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A Jubilee Anniversary Sermon

Paul G. Fleischer

* On April 19, 2009, in commemoration of its 50th anniversary as a congregation, Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church of Sleepy Eye, Minnesota, invited one of its former pastors, Rev. Paul Fleischer, to serve as guest speaker that day. His sermon printed below was addressed to the congregation on the basis of 1 Timothy 4:16.

Please remain seated for the time being. Please join me in prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, our risen and exalted Savior, only Head of the Church, I thank You for another opportunity to preach Your gospel here at Grace. As this congregation begins marking a half-century of Your marvelous grace, use this lispng, stammering tongue to give all glory to You for all Your mercies revealed in the sacred Scriptures. Bless the messenger and the message heard this day. In Your holy name I pray. Amen.

Let’s do it a bit differently. Following the idea of one of our convention essayists last summer, I would like to ask segments of the congregation to rise in sequence.

1) Those age 65 and over, please rise. Using the analogy of spiritual trees, these senior citizens are the *sturdy, gnarled oaks* old enough to tell us something firsthand about how and why this congregation started in 1959. I would suggest that each of you sit down with these folks some time and hear their story. Please remain standing.

2) Now grade-school age—everyone up to age 14, please rise. These are the *twigs*. This is the rising generation which, as God teaches in His Word, needs to be “bent” in His ways. That is, nourished and brought up in His Word, taught the gospel of His Son Jesus, and—I would suggest and underscore this day—needing to learn what Grace congregation and the CLC stand for. If you young ones have been confirmed, the bending process has a good beginning; may it continue.

3) Now the high school/college age group, ages 15-24, would you please rise. These young Christians, may I suggest, are the *saplings*, the young adult trees. Believe it or not, I was where you are right at the time Grace congregation and the CLC were being planted. As I was then, so you right now are facing some big life decisions—what career to pursue, where to go for school, perhaps even thinking

of marriage and family some day. May the God of grace guide all your decision-making through His holy Word!

4) Now for the remaining, ages 25-64, please rise. You are the *adult, mature trees* in the prime of life. If you are members of Grace, you are the backbone of this congregation. On you it falls to have those solemn, serious talks about God and His Word, about church and the Christian life in general, with all those who stood up before you, the older and the younger.

Now the Scripture text as the basis for our meditation on this special day is one my pastor stepfather used as a text for my ordination-installation 45 years ago (1964). This Word of the Lord carries a message as urgent today as it did back then. By the way, your current pastor's father (Bert Naumann) was my "co-pastor" in Marquette, Michigan that day, and Pastor Bruce was but a two-year-old "twig." At any rate, the holy words my stepfather, Pastor Waldemar Schuetze, used for his sermon that day were taken from St. Paul's letter to Timothy: **"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. 4:16). Please be seated.

Dear members and friends of Grace congregation:

How time flies! It was seven years ago this month, but it seems like only yesterday that we packed up and moved to Cheyenne. As a matter of fact, it seems only a bit longer that I sat where you are now, listening to Pastor Paul F. Nolting preach the sermon when we observed the 40th anniversary of Grace congregation in 1999. Ten years later Pastor Nolting, the first pastor of Grace, and many of those on that charter member picture we took up here in the chancel area back then, have gone home with the Lord. The number remaining, may I say, of us "sturdy oaks" is rapidly declining, isn't it? And so there is no time to waste to tell our story. It's a story that needs to be told, as Pastor David Schierenbeck (Berea, Inver Grove Heights, MN) writes in a recent essay in the CLC's *Journal of Theology*:

One of the pastoral challenges of our times is to instill in our members a deeper appreciation of both the Biblical and Lutheran confessional legacy that is theirs. As part of the last generation to have vivid personal memories of the events leading up to the birth, early struggles, and blessings of our synod, the Church of the Lutheran Confession, I have found it increasingly difficult, especially among the younger generation, to generate interest in the CLC story and its significance for our lives today. To our youth it is ancient history. To many of our older members it is a historical blur in which they trust their faithful shepherds to sort it all out and lead them accordingly. We pray that the Lord will use the upcoming Jubilee Anniversaries of both our congregations and church body to renew and heighten our awareness and appreciation of "the great things the Lord has done for us" (Ps. 126:3) as members of our own congregations and of our larger fellowship. (Dec. , pp. 38-39)

I prayed much about what to say today regarding what, I suppose, many of you "twigs" and "saplings" consider to be "ancient history" and what to say to help bring that history into some kind of meaningful focus for us all. In an attempt to meet the challenge that Pastor Schierenbeck speaks of, that of instilling a deeper appreciation of our Biblical and Lutheran heritage, I want to use a phrase I first heard at a family reunion a few years ago. It's the German proverb, "*Ohne Wurzeln in der Vergangenheit, gibt es auch keine Zukunft*" ("Without roots in the past, there's also no future"). If that's a good proverb or principle for an earthly family to bear in mind, it also speaks volumes, fellow Lutheran Christians, to us within a church family! God in His Word teaches the importance of rooting and grounding ourselves solidly in the past—yes, in "ancient history"! David says in the Psalm: **"I remember the days of old; I meditate on all Your works"** (Ps. 143:5). In his final sermon to the Israelites Moses said: **"Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations. Ask your father, and he will show you; your elders, and they will tell you"** (Deut. 32:7). In Jeremiah we read: **"Thus says the LORD: 'Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; then you**

will find rest for your souls” (Jer. 6:16). Truly, it is God-pleasing to remember, recount, review the past, giving thanks for all of God’s mercies. Further, just as a tree without roots—deep roots!—will not long survive the storm, even so a Christian believer, an individual congregation, or a church synod without roots grounded firmly in that ancient Word will not long survive in the true and saving faith in an ungodly world!

Thus the theme chosen for this message today is:
WHY GRACE CONGREGATION AND THE CLC EXIST.

We want to note that . . .

- 1. They exist because of a concern for pure doctrine;**
- 2. They exist for the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ.**

Yes, we note this first: Grace congregation and the CLC exist for the same reason; one was a charter member of the other. In 1999 Pastor Nolting reminded us of these things when he said that Grace congregation got its start not as a “mission congregation” as such, but as a “stand up” church—as a group of concerned Lutherans who took a stand against doctrinal error and for God’s Word of truth, who took a stand not unlike Dr. Martin Luther and his stand (if I may refer to “ancient history”!) before pope and emperor at the Diet of Worms during the 16th-century Lutheran Reformation. In this your Jubilee year, members of Grace, you do well to remember with thanksgiving to God that the *Wurzeln* (roots) of your “stand up” Lutheran congregation were first planted at the time of the Reformation and then transplanted into Sleepy Eye soil on Thanksgiving Day, 1959. From my almost ten years of service here I recall many discussions with the sturdy old-timers about that day and time and the difficult events leading up to that day and beyond it.

But it was not only your roots! In a sense the city of Sleepy Eye is ground zero for tracing the *Wurzeln* of a new synod, the Church of the Lutheran Confession. It was here on a bitterly cold day in January, 1961—when I was a mere 21-year-old sapling studying for the ministry in a make-shift seminary classroom in the basement of Immanuel Church, Mankato—that I remember sitting in (on that cold January day) on the recessed organizing Convention of the newly formed CLC. You will want to read all about it in the book Pastor David Lau is writing, [initially] titled “The Church of the Lutheran Confession—Fifty Years.” That book is a work in progress, and I happen to be one of those receiving the earliest chapters of it. As one who has “vivid personal memories” of those days and events, I encourage each of you to procure the book as soon as it becomes available. It details the *Vergangenheit*, the “ancient history” of some forty-three charter congregations of the CLC, including yours. One of our young pastors told me recently how much he has learned just by reading the first chapters of Pastor Lau’s book. Even so, reading these things will deepen your roots, your understanding of and appreciation for why Grace congregation and the CLC exist.

So *why do they exist?* In our sound-bite era the short answer is that your congregation and the CLC exist over a concern for purity of doctrine. Any number of Scripture passages stress how proper, how crucial, how urgent that concern is! To his young co-worker Timothy St. Paul spoke the words laid on my heart that day in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan: **“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.”** I remember the text, but not the sermon of that day. But I’m sure stepdad stressed to his young pastor-son that **“Take heed unto the doctrine”** means paying close attention to it. He probably revisited some ancient history, calling attention to the words of Dr. Luther who once said: “I often advise, doctrine must be carefully distinguished from life. Doctrine is heaven; life is earth. In life are sin, error, impurity, and misery.

. . . There the forgiveness of sins should mean most if only sin and error are not defended. But in doctrine there is no error, and hence no need for any forgiveness of sins. Therefore there is no similarity

at all between doctrine and life. One little point of doctrine (*apex*) is worth more than heaven and earth. This is why we cannot bear to have it violated in the least" (*What Luther Says*, Vol. I, p. 414).

Of course, it's never been popular to stress doctrine and truth; it wasn't in the *Vergangenheit* of Paul's day or Luther's day or fifty years ago, and it surely isn't today in our brave, post-Christian, postmodern, everything-is-relative, one-religion-is-as-good-as-another, everyone-is-his-own-Bible, there's-no-such-thing-as-absolute-truth world. Regardless of the unbelieving, mocking world we face, you and I still take seriously what St. Paul means when he says in this ancient book: **"A little leaven leavens the whole lump"** (Gal. 5:9). That means that false teaching is not benign, but malignant. It spreads; it permeates. Old-timers like myself have seen how true this is. Fifty years ago and more, we noted the leaven of false teaching making its way into the old Synodical Conference (an alliance founded in 1872, made up of the Missouri, Wisconsin, and old Norwegian synods). Within the ranks of these one-time religious allies various Bible doctrines were coming under fire. I remember how the inerrancy, reliability, and authority of the Bible were being questioned, how the six-day creation came under fire, how basic Bible doctrines like justification by faith and election were coming under attack—not from outside, but from within the alliance. Meetings after meetings were held—Pastor Lau details them in his book—beginning about the year I was born (1939) and going through the 1940s and 50s. In 1959 you and your pastor were convinced it was high time to take a stand for the truth and clarity of the Bible. So you did, and many other congregations like you did, and here in this city in 1961 the roots of the new synod were planted.

There's a commercial these days which says: "You don't say, it's just cancer. You don't say, it's just heart disease. You go to work to address the problem! You do what you can to remove the cancer, to treat the heart disease!" Even so, according to the Bible you don't say, It's just a little false teaching. No, lest the malignancy grows (as it always does!), the false teacher is to be noted and avoided. Listen to some more ancient history, the witness of the "American Luther," Dr. Walther, a prime founder of that Synodical Conference alliance in the 19th century. Dr. Walther said in a sermon based on our very same text: "It is true, brethren, . . . that in our day it is common for people to say, 'Emphasizing doctrine so much only harms and hinders the kingdom of God, yes, even destroys it.' Many say, 'Instead of disputing over doctrine so much, we should much rather be concerned with souls and with leading them to Christ.' But all who speak in this way do not really know what they are saying or what they are doing. As foolish as it would be to scold a farmer for being concerned about sowing good seed and to demand of him simply to be concerned about a good harvest, so foolish it is to scold those who are concerned first and foremost with the doctrine, and to demand of them that they should rather seek to rescue souls. For just as the farmer who wants to harvest a good crop must first of all be concerned about good seed, so the church must above all be concerned about right doctrine if it would save souls" ("Our Common Task: The Saving of Souls," *The Word of His Grace: Occasional and Festival Sermons*, pp. 89-90).

