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## THE LETTERS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES

### #6: TO PHILADELPHIA

*John K. Pfeiffer*

## **BACKGROUND**

Philadelphia was founded by and named after Attalus Philadelphos in the second century BC. It developed into a prominent city in Lydia, lying on a direct trade route between wealthy Sardis, 25 miles to the east, and Asia. Philadelphia became a center for the spread of the Greek language and culture. The people accepted this role with a "missionary" zeal.

Located on the edge of a volcanic plain, Philadelphia was subject to frequent earthquakes. In AD 17 a disastrous quake destroyed much of the city. Tremors were felt for years after that. One wonders whether the expression, "he will go

out no more" (v. 12), had a special significance to a people accustomed to running out of their homes whenever the ground began to shake. The pillars of the Temple of God will not be shaken nor removed forever.

After the big quake, Tiberius Caesar was very generous with the city. In gratitude, they renamed it "Neocaesaria." They were also *honored* by being named a Neocorate (wardens of the Temple for emperor worship). Later, during the reign of Vespasian, they renamed it again after his family name, "Flavius." Eventually, it reverted to its original name. Did Christ have this in mind, when He promised, "I will write upon him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name" (v. 12)?

Philadelphia, along with Smyrna, has survived until the present day. It endured the Moslem hordes as a free, Greek, Christian city until the mid-14th century. Even after the takeover by the Ottoman Empire, a Christian church continued to exist. Today, there remains an Eastern Orthodox church. As for the Holy Christian Church, God only knows, while we pray that the simple Gospel message is still heard.

#### EXEGESIS AND COMMENTARY - Revelation 3:7-13

**7.** Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Φιλαδελφείᾳ ἐκκλησίας γράψον· τὰδε λέγει ὁ ἅγιος, ὁ ἀληθινός, ὁ ἔχων τὴν κλεῖν Δαυΐδ, ὁ ἀνοίγων καὶ οὐδεὶς κλείσει, καὶ κλείων καὶ οὐδεὶς ἀνοίξει·

AND TO THE MESSENGER OF THE IN PHILADELPHIA CHURCH WRITE: THESE THINGS SAYS THE HOLY, THE TRUE, THE ONE HAVING THE KEYS OF DAVID, THE ONE OPENING AND NO ONE WILL CLOSE, AND CLOSING AND NO ONE OPENS:

ἀγγέλω - "messenger," i.e., the pastor (cf. *Journal of Theology*, 26:2 9-10).

τὰδε λέγει = "thus saith the Lord"

ὁ ἅγιος - (6:10) This was a name which the Jews would recognize from the Old Testament (Ps. 16:10; Isa. 54:5; 55:5 [30 ref. in Isaiah]). The apostles repeatedly referred to Jesus as "the Holy One" (Acts 2:27), "the Holy and Righteous One" (Acts 3:14), "Thy holy servant" (Acts 4:27,30). Even the devils recognized Him as "the Holy One of God" (Mark 1:24), but the Jews, in general, did not. Considering the fact that the false Jews were causing trouble for the Christians in Philadelphia, it must have been reassuring to hear Jesus refer to Himself by this name.

Jesus is the Holy One of Israel. He is holy (separate) by virtue of His divine

nature, separate from and independent of all creation: "The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; neither is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all life and breath and all things" (Acts 17:24ff.).

He is holy by virtue of His sinlessness. He was separate from sin before His incarnation. He kept Himself separate throughout His state of humiliation.

He is holy by virtue of His uniqueness. There is none other like Him in heaven and on earth. He is the only God-man and the only Savior of mankind.

ὁ ἀληθινός - (19:11; 22:6) - In Philadelphia were those who were of the "synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not" (v. 9). Such were false, phony Jews. Jesus presents Himself as being "true," "genuine" (ἀληθινός rather than ἀληθής, which is "true" as opposed to that which is a lie). "We know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding, in order that we might know Him that is **true**, and we are in Him that is **true**, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life" (1 John 5:20). Jesus encourages this congregation with the reassurance that He is the True One. They will not be put to shame for their trust in Him, for there is nothing phony about Him.

