeiffer

If there is one thing that makes a seminary professor cringe, it is the voice of a former student saying, "When I was in seminary, I was taught that . . ." As often as not the professor wonders which of his colleagues taught such a thing, because it certainly wasn't he.

Therefore, I will say simply that **somewhere** I learned that the words **prophet** and **prophecy** were applicable to anyone who relays the Word of God to men, whether he received that Word directly from God (immediately: face-to-face, visions, dreams); or indirectly (mediately: through the written Word). Subsequently, I began to question this belief. Therefore, I launched into a study of the Scriptural use of these terms.

My study centered on the following Hebrew and Greek words:

נבא - to spring forth, stream forth, be poured out, bubble up; to discourse, speak, propound, announce (not used in *Kal*). — *Niphal*: to manifest oneself as a (inspired) speaker; to prophesy, announce; to sing inspired hymns, speak poems or proverbs. — *Hithpael*: to prophesy, sing, recite; to show oneself animated, excited (?).

נביא - prophet (**נביאה** - prophetess).

נבואה - prediction; prophecy.

προφητεία - (**προ**: before, forth; **φημί**: utter - speak beforehand; speak forth) something spoken before; something spoken forth; prophecy.

προφητεύω - to speak beforehand, speak forth; to prophesy.

προφήτης - one who speaks beforehand or speaks forth; prophet.

προφητικός - of or relating to prophecy; prophetic.

There are other words which also relate to the office of a prophet:

משא - a lifting up, carrying; a burden; an utterance. (A revelation is *unloaded* on a prophet and he *bears* it to the people.)

נטף - to drop, drip, flow down; *Hiph.*: cause to drop; make discourse flow; speak; prophesy.

חזח - seer (**חזח** - to split, divide; divide sharply with the eye, see; prophesy; announce oracles).

חזון - revelation, prophecy, divine communication, vision (also several related words).

ראה - seer, prophet; revelation; prophetic word (**ראה** - see, look, perceive, inspect; have a revelation).

גלה - communicate, reveal, discover (only in Daniel).

גלה - make bare, uncover; make known, reveal.

ἀποκαλύπτω - to uncover, reveal.

ἀποκαλύψις - revelation.

χρηματίζω - (to transact business; to give advice to inquirers *or* response to one consulting an oracle) impart a divine admonition, instruction *or* warning.

χρηματισμός - a divine statement *or* answer.

λόγιον - (*diminutive of λόγος*, divine response, utterance, oracle).

A separate study could be made of these terms. However, for our present purposes, I am limiting myself to a consideration of the former words, which are the specific terms referring to the office and work of a prophet.

VARIOUS VIEWS In an attempt to learn the source of my former views I looked at a number of authors. This is what I found:

Popular Commentary of the Bible, New Testament, Paul E. Kretzmann, St. Louis: Concordia, 1923, II, 147 - Quoting Martin Luther: "Prophecy is that one can interpret and explain the Scripture correctly, and therefrom, in a powerful manner, prove the doctrine of faith and overthrow false doctrine . . ."

The Greek Testament with English Notes, Rev. S. T. Bloomfield, London: Longman, Brown, Green, & Longmans, 1855, II, 98f. - Quoting Prof. Hodge on Romans 12:6: "From these (says he) and numerous similar passages it appears, that the *prophets* in the Christian Church were men who spoke under the immediate influence of the Spirit of God, and delivered some divine communication relating to doctrinal truths, to present duties, to future events, etc., as the case might be. The point of distinction between them and the *Apostles* considered as religious teachers appears to have been, — that the inspiration of the *Apostles* was *abiding* . . . whereas the inspiration of the *prophets* was *occasional* and *transient*. The latter differed again from the *teachers*, inasmuch as these were not necessarily inspired, but taught to others what they themselves had learned from the Scriptures, or from inspired men."

Matthew Henry's Commentary, New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1935, VI, np - On Romans 12:5: "It is not meant of the extraordinary gifts of foretelling things to come, but the ordinary office of preaching the word: so *propheying* is taken, 1 Cor. xiv.1-3, &c; xi.4; 1 Thess. v.20."

The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians, R. C. H. Lenski, Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1963, 503 - On 1 Corinthians 12:10: "This term is used in a double sense: broadly to indicate any and all ability to communicate the saving will of God to others so that every true teacher and preacher may be called a prophet; and more narrowly to designate the receiving and communicating of direct and specific messages from God. The apostles were prophets in both senses of the term. Their regular assistants were prophets in the former sense. Agabus, Acts 11:28; 21:10, and Philip's daughters, Acts 21:9, were prophets in the latter sense." - In his commentary on Romans (12:6), Lenski argues for his *former sense* based on the proposition that no other supernatural gifts are mentioned in this section.

The Expositor's Greek Testament, St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians, G. G. Findlay, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974, II, 888 - On 1 Corinthians 12:10: "But prophecy, while employing the *νοῦς*, has a deeper seat; it is no branch of *σοφία* or *γνώσις* as though coming by rational insight, but an *αποκάλυψις* of hidden things of God realized through a peculiar clearness and intensity of *faith* (2 Cor. iv.23f.; Heb. xi.1,13; Luke x.21f.; etc.), and is in line therefore with the miraculous powers preceding; hence 'the prophet' is regularly distinguished from 'the teacher'."

The Pulpit Commentary, vol. 43, *Romans*, Rev. J. Barmby, New York: Funk and Wagnalls Co., 344 - On Romans 12:6: "The gift of *prophecy* . . . was the gift of inspired utterance, not of necessity in the way of prediction, but also, and especially, for 'edification, and exhortation, and comfort' (1 Cor. xiv. 3), for 'convincing,' and for 'making manifest the secrets of the heart' (1 Cor. xiv. 24,25)."

An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, W. E. Vine, Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1956, III, 221 - on *προφητεία* (quoting Hogg and Vine, Notes on Thessalonians, pp. 196,197): "It is the declaration of that which cannot be known by natural means, Matt. 26:68; it is the forth-telling of the will of God, whether with reference to the past, the present, or the future, see Gen. 20:7; Deut. 18:18; Rev. 10:11; 11:13. . . . With the completion of the canon of Scripture prophecy apparently passed away, 1 Cor. 13:8,9. In his measure the teacher has taken the place of the prophet, cp. the significant change in 1 Pet. 2:1. The difference is that, whereas the message of the prophet was a direct revelation of the mind of God for the occasion, the message of the teacher is gathered from the completed revelation contained in the Scriptures."

SCRIPTURE In the Old and New Testament Scriptures there are REFERENCES many passages which use the Hebrew and Greek terms mentioned above. In my study, I eliminated those which spoke of prophecy but did not reveal the source or mode of revelation. My conclusions are based on those passages which did address the questions of source and mode.

Those passages of Scripture which reveal the source or mode of revelation might be grouped as

follows:

- A. Those which refer to specific persons.
 - 1) Persons who are called *prophets* uttered things which could not be known by normal means, even to a believer.
 - 2) They are credited with having received revelations, dreams, visions, or face-to-face meetings with God.
 - 3) They prophesied because the Spirit of God came upon them in a manner to be distinguished from His coming to create faith.
- B. Those which refer to prophets in general.
 - 1) Prophets bore messages directly from God.
 - 2) They received revelations, visions, dreams, or face-to-face meetings with God.
 - 3) They received the Spirit in a special manner.
 - 4) Their gift is distinguished from the gift of teaching.

A.1. Persons who are called *prophets* uttered things which could not be known by normal means, even to a believer.

~ **Matthew 26:68** – Those who struck the blindfolded Jesus challenged Him to determine His assailants by means of prophecy.

~ **Acts 2:30f.** – David is called a prophet because he spoke about the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

~ **Acts 21:10** – Agabus, the prophet, foretells future events.

A.2. They are credited with having received revelations, dreams, visions, or face-to-face meetings with God.

~ **Genesis 20:7** – The first man in OT Scripture to be called a prophet is Abraham (Jude does say that Enoch prophesied – v. 14). One author refers to this passage as support for his contention that OT prophets included “all classes of religious teachers” (Bloomfield). However, Abraham did receive immediate revelations from God (Gen. 12:1ff.; 15:1 - vision; 15:18ff.; 17:1ff. - appearance, etc.).

~ **Numbers 11:26ff.** – Eldad and Medad are called prophets, because the Spirit of God rested on them.

~ **Deuteronomy 18:15ff.** – God promises a prophet like Moses, who would have the words of God in his mouth. Other prophets are forbidden to speak any word that He had not commanded them to speak. As for Moses being called a prophet, we are told that God spoke with him face-to-face (Deut. 34:10).

~ **1 Samuel 3:19ff.** – Samuel was a prophet to whom the Lord revealed Himself and whose words always proved true.

~ **1 Kings 22:14** – Micaiah the prophet declared that he could speak only what the Lord said to him.

~ **2 Kings 17:13** – The Lord warned Israel through His prophets and seers. (Cf. 2 Kings 21:10; Ezra 9:10f.; Neh. 9:30; Zech. 7:7).

~ **Jeremiah 1:4ff.** – Jeremiah is appointed to be a prophet to the nations. When he doubted his ability to speak, the Lord assured him that He would tell him what to say.

~ **Ezekiel 2:1ff.** – The prophet Ezekiel heard the voice of the Lord.

A.3. They prophesied because the Spirit of God came upon them in a manner to be distinguished from His coming to create faith.

~ **Numbers 11:26ff.** – Eldad and Medad are called prophets, because the Spirit of God rested on them.

~ **1 Samuel 10:1ff.** – Saul was among the prophets and he prophesied when the Spirit of God came upon him.

~ **1 Samuel 19:20** – Saul’s messengers prophesied when the Spirit of God came upon them.

~ **Luke 1:67** – Zacharias prophesied when filled with the Spirit.

B.1. Prophets bore messages directly from God.

~ **Judges 6:8** – A prophet is sent to Israel with a communication directly from God.

~ **1 Samuel 28:6** – The Lord answers inquiries by prophets.

~ **2 Kings 17:13** – The Lord warned Israel through His prophets and seers (Cf. 2 Kings 21:10; Ezra 9:10f.; Neh. 9:30; Zech. 7:7).

~ **Jeremiah 14:14** – False prophets are described as those whom the Lord did not send nor appoint nor did He speak to them (Jer. 23:21).

~ **Jeremiah 23:37** – Israel had the right to demand that the prophets reveal what the Lord spoke to them.

~ **Amos 3:7** – The Lord revealed His secrets through prophets.

B.2. They are credited with having received revelations, visions, dreams, or face-to-face meetings with God.

~ **Exodus 7:1** – God told Moses that he would be as God to Pharaoh and Aaron would be Moses' prophet. This would tend to support the contention that prophets are so called because they received immediate revelations. As Moses' prophet, Aaron received his messages directly from the mouth of Moses.

~ **Lamentations 2:9** – Israel's prophets were denied visions (Cf. Ezek. 7:26).

~ **Acts 2:17f.** – Prophecy is mentioned with visions and dreams.

~ **1 Corinthians 14:29ff.** – Prophets received revelations (Eph. 3:3ff.).

B.3. They prophesied because the Spirit of God came upon them in a manner to be distinguished from His coming to create faith.

~ **Acts 2:18** – The Spirit empowers the prophets.

~ **Acts 19:6** – After the outpouring of the Spirit, they began to speak in tongues and to prophesy.

~ **1 Peter 1:10f.** – The Spirit predicted things by the prophets.

~ **1 Corinthians 13:8** – Prophecies, tongues, and knowledge will come to an end, i.e., the charismatic gifts.

~ **2 Peter 1:20f.** – Prophecies were made only when one was moved by the Spirit (Eph. 3:5).

B.4. Their gift is distinguished from the gift of teaching.

~ **Romans 12:6ff.** – The gift of prophecy is distinguished from the gifts of teaching and exhortation (Cf. Acts 13:1; 1 Cor. 12:28; 14:6; Eph. 4:11; 2 Pet. 2:1).

According to my study, the remaining OT and NT passages, which use the word *prophet* and related terms, do not reveal any facts regarding the source or mode of the revelation which the prophets conveyed to the people.

Having made this study, I wondered how Luther and others came to their conclusion, namely that *prophecy* refers to any proclamation of the truth, whether that truth was revealed mediately or immediately. In the books quoted above, I found that they made this claim, but I could not find any proof for the claim. Therefore, I do not know how they reached their conclusion. As for myself, I come to the following conclusions.

THE GIFT OF PROPHECY IS DISTINGUISHED FROM THE GIFT OF TEACHING.