When your congregation began in 1959, I was a 20-year-old sapling facing a big decision. I was a college football quarterback and basketball player in a Synodical Conference school near Milwaukee; I heard about the stand you took here in Sleepy Eye and the stand other congregations took; I heard a new synod was being formed. Big decisions for this sapling! What should I do? Where should I go to school? Should I enroll at a brand-new little CLC school in Mankato, which at the time had no sports at all? Encouraged by my stepdad pastor and by what I heard your congregation and other congregations were doing based on Holy Scripture, I made the jump. Excuse the personal references, but as one with vivid personal memories of those days, I only want to add a little bit of flesh-and-blood reality to what happened fifty years ago. Some difficult choices had to be made all around, including here in Sleepy Eye. Was it all so bad that it was necessary to start over with a new church, and in the process strain relations between relatives and church members who didn't agree with you? Not only that, but was it necessary to start a new synod over these matters? **"Ask your father and he will show you; your elders, and they will tell you!"** Your *Vergangenheit* (past) and your *Wurzeln* (roots) answer: Yes, with the help of God it

was necessary for conscience reasons! Talk to the “sturdy oak” senior citizens here at Grace or at Faith, New Ulm, at Immanuel, Mankato, at Salem, Eagle Lake, and other CLC charter churches, and you will hear how with consciences bound to the Word of the Lord Jesus, they had to take a stand. As Jesus one time taught His disciples: **“If you abide in My Word, you are My disciples indeed, and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free”** (John 8:31f.).

Yes, your congregation and our synod came into existence over a godly concern for purity of doctrine. And, we note yet, it was also done:

2. For the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Yes, make no mistake about it, everything said to this point is about that gospel and the truth that sets us free—free from sin, death, Satan, and hell! Pure scriptural doctrine is the foundation, the solid *Wurzeln*, the underpinnings of that only saving gospel. Put another way, every false doctrine chips away at the roots of that gospel! Notice how the text speaks of the importance of continuing in the pure doctrine of God’s Word: “. . . **for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.**” Concern for purity of doctrine, you see, is directly connected with the *saving* of our eternally blood-bought souls. How so?

Think a bit more of how this relates to the phrase, *“Ohne Wurzeln in der Vergangenheit, gibt es auch keine Zukunft”*: “Without roots in the past, there is no future.” Everything you and I believe, teach, and confess is rooted in this ancient book which goes back to creation itself. Likewise, everything our Savior did to ransom and redeem us is indeed ancient history. Everything we confess in the creeds of the church—the Apostolic (everything the apostles of the Lord taught and believed), the 4th-century Nicene, and 5th-century Athanasian Creeds—is objective truth from the ancient past. The words quoted from Pastor Schierenbeck at the beginning were in the context of what he wrote about—the crucial importance of each of our churches and each individual member being firmly rooted in our Lutheran Confessions, those dusty old creeds from the 16th century. Fellow members of the Church of the LUTHERAN CONFESSION, those dusty old statements set forth the truths of God’s saving Word against all the false teachings Satan was using and still uses to undermine and rob us of the gospel of Jesus!

Without that gospel we cannot be saved! You know what the word “saved” means? It means a *radical rescue from a desperate situation*. Only God Himself could save sinners. He did this in the most “radical” way—some 2000 years ago having His Savior-Son become incarnate, coming into this fallen world via a virgin birth, that He might live a holy life and then redeem us “not with gold or silver, but with His holy precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death.” And all of it was certified for us with His glorious resurrection! Ah yes, as we celebrate today, the Easter Hallelujahs echo from the walls and halls of every truly Christian congregation, Christian school, and Christian home, for we believe that the grave of the crucified Christ is empty, vacated 2000 years ago by Him **“who was delivered up because of our offenses, and raised because of our justification”** (Rom 4:25)! Vacated by Him who 2000 years ago said, **“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up”** (John 2:19). Vacated by Him who 2000 years ago said, **“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die”** (John 11:25). You see, fellow believers, *Ohne Wurzeln in der Vergangenheit, gibt es auch keine Zukunft!* Without faith rooted in the past, there is no future—in time or in eternity!

Christian friends, this our Christian Easter faith is ridiculed and scorned by an increasingly bold, atheistic, agnostic, secularistic, humanistic, evolutionistic culture and society. *Newsweek* magazine recently trumpeted: “The Decline and Fall of Christian America” (Apr. 13, 2009)! We are not alarmed because we know the gates of hell will ever try but will never succeed in prevailing against God’s Church. Nor are we surprised, for Paul told Timothy that **“the time will come when they will not endure sound**

doctrine, but . . . they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables” (2 Tim. 4:3-4).

How much more could be said? But let me close with the thought, “I want to die a Lutheran.” I saw it in an article recently and echo that statement for myself. And why? Not because there is a special place in heaven for Lutherans in general or CLC Lutherans in particular. God forbid such pharisaic, devilish pride! But I echo that statement—and pray each of you do—because rooted and grounded in ancient Bible teaching, our Lutheran faith teaches salvation as 100% God’s doing. We have the comfort, certainty, and assurance that salvation is not up to us, but is by God’s grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. In my time as your pastor I had some 22 funerals, most of them sturdy old oaks, a couple younger saplings. In the seven years since I left here, many more have passed on. Fifty years from now most of us will have joined them—joined them in the certainty of a glorious future rooted and grounded in the ancient gospel of Christ crucified and risen again!

Dear members of Grace, throughout this your Jubilee year—and as the CLC, which you helped to plant, observes its 50th next year—God grant that all of us, twigs, saplings, adult trees, and sturdy senior citizens, affirm the commitment made on the day of our confirmation: that our Christian faith, firmly grounded in the pure doctrine of God’s Word, is worth living for, sacrificing for, and even dying for, so help us God.

O gracious Lord, direct us,
Thy doctrine pure defend,
From heresies protect us,
And for Thy Word contend,
That we may praise Thee ever,
O God, with one accord
And say: The Lord, our Savior,
Be evermore adored (*TLH 544:3*).
Amen.

The Church of the Lutheran Confession—Fifty Years

David Lau

Chapter 8: Concerning Church and Ministry

Chapter 3 mentions that one of the doctrinal issues troubling the Synodical Conference in its later years was a controversy concerning church and ministry. To understand this controversy, it is helpful to consider the origins of the Missouri Synod.

In the early days of the Saxon settlers in Missouri it was discovered that their leader, Martin Stephan (1777-1846), had proved to be unfaithful by his adultery as well as by assuming a tyrannical attitude over those under his spiritual care. Such an attitude is contrary to the Biblical admonition in 1 Peter 5:2-3: **“Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.”** Walter Forster tells the whole shocking story in detail in his 1953 book, *Zion on the Mississippi*.

On January 14, 1839, the pastors in the group, including C. F. W. Walther (1811-1887), had signed a document which they presented to Martin Stephan, saying: “We have been instructed by you in many things, and from this instruction an abiding conviction has resulted in us that an episcopal form of polity, in accord with the Word of God, with the old Apostolic Church, and with our Symbolical Writings,

is indispensable. . . . May Jesus Christ . . . permit you, as our leader on the way to eternity, to hold the bishop's staff among us until the most distant limit of your . . . very high old age" (Forster 289). About a month later, on February 16, 1839, a number of them signed a document containing these words: "We solemnly pledge ourselves . . . to submit with Christian willingness and sincerity to the ordinances, decrees, and measures of His Reverence in respect to both ecclesiastical and community affairs" (Forster 294).

We can understand the spiritual turmoil experienced by the Saxon immigrants when they learned the truth about their leader whom they felt constrained to expel from their company. Some thought that the only right thing to do would be to return to Germany. They believed they had no standing as a church since their bishop had proved unfaithful and since they had no ties with any other church government. At this critical moment in their history the young pastor C. F. W. Walther emerged as their leader. He pointed out to them that they, as believers in Jesus Christ, had the ministry of the keys and therefore the authority to call pastors to serve them. They needed no ties to a church government in Germany to function as a Christian church in this country.

On April 15 and 21, 1841, Walther debated the question with the lawyer Franz Marbach at the log cabin "college" at Altenburg, Missouri. The eight theses that Walther defended brought unity to the settlers. Forster writes: "If there was any single factor which saved the colonies from complete dissolution and from the corrosive forces of further internal controversy, it was the Altenburg Debate" (525).

In *Zion on the Mississippi*, pages 523-525, Forster provides in translation [trans. Polack] Walther's eight theses:

- I. The true Church, in the most real and most perfect sense, is the totality (*Gesamtheit*) of all true believers, who from the beginning to the end of the world from among all peoples and tongues have been called and sanctified by the Holy Spirit through the Word. And since God alone knows these true believers (2 Tim. 2:19), the Church is also called invisible. No one belongs to this true Church who is not spiritually united with Christ, for it is the spiritual body of Jesus Christ.
- II. The name of the true Church belongs also to all those visible companies of men among whom God's Word is purely taught and the holy Sacraments are administered according to the institution of Christ. True, in this Church there are godless men, hypocrites, and heretics, but they are not true members of it, nor do they constitute the Church.
- III. The name Church, and, in a certain sense, the name true Church, belongs also to those visible companies of men who have united under the confession of a falsified faith and therefore have incurred the guilt of a partial departure from the truth; provided they possess so much of God's Word and the holy Sacraments in purity that children of God may thereby be born. When such companies are called true churches, it is not the intention to state that they are faithful, but only that they are real churches as opposed to all worldly organizations (*Gemeinschaften*).
- IV. The name Church is not improperly applied to heterodox companies, but according to the manner of speech of the Word of God itself. It is also not immaterial that this high name is allowed to such communions, for out of this follows: — 1. That members also of such companies may be saved; for without the Church there is no salvation.
- V. 2. The outward separation of a heterodox company from an orthodox Church is not necessarily a separation from the universal Christian Church nor a relapse into heathenism and does not yet deprive that company of the name Church.
- VI. 3. Even heterodox companies have church power; even among them the goods of the Church may be validly administered, the ministry established, the Sacraments validly administered, and the keys of the kingdom of heaven exercised.
- VII. 4. Even heterodox companies are not to be dissolved, but reformed.

VIII. The orthodox Church is chiefly to be judged by the common, orthodox, public confession to which its members acknowledge and confess themselves to be pledged.

Walther later expanded on these theses in three famous writings, all of which have been translated into English: *Church and Ministry*, *The Form of a Christian Congregation*, and *The True Visible Church*. Walther understood, as few others did, that Lutheran congregations in the United States did not need to take the same form as Lutheran congregations in Germany and other European countries. In fact, the Lutheran congregations in this country had to have a different form, since in this country there was no connection between church and state. As a student of the writings of Martin Luther, Walther knew that the way the Lutheran church had developed in Germany was not the kind of development that Luther preferred.

Because of these early experiences the Missouri Synod rejected the hierarchical ideas of both J. A. A. Grabau (1804-1879) of the Buffalo Synod and Wilhelm Loehe (1808-1872) of Neuendettelsau, Germany, who trained many young men and sent them over to America as pastors to serve the Lutheran settlers. When the Missouri Synod was organized in 1847, Trinity Church of St. Louis (Walther's congregation) proposed an amendment that was added to the synod's constitution. "This amendment makes the relation of synod to the individual congregations that of an advisory body, and resolutions of synod had no binding effect until adopted by the congregations" (Lueker 1409). Loehe, however, believed that the congregational system being developed by the Missouri Synod could lead only to chaos and anarchy.

Given the circumstances, C. F. W. Walther emphasized the local congregation of Christians as the form of the church, and pastors of congregations as those whom God called to be servants or ministers of the Word through the local congregations. But the chief emphasis of Walther in his writings on the church was that Christ gave the ministry of the keys to believers in Christ, not to Peter as the head of the apostles, not to the apostles as apostles, not to the clergy as clergy, and not to church organizations as such. Thesis IV in his book, *Church and Ministry (Kirche und Amt)*, makes this point: "It is to this true church of believers and saints that Christ gave the keys of the kingdom of heaven." (19).

In his theses on the ministry Walther distinguished between the priesthood of believers and the public ministry. Thesis I on the ministry states: "The holy ministry or pastoral office is an office distinct from the priesthood of all believers" (*Church and Ministry* 21). Since Walther spoke of the holy ministry or pastoral office, it was believed by some that Walther considered the pastoral office to be the only form of public ministry that Christ instituted. Again, in Thesis VI on the ministry Walther wrote: "The ministry of the Word [*Predigtamt*] is conferred by God through the congregation as the possessor of all ecclesiastical power, or the power of the keys, by means of its call, which God Himself has prescribed" (22). Some understood Walther as saying in this thesis that the only valid divine calls were calls issued by local congregations.

Thesis VIII on the ministry declared: "The pastoral ministry [*Predigtamt*] is the highest office in the church, and from it stem all other offices in the church" (22). This was understood by some to mean that the pastor's office is of a different nature than the office of a church teacher, professor, or administrator.

Walther's own writings suggest that he considered a synod to be "church" just as a local congregation is "church." In a sermon preached at the opening of a synodical convention, he spoke of a synod as also being a part of Christ's Church on earth (*Lutherische Brosamen* 391). In a sermon given at the installation of two instructors at a synodical college, Walther stated that it was the church that had called the two men, even though the call was not issued by a local congregation but by the synod. In fact, Walther specifically said concerning the two instructors: "Their office (as professor) is a branch of the office (the public ministry) which Christ instituted when He gave the Office of the Keys" (*Lutherische Brosamen* 347-349).

Who are Ministers? What is Church?

Arnold Mueller of the Missouri Synod studied Walther's writings thoroughly and came to the conclusion that Walther did not teach that the pastor of a local congregation held some kind of special office different from other forms of the public ministry. He wrote in his 1964 book, *The Ministry of the Lutheran Teacher*: "Walther refers to the pastoral ministry as the *Predigtamt* and the *Pfarramt*, but [h]e entertained a broader view of the ministry than the term pastorate or pastoral ministry indicates. He enumerates the apostles and other office-bearers mentioned in the New Testament and says that all of them participated in the ministry" (58). We also hear Mueller's conclusion stated in these words:

The pastorate is not the ministry itself, but, like the position of the teacher, it is one of the forms which the ministry assumes. The term *Predigtamt* (office of the ministry) came to be used synonymously with the term *Pfarramt* (pastorate) because the pastor is commissioned above all things to use the Word in preaching, teaching, administering the sacraments, and in other ways. Walther had a high respect for the position of the Christian teacher, for he called it a "sacred position" and "a part of the one office of the church." (101)

Nevertheless, the view came to prevail in Missouri Synod circles that local congregations are "church," but synods are not "church." Likewise it was believed that the pastor of a local congregation had a ministry that was on a higher level than any other kind of church ministry, for the pastoral ministry, it was believed, had been instituted by God, whereas other forms of ministry were human arrangements. One of the champions of this so-called "Old Missouri" view was a Missouri Synod lay theologian named Clyde Nehrenz, who wrote:

Only a local (particular) congregation can establish the ministry of the Word (office of the ministry; pastoral office). . . . Actual practice confirms this position of the Missouri Synod. No synodical official, whether elected or appointed, was considered an incumbent of the office of the ministry. In case of professors at our seminaries, local congregations were encouraged to consider calling them as assistant pastors. . . . Presidents of Synod and District Presidents were required to hold the office of the ministry in a local congregation. And if a service of Holy Communion were offered during the course of meetings of any synodical organization, including pastor/teacher conferences and even synodical conventions, it was required that a local congregation sponsor the service. Why all this? Because Synod is not a church. . . . It therefore has no authority, indeed no reason, to establish the office of the ministry. The establishment of a local congregation, as we have seen, is a divine ordinance. God has commanded nothing about a synod; it is a human arrangement. . . . The office of the Word (pastoral office) is the only office which Christ Himself established. All other offices in the church flow from this office and are auxiliary to it. (8)

Arnold Mueller admitted that he had been trained in such a view and said of his own experience: "I have said repeatedly that the person who has been brought up to think of the pastorate as the one divinely instituted office will have to go through an evolution in his thinking before he will be able to see just what the Scriptures say and what they do not say about the ministry, and why men like Luther, Chemnitz, and Quenstedt were careful not to identify the one-man pastorate as the one divinely instituted form of the ministry" (16).

It seems that during Walther's lifetime there were no major debates on the doctrine of church and ministry within the synods of the Synodical Conference. On the part of the member church bodies there was apparent agreement with Walther's theses. In his essay on the church presented to the Interim Conference, Leonard Bernthal explained how this situation changed.

The turn of the century brought to light that there was not complete agreement on the Church and the Ministry in the Synodical Conference. That which brought it to light was the incident of two

pastors and their congregations suspended from membership by a District of the Missouri Synod. They applied for membership with the Wisconsin Synod, who deferred action on this application because the Missouri Synod was still dealing with the applicants. During the time when the suspension from membership was in force some Wisconsin Synod pastors fellowshiped the congregations and their pastors. Their action aroused a lively discussion and brought to the surface a confusion in synod concerning the doctrine of the Church and the Ministry. The warning not to undermine the discipline of the Missouri Synod was met with the statement: fellowship with men under synodical discipline is justified on the ground that synod is only a human arrangement, whereas the discipline of the divinely instituted local congregation must indeed be respected. With this statement the authority of the Church is limited to a locally organized congregation because it is instituted of God. Other assemblies of Christians, as conferences, synods, it is said, do not have the authority of the Church and is [sic] not Church, because there is no divine institution for these assemblies in Scripture. ("Doctrine of the Church" 1-2)

In the early stages of the controversy the debate did not pit Wisconsin Synod pastors against Missouri Synod pastors. Pastors from both synods could be found on either side of the debate. Eventually the three professors at the Wauwatosa seminary of the Wisconsin Synod, J. P. Koehler, August Pieper, and John Schaller, took the lead in establishing from Scripture and from church history that Christ did not give the keys to local congregations to the exclusion of other groups of Christians and that Christ did not establish the pastoral ministry to the exclusion of other forms of public ministry. The debate went on for many years, and thousands of words were written on the subject. Eventually the Wisconsin Synod pastors were united in their agreement with the Wauwatosa theologians, whereas the majority of the Missouri Synod leaders still held that the local congregation and the pastorate of the congregation were on a different level than other church organizations and ministries.

Both synods agreed, at least in the beginning of the controversy, that doctrinal agreement is necessary for church fellowship. It may seem puzzling, therefore, that they remained in fellowship with each other in spite of this difference on church and ministry. Egbert Schaller explained it this way: "The Church and Ministry issue was a problem under which unity suffered strain for a long time. But that is a story which cannot be told in a few words. It never became quite clear whether a doctrine was at stake or whether the disputes lay in the area of emphasis and semantics" ("New Synodical Conference?" 40).

The *Brief Statement*, adopted by the Missouri Synod in 1932, does not declare the local congregation the only right form of "church" on earth, nor does it declare the pastoral ministry the only form of the ministry instituted by God. In paragraph 30 the emphasis of the *Brief Statement* is that Christ entrusted the ministry of the keys to Christians.

Since the Christians are the Church, it is self-evident that they alone *originally* possess the spiritual gifts and rights which Christ has gained for, and given to, His Church. . . . Christ Himself commits to all believers the keys of the kingdom of heaven, Matt. 16:13-19; 18:17-20; John 20:22, 23, and commissions all believers to preach the Gospel and to administer the Sacraments, Matt. 28:19, 20; 1 Cor. 11:23-25. Accordingly, we reject all doctrines by which this spiritual power or any part thereof is adjudged as *originally* vested in certain individuals or bodies, such as the Pope, or the bishops, or the order of the ministry, or the secular lords, or councils, or synods, etc. The officers of the Church publicly administer their offices only by virtue of delegated powers, conferred on them by the original possessors of such powers, and such administration remains under the supervision of the latter, Col. 4:17. ("Of the Church" 14, emph. orig.)

In its section on the public ministry the *Brief Statement* also says: "By the public ministry we mean the office by which the Word of God is preached and the Sacraments are administered *by order and in the name* of a Christian congregation. Concerning this office we teach that it is a *divine ordinance* . . ." (14, emph. orig.).

The question confronting the Interim Conference was whether the group that was forming could

state its agreement with the *Brief Statement*. Therefore the Red Wing Interim Conference, meeting in August of 1959, asked George Barthels to consider this matter and report to the next meeting of the conference. At the Mankato meeting of the Interim Conference in January of 1960, Pastor George Barthels read a paper entitled "A Restudy of the *Brief Statement*." In his presentation he pointed out that most of the theses in the *Brief Statement* are "an excellent summary of the doctrine of the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions." But he also said: "There are a few places in the Brief Statement where, in the opinion of this essayist, the door has not been closed firmly enough to error, and other places where the thought could be expressed a little more clearly" (2). He then made a few suggestions for improved wording that would make for a better understanding. Many of his suggestions were in the area of church fellowship and church and ministry. For example, for the sentence of paragraph 31 printed above, Barthels suggested this wording: "By the public ministry we mean the office by which the Word of God is preached and the Sacraments are administered by order and in the name of a Christian congregation, 'conference, or synod'" (4, addition underlined).

Such changes, however, were not made, since the *Brief Statement* was a well-known historical document, the officially stated confession of the Missouri Synod. Nevertheless, the decision was made to include the *Brief Statement* as a confession of our faith, but also to add another statement concerning church fellowship and another concerning church and ministry to clarify our position. The constitution of the Church of the Lutheran Confession states plainly: "We also subscribe to the *Brief Statement* of 1932." It then goes on to say: "Because of differences that arose within the Synodical Conference we have found it necessary to define our position in a particular statement entitled *Concerning Church Fellowship* as well as in *Theses on the Relation of Synod and Local Congregation to the Holy Christian Church* and *Theses on the Ministry of the Keys and the Public Ministry*" (3, Article III: Confession).

In 1932, the same year that the Missouri Synod adopted the *Brief Statement*, representatives from the Missouri Synod and the Wisconsin Synod met in Thiensville, Wisconsin, and drew up the Thiensville Theses on church and ministry. Neither synod formally adopted these theses, but the Synodical Conference adopted them twenty years later at its 1952 convention in St. Paul, Minnesota. These theses are printed in Volume Three of *The Abiding Word* as follows:

- I. As we know from Scripture, it is God's will and regulation that Christians who reside in the same area also establish an external connection in order to exercise jointly the obligations of their spiritual priesthood.
- II. As we know from Scripture, it is furthermore God's will and regulation that such Christian local congregations have shepherds and teachers, who in the name and on behalf of the congregation carry out the duties of the ministry of the Word in their midst.
- III. As we know from Scripture, it is also God's will and regulation that Christian local congregations give expression to their unity of faith with other congregations and carry on jointly with them the work of the kingdom of God as is done among us in the unprescribed form of a synod.
- IV. Because every Christian possesses the keys of the kingdom of heaven, every judgment pronounced in agreement with God's Word by an individual Christian or by more Christians in any kind of combination is valid also in heaven. But, as we know from Scripture, it is God's will and regulation that proceedings against a brother who has sinned shall not be considered completed until his local congregation has acted. Congregational discipline and synodical discipline, if everything is done properly, cannot cause a conflict, since the local congregation excludes from the local congregation and not from the Synod, and Synod excludes from Synod and not from the local congregation. (qtd. in Von Rohr Sauer 336-337)

In a letter dated April 13, 1947, a Missouri Synod pastor, Pastor Marxhausen of Courtland, Minnesota, wrote to Pastor George Schweikert of Okabena, Minnesota: "Some time after these theses were adopted a venerable old theologian of our Synod, and he is still living and can verify this statement, met Pfothenauer [president of the Missouri Synod from 1911 to 1935] and asked him what

had been done. Pfothenauer replied that the matter had been settled and that Wisconsin had yielded its position. Shortly thereafter the same man met A. Pieper [Wisconsin Synod seminary professor] and asked him the same question. Pieper stated that the matter had been settled in this way, that Missouri had adopted the viewpoint of Wisconsin" (1).