It appears to me that Scripture distinguishes between the gift of prophecy and that of teaching, preaching, or evangelizing. In Acts 13:1 we are told that there were prophets **and** teachers in Antioch. — In Romans 12:6ff. Paul speaks of “**gifts that differ according to the grace given to us.**” Among these he lists prophecy, teaching, and exhorting. — In 1 Corinthians 12:28 Paul distinguishes between apostles, prophets, and teachers (also in 1 Cor. 14:6). — In Ephesians 4:11 Paul lists as the gifts of the ascended Lord apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. — Peter makes a distinction between prophets and teachers as he looks to the future.

While prophets were teachers, not all teachers were prophets. Similarly, the apostolic office embraced the gifts of prophecy, evangelizing, and teaching, as well as other needed gifts. Yet this in no way means that every prophet, teacher, or evangelist was also an apostle.

THE GIFT OF PROPHECY WAS REPLACED BY THE GIFT OF TEACHING.

Paul tells us that the gift of prophecy would be done away. The context seems to imply (but does not insist) that this will happen on the last day, when perfect knowledge shall be given to us. While Paul does not specify when prophecy would be done away, Peter writes, “**False prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you . . .**” (2 Pet. 2:1). This implies that the very

people to whom he was writing would see the end of the prophetic gift as it was replaced by the teaching gift. Historical records show that, with the conclusion of the Apostolic Era, the gift of prophecy disappeared.

THE GIFT OF PROPHECY REQUIRED A SPECIAL ACT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

Peter writes that **“no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God”** (2 Pet. 1:21). The prophecies of Scripture came directly from God by intercession of the Holy Spirit.

Paul verifies this when he writes that **“the mystery of Christ . . . in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit”** (Eph. 3:5).

PROPHETS RECEIVED THEIR REVELATIONS DIRECTLY FROM GOD.

The heart of prophecy was the special revelations which came directly from God. Teaching was the artery leading from the heart, conveying the revelations to the Church. This is not to say that every message delivered by the prophets came by direct revelation. However, no one could be called a *prophet* who did not receive an immediate revelation. The office of a prophet involved direct contact with God, whether face-to-face, or by an inspired revelation, or by visions, or by dreams.

THE *CHARISMA* OF PROPHECY

During the time that the NT Scriptures were taking form, God gave various *charisma* (χάρισμα: “a gift”) as signs from heaven to confirm the message delivered by His servants (Mark 16:20; Acts 19:6). With such signs and wonders God bore witness to the veracity of the message (Heb. 2:4).

Among the *charisma* was prophecy. It served the purpose of filling in the time gap between the Old and New Testament Scriptures. The OT prophecies had been fulfilled in the Christ. The NT Scriptures, which recounted the facts of the fulfillment and the teachings of Christ, were still being written. While the Church waited for the inspired record, apostles and prophets were sent among the people to relay messages from God.

However, once the Scriptures were completed, God’s revelation was also completed. There was nothing more that needed to be revealed. All that men need to know for life and salvation is found in the canon. Since the gift of prophecy was no longer needed, God no longer gave it. Thenceforth, all that was needed was teachers, who would fill their own minds and hearts with the written Word and then proclaim it to men.

It is true that since that time there have been those who claimed to have the prophetic gift. However, invariably their “prophecies” were direct contradictions of the written Word. Since these false prophets could not find any Scripture to support their errors, they had to claim the gift of prophecy. In this way their lies would appear to have some validity, at least in the eyes of the ignorant.

If, perchance, their “prophecy” agrees with what has already been written, we can only say, “Why the prophecy? Why now does God need to repeat what He has already stated?” One needs to be wary, for such “prophets” may be attempting to establish themselves within the Church, so that, once established and accepted, they can unload their errors.

It seems to me that modern claim to the gift of prophecy has as its prime purpose the undermining of the gospel itself. So it has been throughout history. — Within Catholicism the claim to special revelations from God has taken them away from the blood-bought atonement of Christ. — Within Mormonism they lay claim to the gift of prophecy, while denying the deity of Christ and His salvation by grace alone through faith alone.

Beware also millennialists who teach that the Bible is inerrant, while also declaring that the gift of prophecy is alive. This is convenient for the dispensationalists, who claim that God provided a different way of salvation during each “dispensation.” They might imagine that, following the rapture, new prophecies will reveal a different pathway to glory for those left behind, especially the Jewish nation.

It is with hearts full of gratitude that we approach the written revelation of God. Here we have something solid and unchangeable. Whenever questions arise, we can always turn to this record of the mind and heart of God to find the answers. Whenever we are confronted by those who contradict the truth, we can always turn to the Holy Writings and with them determine what is sound doctrine. Paul urged Titus

to refute the contradicters, not with his own prophecies, but with “**the faithful word**” (Titus 1:9). Whenever we begin to drift upon a sea of doubt, we can always turn to the written Word and find the immovable rock, the immutable promises and oaths of God, in which to sink the anchor of our souls. Thus our faith is reestablished upon Christ, whose salvation never changes nor fades nor flees. Just as Abraham saw Christ’s day and was glad, so until the end of time the Church will see Christ’s day and be glad. No new prophecy will be given to change this gospel, for it stands from eternity to eternity. God be praised!

THE PASTOR AS SPIRITUAL PHYSICIAN

Stephen C.F. Kurtzahn

In Acts chapter 20 the Holy Spirit records for us St. Paul’s parting words to the elders of Ephesus. Because of his eagerness to reach Jerusalem by Pentecost, Paul summoned these men to meet him at the port of Miletus. The apostle’s address is beautiful, emotional and instructional, all at the same time. We witness the love Paul had for his people. We see that he not only taught in the public worship service, but also personally in the peoples’ homes (v. 20). He declared to them the whole counsel of God (v. 27). Paul even preached with tears in his eyes when he warned of the coming judgment (v. 31). All in all, Paul was a shepherd to the Ephesians, and he wanted these elders also to “shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood” (v. 28).

Paul’s words are as applicable to pastors as they were to the Ephesian elders. We have also been called by the Holy Spirit through our congregations to be overseers. As “stewards of the mysteries of God” (1 Cor. 4:1) and dispensers of the Means of Grace, we also “shepherd” our flocks. We feed the members of our congregations food from the Word that they require at the time. Sometimes that means simple milk, at other times meat and potatoes. We may come upon sheep who need to hear only the Law in all of its fury, while others require only the peace and forgiveness of the Gospel. But generally, both Law and Gospel will be proclaimed, with the Gospel of “Jesus Christ, and Him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2) predominating our teaching and preaching. Like doctors, we mete out medicine from the Word for the spiritual ailments of our people—the most serious ailment, of course, being sin and its accompanying guilt. We can rightly say then that pastors are “spiritual physicians.”

In referring to this work of pastors, our German forebears utilized the word “*Seelsorge*”: “Another term that has become closely associated with that of shepherding is the German word *Seelsorge*, or when applied to an individual, *Privatseelsorge*. This has been translated into English as ‘the cure of souls.’ Since the translation does not carry with it the rich warmth and deep feeling of *Seelsorge*, the German expression finds frequent use in English writings. The German expression speaks of the deep concern which the pastor shows for the needs of the souls entrusted to his care. It speaks of the healing comfort and strength from God’s Word of grace that the pastor applies to souls in their need.”¹

In this paper we will follow the outline John H.C. Fritz offered in his textbook, *Pastoral Theology*, under the chapter entitled “The Cure of Souls (*Privatseelsorge*).”²

A. Pastoral Calls in General

“. . . I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house . . .” (Acts 20:20).

When we go to the doctor for a stomach ache that will not go away, we expect our physician to ask all kinds of questions and do a thorough examination before he would prescribe a treatment. A doctor who prescribed medicine or performed surgery without listening to the needs of his patients would soon lose his license to medical malpractice.

It is not different for a pastor, a physician of the soul. Listen to what Fritz says in this regard: “A pastor should be personally well acquainted with the individual members of his congregation, the children included. The pastor is a spiritual physician. He should well know each of his members, be able to diagnose any case of spiritual illness, and prescribe and apply the necessary treatment (Law and Gospel). He should study the individual church-member in reference to his character, disposition, temperament, opinions, environment, education, friends and acquaintances, occupation, business associates, poverty or wealth, special hobbies, reading, physical condition, etc.”³

How can the pastor “well know each of his members”? The answer is found in the regular visitation

of the shepherd to the homes of his sheep. Pastors should take the time to visit every one of them. Most of our congregations are not so large that a pastor cannot visit every home at least once a year. In a very large church the visits may have to be made over two or even three years. Smaller churches may have the advantage of having the pastor visit twice a year. There may be weeks when the pastor can make no general calls, because of other business that demands his attention. But there may be other weeks when he can make several.

Regular in-home visits allow members to feel comfortable with their pastor. It allows them to open up and speak to their spiritual physician about personal matters they may not want to discuss after the church service on Sunday morning. In making pastoral visits spiritual needs can be surmised by the way members interact with one another in the family, how they speak, how they live, etc. In casual conversations within the home the pastor learns quickly to “read between the lines.” This is where the old adages find application, “The true pastor finds the themes of his sermons among his people.” And, “A housegoing pastor makes a churchgoing people.”

“A record ought to be kept of calls that have been made, not only to arrive at statistical totals, but also to indicate when homes have been visited so that on subsequent rounds those who have not been visited for the longest period may be visited first. Opinions may vary as to what is to be listed as a call. A casual encounter with a member is certainly not to be considered a pastoral call. An earnest conversation on a street corner which was truly pastoral in nature might well be so listed, however. One record system provides columns for listing sick, pastoral, mission, social, and office calls. This may be as good a system as any.”⁴

The public ministry of the Word is a “people” occupation in the sense that we dispense the Means of Grace to other human beings purchased with the blood of Christ. Pastors may erroneously think they have more important matters to attend to sitting in front of their computers. Personal in-home visitations are so vitally important to the work of the ministry that if a man cannot get out of his office to visit with people face to face regularly, he should seriously consider a different vocation. This is indeed an integral part of the pastor’s call, besides preaching and teaching the Word of God and administering the sacraments: “IN EXTENDING THIS CALL TO YOU WE SOLEMNLY CHARGE YOU . . . To discharge toward all the members of our congregation(s) the functions of a pastor, that is, to watch over their souls in an evangelical manner (Acts 20:28), in particular, to visit the sick and the dying; to admonish indifferent and erring members (II Timothy 4:2); and to be ever zealous for the winning of souls for Christ’s kingdom . . .”⁵

Carrying out this solemn charge requires the regular visitation of members in their homes.

B. Visiting the Sick and the Dying

“Next to his preaching and teaching activity, the care of souls is the pastor’s most important duty, and experience teaches that a very decided proportion of this is done in the sickroom.”⁶

The importance of this aspect of *Seelsorge* is evident throughout Holy Scripture:

Matthew 25:36 “. . . I was sick, and ye visited Me . . .”

Ezekiel 34:4 “. . . The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken . . .”

James 5:14,15 “Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: and the prayer of faith shall save the sick . . .”

Isaiah 38:1 “In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death. And Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came unto him . . .”

2 Corinthians 1:3,4 “Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.”

It should not even need to be said that a pastor will always be prepared to respond to a sick call. It makes no difference whether the sick or injured member is at home or in the hospital. In cases of emergency a pastor should be ready to minister with the Word no matter what time of day or night the call might come. The pastor does not want a dying member to be without the comfort of the gospel in his last earthly moments due to his laziness or negligence.

Our members should also be trained and instructed to contact the pastor when they are sick, injured or about to undergo surgery. It can be very frustrating for a pastor to find out several weeks later that one of his parishioners underwent surgery and he was not there to comfort with the Word because he was not informed. Our people can be taught this courtesy through bulletin announcements, casual references in sermons and Bible classes, and also through personal admonitions. A person who does this once and is then

taught the importance of the Word during such a time of uncertainty will probably not do it again. We do not expect our members to inform us every time they catch a cold. But we do need to know when they are hospitalized, or about to undergo surgery (even same-day outpatient surgery), or when they contract an illness that may keep them confined to home and away from the house of God for a period of time.

Concerning the nature of the sick call we again listen to Dean Fritz: “When the pastor steps to the bedside, he should always remember the purpose for which he has come: to make, not a social call, but a pastoral call, for the purpose of looking after the spiritual welfare of the patient. Even as the physician at once proceeds to feel the patient’s pulse, take his temperature, ask a number of questions, diagnose the case, and write out his prescription or administer his remedies and, when he has done this, leaves again, so the pastor, *mutatis mutandis*, should do, too. If he does not do so, he neither serves the purpose for which he is called, nor does he leave a good impression with the sick person and members of his family.”⁷

The medicine the pastor administers is the Means of Grace, the gospel in Word and sacraments. The sick call will usually entail a brief Scripture reading, a devotional based upon the reading, and a prayer. Should the sick member desire it, the sacrament may also be administered. If the individual is a shut-in, the Lord’s Supper may be given regularly on a monthly basis. The devotion shouldn’t be too long. A pastor may use a portion of a recent sermon. His storehouse of texts to use for such calls will grow with experience and with his continued personal, devotional study of the Word. Devotions should also be prepared ahead of time. As a pastor becomes more experienced this can even be done in the car on the way to the hospital.

We like the way *The Shepherd under Christ* states the nature of the sick-room meditation: “In his devotions with the sick the pastor ought always to take the patient to the foot of the cross. He will not just tell him that because he is a child of God all is well, or that a child of God is patient. Rather, he will remind him that it was for a sinner like him that Jesus died; that the death of Jesus for him is proof that God loves him; that the Savior who loves him has promised to be with him and is leading him at all times in wisdom and love.”⁸

William Lauterbach speaks of the law and gospel presentation in this way: “After the diagnosis has exposed the nature of the malady and the remedy has been determined, the method of treatment may be decided. It would be disastrous to amputate a limb that can be restored to usefulness by proper medical treatment, and just as dangerous to allow a cancerous growth to spread when it could be removed. The humble penitent is in need of the sweet consolation of the Gospel, while the unreconciled person must be shown that the grudge which he carries in his heart is a barrier between him and heaven and must be broken down if he would find forgiveness and acceptance with God. The application of the divine Word should suit the spiritual and physical needs of the patient in order to bring the maximum benefit unto him. That thought and planning are needed is very obvious when we remember the importance of the sick call and consider our own insufficiency. Jesus knew perfectly what was in man and needed not that any should tell Him. We lack this perception and understanding and must weigh and analyze to see what is best.”⁹

There are times in dealing with the sick and the shut-in that we wonder whether the Lord’s Supper should be administered due to the communicant’s mental state. In making regular visits with our house-bound elderly members we may gradually see the onset of Alzheimer’s or dementia. When is the point reached that the sacrament should no longer be administered? This is a “judgment call” on the part of the pastor based on the inspired words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:28,29: “But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation [judgment] to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body.” When the sick or shut-in communicant can no longer examine himself and discern the Lord’s body and blood, that is, recognize he is receiving them “in with and under” the elements, he should no longer be communed. In those cases when there may be doubt, don’t do it.

A word should also be said here about the opportunities the Lord gives us for evangelism when making a sick or shut-in call, especially in a hospital or nursing home. It can be very difficult for a roommate to ignore the words of the devotion, or even the liturgy that is involved in communing the sick and shut-in. There have been several times when this writer would begin a devotion with a shut-in in a nursing home and very soon he was surrounded by a number of elderly listening from their wheel-chairs. This is just as much evangelism as knocking on doors during a neighborhood canvass or sending a missionary to a far-off land—even more so when one considers these elderly people likely have very little time left on this earth.

To conclude this section on “Visiting the Sick and the Dying” we would share these words: “As a

true shepherd of souls it is his duty to refresh and nourish the languishing members of the flock of the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ, and to lead them on the homeward way. This work of visiting the sick lacks the color of organizational activity or the drama of an elaborate building program, and it may not always rate their importance in the eyes of men; but it is the Lord's work in the fullest sense of the term, and He who has valued the human soul above all the treasures of earth will never underestimate the value or importance of ministering unto the souls of the sick. There is no more blessed work that mortal man can be engaged in than the care of souls. The fruit of such labor will cause the heavenly mansions to resound with joy."¹⁰

C. Treatment of Special Cases [now referred to in our day as "Pastoral Counseling"].

A good definition of pastoral counseling is offered in *The Shepherd under Christ*: "Pastoral counseling is that pastoral care (*Seelsorge*) of individuals as they face their problems, troubles, griefs, burdens, fears and illnesses, which involves not simply giving advice, but assisting them to find help from the Word of God. . . . This definition recognizes that counseling is a form of *Seelsorge*. This must never be forgotten."¹¹

After this writer had graduated from Immanuel Lutheran Seminary and began his work in the public ministry, he wished he had been given special training for one-on-one pastoral counseling. But after he had been in the ministry for a while it gradually dawned on him that he had been given the proper tools for this form of *Seelsorge*. We do not need to be jealous of the secular counselor. Our tools and goals are much different and much higher: "The Christian pastor's role in counseling is different from that of the psychiatrist, the clinical psychologist, the social worker or other professional counselor. First is his divine call. The pastor has a call from God to serve also in this area of counseling, an important part of pastoring the people of God entrusted to him. Secondly, as a pastor his objectives in counseling will be determined by this divine call; his objectives will be unique as they take into account his shepherding responsibilities. Finally, the tools the Lord has given the pastor make his position unique in important ways."¹²

Pastors are stewards of the mysteries of God and dispensers of the Means of Grace in behalf of the congregation. Such ministry and service is performed in the formal worship setting of the Sunday morning service, with the preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments. It is also carried out in Bible class, confirmation class and the adult information group. Dispensing the Means of Grace can also occur in the more informal settings of our members' living rooms and kitchens when we come for visits, or when we enter a hospital room for a sick call, or when a member may come to our office for a particular personal problem. All of this is *Seelsorge*, and all of this entails the proper application of law and gospel. The difficulty of pastoral counseling *per se* is the proper distinction to be made between law and gospel to an individual's personal need or problem. This requires some amount of work on the part of the pastor.

In speaking of the difference between firmness and legalism in the use of law and gospel during pastoral counseling, *The Counseling Shepherd* offers the following: "If the pastor is to be faithful to his Lord, he has no choice but to speak the truth firmly as revealed in Holy Scripture, both law and gospel. To be firm in proclaiming God's law, revealing sin for what it is as God does in Scripture, in order to prepare hearts for the message of forgiveness in Christ is not legalism. In fact, not to be firm and to tone down the law would be unevangelical, that is, would not serve Christ's saving mission at all.

"To continue to proclaim the law to a person already crushed by guilt and sin, while withholding even temporarily the comfort of forgiveness, is spiritual tyranny and a gross misuse of the law.

"To be firm in proclaiming the gospel as grace and grace alone, not allowing any place for human works as a means to merit God's salvation, is required by the very nature of the gospel. 'If by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace' (Ro 11:6).

"To use law, also the law revealed in Scripture, in order to effect change in a Christian's life without the motivation of the gospel is a pagan use of law and nothing but legalism. In his various letters St. Paul shows how to provide the proper motivation.

"To add to the moral law and impose doctrines of men upon God's people as necessary for salvation is to make them servants of men and is legalism.

"In summary, law and gospel must be used for the purposes God reveals in Scripture. Use the law to reveal sin and as a guide for Christian living. Use the gospel to show the way of salvation and motivate the Christian's life. That is evangelical practice in the scriptural sense. To confuse law and gospel will lead to legalism. To be firm in the right use of each is not the same as the firmness often associated with legalism. The latter must be avoided. The former is called for by Scripture."¹³

God comes to us in His grace, mercy and forgiveness through the gospel. We can approach God with all of our concerns as well as thanksgivings through prayer. It need not even be said that pastors

should pray for their congregations corporately and also for the members individually on a regular basis. How many of us pray with our membership list in front of us? We cannot overemphasize the importance of prayer before a home visit, a hospital call or a counseling session. With our members it is important to begin and end the counseling sessions with prayer (“*ex corde*,” as one of our sainted professors would emphasize). We remind you of the Pastor’s Daily Prayer in The Lutheran Agenda that might be used on at least a weekly basis in the privacy of our office.

Concerning the importance of prayer in *Seelsorge* we read: “So it is not only in connection with his sermon work that a pastor needs to cultivate fervent and frequent prayer for the Lord’s blessing. He will also need to ask for the Lord’s guidance in the care of souls committed to his care by the Lord. It will be his experience that the Lord does hear and guide him. As he does his work, relying on the Lord’s help, he will have frequent occasion to offer up for his congregation and its individual members prayers of thanksgiving similar to those found so frequently in the epistles of St. Paul.”¹⁴

We would like to end this paper where we began. Like doctors, pastors mete out medicine from the Word of God for the spiritual ailments of our people—the most serious ailment, of course, being sin and its accompanying guilt. We distribute the Word in both law and gospel, but with the gospel having the pre-eminence. As we do so we can rightly say that pastors are “spiritual physicians.”

NOTES

¹ Armin W. Schuetze and Irwin J. Habeck, *The Shepherd under Christ* (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1974) 179.

² John H. C. Fritz, *Pastoral Theology* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1945).

³ Fritz 173.

⁴ Schuetze-Habeck 141.

⁵ Diploma of Vocation, Church of the Lutheran Confession.

⁶ William A. Lauterbach, *Ministering to the Sick* (St. Louis, Concordia, 1955) 3.

⁷ Fritz 178.

⁸ Schuetze-Habeck 154.

⁹ Lauterbach 16.

¹⁰ Lauterbach 4.

¹¹ Schuetze-Habeck 181.

¹² Armin W. Schuetze and Frederick A. Matzke, *The Counseling Shepherd* (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1988) 1. This is a volume every one of our pastors should have in his personal library. Not only does the book remind us of our unique call, objectives, and tools (the Means of Grace) for pastoral counseling, but it also offers concrete suggestions on how to approach common counseling situations. The book stresses the importance of the “pre-interview assessment” and the “initial interview.” These two steps provide the pastor the opportunity to prepare for the proper application of law and gospel. In this regard we would remind our pastors of the importance of regularly (every year or so) reviewing for themselves Dr. C. F. W. Walther’s book, *The Proper Distinction between Law and Gospel*.

¹³ Schuetze-Matzke 32-33.

¹⁴ Schuetze-Habeck 138.

A STUDY OF 1 CORINTHIANS 10:14-22 WITH SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON “WE WHO ARE ONE BODY”*

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The Lutheran Church is a “Means of Grace” church. Therefore, the Lutheran Church is a sacramental church emphasizing and treasuring the sacraments - the Lord’s Supper and Baptism. The sacraments are means of grace by which Christ through visible means gives His people the forgiveness of sins. Most churches today, especially the evangelical and fundamentalist churches, reject both Baptism and the Lord’s Supper as means by which God gives to people the forgiveness of sins. They have turned both

Baptism and the Lord's Supper into ritual that man does for God.

One of the biggest obstacles to visitors who attend our services is our practice of close or closed communion. [Some might maintain that the term "close" communion is a result of politically correct speech. However, in connection with 1 Corinthians 10, I believe that "close" communion stresses the heart and center of God's words regarding the participation involved in communion.] Who of us as pastors does not dread having a person outside our fellowship come forward to the altar to participate in communion? Nothing turns off visitors faster than the feeling of not being allowed to participate in our communion celebration. People do not understand the practice of close communion.

Some reasons for this problem with "close communion" include:

- ∪ *The historical struggle within American Lutheranism regarding "pulpit" and "altar" fellowship.* In the middle 1800's, American Lutheranism became divided over the so-called four points: 1) the lodge; 2) the millennium; 3) whether non-Lutherans were permitted to commune at Lutheran altars; and 4) whether non-Lutheran pastors were permitted to preach in Lutheran pulpits. These are lines that have become blurred as most Lutheran churches today practice some type of open communion.
- ◆ *The lack of understanding about fellowship principles and a failure to appreciate the need to make a clear confession of what is believed and taught by a church and congregation.* The entire idea of participating in what a church teaches and believes by participation in worship and communion is as foreign as "grits" to a person of Northern extraction. The emphasis today is on the individual and not on the corporate body. The entire concept of fellowship and avoiding those teaching contrary to His word is not even considered, much less debated.
- ∪ *The growing idea that "I" have the right to participate in the Lord's Supper wherever and whenever "I" wish.* It is not popular to speak of the church as being responsible for those who partake of the body and blood of Christ at its altar. People today feel that no congregation has the right to deny them communion.
- ∪ *A reformed influence that does not recognize the sacraments as means of grace.* Many churches do not believe in or teach the "real presence." We believe and teach, especially in connection with 1 Corinthians 10 and 11, that Jesus' body and blood are truly present in the bread and wine and received by all communicants.
- ∪ *The strong feeling that to deny someone access to the Lord's Supper is to question his or her faith.* People get the impression, rightly or wrongly, that the church is questioning the legitimacy of their faith. This is especially true of visitors who attend services for a longer period of time.
- ∪ *The fact that membership is in an **outward organization**.* Since we live in this world, we have to operate under organizational boundaries. We need constantly to remember that the Church is the sum total of believers, which is known only to God. Nevertheless, sometimes as pastors we find ourselves giving communion to the weak member who attends church occasionally and does not show much interest in the word of God, while simultaneously denying communion to the person who regularly attends church and Bible class, but who is not a member of the congregation. Perhaps part of the answer is, as pastors and congregations, to take more seriously the commitment involved in membership.
- ∪ *The intimate expression of fellowship in communion.* Our history emphasizes the unit concept of fellowship. However, there are certain aspects of fellowship that communicate a oneness of faith and teaching more emphatically than others. For instance, the early church permitted converts to participate in the service but then asked them to leave when communion began. American Lutheranism debated "pulpit" and "altar" fellowship because they were at the heart of confessional oneness. We do not practice "close" prayer or "close" hymn singing in our services by putting a notice in the bulletin that those who are not members are asked not to pray or sing with us. Communion is at the heart and center of our confession of oneness with others.
- ∪ *The basis for defending close communion.* It is not enough simply to declare that this is our fellowship principle. It is important that we go back to Scripture to learn why the organized church since Christ has practiced "close" communion. The key to this understanding is found in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians.