Thus since these theses clearly did not resolve the issues that had been debated, the debate continued. Eventually many views on church and ministry emerged within the Missouri Synod. There has been no unanimous teaching on church and ministry in that synod for many years. But what was and is considered the "Old Missouri" position on church and ministry has been championed by the Orthodox Lutheran Conference, the Concordia Lutheran Conference, and the Lutheran Churches of the Reformation. These are smaller church bodies created by individuals and groups that had removed themselves from the Missouri Synod. These church bodies refuse fellowship with the Wisconsin Synod because of its position on church and ministry.

In 1944 George Lillegard of the Norwegian Synod presented a paper on church and ministry that addressed the various issues which had been raised during the long debate. He stated the differences between the two as this: Missouri contended that a local congregation is "church," but that a synod is not "church." Wisconsin contended that in essence both local congregation and synod and any other functioning group of Christians are "church," since in essence they are believers joining together to do the work of the Lord. Lillegard concluded:

There is in reality nothing in Scripture which justifies the sharp distinction which Missouri makes between the local congregation and other church organizations, as regards their divine institution. . . . We . . . can point to no direct command to organize local congregations any more than we can point to such commands to organize synods. . . . We have only the general commands which, to be carried out, necessitate some sort of organization, first locally, and ordinarily also on a larger scale. (12-13)

On the differences in their understanding of ministry Lillegard summarized thus: "Missouri puts the pastor in a local congregation in a class by himself, separating all other church offices from it [as] only secondary. . . . Wisconsin puts all called servants of the Word, whether pastors, theological professors, or missionaries, etc. in the same class" (12). He then stated as a conclusion:

The Wisconsin position accords with Scripture when it brings out that missionaries, theological professors, etc., have a divine call on a par with that of the local pastor. . . . For Paul and Barnabas were sent out by the congregation at Antioch . . . to preach the Gospel as missionaries to the Gentiles, —the "ordination" of missionaries th[us] being as directly established by Scripture as the ordination of local pastors. (12)

Lillegard concluded his paper with this hope:

I believe that the analysis I have given above indicates correctly how the views of Missouri and Wisconsin can be reconciled, if extremist positions and statements on both sides are avoided. It is my fervent hope that there will be at least some among us who will agree with me on this; if we study the points at issue with an open mind, accepting Scripture alone as our authority, it should be possible to come to a full agreement on such matters as these here discussed. (15)

On February 16, 1948, a number of pastors from the various synods of the Synodical Conference met for a free conference in Sleepy Eye, Minnesota. According to the report of Pastor George Schweikert of Okabena, there were present at this conference between twenty-five and thirty Wisconsin Synod men, six Norwegian Synod men, and three Missouri Synod men. During the conference a Norwegian Synod pastor, Stuart A. Dorr, presented 18 theses under the heading "Congregation and Synod." Some of the questions discussed in the theses were these: "Is synod or conference a 'church'? Did God institute the form of the present-day *Pfarramt*? Does a professor or day school teacher have a 'divine call'?" Schweikert reported the apparent agreement and confession of the Wisconsin and Norwegian men as this:

Any synod or conference of Christians assembled to do the will of the Lord as commanded in Matt.

28 is a congregation, or “church,” because then we have a communion of saints. Any group of Christians engaging any fellow Christian for divinely commanded church work is giving him a divine call. . . . God instituted the Office of the Word and established the Universal Priesthood by Mt. 28, John 20, 1 Pet. 2:9, etc. But God has nowhere commanded the present-day form of pastoral office as a form which must remain in the church for all time. (Schweikert 1)

There were other such meetings. Among the participants were C. M. Gullerud of the Norwegian Synod and Egbert Schaller of the Wisconsin Synod. At first C. M. Gullerud held the so-called “Old Missouri” view since he had been trained in Missouri Synod schools. Further study and discussion eventually brought him to the Wisconsin position.

In 1952 the English translation of Francis Pieper’s *Christian Dogmatics*, Volume III, appeared in print. On page 421 we find these words with reference to Matthew 18:17: “The union of congregations into larger church bodies, such as conferences, synods, etc., has not been ordained by God. The command ‘Tell it unto the church,’ according to the context, pertains to the local church, or congregation, and it must be restricted to the local church. ‘Tell it unto the synod,’ etc., is a human device.”

In this case, however, the English translation was not accurate. Pieper’s original words could better be translated: “The command: ‘Tell it to the church!’ pertains, according to the context, to the ‘local congregation’ and beyond this should not be made mandatory as a divine ordinance.” Pieper’s words therefore can be understood to mean that it is not necessary to go any further than the local congregation in matters of church discipline. Jesus is not saying that we must tell the matter of someone’s impenitence to all Christians everywhere on earth, or even to a larger group or synod of Christians, before we can judge someone to be a heathen and a publican. It is enough if we bring this matter to the local group of Christians. If the impenitent sinner does not listen to this group of believers, as small as it may be, let him be considered a heathen. No one can say that a matter of church discipline must by God’s command be brought to some higher church tribunal before the case can be closed. In recognition of this fact the CLC Constitution has always included a statement to the effect that an excommunication of a member by any congregation “is to be recognized and honored by the entire membership of the Church of the Lutheran Confession” (12, Bylaw 6).

To say, however, that the “church” in Matthew 18:17 must always refer to a local congregation is going too far. “While the Matthean text undoubtedly empowers the local congregation to exercise the office of the Keys, this limitation of ‘only’ is brought in by interpretation and is not a direct statement of the *nuda Scriptura*” (“Toward Agreement” 20). When it made this assertion, the Federation for Authentic Lutheranism was made up of a number of pastors and congregations that withdrew from the Missouri Synod for doctrinal reasons, and after intensive study of the Scriptural passages dealing with church and ministry, they came to agree with the Wisconsin Synod position. After several years as an independent church body its members decided to dissolve the church body as such and join either the Evangelical Lutheran Synod or the Wisconsin Synod, with whom they were in doctrinal agreement.

The need for unity

Because of the many debates on church and ministry in the Synodical Conference and elsewhere, it was determined very early in the days of the Interim Conference that unity on the church and ministry issue was just as vital as unity concerning church fellowship. At the Mankato conference in December of 1957, Gervasius Fischer of Mankato was asked to draw up a confession on church and ministry to be presented at the next conference. Because of illness Pastor Fischer was unable to fulfill his assignment. He did, however, address a letter to the Cheyenne conference in May of 1958, in which he stated his observations as follows:

The differences which have arisen were not due to a disagreement in the doctrine of the church as such, or of the public ministry (*Predigtamt*), or of the ministry of a pastor in a congregation, or even

of the functioning of a synod and its relation to its constituent congregations. But our difficulties seemed to have arisen when we began to speak of the institution of a local congregation in its present form, its rights and autonomy, especially as it distinguishes itself from an affiliation of Christian congregations known among us as a synod.

But here again we discover that the Missouri Synod, which has spoken of the local congregation as being alone divinely instituted and stating that a synod is of human origin, has recently permitted synodical officials to interfere with the ministry of local congregations and even caused congregations to depose their pastors, not because these had become guilty of false doctrine, unscriptural practice, or a sinful life, but merely because these pastors refused to submit to synodical resolutions.

On the other hand, the Wisconsin Synod, which maintains that the synod functions "as church," instructs its district officials through its constitution that even though they are to supervise doctrine and practice in the congregations of their districts, they are nevertheless in "intra congregational" affairs to serve only in an advisory capacity.

So we must guard against being misunderstood by making general or sweeping statements in the matter. Those in our midst who speak of the synod as having the marks of "church" do NOT want to establish a super-church or a synod which rules all other congregations by its officials. . . .

It is my sincere conviction that in due time we shall reach clarity in the whole matter if we avoid raising the matter to the level of a doctrine, which even could become divisive. As for me, after further studies in these differences, I am still of the opinion that the whole matter is one of emphasis. (1-2)

The assignment was then given to Leonard Bernthal, who presented his essays on church and ministry at the conferences in Spokane (August 1958), Mankato (January 1959), and Red Wing (August 1959). Drawing on the work of the Wauwatosa theologians, especially August Pieper, Bernthal defended as his first thesis: "No one is able to understand the Scriptural teaching of the church unless he keeps fast before his eyes that the word church in the New Testament does not ever mean anything else than congregation of saints or believers" ("Doctrine of the Church" 2). This led to a prolonged discussion of the usage of the word *ekklesia* in the New Testament. Eventually the view prevailed that this thesis was a bit of an overstatement. The wording adopted by the August 1962 convention of the Church of the Lutheran Confession was this: "When our Savior, in Mt. 16:18, declares that He would build His Church, He was not speaking of any visible church body as such, but of His spiritual Body. This is the first instance of the New Testament use of the term 'ekklesia,' which we translate as 'church'; and in similar contexts the Apostles consistently employ the term in the same sense" (*Concerning Church and Ministry* 9).

Bernthal's second thesis was this: "The Lord has entrusted the preaching of the Gospel, and with it the Authority of the Keys, to His Church, the Congregation of Saints, not to a corporate body of confessing Christians existing according to an outward prescribed form comprising believers and hypocrites, nor to any specific form of the Ministry." In this section Bernthal maintained: "Any assembly of the church in whatever outward form it might be has the ministry of the keys, solely because of the believers in the outward assembly. . . . One must clearly distinguish between the true inner essence of the church, the congregation of saints, and its outward form." On the question of whether the pastoral ministry had been instituted by God, Bernthal declared: "Whenever we speak of the pastorate as ordained of God, we do not thereby say that this specific form of the public ministry is ordained of God, but that the public ministry itself is ordained of God" ("Doctrine of Church and Ministry" 2, 5, emph. orig.). Bernthal pointed out that Martin Luther did not regard the pastorate as the one divinely ordained ministry, but said: "'I do hope the believers well know that the spiritual calling is instituted and ordained of God. . . . This calling I mean which has the office of the ministry and use of the Word and the Sacraments . . . such as: the pastorate, teacher, preacher, reader, priest, . . . sacristan, schoolmaster, and the like" (qtd. in "Doctrine of Church and Ministry" 5).

At the Mankato conference in January of 1959 it was decided that the chairman, Edmund Reim, should conduct a seminar on church and ministry to discuss more thoroughly some of the points that

had been raised. Two such seminars were held at Mankato before the next conference at Red Wing in August of 1959. The minutes for the seminar on February 4, 1959, indicate that those present at that meeting included Edmund Reim, Tobias Pederson, Theodore Pederson, Orrin Falk, George Barthels, C. M. Gullerud, Gordon Radtke, Norman Madson, Sr., Martin Garbrecht, Robert Rehm, Mr. Tietz, Mr. Johnson, Dave Hanel, and students L. Dale Redlin, Clifford Kuehne, and Gene Schreyer.