1 CORINTHIANS AND COMMUNION

The account of the institution of the Lord's Supper is found in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. The Apostle John who records in detail the last words of Jesus to His disciples does not include the institution of the Lord's Supper. This covenant meal of the New Testament has its roots in the Passover, the covenant meal of the Old Testament. From the Passover meal celebrated with His disciples, Jesus took the unleavened bread and "cup of Thanksgiving." He gave the bread and wine only to His disciples to eat and to drink in remembrance of Him and His death at the cross for the sins of the world.

It is significant that the Apostle Paul has the most to say about the Lord's Supper in his first letter to the Corinthians. Paul wrote First Corinthians to a congregation that was split into factions over his ministry, and in the name of love and freedom tolerated a man living with his father's wife. This was a congregation threatened by immorality and idolatry. The theme for this letter is set forth in 1 Corinthians 1:10, "Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment." In chapter 10 the Apostle warns the Corinthians to "flee from idolatry." It is significant that the Apostle Paul uses communion as the fulcrum for this admonition because of the "sharing" exhibited in the Lord's Supper.

The key word in this section is "*koinonia*," meaning "association, communion, fellowship, close relationship," also "participation or sharing in something." This is the word translated as "communion" or "union with" something.

There is communion or sharing between the cup of blessing and the blood of Christ and a sharing between the bread and body of Christ. "Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ?" (1 Cor. 10:16). It is amazing that the NIV Study Bible comments: "A memorial symbol of fellowship with the crucified Christ, not a literal drinking of his blood." The text clearly does not speak of the Reformed symbolic view of the Lord's Supper nor the Catholic view of transubstantiation. This verse clearly establishes the real presence of Jesus' body and blood in, with, and under the bread and the wine. When a person partakes of the cup of blessing and the bread, he shares the blood and body of Christ. Consequently the Apostle warns that "whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord" (1 Cor. 11:27).

This is a fellowship meal. This participation with the blood and body of Christ brings us into a close, personal relationship with Jesus. Jesus comes to His people and, through His body and blood, brings to remembrance the cross and His death for the forgiveness of our sins.

WE ARE ONE BODY

Paul tells us that there is also a horizontal participation in the Lord's Supper. Communion expresses the unity of the body of Christ, the Church. "Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Cor. 10:17). The Lord's Supper is an expression of oneness as symbolized by the one bread of which we all partake. Partaking of the Lord's Supper brings us into fellowship and sharing with all who eat and drink with us in this sacrament.

Paul goes on to use this "fellowship" principle of communion to warn the Corinthians about participating in the meals associated with idol worship in Corinth. Paul warns that when a person eats meat in connection with temple feasts, he becomes "a participant" with idols. Participation involves identification. This is a difficult concept for people today, although one may see it reflected when a politician gives up membership in an all-white golf club because that membership infers endorsement of the policies of that country club.

Participation at an altar involves identification with what that altar represents. When the people of Israel ate part of the sacrifice at the altar, they participated in the worship of God at that altar. "You are not allowed to eat within your gates the tithe of your grain or new wine or oil, or the firstborn of your herd or flock, or any of your votive offerings which you vow, or your freewill offerings, or the contribution of your hand. But you shall eat them before the LORD your God in the place which the LORD your God will choose, you and your son and daughter, and your male and female servants, and the Levite who is within your gates; and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God in all your undertakings" (Deut. 12:17-18).

There is a mutual exclusiveness involved in partaking of communion. "You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons" (1 Cor. 10:21). This was the application that Paul made to the Corinthians because of the danger of idolatry in Corinth and the very real question of eating meat sacrificed to idols. The principle is clear. **When you**

partake of the Lord's Supper at an altar, you share in what that altar teaches and confesses. Applying this principle of participation only to pagan idol feasts would be incomplete.

Paul, first of all, approaches the question of partaking at an altar from the viewpoint of the believer. You would not want to be identified with an idol by partaking of the feast offered to the idol. You would not want to be identified by partaking of communion with a congregation that denies the resurrection of Jesus or does not follow Jesus' words regarding abortion or baptism or conversion. If you partake of communion at that altar, you participate in what that church believes and teaches. The point of chapter 11 is that the divisions and factions in Corinth were making a mockery of the "one bread" concept of the Lord's Supper.

When God tells us to avoid "those teaching contrary to his word," He means it. The question today is not the application of participating at an idol feast. Rather it is the principle that participation in communion at an altar involves us in participation and sharing what is taught and practiced at that altar. In 1 Corinthians 10, communion became the line that separated the Christian from participation at a false altar.

Later in chapter 11, the Apostle approaches this subject from the viewpoint of the congregation. He upbraids the congregation at Corinth because it did not police itself in correcting the abuses occurring in connection with the celebration of the Lord's Supper. The congregation was responsible for allowing people to partake of the sacrament in an unworthy manner. "But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged" (1 Cor. 11:31). It is not right, as an ALC pastor remarked to me, to offer the Lord's Supper to everyone and make the individual responsible for partaking of the Lord's Supper in a worthy and God-pleasing manner. The congregation cannot, like Pilate, wash their hands of responsibility for those who partake of the Lord's Supper at their altar.

"Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Cor. 10:17). In the context of this chapter, these words refer to more than the unity Christ has created in the "Una Sancta," the Holy Christian Church. Those who partake together at the altar of the one bread confess a unity of belief and teaching and practice. This is also brought out in the description of the church in Jerusalem at Pentecost, "They were continually devoting themselves to the **apostles' teaching and to fellowship**, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (Acts 2:42). Participation in the bread and wine involves a participation in the teaching of that church. Partaking of the one loaf of bread is a participation in what that altar or church teaches and believes. Differences in doctrine and teaching are a contradiction of the unity that should be confessed at the communion table. Communion exhibits a oneness among those who commune together. This is a precious unity which those who partake together of the one bread should treasure and take seriously.

OUR COMMUNION PRACTICE

We practice what is called close communion. While Jesus commands that the gospel is to be preached to "all nations" (Matt. 28:18-20), Jesus does place certain restrictions on who is to partake of the Lord's Supper. Jesus promises that "he who believes and is baptized will be saved." Thus, we speak of the need for an "emergency Baptism." The Bible does not speak of communion as necessary for salvation. There are times when a person cannot partake of communion. The Lord's Supper is a unique means of grace.

According to 1 Corinthians 11:28, "A man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup." In order to examine himself, a person needs to know that he is a sinner; he needs to know that Jesus died for his sins; and he needs to realize that he is partaking of the body and blood of Christ. The Lutheran Church baptizes babies but does not give communion until after confirmation. It is realized that a period of instruction is necessary before a person is able to examine himself. We also do not give the Lord's Supper to someone who is unconscious or who is not able to use his mental faculties to examine himself.

Giving the Lord's Supper to someone who does not believe in the real presence of Jesus' body and blood in this sacrament would not only be wrong but would also be to the person's judgment. "For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly" (1 Cor. 11:29). It would be a denial of the essence of the sacrament to give the Lord's Supper to someone who does not recognize or believe that he is receiving the true body and true blood of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins. This would be a gross contradiction and harmful to the individual.

"Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be

guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord” (1 Cor. 11:27). The congregation is to take steps to see that no one partakes of the Lord’s Supper in an unworthy manner. This would include the person who does not believe or who mocks the Lord’s Supper. It would include, for example, the couple living together and thinking that this right in the sight of God. Whoever eats and drinks without recognizing the body of Christ, brings God’s judgment on himself. This is an important consideration for the pastor and the congregation.

The Biblical principle of fellowship especially applies to communion. Members of a fellowship are to continue in the Apostle’s doctrine. The Lord’s Supper is an intimate expression of the fact that we are “one bread.” At the same time, God commands us to avoid all teaching contrary to His word. We can only recognize our oneness on the basis of the confession of our lips and our actions. By communing at a congregation’s altar, you are saying, “I agree with what this church teaches and practices.” I do not know if the Corinthian congregation had a formal membership list or not, but the principles of agreement in doctrine and life were a part of the early church’s life and were to be reflected in their communion practice (1 Cor. 11).

PRACTICAL PROBLEMS

How do we inform visitors of our communion practice without unduly giving them the wrong impression of our theology? Many congregations use a pre-communion registration, either in person or by card. The most common method is through an announcement in the bulletin that is repeated by the pastor during the service. Some of these announcements give the impression that, by meeting with the pastor before the service, a person could partake of the Lord’s Supper with us. The bulletin announcement should seek to stress that our communion practice is not only based on a oneness of faith that is only known to God, but also is based upon a oneness in belief and teaching. This then is tied to the fact that this confession is made in connection with one’s membership in the congregation. The problem is that people do not feel that membership in a different church with a different confession is an impediment to their partaking of communion at our altar.

Principle should not be deduced from exceptions. I once gave the Lord’s Supper to someone who was dying, without going through the formal process of instruction and membership. This was a person who was not a member of another church. She confessed her faith in Jesus and accepted Scriptural doctrine as far as could be determined. She requested the Lord’s Supper the day before she died. However, it undermines the principle to invoke the Missouri Synod’s “grandmother” exception. The thought is that it would do more harm than good to deny communion to someone’s ELCA grandmother who was visiting. Armin Schuetze in the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* makes a strange reference to giving **private** communion to a person whose true confession of Christ we recognize if we realize that his membership in an erring church body is a weakness in understanding. He speaks of the bed-ridden Missouri Synod parent who is not aware of the doctrinal problems within the Missouri Synod and desires the comfort of the Lord’s Supper. I do not believe that the private nature of the situation changes the principle of fellowship. It would be better to find a Missouri Synod pastor to give this person communion.

CONCLUSION

The Lord’s Supper is a comforting expression of God’s grace and a tremendous affirmation of God’s forgiveness to us on a personal level. Jesus gives to each of us His body and blood in communion with the bread and wine in this meal. There is no more intimate and personal assurance of forgiveness than when we receive the body and blood of Jesus in communion.

Jesus also brings a mutual strengthening of faith by stressing the unity we have with each other. We celebrate this unity as we partake together of that one bread. Perhaps we take for granted the blessings of this unity in our circles. Because of our practice of close communion, we do not experience the discord of celebrating communion with those who favor abortion; with those who deny the inerrancy of the Scripture; with those who do not believe in infant Baptism; with those who deny the real presence of Jesus in the Lord’s Supper; with those who are living in open sin. Communion is a participation with Christ’s body and blood. Communion is also a participation with each other as we partake together of that one bread. There is a very real positive side to the Scriptural practice of close communion as reflected in 1 Corinthians 10 and 11.

May God bestow on us His grace and favor

To please Him with our behavior
**And live together here in love and union,
Cherishing our blest Communion.**
O Lord, have mercy!
Let not our good Spirit forsake us;
Grant that heav'nly-minded He make us;
**Give Your Church, Lord, to see
Days of peace and unity.**
O Lord, have mercy!

– Martin Luther (*Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal*, #317:3)

P A N O R A M A

Once More unto the Breach: WELS and Romans 16:17-18.

We trust that the reference to Shakespeare's Henry V in the title above will be pardoned by our readers, but there are times when William How's phrase, "the warfare long" (TLH 463), strikes home more strongly than usual. However, two recent publications from the pen of Professor John Brug of the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (WELS) require a response, since his articles present a denial that a doctrinal difference has existed (and still exists) between the WELS and the CLC in regard to termination of fellowship on the basis of Romans 16:17-18.

The first article by Professor Brug to come to our attention was published in the Fall 1996 issue of the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* (Vol. 93, No. 4, 293-296), titled "Doctrine and Practice." The second is Chapter 9, "The Split between WELS and the CLC Concerning Church Fellowship," in a new book in the People's Bible Teachings series (John F. Brug, *Church Fellowship: Working Together for the Truth*, Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1996, 87-97). Since both of these statements present virtually the same argumentation, we will deal with them together.

In the most recent discussions between representatives of the WELS and the CLC (1987-1990), the following statement was accepted by both sides:

Admonition continues until the erring individual or group either repents of its error and turns away from it or until it shows itself to be persistent in its error by adhering to it in its public doctrine and practice, by demanding recognition for it, or by making propaganda for it and trying to persuade others of it.

This, then, according to Professor Brug, satisfied the WELS representatives and their suspicions that the CLC refused to admonish brethren who had fallen into error were allayed.

On their part, the CLC representatives (again according to Professor Brug) were satisfied with an acceptance by the WELS representatives of a statement that "the imperative *ekkline* calls for a clean break of fellowship with those who persistently adhere to error. ... We reject the view that the decision to continue or discontinue admonition and proceed to avoid is made on the basis of a subjective human judgment or conjecture about the possible outcome of the admonition. ... We reject the view that permits the use of human judgment to prolong fellowship with persistent errorists as contrary to Scripture."

These statements, accepted as they were by both sides, should have settled the differences satisfactorily, Professor Brug assumes. Why, he asks, do CLC writers and conventions declare that a doctrinal difference has existed and still exists between the CLC and the WELS? We will try to answer his question.

First of all, it is necessary to recall that the 1987-1990 series of meetings, as well as those taking place in the 1970s, took place only between representatives of the church bodies; although official to a degree, theses accepted by the representatives remained only that until and unless they were also accepted by the bodies they represented. Unfortunately, in this writer's opinion (expressed at the time also!), it was agreed by the representatives that papers and theses should not be published at the time. Consequently, lay and pastoral members of both church bodies were unable to be informed and had to be satisfied with

general statements of “progress” which turned out to be unintentionally deceptive. The outcome of the meetings, therefore, has never been more than a discussion among representatives; their theses and other doctrinal statements have never been accepted by either church body in an official way. The mere fact, then, that the subsequent acceptance of theses by the representatives “led the WELS Commission on Inter-Church Relations to conclude that there was no difference of doctrine between the WELS and CLC” (WLQ 294) does not establish that there is no difference; the conclusion was premature.

The cause of the apparent agreement on the use of admonition is that the two sides differ on who the recipient of the admonition is. It is apparent from the paper on Romans 16:17-18 delivered by Professor A. Panning (former president of the WELS seminary) that within the WELS it is held that the objects of *skopein* are understood not as actual causers of divisions and offenses who must forthwith be avoided, but, rather, as potential causers whose true status must be determined through a change or lack of it (Cf. *Journal of Theology*, September 1996, 50). For the WELS, then, Romans 16:17-18 may be applied to weak brethren. Within the CLC it is taught that *skopein* has as objects only those who in an on-going way are in fact causing (*poiountas*) divisions and offenses contrary to the true doctrine. Of course, one Christian admonishes another Christian who has through weakness or unclarity of speech made an error in doctrine or practice. He does not immediately watch out for him as a causer of divisions, however; that would be a premature judgment. The one to watch out for (*skopein*) is the one who holds to an error in doctrine and/or practice in an on-going way. When such a person is noted, right then is the time to obey *ekklinete*, avoid! This is what the CLC representatives were declaring in the statement on admonition.

How can we of the CLC know what the WELS understands by the same statement, or, for that matter, the other statements cited above? When the WELS representatives approved the statement, “The imperative *ekklinete* calls for a clean break of fellowship with those who persistently adhere to error. When it has been ascertained that a person or church body is causing divisions and offenses ... by teaching contrary to Holy Scriptures, the directive to avoid is as binding as any word addressed to us by our Savior in his Holy Word,” they were accusing the WELS itself of disobedience to Romans 16:17-18. In its 1955 convention the WELS unanimously declared that “The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod has by its official resolutions, policies, and practices created divisions and offenses both in her own body and in the entire Synodical Conference” (1955 WELS Proceedings), and then did not follow the directive to avoid. We note that the unanimous declaration of the WELS was identified as the Preamble (pre-amble); thus they adopted the “pre-” but not the “amble”; in other words, they “talked the talk but did not walk the walk,” as the expression has it.

Interestingly, Professor Brug certainly practices *Leisetreten* when in his book he writes of this 1955 resolution: “The convention unanimously adopted a preamble that rebuked Missouri’s unionism and declared it to be the cause for a break in relations,” which, then, the WELS refused to carry out. “Rebuked Missouri’s unionism”? No, it declared in plain language that the LCMS “... has created divisions and offenses.”

Furthermore, when the WELS representatives approved the statement, “Pleading a debt of love dare not serve as an excuse for putting off a break of fellowship with those who have shown themselves to be not weak brethren but persistent errorists,” again they were at least casting a shadow of doubt over the validity of the 1955 resolution (not the preamble) not to break fellowship with the LCMS. We quote from the WELS *Post-Convention News Bulletin* of 1955: “Agreement on the fact that Romans 16:17-18 applied to the situation in the Missouri Synod was almost unanimous.” (The record indicates that the vote was unanimous.- J.L.) “The divisions and offenses are clear. There was an honest difference of opinion on whether it was necessary to break relations completely with the Missouri Synod now or whether we, in the words of our President, ‘still have an unpaid debt of love to those whose fellowship we have cherished so many years.’ The body, by a vote of two to one, decided to wait a year.” (Emphasis in the original. - J.L.) In speaking of the choice between breaking fellowship or remaining in fellowship because of an “unpaid debt of love” as “an honest difference of opinion,” the WELS is denying the clarity of Scripture.

Again, when the WELS representatives accepted the statement, “We reject the view that the decision to continue or discontinue admonition and proceed to avoid is to be made on the basis of a subjective human judgment or conjecture about the possible outcome of the admonition,” they seem to be denying or rejecting the statement adopted by the WELS in its 1959 convention: “Termination of church fellowship is called for when you have reached the conviction that admonition is of no further avail and that the erring brother or church body demands recognition of its error” (1959 WELS Proceedings).

In each of these three instances, then, it appears that the WELS representatives disavowed or denied former convention-adopted, official pronouncements of that church body. Yet, they also seem to believe

that they did not do so. First, on the one hand, they have clearly accepted statements which are in plain and direct disagreement with their former doctrinal statements. Yet, on the other hand, they also state that they do not believe that the disagreement between the WELS and the CLC was ever a doctrinal disagreement! Which of these views do these representatives actually hold, and, more importantly, which does the WELS itself hold? Secondly, when the CLC representatives requested that the theses of apparent agreement should be preceded, before final adoption, by a formal declaration of repudiation of official WELS/ELS statements which the CLC holds to be doctrinally incorrect (and which the WELS representatives also seemed to hold, by their acceptance of the theses, as doctrinally incorrect), the request was not honored. Instead, it was proposed by the WELS representatives that a weak and innocuously worded preamble such as the following might be acceptable: "This Joint Statement, therefore, when accepted by our three church bodies, supersedes any and every previous statement that might be or might appear to be in conflict with this document. Any and all such conflicting or possibly conflicting statements are herewith disavowed" (Emphasis added).

Church history has surely established the wholesome benefit of a clear and unequivocal repudiation of error in the very documents (*ipsis verbis*) when attempts are being made to reconcile differences. The WELS itself followed such an approach when it was dealing with the LCMS back in the 1940s and 1950s over the so-called Common Confession. Merely no longer discussing the very statements that brought about the separation between the WELS and the CLC will accomplish only confusion. The preamble proposed by the WELS representatives speaks of superseding prior statements that might be or might appear to be or might possibly be in conflict with the accepted theses. In former times that would not have been acceptable for the WELS either.

Everyone is familiar with the old saying: "What you do speaks so loudly that I cannot hear what you say." It seems quite evident to this writer that the CLC is receiving a very unclear message from the WELS, to say the least. There are times, such as in the last series of meetings between WELS and CLC representatives, that we seem to be speaking the same language. But then we take note of things that the WELS does, and we are dismayed. Cases in point: leadership meetings paid for by unionistic fraternal insurance companies in which there is joint activity which can by no stretch of the imagination be called "cooperation in externals." (It would do the WELS good to listen to words about that from their former seminary president, Carl Lawrenz.); a worship conference in which religious instruction is brought not only by men but also by women who are not in fellowship with the WELS; and membership by WELS members in Lutheran Brotherhood (LB) and Aid Association for Lutherans (AAL), which involves WELS members in financial support of religious and theological programs of church bodies with which the WELS is not in fellowship; that, plainly, is unionism. Of course, the financial benefit to the WELS through such membership must be great. One can hardly read a single copy of the *Northwestern Lutheran* without learning of such benefit. The current issue (December 1996) in its "News around WELS" section (p. 22) reports: "Through AAL's 1996 Network Grants Program the Commission on Youth Discipleship received \$15,000 in support of Lutheran Outdoor Ministries." Can the WELS possibly regard that as "externals"? There are also documented cases within the WELS of "enthusiasm" (confessional term) in the form of "church growth" practices.

These practices (what the WELS does) do tell us that the present-day application of Romans 16:17-18 on the part of the WELS is much different from what it was in the years when we were all in fellowship together. For that reason we are following today, in relation to the past discussions with the WELS, what we resolved in convention in 1992:

"1) We affirm that ever since the formation of the CLC in 1960 there has been a doctrinal difference between the CLC and the WELS/ELS on the matter of termination of fellowship with church bodies that have become causers of divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which we have learned, cf. Romans 16:17-18.

"2) We are convinced by Scripture (Galatians 5:9; 1 Thessalonians 5:21-22) that in order to resolve doctrinal differences it is necessary that previous official false statements and actions be clearly rejected. This conviction is reinforced by a study of church history.

"3) Since in the correspondence of the past biennium the representatives of the WELS/ELS have refused to acknowledge up to this point that this difference which separates us is a matter of doctrine, we urge the Board of Doctrine to terminate the present discussions with the representatives of the WELS/ELS, unless such discussions address this specific doctrinal difference from the outset.

"4) We encourage all members of the CLC to study the 'Theses and Antitheses on the Role of Admonition in the Termination of Fellowship with Church Bodies' (Revised by the Board of Doctrine,

February, 1990) and to restudy the pamphlet entitled 'There is Still a Difference' 1982, in order to gain a better understanding of this doctrinal difference.

"5) We thank our Lord for giving us the opportunity both to study God's Word and to give testimony in this area of the doctrine of church fellowship. We pray that the Holy Spirit will use His Word and this testimony to accomplish His will to the glory of God and His saving Gospel" (1992 CLC Proceedings).

– John Lau

NOTES

1. In his book Professor Brug refers to an interpretation, by the present writer, of the WELS termination resolution as a "distortion" of their position. The interpretation was presented in an essay addressed to the 1994 CLC convention as one of three on the general subject: "A Call to Recommitment." The topic of this particular essay was "We Recommit Ourselves to Hold Fast to Sound Doctrine" (Cf. *Journal of Theology*, December 1994, 23-35). The statement Professor Brug questions is as follows: "It is wrong to avoid in this way only when we come to some sort of subjective judgment that admonition will never be heeded (as the WELS and ELS falsely teach), for that judgment is not in our power to make (only God reads the heart)." Perhaps Professor Brug does not agree with the statement which the WELS representatives accepted in their meetings with CLC representatives: "We reject the view that the decision to continue or discontinue admonition and proceed to avoid is to be made on the basis of a subjective human judgment or conjecture about the possible outcome of the admonition." At any rate, his exception is chiefly to the word "never."

In an effort to see whether or not the WELS position has been distorted, let us review their 1959 statement once more, adding some emphasis: "Termination of church fellowship is called for when you have reached the conviction that admonition is of no further avail." Words do convey meaning, and readers of them have a perfect right to regard those meanings as intended by the writer(s). The subjective nature of the conviction referred to is clearly indicated by the pronoun "you." It indicates, then, that the decision as to whether or not to break fellowship depends upon your having reached a conviction, and, therefore, not upon objective facts. The word "conviction" should mean a strong belief in which the individual is absolutely convinced. (This word, however, has held an unclear position in WELS in regard to this controversy. For example, the record shows that the WELS committee on church union was unanimously of the conviction that the WELS should break fellowship with the LCMS at the 1955 convention. Yet some committee members changed their minds rather quickly.) The purpose of admonition, in this context, is that it be followed by a change in the receiver of the admonition; that is the avail that is hoped for, namely that the admonition will be heeded. When one speaks, then, of "further" avail, one is speaking of such heeding at some future time (that's what "further" means). The WELS statement declares that one must come to the conviction that admonition, since it is not of present "avail" (i.e., is not being heeded), is also of no "further" (i.e., subsequent, later, or at any time in the future) use or "avail." If the WELS statement was intended to say, as Professor Brug interprets it, "... we must determine whether our admonition has been heard and rejected before we break fellowship," and only that, it would be adequate only if admonition is the means by which the actual causing (*poiountas*) of divisions and offenses is revealed (because the basis for a termination of fellowship is the causing of divisions and offenses in an on-going way, not the possible result of admonition). Also, if the WELS wanted to say what Professor Brug feels they meant to say, they surely were capable of doing so. To this writer, "no further avail" means, simply, "no avail ever." There was no intent to distort.