Edmund Reim opened the seminar with remarks well worth remembering:

In our discussions let those of us who hold the “Wisconsin” position remember the historical background for Missouri’s insistence on the sovereignty of the local congregation over against the Synod, and on the divine institution of the local congregation and its ministry. In its early years Missouri was faced with the claims of Grabau of the Buffalo Synod, and similar views held by Loehe of Germany, both to the effect that for the sake of establishing a legitimate ministry and for the proper exercise of church discipline a local congregation is under the authority of the larger church body and dependent on its functions, particularly that of a continuing and self-perpetuating Ministerium, through which the office of the Ministry must be transmitted to such a congregation in order to be valid. Against these views which challenged the legitimacy of the ministry as it was constituted in Missouri’s congregations Walther, proceeding from the doctrine of the universal priesthood of all believers, emphasized the sovereignty of the local congregation. By virtue of their royal priesthood its members are in full possession of the Means of Grace, and when by their call they confer upon a qualified individual the public administration of these Means, the use of the Keys in their behalf, they are for the sake of the validity of their action not dependent upon the aid of a super-Church, but are simply exercising a function which is already theirs. It is their call which makes their chosen pastor a Minister of Christ—not the fact that he has been given to them by a Synod or its officials. This is Walther’s “*Uebertragungslehre*,” a doctrine which we of Wisconsin heartily endorse. (1)

Reim continued:

It is equally important that those who hold the “Missouri” position understand how Wisconsin came to state that a synod is “church.” Several Wisconsin pastors had continued to fraternize with a Missouri pastor in spite of the fact that he was under synodical suspension, justifying their action by claiming that this suspension, even though carried out by the Synod in keeping with its assigned function of supervision of doctrine and practice, was nevertheless not the disciplinary action of a local congregation (“excommunication”), but only that of a synod, which is after all “merely a human arrangement.” Against this view which so seriously belittled the spiritual quality of a synod and its important disciplinary function Wisconsin’s theological faculty claimed that a synod is indeed “church” . . . by virtue of the true believers that are gathered there in the name of Christ. But it should be noted that the purpose of this claim was not to secure for a synod the status of a super-church, but was rather born of deep concern lest, with all the discussion about the form and function of a synod, we lose sight of the fact that in its essence and nature it is truly a creation of the Holy Spirit. (1-2)

This first seminar (February 1959) came to an agreement on six points, which Reim then offered to the conference “as an informal summary of the unity that was achieved.”

1. In discussing the doctrine of the Church, specifically the relation of synod and local congregation, we have found it helpful to note whether we are speaking of the nature and essence of these respective bodies, or of their organizational form and function.
2. When it is said of local groups of professing Christians that they are “church,” this is said with regard to their inner nature and essence; they are manifestations of the creative work of the Holy Ghost. Historically and by their function such local groups (congregations) are certainly the primary and basic form of the visible church. But it should be noted that in their outward organizational form even the apostolic churches varied widely. Compare Corinth with Jerusalem.

3. When it is said of a synod that it is a “human arrangement,” this is properly said with reference to its outward organizational form, which is determined and defined by the congregations that have constituted this larger body.
4. When it is said of a synod that it is “church,” this is said with reference to its inner nature and essence (a gathering of true believers), and in grateful recognition of the way in which, particularly also in this larger field, the fellowship of a common faith is a unity that is “of the Spirit.” Eph. 4:3.
5. When the formal origin of synods as we know them (cf. Point 3) is kept in mind, there will be no room for a situation where a synod invades and overrules a congregation in its exercise of Christian discipline. When a synod goes beyond the functions that have been assigned to it by the constituting congregations, it oversteps its “call” and becomes a busybody in other men’s matters (I Pt. 4:15).
6. If we remember what was said in Point 4 about the nature and essence of a synod, we will not doubt that when such a synod faithfully and conscientiously fulfills its assigned functions (whether it be in the training of pastors and teachers, in promoting the work of missions, or in the area of doctrinal discipline, the supervision of doctrine and practice), its actions are completely valid and have divine authority. For they are functions for which, as “church” it is fully competent and qualified. (Reim 2-3)

Another seminar to discuss these six points was scheduled for April 13 at Mankato. The minutes of this meeting are not available. The Red Wing conference held in August of 1959 made some amendments to the above six points, and Leonard Bernthal was asked to continue his work, since some points in his presentation were still being disputed. At the January 1960 meeting in Mankato the six points of the Mankato Seminar as well as Leonard Bernthal’s essay on the church were given to an Editing Committee (C. M. Gullerud, Robert Dommer, James Pelzl) with instructions to draw up propositions on church and ministry in a final form.

By the time of the organizing convention of August 1960 at Watertown, South Dakota, there were two sets of theses available for study, discussion, and adoption. The “Theses on the Church” consisted of six points, revised from the six points listed above. In addition, there were “Theses of Agreement on the Office of the Keys and the Public Ministry.” The three paragraphs of these theses were submitted over the names of “The Committee of the Sleepy Eye Free Conference”: Norman Madson, Sr.; C. M. Gullerud; Egbert Schaller. There is no indication on the document as to when this Sleepy Eye Free Conference took place. These two sets of theses were thoroughly discussed and revised by a floor committee and then discussed by the convention as a whole. The result was that both sets of theses were adopted unanimously as the confession of the conference and were named in the constitution as the united confession of the newly organized church body.

Leonard Bernthal read his paper on the ministry at the Watertown meeting and served as secretary of the floor committee that proposed the two sets of theses for adoption. Certainly the blessing of the Lord rested on the many hours and strenuous efforts given to the task of formulating these statements on church and ministry, which satisfactorily resolved certain questions that had been debated for so many years.

Not all of those that withdrew from the synods of the Synodical Conference were able to agree with our confession. The Orthodox Lutheran Conference, the Concordia Lutheran Conference, and later the Lutheran Churches of the Reformation rejected our confession on church and ministry as false teaching. The Wisconsin Synod, however, has expressed its agreement with our statement on church and ministry and has even made use of it as a summary of its own position in discussions with other church bodies.

Since those days many other issues have been raised in the Missouri Synod and elsewhere concerning church and ministry. The theses adopted by the Interim Conference in August of 1960 are still helpful today in dealing with these issues in a Biblical way. The August 1960 convention asked

Egbert Schaller to draw up a longer document explaining both sets of theses and presenting the Biblical proof in greater detail. At its convention in August of 1962 the Church of the Lutheran Confession adopted Egbert Schaller's essay on church and ministry as a statement of its public doctrine. Subsequently the explanation together with the theses have been published in a pamphlet entitled *Concerning Church and Ministry*.

[Ed. Both sets of Theses, which are the essential points confessed in *Concerning Church and Ministry*, are here printed with Scripture references noted and also with gratitude to our gracious God, who enabled the founders of the Church of the Lutheran Confession to confess these doctrines in clarity and simplicity.]

I. Theses on the Relation of Synod and Local Congregation to the Holy Christian Church

In the discussion of the doctrine of the Church, specifically the relation of synod and local congregation, it is helpful and essential to distinguish between THE NATURE AND ESSENCE of these respective bodies on the one hand and their ORGANIZATIONAL FORM AND FUNCTION on the other.

1. The Church, according to its inner nature and essence, is the total number of all those whom God recognizes as His dear children by faith in Christ Jesus. 2 Timothy 2:19; Galatians 3:26; 1 Peter 2:9; Ephesians 2:19-22; Acts 2:47b.

2. Any group of professing Christians gathered in Christ's name (Matthew 18:20) can rightly be called "Church" because of the Christians in it. Therefore also a so-called local congregation gathered about Word and Sacrament is rightly called "Church" only because of the Christians in it. Ephesians 1:1; Philippians 1:1; Colossians 1:2; Matthew 18:20. The outward organizational form of a congregation is of human arrangement and may vary widely as it did even in the Apostolic Church. Compare Corinth with Jerusalem. 1 Corinthians 12 and 14; Acts 6.

3. When it is said that a synod is "Church," this is said with reference to its inner nature and essence, namely insofar as it constitutes a communion of true believers. When it is said that a synod or conference is a "human arrangement" this is properly said with reference to its outward organizational form which is determined and defined by the congregations that have constituted this body.

4. When the formal origin of synods as we know them is kept in mind there will be no room for a situation where a synod invades and overrules a congregation in its exercise of Christian discipline. When a synod goes beyond the functions that have been assigned to it by the constituting congregations it oversteps its call and becomes a busybody in other men's matters. 1 Peter 4:15.

5. If we remember that a synod is "Church" with reference to its inner nature and essence, we will not doubt that when a synod faithfully and conscientiously fulfills its assigned functions (whether it be the training of pastors and teachers, in promoting the work of missions, or in the area of doctrinal discipline, the supervision of doctrine and practice), its actions are completely valid and have divine authority. For they are functions for which, as "Church," it is fully competent and qualified. Matthew 18:20; John 20:21-23; Mark 16:15; 1 Corinthians 3:21-23.

II. Theses on the Ministry of the Keys and the Public Ministry

1. The Ministry of the Keys, which is the ministry of the Word, has been committed to the Holy Christian Church—therefore to each Christian man, woman, and child. Christians are to be personally active in this ministry in every possible way which is not in violation of God's will and ordinance. Mark 16:15; Matthew 28:18-20; John 20:21-23; 1 Corinthians 3:21-23; 1 Peter 2:9.

2. It is God's will and Ordinance that Christians provide for the public administration of the Keys. This is achieved through the calling of qualified individuals who are thus placed in charge of the public administration of Word and Sacraments and perform this task in behalf of their fellow Christians (*von*

Gemeinschafts wegen). Such service is referred to as the public ministry; and its duties are to be exercised only by those who are properly called to it by the Church. This Public Ministry is God-ordained and not a product of historical development. Acts 1:23-26; Acts 6:5-6; I Timothy 3:1-5; I Thessalonians 5:12-13; I Timothy 5:17; Titus 1:5-9. Augsburg Confession, Article 14: Of Ecclesiastical Usages.—Of Ecclesiastical Order they teach that no one should publicly teach in the Church or administer the Sacraments unless he be regularly called.

3. The office of the Public Ministry is not limited to any divinely fixed form as such, for example the outward form of the “*Pfarramt*” or pastoral office. In Christian liberty, as circumstances require and as the Lord supplies diversity of gifts, operations and ministries (1 Corinthians 12:4-6—Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. 12:28—And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healing, helps, governments, diversities), the Church may separate the various functions of the Public Ministry of the Word and apportion them to whatever number of qualified persons it may choose to call. It is essential that each call thus extended shall specify the area of responsibility and the type of duty thereby assigned, and that each laborer abide by the terms of his call. Acts 6:1-4; Philippians 1:1.

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“Save” the Wife and Children
Vance Fossum

Editor’s Note: The following was originally presented to the CLC Southeastern Pastoral Conference which met in October of 2009. Since then the author has composed a companion study guide to be made available to congregations and clergy some time this year. Wherever noted, the author’s translation of Scripture passages has been indicated parenthetically with his initials *vf*. Parts I and II below will be concluded with part III in the June issue.

Introduction

The purpose of this essay is not to set forth a doctrinal statement on the position of men and women in the home, the church, and the world. Among us there is agreement on this principle as it is clearly set forth in Holy Scripture. Our concern is that Christian men understand and perform the role which God, our Savior, has also chosen for them.

It has been said that the gender-based positions taken by the churches today are a reaction to the rise of secular feminism in our culture. This is only partly true. Weeds grow where grass is permitted to die out for lack of water and fertilizer; air rushes in to fill a vacuum, if given the chance; and women will lead, if men will not. God help us all to perform our assigned role as *Christ’s* men to His glory for the home, the church, and the world.

Since beginning this assignment under the title, “The Role of Man in the Home, the Church, and the World,” it was decided that the scope of such a paper is too broad. Thus the focus has been narrowed to “The Role of Men in the Home.” We believe that much confusion in our world and in the churches today stems from an upside down view of the relative positions of men and women *in the home*. The home is where it all begins, “for better or for worse,” for the church and for the world, for as the family-home rises or falls according to its leadership, so does a nation.

PART I: The Genesis of the Matter
***From the beginning God established the man
to be the head of his wife.***

We realize that the role of men cannot be intelligently discussed and understood without some consideration to the proper relationship of men and women. This is necessary, not because of the current debate and power struggle in American society and particularly within our nation’s religious denominations, but because of the *genesis* of man and woman.

Many argue that since Paul writes that “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28), the roles men and women play should be based on the God-given *gifts* of individuals, which are without regard to gender, class, or race. However, the roles that men and women are to play in God’s world, even this fallen world, are assigned, not assumed, even as the director of a stage play assigns the particular roles to his actors and actresses. Although gifted male and female performers are often able to switch roles and play the opposite sex, this is not done without the director’s approval and assignment of the role, regardless of the ability of the players. So also, we are not free to assign roles to men and women that our heavenly Creator and Director forbids.