2. We in the CLC have held that the WELS at one time was also convinced that it was a doctrinal difference that separated us. The proof for this is found in a portion of a resolution adopted by the WELS in its 1973 convention, summing up what WELS representatives concluded after a meeting between WELS and CLC representatives at that time: "... be it resolved, a) That we express regret over the failure at that meeting to reach agreement on the doctrine under discussion." Now, in his book Professor Brug explains that in this way: "(A 1973 WELS convention resolution referring to a 'doctrinal difference' was an anomaly since it did not accurately reflect the wording of the report submitted by the WELS commission that had met with the CLC.) The CLC, however, has continued to claim that a difference in doctrine divided the two synods" (p. 92). This is another instance of the difficulties in dealing with the WELS. We have consistently attempted to keep our attention focused on official resolutions of the WELS in attempting to determine its doctrinal position. It is, after all, the official resolutions that express the will of a church

body. If a convention resolution can be successfully challenged as erroneous, it takes a convention to change it! Calling a convention resolution an anomaly does not change it, even if evidence is presented, which Professor Brug did not do in his book. As for the present writer, he is content to let the record stand.

ORDAINED WOMEN PASTORS?*

* The quoted portion of this article was printed in the August 1996 issue (No. 202) of *Information*, published by the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany.

In an effort to defend the ordination of women into the ministry, a leader in the German church by the name of Hans-Dieter Wille, from Stuttgart, declared that **“only on the basis of a legalistic understanding of the Bible according to which the sayings of the Apostle Paul are viewed as norms that are valid for all time,”** could a theologically-founded consideration of the changed position of the woman in society be rejected. The ordination of women, he declared, is founded on the **“totality of Scripture”** and in the **“middle of the biblical witness”** (Scripture interprets itself). In response to this, Dr. H. L. Poetsch writes (freely translated):

“Here we see happen again what we unfortunately often experience with theological statements, namely, that a theological argument is rejected because it is placed on a false level. In this case we are not dealing with a legalistic understanding of the Bible, but rather with the authority of the Bible itself. Is the Bible valid as the rule and basis of the faith and life of the church or not? The churches of the Reformation have always answered this question with an unequivocal ‘yes.’ What they have said ought to be observed, especially when St. Paul indicates that the position of the woman in the congregation involves ‘the command of the Lord.’ We are not, therefore, dealing primarily with the ‘statements of the Apostle Paul,’ but with the validity of the command of the Lord.

“Regarding the theological foundation for the ordination of women to the ministry, it is not clear what OKR Wille understands by the ‘totality of Scripture’ and ‘the middle of the divine witness.’ These concepts admit many meanings. If they are to be understood the way that Wille uses them, then they are wrong! Certainly the words of First Corinthians need not contradict them. But it won’t do to try somehow to wrest away the divine order of creation with the help of the divine order of grace. Dr. Martin Luther has emphatically rejected such thinking as total miscomprehension.

“Fundamental to the spiritual power of the church is believing assent to the authority of Holy Scripture. If this is denied, then indeed an ‘institutional’ power can easily remain, which, in itself, is legalistic. On the other hand, whoever recognizes the Bible as the supreme authority in the church and who observes what it says, is preserved from legalism. He accords the divine law the significance it requires, and he, first and foremost, correctly places the Gospel in the center of the church’s message and activity. He certainly does not try to play one against the other. That could only happen should he call into question the fundamental authority of Scripture. When that occurs, it is no wonder that divine creation and divine preservation are surrendered to subjective opinion, an opinion that reflects the spirit of our times.”

– Robert Dommer

BOOK REVIEWS

A History of Christianity in Asia, Volume I: Beginnings to 1500, by Samuel High Moffett. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1992.

This 560-page book is a wealth of virgin territory to us whose roots are in the western church. The spread of Christianity in Syria, Persia, India, and China is a hidden history to most of us. When we think of Mongols, Tartars, and Huns, don’t we associate such with violent horsemen of the steppes and plains of Eurasia? While Tamerlane would pile high the skulls of his victims in grisly pyramids, what about Genghis Khan and Kublai? Could a Christian queen or a Christian princess be intertwined in their sagas?

When did the first recorded Christian witness come to China? A Nestorian missionary came to the Tang Dynasty in 635. We think of the Christian kingdom of Karl der Grosse (otherwise known as Charlemagne), with his compelling subjugation and conversion of Germanic tribes, and recollect the year 800. Predating this is the expansion to the East and the first Christian monarch in Armenia. Going back

even farther, Moffett investigates the evidence of Thomas' going to India(25-36).

I found particularly intriguing the presentation of the Nestorian controversy and the subsequent thrust to the East by "Nestorians." Moffett does not appear to be a sly historical revisionist but a dedicated scholar. One has to read with sorrow of the tragic dimensions of the Antioch/Alexandria rivalry. One emphasizes Christ's human nature, while the other emphasizes His divine nature. What about calling Mary the "Mother of God"? Could we have stood with Cyril the unscrupulous? Moffett says that Luther in his day, looking over all that was extant of Nestorius' writings, stated that there was nothing he discovered that was heretical (176). It is eye-opening to read of the 1899 discovery of an 800-year-old manuscript of a Syriac translation (made about 540) of Nestorius' own account of his controversies and teachings.

Moffett concludes his study by postulating seven reasons for "the turbulence of the course of Asian church history ...: geographical isolation, chronic numerical weakness, persecution, the encounter with formidable Asian religions, ethnic introversion, dependence upon the state, and the church's own internal divisions" (503).

We would state, after reading such an expansive chronicle, that it is due to man's own inherent sin and the power of the raging lion that visible Christianity in Asia has taken such a licking. What a joy in the face of this to contemplate, in those many times and places in the Orient, that there were those who "were glad and glorified the Word of God; and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed" (Acts 13:48). And what pure pleasure it is to be a part of the renewed proclamation of that renewing Word in India and Thailand.

– David Koenig

BOOKS OF INTEREST

Faith Alone, by R. C. Sproul. Baker Books, 1995.

This 219-page book by a prolific American spokesman for Calvinism is a reaction to the recent attempt on the part of some "evangelicals" to make common cause with the Roman Catholic Church in the battle against secularism and immorality. There is reason for serious concern. In 1994 publicity was given to a 26-page document signed by many prominent representatives from Roman Catholic and "evangelical" circles. The document was entitled *Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium (ECT)*. The "evangelicals" who signed this document include in their number such well-known leaders as J. I. Packer, Bill Bright, Charles Colson, and Pat Robertson. Moreover, the Foreword to Sproul's book quotes Billy Graham as saying in 1994: "I have found that my beliefs are essentially the same as those of orthodox Roman Catholics" (p. 11).

Is it really true that the battle fought by Martin Luther and the confessional Lutherans of the sixteenth century against Roman Catholicism is now over? Must we now agree with the majority of the "evangelicals" of our time that the identification of the papacy as the Antichrist was an overzealous reaction of the Reformers to the corruptions of the medieval church and that now "evangelicals" and Catholics are in agreement on all the basic articles of faith? Why, *ECT* indicates that even the doctrine of justification is no longer an issue, for both "evangelicals" and Roman Catholics are in agreement with this statement: "We affirm together that we are justified by grace through faith because of Christ" (quoted on p. 35). *ECT* does, of course, acknowledge that there are differences between "evangelicals" and Roman Catholics on such matters of doctrine and practice as the remembrance of Mary and other saints, the use of the sacraments, and the authority of Scripture. But *ECT* does not list the doctrine of justification as one of the areas of difference.

Sproul's contention is that the above-quoted statement on justification is by no means a settlement of past differences. Roman Catholicism has always taught a justification by grace through faith because of Christ, but it has always defined the terms "grace" and "faith" in its own way. What is missing in *ECT*, says Sproul, is the acknowledgment that justification is by faith **alone**. This was Luther's bold confession against Rome. This is where all the later Reformers united against Rome. This is what the apostle Paul taught in Romans 3:28: "We conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law." If two things are presented as options for justification, and the first of them is selected and the second rejected, then it is clear as Luther taught that it is the first **alone** by which we are justified. Justification by

faith **alone** — this was Luther’s contention, and the contention of all the Reformers. And now *ECT* does not even so much as mention the word “alone” and yet thinks of “evangelicals” as being in essential agreement with Roman Catholicism on the doctrine of justification. It was not justification by faith, but justification by faith **alone**, that was condemned by the Roman Catholic Council of Trent, and nothing in more recent Catholic documents nullifies Trent’s curse on Luther’s teaching.

Other related issues are also discussed in Sproul’s book: for example, the forensic nature of justification and the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to the believer as opposed to the Roman Catholic infusion of grace. These Bible doctrines are presented together with copious quotations from Martin Luther and John Calvin. But clearly Sproul’s emphasis is on the word **alone**. He summarizes on p. 183: “Historic Evangelicalism was prepared to die for the gospel of justification by faith alone. Contemporary American evangelicalism has moved away from the centrality of *sola fide* to the gospel.” Sproul specifically alleges that J. I. Packer, erstwhile spokesman for Reformation doctrine, has compromised the gospel by his willingness to sign *ECT*. I believe all confessional Lutherans will side with Sproul against Packer on this particular issue, which is vital for the proper understanding of what Christianity is all about.

Loyal Opposition, by John Eidsmoe. Huntington House Publishers, 1993.

The subtitle of this book is “A Christian Response to the Clinton Agenda.” Eidsmoe is a lawyer who has theological training in conservative (but pietistic) Lutheran circles. He begins his book by referring to “visions” from God the charismatic preacher Paul Cain is supposed to have received in 1992, telling him before the event that “Bill Clinton would be elected president” and that “the Lord loves and intends to use Bill Clinton.” Eidsmoe rightly points out that God wants us to “test” visions such as those of Paul Cain by the standard of Scripture and not simply swallow the things that preachers say in God’s name.

According to Eidsmoe, the record clearly indicates that Clinton, who claims membership in a Southern Baptist congregation, is by no means doing the will of God in connection with the decisions he has made on abortion and homosexuality. Eidsmoe traces the background and past decisions and statements of both Clinton and his wife Hillary, who is of Methodist background, and concludes that their viewpoint on many issues is not consistent with the principles and values found in the Word of God.

Nevertheless, since our God through the apostle Paul instructed the Christians of his time to be subject to the emperor Nero (Romans 13: 1-7), who was openly cruel and immoral and a persecutor of Christians, we also ought to recognize the present Clinton administration as having God-given authority. Moreover, we should respect and obey such authority for conscience’ sake, not just to avoid being punished but above all to do the will of God. And there is no doubt that we should continue to pray for our country and all its leaders (1 Tim. 2: 1-2). But Eidsmoe also refers to the exception enunciated by the apostle Peter in Acts 5:29: “We ought to obey God rather than men.” Eidsmoe explains: “We obey civil authority except when the authorities command us to do what the Word of God forbids, or forbid us to do what the Word of God commands” (p. 81).

Does this word of God allow or call for Christians to block entry to abortion clinics? Does it ever justify rebellion against the government itself? Eidsmoe seems to answer no to these questions. His position is rather this: “We use all political means of opposition, but we operate within the law. We work in and through the political process, using persuasion, media, organization, etc., to bring about this leader’s defeat and the election of someone better. But we do not go beyond the law” (p. 80).

Eidsmoe clearly wants Christians to get involved in the political process as individual citizens rather than as an organized church. He lists the duties of the church to the state as follows (pp. 103-107):

- 1) “to maintain the moral tone of society”
- 2) “to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. Through the gospel God imparts forgiveness of sins and eternal life for the believer.”
- 3) “to teach Biblical principles of government”
- 4) “the church should call civil society to repentance for moral evils”
- 5) “Christian charity”

In this connection Eidsmoe says: “I do not believe the church should be extensively involved in political activism. ... Individual Christian citizens who have learned Biblical principles in the church can then go forth into society and articulate those principles and help implement them”(p. 106).

In response to Eidsmoe I would say that preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ ought to be a much

higher priority for the church than maintaining the moral tone of society. The gospel will raise the moral tone of those who believe it, but this is a byproduct and cannot be set forth as our main goal, lest we become entrapped by work-righteousness and moralizing.

In conclusion Eidsmoe lists some of the main issues Christians need to be concerned about: religious freedom, public school education (including the prevalence of the teaching of evolution), the right to life, health care, gay rights, defense and foreign policy, economics, environment, and constitutionalism. The Christian viewpoint on all these topics is summarized quite well. We can hardly agree, however, with Eidsmoe's statement that "the custom of praying at graduation services lends dignity, solemnity, and reverence to this rite of passage and should be preserved" (p. 113). But Eidsmoe does recognize, to his credit, that "school officials" should "distance themselves from religious activity."

In his appendix Eidsmoe explains the differences between reconstructionism and dispensationalism. In keeping with his training from the Lutheran Brethren, Eidsmoe declares himself to be a dispensationalist. He defines reconstructionism to be "the belief that the Mosaic law ... is binding upon the Church and/or America today just as it was binding upon Israel during Old Testament times, and that by applying the Mosaic law to our society we are helping to create conditions which will usher in the millennium" (p. 126). Dispensationalism, on the other hand, teaches "the premillennial return of Jesus Christ and the pretribulation rapture of the church, and they believe the covenant God made with Moses applies to Israel, not the Church" (p. 126). Eidsmoe tries in this appendix to bring the two sides together by presenting some of the writings of Martin Luther. That solution is good, but in order for it to work, both reconstructionists and dispensationalists will have to give up the many unbiblical portions of their beliefs and teachings.

One helpful feature of Eidsmoe's little book is his listing of various organizations and their publications together with their addresses, so that we can obtain more information if we need it. For example, pp. 96-98 and pp. 100-102 provide the names and addresses of various conservative organizations and publications.

Through Gates of Splendor, by Elisabeth Elliot. Crossings Classics, 40th Anniversary Edition, originally published in 1956.

Indeed more than forty years have now passed since five young missionaries were killed in the jungles of Ecuador by a tribe of Auca Indians, who at that time had no contacts with other human beings but were feared as killers by their neighbors. On January 8, 1956, the five young men were speared to death, leaving behind five widows and a number of small children.

The five men were Nate Saint, the airplane pilot who flew them into the jungle; Jim Elliot, the husband of the author of this book; Ed McCully, Pete Fleming, and Roger Youderian. All of them, together with their wives, had a strong desire to bring the gospel of Jesus Christ to this feared tribe of Indians. They were already working with the gospel among other tribes in the area, but they knew that God loved the Auca Indians also and that Jesus had died for them as well.

With this strong desire the five young men carefully made their plans to "catch" the Auca Indians for Christ. They learned as much as they could about the Auca language from a young Auca woman named Dayuma who had escaped from the tribe at an earlier time. They began to make contact with the Aucas from the air. They dropped down many gifts for them and received gifts from them in return. The Lord seemed to be blessing their efforts. So they decided to go further and establish a base in Auca territory. At this time they made physical contact with two Auca women and a young Auca man whom they called George. They even took this young man for a spin in their airplane. It was an exhilarating time for them; it was a time for which they had prayed most fervently. But almost at once God saw fit to bring their mission efforts to a screaming halt. All five were speared to death by those they had come to save.

But it was not the end of the mission effort. Rachel Saint, the sister of the slain airplane pilot, continued to work with Dayuma, the Auca woman who has escaped. Soon Dayuma professed faith in Christ.

Only three years after the murderous attack Elisabeth Elliot and her three-year-old daughter Valerie, together with Rachel Saint, were invited to live with the very Aucas who had killed the five missionaries. Elisabeth Elliot herself heard the account of the killings from Gikita, the first of the Indians to hurl a spear into a missionary's back. The gospel of Christ did get through to them, and at least a few Aucas now confess the name of Jesus Christ. On the Last Day the word of God that meant so much to the five missionaries will be fulfilled: "Behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes,

peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'" (Revelation 7: 9-10).

Through Gates of Splendor was the first full-length account of the Auca mission venture. Elisabeth Elliot subsequently remarried twice; her second husband, Addison Leitch, a teacher of theology, also left her a widow. Some of her many other books include *Shadow of the Almighty*, the life of Jim Elliot; *The Savage My Kinsman*, her account of her first year with the Indians who had murdered her husband; and *Let Me Be a Woman*, advice for daughter Valerie as she was about to be married.

Other books have been written on the Auca mission effort. Two that I am familiar with are *The Dayuma Story* (I can't remember the author's name) and Russell Hitt's book, *Jungle Pilot*, the account of Nate Saint, the missionary who combined a love of flying with devotion to the spread of God's Word.

Let us never forget to pray for those who willingly risk their lives to bring the gospel of Christ to those who have not yet heard it. As Jim Elliot once said, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."

Where Is Theology Going? by Millard J. Erickson. Baker Books, 1994.

Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity, by Alister McGrath. InterVarsity Press, 1995.

A Passion for Faithfulness, by James I. Packer. Crossway Books, 1995.

Romans, by John Stott. InterVarsity Press, 1994.

The *Journal of Theology* of September 1994 reviewed Walter Elwell's *Handbook of Evangelical Theologians*, containing biographical sketches of 33 systematic theologians. Four of these theologians, all of them prolific authors, have recently published books that may be of some interest to confessional Lutherans.

John Stott (1921-) has been a leader in the Church of England for many years. Known primarily as an expository preacher with outreach emphasis, Stott has written many helpful treatises on various sections of the Bible, such as the seven letters in Revelation, the three letters of the apostle John, the book of Acts, the letters to the Thessalonians, and now this 432-page book on Romans, entitled ***Romans***, subtitled "God's Good News for the World."

So that we might get a little bit of the flavor of Stott's presentation, here are a few excerpts from his discussion of the statement in Romans 4:5 that God "justifies the ungodly." He says: "No expression in Romans is more startling. ... How can God justify the wicked? In the Old Testament he repeatedly told the Israelite judges that they must justify the righteous and condemn the wicked. ... It is preposterous. How can the righteous God act unrighteously, and so overthrow the moral order, turning it upside down? It is unbelievable! Or rather it would be, if it were not for the cross of Christ. Without the cross the justification of the unjust would be unjustified, immoral, and therefore impossible. The only reason God 'justifies the wicked' is that 'Christ died for the wicked'" (pp. 112-113).

Nevertheless, Stott is unable to accept the teaching of universal justification, as taught by the apostle Paul in Romans 3:24, Romans 4:25, and especially Romans 5: 12-19. He says: "In Romans 5 the 'all men' who are affected by the work of Christ cannot refer to absolutely everybody." Later he goes on to say: "Romans 5: 12-21 gives us solid grounds for confidence that a very large number will be saved and that the scope of Christ's redeeming work, although not universal, will be extremely extensive" (p. 159). In short, Stott cannot conceive of a universal justification that does not lead to universalism, the doctrine that all will eventually go to heaven.

How happy we should be that our Lutheran heritage includes the doctrine of universal justification, as the apostle taught it, for only in this teaching can every sinner, including me, find comfort! At the same time our Lutheran heritage clearly rejects universalism as a false hope planted by Satan himself.

We cannot agree, either, with Stott's understanding of Romans 7, for he rejects the view that these verses "depict vividly the inner conflict characteristic of the true Christian" (p. 207). He seems to think that Romans 7 describes what can be called "Old Testament Christians," whose religion is law, not gospel. But is there any Christian whose religion is law rather than gospel? Such a person is not a Christian at all, as Galatians 5:4 clearly teaches: "You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace."

In summary we cannot recommend Stott's *Romans* as a reliable exegesis of the apostle Paul's thinking. Nevertheless, he says some things very well, and for that we can rejoice and from that derive some benefit.

James Packer (1926-) is now teaching theology at Regent College in Vancouver, British Columbia, after many years of service in England. He has taken a correct Scriptural stand on many issues in controversy through the years. For example, he has been a leader in the promotion of the inerrancy of Scripture. His recent book, *A Passion for Faithfulness*, is a stimulating study of the little-known Old Testament book of Nehemiah. Packer presents Nehemiah as an example of Christian leadership. Although he was certainly not without sin, Nehemiah is presented in Scripture, says Packer, as a model of "personal zeal," "pastoral commitment," and "practical wisdom." But of course the main focus of the book of Nehemiah cannot be on the man himself but on Nehemiah's God, whom Nehemiah's book describes particularly in chapter 9 as Creator and Preserver of all things, as having chosen Abraham and his descendants as His special people, as being willing to forgive His disobedient people time and time again, and as being both just and faithful in all His dealings with His people. Because Nehemiah knew his God, he knew where to turn in all the challenges he faced. He prayed to his God, and many of his prayers are recorded in his book.

Nehemiah is a good book for us Christians to read, of course. Packer's little book will help us apply the truths of Nehemiah's book to our own situations. Of special interest in this connection is Packer's epilogue on success in the ministry. The title of Packer's book indicates what he thinks ought to be emphasized: **faithfulness**. The 13th chapter of Nehemiah presents Nehemiah as an outward failure. For when he returned to the people of Israel after many years away from them, he found them living in the same sins for which he had earlier rebuked them. Packer's chapter on this sad episode in Nehemiah's life is entitled "Back to Square One."

If we were to judge Nehemiah by the standards used by "church growth" people today, Nehemiah would indeed be a failure. For, as Packer says, "Churches, pastors, seminaries, and parachurch agencies throughout North America are mostly playing the numbers game — that is, defining success in terms of numbers of heads counted or added to those that were there before. Church-growth theorists, evangelists, pastors, missionaries, news reporters, and others all speak as if (1) numerical increase is what matters most; (2) numerical increase will surely come if our techniques and procedures are right; (3) numerical increase validates ministries as nothing else does; (4) numerical increase must be everyone's main goal" (p. 208).

Packer reminds us: "Our success in the real business of church-building — not the production of plant and programs, but the shepherd's work of gathering, nurturing, feeding, and guiding those whom Christ pictures as the sheep of his flock — is something only God is ever in a position to measure. ... Nehemiah's passion was for faithfulness; whether he had been appointed to succeed he did not know, but he knew he was called to be faithful to the word of his God in all things"(pp. 209-211).

"Christ will build his church, using us as he wills, in ways that involve the appearance of triumph and disaster over and over again. Our part is not to let either appearance fool us, but to maintain an unflinching fidelity to the particular tasks and roles we know we have been given to fulfill, all for the honoring and pleasing of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, who by their joint action are the true agents of the entire building process" (p. 212).

Alister McGrath (1953-) is the youngest of the 33 theologians sketched in Elwell's handbook. He was hostile to Christianity in his youth in northern Ireland, then became a Christian at Oxford University in 1971 through the testimony of evangelicals, then turned to theological liberalism because evangelicalism was generally despised by intellectuals, then realized the bankruptcy of liberal ideas when he served as a pastor for a few years, and finally returned to evangelicalism, which he now publicly espouses as a teacher of theology in Oxford University. The many books he has written indicate a special interest in Reformation history and doctrine: *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification* (2 volumes); *Luther's Theology of the Cross*; *A Life of John Calvin*; *The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation*.

His 1995 book, *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity*, is an optimistic assessment of evangelicalism as the prevailing Christian viewpoint of the immediate future. Liberalism is bankrupt. The mainline churches are losing influence. Fundamentalism is a spent force. But evangelicalism is becoming more popular, more influential, and more firmly supported by sound intellectual argumentation than ever before.

His definition of evangelicalism is quite broad, broad enough to include Lutherans, Catholics, Baptists, Reformed, and Pentecostals. There are six basic evangelical convictions, he says:

- 1) The supreme authority of Scripture;
- 2) The recognition of Jesus as God and man, and as the Savior of mankind;
- 3) The lordship of the Holy Spirit;
- 4) The need for personal conversion;
- 5) The priority of evangelism for the church as well as for the individual Christian;
- 6) The importance of the Christian community for spiritual nourishment, fellowship, and growth (pp. 55-56).

McGrath is willing to allow differences of opinion on all other doctrines, such as Baptism and the Lord's Supper. His contention is that the Bible is unclear on such matters and allows for several right views. Obviously, all of his study of Luther has not convinced him that Luther was right to withhold fellowship from Zwingli because of their disagreement on the Lord's Supper. In fact, McGrath makes a big point of the fact that Luther did not leave the Roman Catholic Church but was excommunicated from it. He thinks Luther would have tried to reform the church from within, if he had had that option.

In a similar way McGrath seems to agree with James Packer and John Stott that it was right for evangelicals to have remained in the Church of England in 1966 at the time when D. M. Lloyd-Jones was calling on evangelicals to separate themselves from the heterodoxy and apostasy prevalent in that Church. Likewise, McGrath applauds the efforts of unionists like Billy Graham in becoming less separatistic and more inclusive. A Billy Graham crusade in our time seems to enlist the cooperation of just about everybody who claims to be a Christian. All divisive matters of doctrine are simply not discussed.