It is true as Galatians 3:26-28 states: Through faith in Christ there is no distinction with God between male and female—“all are one.” We rejoice in this! At the same time we celebrate the truth of Ephesians 5:22-33, where the God-inspired apostle makes a distinction between the husband and the wife in saying, “The husband is the *head* of the wife.” Paul was not conforming to the bigotry or social norm of his day in this passage, or in 1 Timothy 2:9-15, or in 1 Corinthians 11 and 14. He only makes

reference to the order God established.

Again, we gladly affirm at the outset that the Bible from Genesis to Revelation teaches an equality of women with men before God:

- 1) Both were made “in the image of God”: “God created man [אָדָם] in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male [זָכָר] and female [אִשָּׁה] He created them” (Gen. 1:27).
- 2) Since the fall into sin women are declared to be *spiritually* equal with men in Christ (Gal. 3:26-28) and by faith “heirs together of the grace of life” (1 Pet. 3:7).
- 3) They are gifted by the Holy Spirit to share in the work, sacrifice, and suffering that goes with the spreading of the Gospel and the building of the Church of Christ (John 20:17-18, Acts 2:16-18, 41-47, 16:14-15, Rom. 16:1-6, Phil. 4:1-3, *et al*).

However, against the confusion of our dark age we assert without reservation that God Himself distinguished the roles of man and woman from the *genesis* of creation. Man’s God-ordained role as head/leader of the woman was born in Genesis and carried through the rest of Holy Scripture.

Genesis 1 – Creation Defined: On the sixth day, as the crown of His creation God creates man and woman in His own image (Gen. 1:26-27).

Genesis 2 – Creation Detailed: The man is created first and the woman is created from him to be his “helper.” Thus the headship/helper relationship is established in the details of chapter two.

- 1) Man was created for God from the elements of the earth (Gen. 2:7).
- 2) God placed the man in His garden to “cultivate” [עָבַד] and “guard” it [שָׁמַר] or care for it (Gen. 2:15).
- 3) Before the woman was created, God gave the first command directly to the man, along with the warning that death would be the result of disobedience (Gen. 2:16-17).
- 4) Before the woman was created, God brought the animals to the man so that they might receive their names from him (Gen. 2:19-20).
- 5) God’s distinction of man’s role as the head of the woman is confirmed when the woman is created *from* the man (Gen. 2:22) to be man’s “helper” [עֲזָרָה] (2:18).
- 6) The Creator permits the man to name the woman, further demonstrating the leadership role assigned to him (Gen. 2:23).

Genesis 3 – Creation Defiled: When God’s created order was threatened by the fall of mankind into sin, God reasserted the headship/helper relationship of man and woman.

- 1) After the fall into sin God calls out to man first, showing that He considered Adam to be the leader and held him responsible more than the woman (Gen. 3:9), even though he was “not deceived” (1 Tim. 2:14).
- 2) By His words to Eve, “He shall rule over you” (Gen. 3:16), God reasserts the order He established before the fall by a divinely directed longing for the man. In other words, Eve’s disobedience did not result in woman permanently taking the leadership role away from man in this world.¹
- 3) The headship/leadership role of man detailed in Genesis is clearly taught and applied in the New Testament, especially in 1 Corinthians 11:3, 7-9, 14-15; Ephesians 5:22-24; and 1 Timothy 2:9-15.

From the recorded genesis of mankind to the end of Holy Scripture we learn that men and women are created equal in the image of God and are equally acceptable to Him in Christ, but they are not absolutely equal in every other sense; there are differences in role and function based on gender.

Doesn't a bear have a different role and function in God's creation than an elephant? Yet both are equally fascinating animals and equally important in maintaining the balance of nature.

God also made men and women equal in terms of their importance and work in His world. Because both were created in His image, they were equally holy and happy in their knowledge of God and in their perfect relationship with Him. Still, He gave to the man a different role than he gave to the woman; He gave the man the *headship* role, revealing this order in both the Old and the New Testaments. And God was so zealous to preserve this order that He did not permit the devil's defilement of creation to change the headship/helper relationship of man and woman.

The *genesis* of man and woman reveals another and most important truth regarding the created role of man: *God first made man responsible to Him for the sake of all creation; then He gave man authority over the woman.* Or to put it another way, man's role (responsibilities) in God's world existed before the woman's role, so that man's first role was to serve God above all. Man's God-given headship authority flows from his God-given role as caretaker of the garden and the woman and all that God gave him.

PART II: The Role of Christ's Men in the Home

As Christ was both the Head and self-submitting Savior of His bride, the Church, so the husband is to use his headship to "save" his wife.

Again, man's headship authority over the woman was given to him because of and in the service of his *God-given responsibility toward God, toward the woman, and toward all creation.* God did not give authority or headship to the man arbitrarily, for no reason, but for the sake of the woman and all creation. Keeping this scriptural perspective is helpful in discussing the man's role in the home.

What constitutes a *home*? Even in our day it is generally understood that a home begins when a man takes a wife to himself in marriage, or a woman "takes" a husband. Some are of the opinion that Holy Scripture contains more detail about the role of women in the home than the role of men. Some have suggested that this is so because God saw that woman would be envious of a man's apparent freedom, and He wanted to restrain her beforehand.²

We will not set ourselves the tedious task of trying to determine whose domestic role gets the most attention in the Bible. This would be a useless and divisive discussion. Didn't the apostle warn against teachings "which cause disputes rather than godly edification" (1 Tim. 1:3-4)? Rather, the focus of this essay is on the evangelical admonitions of Paul to the Christian *man*, particularly in Ephesians 5. For there we see that with the broadest, all-encompassing strokes, the inspired apostle presents the role of husbands as flowing from the Gospel of Christ and the example of Christ. The chief premise of this study is not about man over against woman, or even comparing man to woman, but man following Christ's lead as the "head" of the woman in the home and also acting as her "savior."

Christ's role in relation to His Bride, the Church, is the God-intended pattern for the role of the husband in relation to his wife and in relation to his children.

Ephesians 5:21-24 *"Submitting yourselves to one another in fear of God; the wives to their husbands as to the Lord, because the man is head of the wife as Christ is head of the church—He, Savior of the body. But just as [ἀλλὰ ὡς] the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives to their husbands in everything" (trans. vf).*

In Ephesians 5 Paul has been encouraging Christians to "walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us" (5:2),³ and therefore also to "walk as children of light" (5:8), "circumspectly" by "understanding what the will of the Lord is" (5:15, 17). Then, in keeping with the goal of walking in love, he urges everyone to "be submitting to one another in the fear of God" (5:21). With this last verse the

apostle begins an entire section on *self*-submission in love directed to wives, husbands, children, masters, and servants.

The wives are directed first in Ephesians 5:22 to submit themselves “*to their own husbands as to the Lord.*” Far from giving husbands the go-ahead to demand the submission of their wives, this verse addresses the wives only. *They are to submit themselves to their husbands.* The inescapable implication is that they will be moved by Christ’s love for them to *want* to place themselves *under* their husbands “*as (they already do) to the Lord.*”

But Paul takes nothing for granted. He hurries on with more encouragement to the Christian wife: “*For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the Church*” (5:23). In his headship role the husband is never to dominate and oppress his wife. There is no New Testament basis for the idea that *headship* = *lordship*. Although a wife may happily join Abraham’s Sarah and call her husband “lord,” the husband is not to *lord it over* his wife or even force her to recognize his appointment by God. Does our Savior *force* us to call Him Lord? No. For although we call Him “Lord,” He does not *lord it over* His believing brothers and sisters in the family of God. His headship is given by the order of His Father, who “*gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all*” (Eph. 1:22-23). Christ’s headship is for the sake of His body, the church, which is His “*fullness.*”

Christ, as our spiritual Head, does not treat His body of believers as slaves to be dominated by force. He rather calls us His “branches,” “disciples,” “friends,” and willing “servants” (John 15), as those who make Him “full” according to a mystery (Eph. 5:32), a divinely established relationship between Him and those who are His. So also, the “head” of the divinely established relationship called marriage is to regard his wife in love as that which “fills” him—completes and complements him (“*comparable to him*” Gen. 1:18, 20)—not as someone to be lorded over for his own selfish purposes.

Indeed, in all our marital and pre-marital counseling we must be so careful whenever we stress the God-ordained headship of the man to speak of it *only* in the wonderful context Paul introduces with the term “*Savior,*” when he writes: “*He [Christ] indeed (is) the Savior of the body.*” The point is clear: The wife is to regard her husband as her head in the same sense that the Church owns Christ as its Head. For just as He is the Savior of His spiritual body, so the husband is the *savior* of her body. Far from being fearful that her husband will lord it over her for his own gain, she should rightfully think of him as nothing less than her *savior*.

Only in this blessed *saving* context does Paul continue with that “hard saying” (John 6:60), so objectionable to the modern “liberated” woman: “*Therefore [ἀλλὰ = “but” or “nevertheless”], just as the Church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.*” Even though Christ alone is the true Savior of the Church, and no husband can assume that role in its highest sense, “*nevertheless,*” wives should regard the headship of their husbands as a God-ordained role for the *saving* of their wives.

Given the inclination of the sinful flesh of both husband and wife, the phrase “*in everything*” can become a real stumbling block for both partners in the marriage. For immediately both the wife and the husband begin to think according to law and proscription, in terms of what specific commands must be obeyed and what all can be demanded. The inspired apostle, that Dr. of Theology and champion of the Gospel of Christ, will not permit any misunderstandings prompted by the flesh! He must quickly add an evangelical punctuation that defines the man’s role as *savior* of his wife.

Ephesians 5:25-27

“The husbands, love (your) wives, just as also Christ loved the church and gave himself for her, that her He might set apart, cleansing, by the washing of the water in connection with (the) word, that He might present to Himself the church glorious, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she might be holy and without blemish” (trans. vf).

In verse 25 Paul directs husbands to “*love your wives, just as Christ also loved the Church. . . .*” As

pointed out in endnote 3, ever since the beginning of Ephesians 5, the apostle has been thinking only of the highest term for “love,” AGAPE, and has used this term to define the Christian “walk” throughout the chapter. So also here AGAPE is used twice to define the kind of love husbands are to have for their wives. This is not the love of mere affection, but the love with skin on it; not a mushy, sentimental love, but a thoughtful, purposeful love. This is not the Hallmark card love. There are plenty of husbands who proudly hand the wife a birthday card right on time, and yet they never lend a hand and are hard on their wives most of the time! The love we are to have for our wives is a strong love, a manly love that wants the best for his wife without regard for himself, a love that does not only talk the talk, but walks the walk. This is the *AGAPE Love* that *does*.

These verses tell us that it is the role of the husband to love his wife *in the way that* Christ loved the Church. In what way did Christ love the Church? “*He gave Himself for the Church.*” So also, *husbands are to give themselves for their wives*—not just to them, *but for them*. Since the fall what was created to be a loving headship on the part of the man has often degenerated into an oppressive one. But in Christ God’s original intention of a *servant* headship on the part of the husband is partially restored.

Inspired by Christ, Christian husbands are to love their wives “*even as* Christ loved the Church.” Here a man must be careful to understand that in this way he is to be “*submitting himself*” to his wife (Eph. 5:21). We note the emphasis which the Greek places on “*her*,” i.e., the Church, by the upfront position in the ἵνα clause that begins verse 26: “*He gave Himself for her, that her He might set apart, cleansing . . .*” (vf). Thus the apostle illustrates in the pattern of Christ toward the Church what the husband is to do. He is to have *her* welfare in mind at *all* times and to put his love into action for *her* welfare, even if it means that he must humble himself, help with the housework, seek her forgiveness, require her obedience, or do whatever else is necessary to serve and to save *her*.