Our Lord teaches us in His Word not to be so reckless with God's truth. The true evangelical, that is, the Christian who treasures the true gospel of Jesus Christ, will not want to make any compromises with or concessions to any kind of teaching or practice that is contrary to God's Word. For he knows, as God's Word instructs him, that any and every false teaching is a spreading cancer, a leaven that eventually leavens the whole lump. In spite of McGrath's optimism, he may discover to his own consternation that the evangelicalism he now supports may quickly become the liberalism he found bankrupt.

Millard Erickson's book, *Where Is Theology Going?*, attempts to determine the future direction of current movements in the church. It is "a mixture," he says, "of what one thinks will happen, what one hopes will happen, and what one fears will happen" (p. 9). Millard Erickson is professor of theology at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas, and also the author of many books: *The Word Became Flesh*; *Christian Theology*; *Evangelical Interpretation*; *The Evangelical Mind and Heart*.

After several introductory chapters that indicate how Erickson attempts to predict future trends on the basis of what is going on in the world and in the church, he takes up the individual doctrines of Scripture, God, humanity, sin, Christ, and salvation, and makes his prognostications as to how these doctrines will be taught in the near future.

On the subject of Scripture Erickson sees a turning away from the more extreme assertions of negative criticism. People will have a higher view of the Bible in theory, but in practice they will be reading and using it less and less. They will not have a clear understanding of the history and contents of the whole Bible but will tend to use only certain portions or certain phrases that agree with their predetermined opinions. Popular psychology and the opinions of experts will continue to shape the practical theology of Christians who ought rather to be looking for answers in God's Word. The principles of ministry and evangelism that are taught in Scripture will continue to be influenced and even replaced by pragmatic considerations. To put it bluntly, we will use what works in our own experience rather than what God says we should use and what He promises to bless. What is the source of this opinion? Erickson says: "David Hasselgrave (in a 1988 book) has noted a sharp increase in missiology articles drawing primarily on the behavioral sciences instead of biblical and theological materials, and observes that this trend is especially common among evangelicals" (p. 109).

On the subject of God, surveys indicate "a shift away from belief in a God who is actively involved in our lives and hears our prayers" (p. 112). Feminism is having an influence on how some women and men are thinking about God. The God of the Bible is being rejected in favor of a god that agrees with feminist doctrine. Popular Christian songs of today indicate less and less emphasis on God's holiness and God's law and the final judgment and more and more emphasis on God's power and victory over evil and

the preservation of His children. In this connection Erickson says: (In the popular Christian songs of today) “there is no reference to repentance and confession of sins, and very little mention is made of the need for cleansing and forgiveness. The most crucial missing ingredient appears to be any indication of ... a sense of awe in the presence of the sacred” (pp. 117-118).

After thus discussing the selected areas of doctrine, Erickson concludes his book with a chapter entitled “Influencing the Direction of Theology.” He says: “There are three possible ways in which people relate to change: some make it happen, others watch it happen, and the third group wonder what happened” (p. 198). Erickson wants us to act now rather than react later. He refers to a 1993 book by David Wells, entitled *No Place for Truth, or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* Wells says: “Concern for the truth and fidelity to the theological heritage of the church are needed” (p. 200). Although we as confessional Lutherans disagree with both Erickson and Wells on what is meant by truth, we would certainly agree that regardless of what happens in the world and in the church we need to keep right on doing what our Lord has told us to do. “We must be willing and able to break away from the crowd” (p. 199). In this connection Erickson makes an interesting point that is worthwhile for all our congregations and our church body to consider. “The real value system of a church, denomination, or other religious institution is not found in its statement of purpose or mission; it is found in its budget. What we are willing to pay for shows what is really important to us” (pp. 200-201).

Another important suggestion made by Erickson in his final chapter is that “we watch very carefully our ethics and lifestyle to assure that they are genuinely biblical and Christian. ... We sometimes form our ethical convictions to fit what we want to do and then construct a theology to justify or rationalize them. ... The credibility of our theology will depend at least in part upon the integrity of our lives” (pp. 201-202). This certainly agrees with the words of the apostle Paul to Timothy: “Be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity. ... Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you” (1 Tim. 4: 12-16).

Erickson believes that the church ought to give “high priority” to theology in its planning and work. “Take heed to the doctrine,” says Paul to Timothy. “Success in missions depends upon a sound theology of mission, evangelism upon a correct doctrinal understanding of the human predicament and the divine provision for meeting that predicament” (p. 203). There are several indications in Erickson’s book that his theology is not precisely our theology; nevertheless, we can agree with him on the importance of theology. “If the theological enterprise is to receive priority, the church must support theological education well. There is a popular theory that certain denominations have drifted away from the gospel because their seminaries lost their faith. In actuality, the truth is quite otherwise. The schools did not abandon the churches; rather, the churches abandoned the seminaries, failing to support them” (p. 204). I would say in response that both are true: seminaries have led their church bodies away from the truth, and church bodies have abandoned their seminaries.

Since theology is so very important, it is clear that we should be encouraging the brightest and most balanced of our Christian young men to take up the study of theology. Erickson rightly says: “We who are now in a position to do so need to be on the lookout for bright, talented, dedicated young people who have all of the gifts to be the theologians and teachers of theology in the future. We need to place before them the challenge of theological scholarship” (p. 206).

“In addition to the theological enterprise we must commit ourselves to serious education of lay people regarding the content of the Bible, the meaning of doctrines, and their relationship to practical issues of life” (pp. 208-209). Some of the methods suggested by Erickson veer far away from the use of the divinely ordained means of grace, and we dare not follow him there. Nevertheless, we can agree with him when he says: “At the local church level we must do our utmost to instruct our young people thoroughly in correct doctrine, for the direction of the church and its theology can to a considerable extent be predicted by observing what the coming generation believes” (p. 201).

In all of this discussion Erickson does not give enough attention to the fact that the Lord God is in control of yesterday, today, and tomorrow. We need to believe Jesus’ words: “I will build My church” (Matt. 16:18) and depend on Him to do what He says He will do, working with the means He says He will use. That He has chosen to work through flawed human beings like ourselves is amazing. Simon Peter could not grasp this when he said: “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!” But let us take comfort both from Jesus’ reply and from the multitude of fish Peter caught when he followed Jesus’ instructions. “Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men” (See Luke 5: 1-11).

Chemnitz and Walther

When I was a seminary student from 1956 to 1960, we did not do much reading of Martin Chemnitz or C. F. W. Walther. Their writings were in our seminary library, of course, but only in Latin or German. Having studied both Latin and German for eight years in high school and college, we should have been able to read their writings quite easily, I suppose. But it happened only rarely, I am sure. Our Latin and German studies in college had never been geared towards reading specifically Christian material, such as the Latin Vulgate or Luther's German Bible or the writings of the church fathers or even our Lutheran confessions. For the most part, we had studied the heathen classics and we had not become familiar with anything else. So the Latin writings of Chemnitz and the German writings of Walther remained on the seminary library shelves, largely unknown and almost totally unused. We studied the *Formula of Concord*, of course, and we did read Walther's *Law and Gospel* in English, but very little beyond these.

Our seminarians today as well as our pastors and teachers in the field have a great advantage over the previous generation. To be sure, the Latin and the German languages have been de-emphasized, and this is a distinct loss. But see what our Lord has made available to us through English translations. Take the writings of Martin Chemnitz, for example. Now we have not only the *Formula of Concord* in English, but we have:

- 1) *The Two Natures in Christ* (J. A. O. Preus translation);
- 2) *The Lord's Supper* (J. A. O. Preus translation);
- 3) *Examination of the Council of Trent*, 4 big volumes (Fred Kramer translation);
- 4) *Ministry, Word, and Sacraments: An Enchiridion* (Luther Poellot translation);
- 5) *Loci Theologici*, 2 big volumes (J. A. O. Preus translation);
- 6) *Justification* (J. A. O. Preus translation). Note: *Justification* is a portion of the *Loci Theologici*.

Chemnitz was a careful student of Scripture. He was also a student of the church fathers. He wrote in language that we can understand, not in philosophical or technical language, as some of the later Lutheran theologians. Robert Preus says of his *Loci Theologici*: "Although bulky and repetitious, (it) is very easy reading and quite free of intricate terminology" (Robert Preus: *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, Vol. I, p. 96).

If we want to study the historical setting of Chemnitz and his writings, we now even have a full-length biography of Chemnitz in English: *The Second Martin*, by J. A. O. Preus. It is quite remarkable that a prominent church leader like J. A. O. Preus, president of the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod during some of its stormiest years, was able to devote so much time to the translation of Chemnitz. Perhaps Preus was right in making the prediction that in time to come, he would be remembered more for his translation of Chemnitz than for all his other activities. Certainly we should thank our God that these Scriptural studies are now available to us in our own language. As expensive as these books are, I encourage our pastors and teachers to consider the purchase of these items. Having become fond of one such book, you may get to be like me and buy everything by Chemnitz you can lay your hands on.

C. F. W. Walther was the man God used in our own country to establish the Lutherans transplanted from Europe on the solid foundation of Scripture and the Lutheran confessions. He also was thoroughly acquainted with the writings of Luther and all the later Lutheran theologians. He quoted from all of these theologians so extensively that his detractors called him the "citation theologian." But when we read and study Walther's writings, I think we shall be more inclined to consider him one of God's greatest gifts to His Church since the days of Martin Chemnitz. More of his work is available in English now than at any previous time. The following is a partial list:

- 1) *Church and Ministry*, originally *Die Stimme unserer Kirche in der Frage von Kirche und Amt* (J. T. Mueller translation);
- 2) *The Form of a Christian Congregation*, more fully *The Right Form of an Evangelical Lutheran Local Congregation Independent of the State* (J. T. Mueller translation);
- 3) *The True Visible Church*, more fully *The Evangelical Lutheran Church, the True Visible Church of God upon Earth* (J. T. Mueller translation);
- 4) *Walther on the Church* (an abridgment of the above three works, by J. Drickamer);
- 5) *Pastoral Theology*, originally *Amerikanisch-Lutherische Pastoraltheologie* (translation and abridgment by J. Drickamer) (reviewed in the June 1996 *Journal of Theology*);
- 6) *The Congregation's Right to Choose Its Pastor* (Fred Kramer translation);

- 7) *Year of Grace* (sermons for the entire church year translated by Donald Heck);
- 8) *The Word of His Grace* (sermons for special occasions and festival sermons translated by various members of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod);
- 9) *Selected Sermons* (H. Eggold translation);
- 10) *Law and Gospel*, more fully *The Proper Distinction between Law and Gospel* (Dau translation);
- 11) *Law and Gospel* (an abridgment and new translation by Herbert Bouman);
- 12) *God's No and God's Yes* (another abridgment of the above);
- 13) *Letters of C. F. W. Walther* (Carl S. Meyer translator and editor);
- 14) *Walther Speaks to the Church* (letters translated and edited by Carl S. Meyer);
- 15) *Selected Letters* (Roy Suelflow translation);
- 16) *Editorials from "Lehre und Wehre"* (Herbert Bouman translation);
- 17) *Convention Essays* (August Suelflow translation);
- 18) *Essays for the Church*, Volume I and Volume II (translated by Everette Meier and others).

Many of these are still available from Concordia Publishing House. Numbers #17 and #18 as listed above contain all of the many essays (35 in all) that Walther delivered to various conventions. One series of essays ran from 1873 to 1886 on the topic: *The Doctrine of the Lutheran Church Gives All Glory to God, an Irrefutable Proof That Its Doctrine Alone Is True*. This series of essays included three essays on the doctrine of predestination at a time when the predestination controversy was raging.

As we read these essays, we begin to understand that the strength of the Missouri Synod was its commitment to the study of Christian doctrine. We must admit that our own studies at conventions and conferences, as well done as they generally are and as appreciated as they may be, are still rather shallow and superficial in comparison with the thorough work done in those years by men like Walther.

But now that so much of Walther is available in English, it is for us to study Scripture as he did and also more deeply appreciate the writings of Luther and the orthodox fathers that Walther liked to quote so extensively. Since it seems evident that confessional Lutheranism is dying out in the world, could it be that God has seen to it by making these theological treasures available in English that future generations will have no excuse for forgetting or neglecting their heritage? Or could it be that God will use these writings to bring about once more, as He did in Walther's day, a revival of confessional Lutheranism? May God grant this for His mercy's sake.

For a study of Walther's life we have the short biography by L. W. Spitz: *The Life of Dr. C. F. W. Walther*, also *Zion on the Mississippi* by Walter Forster that describes in great detail the emigration of the Saxon Lutherans to Missouri in 1839. Other studies include *C. F. W. Walther: The American Luther*, a volume edited by Arthur Drevlow, Glenn Reichwald, and John Drickamer. We understand that August Suelflow is also working on a new biography of Walther. We simply have no reason for forgetting our heritage.

– David Lau