Furthermore, just as Christ did not wait for the Church to give to Him or do for Him before He submitted Himself to the way of the cross for our sakes, so also the husband is not to take his cue from his wife’s submissiveness, that is, he is not to act lovingly toward her only *after* or *according to* the love and respect she owes him (Eph. 5:33) and shows him. His role is to *earn* her submissiveness by taking the initiative in his acts of love and kindness before and even without his wife’s loving consideration of him. Just as Christ never asked the Church to come and worship Him *before* He humbled Himself on the cross and opened heaven’s door for her, neither should the husband require his wife to bow in humility before he opens the car door for her. He is her “head.” The head leads; and where the head goes, the normally functioning body follows.

But taking the lead in earning his wife’s submissiveness by loving her is not a loathsome duty for the man graced by Christ. Neither does he seek to win her submission to him in order to get something from her in return. Wives see through such schemes. Rather, the Christian husband can’t help himself. For if he is “giving thanks always for all things to God the Father” because of Christ (Eph. 5:20), he has a song in his heart which he keeps singing to his dear wife. While “*singing and making melody*” in his “*heart to the Lord*,” he will be “*speaking*” to his wife “*in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs*” (Eph. 5:19). Call it a love song, if you will. She will pick up the tune! When a wife receives such self-sacrificing, submissive savior-love, she finds it much easier to accept her husband’s headship. Doesn’t the grace of our Savior God move us to love Him because He loved us *first* (1 John 4:19), as evidenced by His total and completed sacrifice (τετέλεσται! John 19:30) of Himself for us?

Our dear Savior carried out this *selfless* sacrifice for His Church because *He chose her to be His spiritual body, His Bride*. So in verses 26 and 27 Paul begs men to consider how carefully Christ went about bringing His Bride to Himself. “*He gave Himself for her that her He might set apart, cleansing, by the washing of the water in connection with (the) word, that He might present to Himself the church glorious, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she might be holy and without blemish*” (vf).

Of course, it was God the Father who gave His dear Son to the Church to be the Head of that

spiritual body. *“He gave Him to be the Head over all things to the Church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all”* (Eph. 1:22). But the Father made His Son to be the Head of the Church in order to save the Church for Christ. And Jesus recognized the Church as a gift from His Father to be sought out and won by Him through His message of forgiving grace and love. In fact, He could say to His Father on the night before His sacrifice of Himself: *“Those whom You gave Me I have kept . . .”* (John 17:12).

Certainly this marriage between Christ and His Church was “made in heaven.” Yet in this passage Paul wants to emphasize that what the Father willed for His Son was also what the Son willed and *chose for Himself*. Here the saving purpose of the *Bridegroom and Head of the body* is set forth. He *gave Himself for her* so that He might set her apart for Himself and present her “to Himself” as “glorious,” entirely “without stain and wrinkle or any such thing, but holy and without blemish.”

Ephesians 5:28-29

“So ought the husbands to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh; but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the Church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. ‘For this (reason) a man shall leave the father and the mother and be joined to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh’” (trans. vf).

Just as Christ presented the Church “to Himself” by all that He chose to do in order to cleanse her from sin and win her salvation, so also the man is to be presenting his wife to *himself* in all that he does for her. And why not? She is his “own body”! *“Husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh; but nourishes and cherishes it. . . .”* Yet this verse has been so mishandled in recent years by the self-esteem advocates that men by the tens of thousands have been led to believe that they are to present their wives to themselves for themselves!

We have seen Paul’s admonition presented in one essay as if he is saying: “Love your wife so that you may reap the benefit for yourself.” In a book on marriage counseling offered at Concordia Seminary library in St. Louis some twenty-five years ago, husbands were advised that they could not love their wives as Paul directs without first loving themselves. Contrary to that idea, however, the apostle is continuing the parallel between Christ and the Church and the husband and his wife. Christ did not love His spiritual body so deeply and totally because He first loved Himself!

Neither the Greek grammar nor the sense of Paul’s argument will permit such nonsense. The principle set forth here is a commonly understood, axiomatic truth: Husbands ought to love their wives *even as they already love their own bodies*. It is a natural thing to “love one’s own body” in the sense that we are careful to protect and provide for it, not to ignore or abuse it; *“for no one ever hated his own flesh; but nourishes and cherishes it.”* Every husband ought to recognize that Paul is encouraging him to present his wife to *himself* because she is *truly part of him*. In fact, she is his body—that which completes him and makes the two one!

The principle that husbands are to love their wives even as they already love their own bodies is beautifully covered or dressed up (to continue the picture of the bride) by the terms “nourishes” (ἐκτρέφει) and “cherishes” (θάλπει). The literal meaning of these verbs—“feeds” and “warms”—exactly describes the utter devotion of the man (yes, of everyone, “for no one ever hated his own flesh”) to his own body. How lovely and winning is this example, one’s devotion to his own body, in our understanding of the marital relationship! Consider how well we feed our own bodies and give them every comfort we can afford, and more.

Indeed, it is natural and instinctive for us to provide the basic needs of our own bodies before we do anything else with our time, energy, and money. Though we did not choose our bodies, we naturally “love” them and carefully devote ourselves to the well-being of each and every part. The man who freely chooses a woman to be his wife and makes his wedding vow before the Lord is freely

choosing her to be his own body, to be “one flesh” with him. As the אִשָּׁה (*woman*) comes from the אִישׁ (*man*), so let the Christian husband learn that the *s* in “she” stands for the self-submission of the “he.” Acting in love according to the principle and its dress as described by the apostle, such a husband will *thoughtfully* (every “head” thinks!) consider the needs of his wife before his own. If he is unable to do both, he will cover her cold feet before he covers his own head, so to speak.

When the Christian groom stands before God’s altar with his bride at his side, he may indeed acknowledge God and give thanks to God for bringing her to him. But he is also presenting her to the world as his own choice. He freely and willingly promises faithfulness to her, to love and cherish her, to protect and serve her in sickness and in health as long as they both shall live. As beautiful and pure as his bride is on the day of the wedding, not only in her appearance to the world, but as he sees her in his own heart, so he is to present her to himself as his own body for as long as they both shall live.

In continually presenting his wife to himself, as the Lord presents the Church to Himself, the husband is acknowledging an essential truth about his special relationship with his wife in marriage: *Although two, they are joined in one*, even as Christ is joined with His specially chosen body, so that it may be said, “*We are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones.*” In this way also Adam understood the God-ordained union that calls for a leaving of one’s closest family members to “*cleave*” to his wife, becoming “*one flesh.*”

Adam understood that he was to devote himself to his wife because she was both taken from him and given to him. “*Adam said, ‘This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.’*” (Gen. 2:23 KJV). In the Song of Solomon the inspired writer gives a picture of the devotion of the Christ to His Church in terms of a man’s devotion to his wife—*his flesh*—given to him by God. Similarly, the inspired writer of divine wisdom speaks of total devotion on the part of the husband toward the wife he has received from the LORD.

“A prudent wife is from the LORD” (Prov. 19:14).

“He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor from the LORD” (Prov. 18:22).

“Let your fountain be blessed: and rejoice with the wife of your youth” (Prov. 5:18).

God’s greatest earthly gift to men who do not have the “gift” of the Apostle Paul (1 Cor. 7:7) is a wife, especially a good wife (Prov. 31:10-31). The husband needs to be reminded, even when tempted to think otherwise, that his wife is a “*good and perfect gift*” from the “*Father of lights*” (James 1:17). For as long as they live, the husband is to keep himself and his “*fountain*” to himself, that is, to his own body, namely, his wife. “*Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her*” (1 Cor. 7:3), and to her alone for as long as they both shall live. Indeed, let him find blessing and happiness as he never tires of the wife he chose in the strength of his youth; let him rejoice “*with her*” and seek no other substitute, neither pictures nor prostitute!⁴

The Christian husband ought to know that from the beginning God commanded the man’s devotion to his wife above all other human relationships: “*He shall leave father and mother and cleave to his wife.*” In a sermon written in 1525, Luther spoke of what this would mean for the faithful husband: “He should not consider her a rag on which to wipe his feet; and, indeed, she was not created from a foot but from a rib in the center of man’s body, so that the man is to regard her not otherwise than his own body and flesh. . . . You should . . . not love *her* as much as you love your own body. Nay, nay, *your* wife you should love as your own body.”⁵

We emphasize, as the first husband did: Although God truly ordained the husband to be the head of his wife, and thus to be over her, she was taken from his side, not his foot, and she is “*of his flesh and bones*”; therefore the husband chooses to “*cleave to her,*” keeping her where God put her, *close to his heart*, throughout their life together. In this way the husband is to submit himself willingly and continually to his bride. For as Jesus said to His Bride: “*Lo, I am with you always . . .*” (Matt. 28:20).

The husband's submission of himself to his wife in AGAPE-love, that is, in order to serve and to save her in every way that he is able, is no easy thing. This love does not flow naturally either from an erotic love or from that genuine affection that can even make the marriage of the unbelieving last. This love is taught and brought only by the Gospel of Christ to the heart of the Christian husband of whom Paul is speaking. The depth and breadth of this love is beautifully described in 1 Corinthians 13. However, it is shown to the wife only when it has been *first* instilled and improved in her husband's heart by the love of Christ for him. "*Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends,*" Jesus says to us (John 15:13). Believing husband, *you* are Christ's "friend," but your wife is your *body*. As He laid down his life for you and now lives *for you*, will you not, if you would die for her, also *live* not only *with* her, but also *for* her?

Christ has chosen the individual members of His Church, promised to be with them always, and daily tends to their needs for their good. No matter how we fail Him, He always treats us just as He has *chosen* and made us to be: His own "*special people*" (1 Pet. 2:9). And don't we know it! For "*the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us*" (Rom. 5:5) by our Bridegroom! Writing to her daughter, one Christian wife described her husband's love for her in this way: "Your father treats me as if I am special to him." This is the AGAPE, *action-love*, that the husband is to have for his wife, just as Christ always has for His Church, which He "*nourishes and cherishes.*"

If asked, many wives would surely say that what they desire most is to be cherished and feel cherished by their husbands as someone very special. Paul could not state the case more plainly. Husbands are called to love their wives as their very own selves because they *are*. Husbands are called to nurture and to cherish their wives as they do their own bodies because their wives *are* their own bodies. Given time, patience, and the grace of Christ in the home, a wife will be drawn more and more to her husband as he nurtures and cherishes her as someone special beyond any other human being, including even himself, her husband-head.

(To be continued)

Endnotes

¹ Genesis 3:16b reads: "*Your desire (תְּשׁוּקָתְךָ) shall be for your husband, and he shall rule (מְשַׁל) over you.*" Some think that (תְּשׁוּקָתְךָ) carries the idea of a "desire to dominate," based on their interpretation of the same word in Genesis 4:7, where the Lord may more easily be understood to say to Cain, "Sin's desire is to dominate you, but you must master it." However, it seems to this writer that where sin is personified in that passage ("it" = Heb. masc. ending), it's enough to picture "sin" as an intense longing for Cain, the way the Devil roams the earth, "seeking whom he may devour." In the only other place where this word appears, Song of Solomon 7:10, the word clearly does not speak of a desire that is sinful, but simply passionate. So here we believe that God is saying to the woman that she will continue to have a strong longing or passionate desire for her husband.

The verb מְשַׁל is the normal word for "rule" in the Old Testament. The many passages in which it occurs seem to indicate that the main import of the word in its various contexts is simply to have *authority, to rule by authority*, whereas another common word for "rule" is רָדָה, which carries the idea of "*treading down*"—*to rule by force and oppression*. Interestingly, when God prophesies the judgment that shall come upon His rebellious people in Isaiah 3, He uses the term מְשַׁל in verses 4 and 12 to speak disparagingly of "babes" and "women" ruling His fallen people. These, who are weak and incapable, are nevertheless invested with *authority*.

Thus when Eve turned the world upside down by her rebellion against God's order, which had placed man as her head (*chief, authority*), God responded to the woman's sin, not with a curse (note

that the man is not cursed either, but the ground he works is!), but with the *proto-evangel*, as well as the consequences of death and temporal punishment for her rebellion, which would put her back in her assigned place for her own good.

God is reasserting the order He established before the Fall. In case the woman or the man have any doubts or later regrets, the man will continue to have the authority over the woman in this world. Eve did not succeed in permanently taking the leadership role away from the man.

The woman's "*desire*" for the man does not speak of a wicked desire to dominate, but of a divinely directed longing for the man in spite of the post-fall burden of child-bearing. The statement, "he will *rule* over you," by itself says nothing at all about the how of man's rule over the woman; the how will depend upon many factors, in particular whether or not the man has a *working* relationship with Christ by faith.

² In what may be still be considered a "man's world," because of God's order I suppose it may be said that a man may exercise a bit more "freedom." However, we need to remember that God cursed the ground as a result of man's first sin; and man's labors in every "field" since then have involved much "hard labor," frustration, and stress. We have read reports that as more and more women have left the home and entered the competitive, dog-eat-dog workplace of men, stress-related illnesses have also increased among women.

³ We do not want to overlook the significance of Ephesians 5:1 to the rest of the chapter, particularly to the "*love*" referenced here and in those later verses so pertinent to our present discussion. When Paul encourages us in verse 2 to "*be continually walking in love as also Christ loved*" us, he uses the same verb for *love*, ἀγαπάω, as he does in verse 25 when he directs the husbands to "*love*" their wives even as Christ also "*loved the Church.*"

⁴ The called pastor is not long in the ministry before he sees the terrible damage done to a marriage by the adulterous affair. But we have also seen firsthand how a husband can erode his wife's trust and do great, sometimes irreparable damage to their marital relationship by the use of pornography. This problem has been greatly increased by the accessibility of porn via the Internet.

⁵ Quoted in translation by Ewald Plass, *This is Luther*, Concordia Publishing House, 1948, p. 257; emphasis original. Luther's German source is noted as *Saemmtliche Werke*, 16:181-182.

Book Reviews and a Notice

Martin Luther: *Luther's Works: Sermons on the Gospel of St. John Chapters 17-20* (Vol. 69), Ed. Christopher Boyd Brown. Concordia Publishing House, 2009, hardcover, 469 pages.

This fairly recent volume is the first to be published by Concordia Publishing House in the projected twenty-volume addition to the American Edition of *Luther's Works*. In the Church of the Lutheran Confession we should especially appreciate the fact that more of Luther's Latin and German writings are being translated into English, for Immanuel Lutheran College and Seminary are no longer making the study of German and Latin a requirement in its training of future CLC pastors. There were 55 volumes in the original set. The new volumes will be numbered from 56 to 75. The first one made available is Volume 69, which contains some of Luther's sermons on chapters 17-20 of the Gospel of John.

These sermons, of course, show Luther to be a preacher of the saving gospel of Christ and an enemy of the work-righteousness of the papacy. In our time many seemingly loyal Christians have made their peace with the pope and the Roman Catholic system. It is good for us once again to sit at the feet of the man whom God obviously chose for the necessary work of reclaiming the true way of salvation

and exposing the errors that had invaded the church then and are still prevalent in the church of the pope today. Printed below are a few quotations to help us savor the flavor of these sermons.

“If the glory and knowledge of God could have been revealed through the Law, then Christ would not have had to come, preach, suffer, and die in order to glorify the Father. . . . In Christ we see nothing but pure, heartfelt, unfathomable love and grace, but outside of Him nothing but wrath and displeasure. . . . Where Christ is absent, there is likewise no true God or worship” (p. 27).

“There is no counsel for withstanding the devil’s temptation except to adhere to the bare, clear word of Scripture and to think and speculate no further. With eyes closed, simply say: ‘What Christ says shall and must be true, regardless of whether I or anyone else could comprehend and understand or know how it could be true. . . .’ For it is impossible for the human mind and reason to grasp even the least article of faith” (pp. 30-31).

“It is now also easy to judge what a wretched and miserable thing, yes, what an accursed abomination is the doctrine of the pope and monks, who shamelessly blabber that Christ did not teach and speak nor do and accomplish everything, but has left much remaining to teach, enjoin, ordain, and do. . . . They say: ‘It is not enough; there is much more to it than that. You must listen to the councils, follow the doctrine, life, and example of the holy fathers,’ etc. It is high time for all good Christians to forsake them. . . . This is our quarrel with the pope’s doctrine: he . . . will not allow us to retain the pure and bare knowledge [of Christ]. Otherwise I would never have attacked him with so much as a word” (pp. 40-41).

“It is not man’s will and intention that make one cling to Christ and become His disciple, but it is God’s work and power” (p. 51).

“Whoever seeks God henceforth and wants to meet Him or find Him anywhere but in Christ will not find or meet God, but the devil himself in God’s place” (p. 54).

“If you cling to the Lord Christ, you are surely one of the flock whom God has chosen from the beginning to be His own. . . . In this way the great temptation and all the disputations about secret predestination are struck down, with which some people torture and worry themselves so sorely that they risk going insane. And all that they accomplish is to give the devil occasion through despair to lead them to hell. . . . For what Scripture says about it is not intended to worry and terrify the poor, tempted souls who feel their sins and would gladly be rid of them, but rather to comfort them” (p. 56).

John Brug: *WELS & Other Lutherans* (Second Edition), Northwestern Publishing House, 2009, paperback, 279 pages.

The first edition of this useful guide to Lutheran church bodies appeared in 1995 and was reviewed in the September 1995 issue of the *Journal of Theology*. The second edition is basically a new book. The first edition had three authors: Armin Schuetze, John Brug, and Edward Fredrich II. This second edition has only one author, John Brug. The first edition had 104 pages. This second edition is over twice as long. The first edition confined itself to American church bodies. This second edition includes a section on Lutherans in other lands. The first edition discussed the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) in Part One, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) in Part Two, and seventeen smaller church bodies in Part Three. This second edition has the same three parts, but they are greatly expanded: Part One from 16 pages to 57 pages, Part Two from 53 pages to 109 pages, and Part Three from 15 pages to 83 pages. It seems there is reference to as many as 43 smaller church bodies instead of 17, and these smaller church bodies are divided helpfully into six groups: 1) Remnant churches that remained independent of the major Lutheran mergers; 2) Groups originating primarily from protests within the Wisconsin Synod; 3) Groups originating primarily from the Missouri Synod; 4) Groups originating primarily from the ELCA and its predecessor churches, especially the ALC; 5) Apostolic

succession Lutheran churches; and 6) Surrogate churches for foreign churches under Soviet oppression.

In all of the parts there is reference to recent developments. For example, the discussion of the Missouri Synod includes a critique of the Yankee Stadium service in September of 2001, in which a prominent Missouri Synod official participated in an ecumenical service involving all shades of Christians and non-Christians. The discussion of the ELCA refers to the recent ELCA decisions on homosexuality. The discussion of the smaller church bodies in Part Three makes mention of the various groups protesting ELCA actions in matters of sexuality and ecumenicity, some of them remaining within the ELCA and some separating themselves from the ELCA. I was surprised to hear of Lutheran groups actively promoting apostolic succession.

The first edition devoted a little over one page to the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC). In this second edition Brug presents the CLC, together with the Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship (LCCF) and the Reformation Lutheran Conference (RLC), in 14 pages. His summary of the conflict between the WELS and the CLC includes this statement: "The WELS has never been able to see that there has been a clear difference in the doctrinal principles themselves between the CLC and the WELS. What we admit is that there was a difference concerning the application of the church fellowship doctrine in the 1950s" (p. 201). Brug finds it odd that the CLC keeps on referring to a statement made by Carl Lawrenz in 1958 as evidence of false teaching on the part of the WELS. Brug admits that this Lawrenz statement "has shown itself to be an ambiguous statement open to varying interpretations. . . . However, we would not be able to condemn it as false doctrine, because we can understand it in a proper way. . . . Progress toward reconciliation will not be made, however, if the CLC continues to insist that the Lawrenz statement of 1958 must be labeled as false doctrine" (pp. 201-202). We, on our part, find it odd that the WELS cannot detect the false doctrine in the Lawrenz statement, since their position seems to be that we are united with them in the doctrinal principles concerning church fellowship.

In this brief review we will not respond to every comment made about the CLC in the 14 pages. Three chapters in the soon-to-be-published anniversary history of the CLC present the CLC position in this controversy, including a detailed discussion of why the meetings between the CLC and the WELS in the 1980s failed to bring about a reconciliation. Chapter four ("Taking a Stand") of the CLC history (*Journal*, June 2009, pp. 22-47) presents the historical background for the Lawrenz statement of 1958 and reaction to the statement on the part of those who subsequently organized the CLC. Chapter seven of the CLC history (*Journal*, Dec. 2009, pp. 20-37) tells the story of the CLC document *Concerning Church Fellowship*, which presents the Biblical basis for declaring the Lawrenz statement as false doctrine. Chapter thirteen of the CLC history recounts the various meetings between the WELS and the CLC through the years and documents the specific reasons why the CLC is not in fellowship with the WELS at the present time.

Two church bodies have emerged from the CLC: the Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship (LCCF) and the Reformation Lutheran Conference (RLC). The charges of these groups against the CLC are outlined in *WELS & Other Lutherans*. Of the LCCF Brug says: "Its future existence seems unsure" (p. 203). Of the RLC Brug says: "The future existence of the group seems uncertain" (p. 204). The latest LCCF publication indicates that the group now has one pastor. Very recently two congregations declared their independence from the RLC. As far as the CLC is concerned, we are still hopeful that the issues that divided the members of the LCCF and the RLC from us will be resolved so that we can enjoy fellowship with them once again.

At various points in this second edition Brug lists books and articles for further reading. I was somewhat surprised that he lists some LCCF articles and refers to some RLC statements that put the CLC in a bad light, but he gives no suggestions for further reading of any materials published by the CLC. As one such reference readers could be referred to John Lau's *Apologia*, available from the CLC Book House, which reprints at least a dozen *Journal of Theology* articles that deal with relations between the WELS and the CLC over the years.

In spite of Brug's dissatisfaction with the position of the CLC, we recommend that our pastors, teachers, and church leaders obtain this book for its helpful and not-so-easily-obtained information. It is especially helpful for its sections on the ELCA and the LCMS. Brug is right when he says that the WELS and the CLC are "cut out of the same cloth" (p. 202) in many respects, and therefore what the WELS has to say about the LCMS and the ELCA is very similar or even identical to what we would say. At the same time, we must be very discriminating because if we believe that the WELS is guilty of false teaching, we also know according to the Scriptures that false teaching spreads and may have spread further than we know, also in the WELS. One is happy that Brug concludes Part Three with this warning: "The chief causes of this deterioration [among the various church bodies] have been lax fellowship principles and practices and the inroads of the higher critical method of Scripture study. Unless the remaining confessional groups hold firm in resisting deterioration in these areas, it is inevitable that they will slide down the slippery slope of doctrinal decay as so many church bodies have done in the past. We can be warned by the decline of American Lutheranism to 'take heed lest we fall'" (p. 255).

David Lau

David Lau: *Out of Necessity: A History of the Church of the Lutheran Confession*, 2009, hardcover, 467 pages.

What is noted in the previous review as the "soon-to-be-published anniversary history of the CLC" is now complete and available for purchase. Recently printed under the revised title above, David Lau's comprehensive chronicle of the CLC's fifty-year history totals 22 chapters, nine of which have now been printed in the *Journal*. The hardcover volume, priced at \$29.95, can be ordered from the CLC Book House in Eau Claire, Wisconsin.