There is so much on earth that claims to be "the real thing," yet it all turns out to be phony, empty, never fulfilling the promises that it gives. Likewise, those who cling to such things find themselves empty inside.

It is not so with Christ and His promises. He alone is "the real thing." As surely as He is genuine, so surely are His divine and human natures genuine; His words are genuine; His work of redemption is genuine; forgiveness is genuine; life is genuine; salvation is genuine.

ὁ ἔχων τὴν κλεῖν Δαυΐδ - The Lord first referred to "the key of David" in Isaiah 22. There He condemned Shebna, the steward of the royal house, for his self-centered life of luxury. The Lord announced that He would depose him from his office and replace him with Eliakim. Upon Eliakim God would bestow great powers. The "key of the house of David" (v. 22) would be placed upon his shoulder (though not in his hand, which final authority rested in the king). With this authority, Eliakim would control entrance to the palace and thus into the presence of the king. If he opened the door to anyone, no one could close it. If he closed the door to anyone, no one could open it. He was more than a mere doorman. His decisions necessitated an intimate involvement in the affairs of state, as can be seen in 2 Kings 18:17ff.

The fact that the key is called "the key of the house of David" and not "the key of the house of Hezekiah" has Messianic implications.

In this letter to the Philadelphians, Jesus claims possession of the key of David. The house of David is no longer a building in Jerusalem, but the Holy Christian Church, as was prophesied by Zechariah (12:10). Here God Himself

resides, and here sits the throne of David upon which the Son of God is enthroned. Admission to the house of David is nothing less than admission into the gracious presence of God. It means salvation. Jesus Himself has absolute authority in this matter.

ὁ ἀνοίγων καὶ οὐδεὶς κλείσει, καὶ κλείων καὶ οὐδεὶς ἀνοίγει· - Jesus determines who shall enter into the presence of God. "No one comes to the Father, but through Me" (John 14:6). If He locks the door to anyone, there is absolutely no way that that person can be saved. Thus, Jesus holds "the keys of death and hell" (Rev. 1:18). If He unlocks the door to anyone, there is no one who can deny salvation to that person.

To Peter, Jesus spoke of "the keys of the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 16:19). Although He changes the figure slightly, speaking of "binding" and "loosing" rather than "opening" and "shutting," the thought is the same. Entrance into the Holy Christian Church is the same as entrance into the kingdom of heaven.

In that place He shares His authority with Peter and the other disciples. In other places, He reveals that this authority is shared with the whole Christian Church (John 20:23; 1 Pet. 2:9). It is through His Church that Christ uses the keys.

As we learn from these references, the keys of which Christ speaks in each of these places is nothing less than the Gospel of full and free forgiveness. With the Gospel, Christ opens or closes, binds or loosens, remits or retains. By the proclamation of the Gospel, He opens the door of the "house of David" and invites men in. By preventing or forbidding the proclamation of the Gospel, He closes the door and refuses entry.

Whenever a man accepts and believes the Gospel, he enters. The man who rejects the Gospel and refuses to repent of his sins is turned away at the door. "Unless you are converted and become like little children, you shall not enter the kingdom of God" (Matt. 18:3).

If a difference is to be found between the references, it would have to do with the point at which Christ intervenes and allows or prevents the preaching of the Gospel. In explaining the ministry of the keys, we speak of forgiving the sins of the penitent sinners and retaining the sins of the impenitent. Here, the point at which He allows, nay, commands the preaching of the Gospel is when the sinner repents. The point at which He commands that the Gospel not be preached is when the sinner is impenitent. Such a use of the keys requires the faithful cooperation of the preacher.

In our reference to the key of David, no cooperation is required. In Christ's use of this key, He acts independently and either makes the preaching of the Gospel possible or impossible.

The Apostle Paul frequently experienced Christ's use of this key. Speaking of his work in Ephesus, he writes: "A wide door for effective service has been opened to me, and there are many adversaries" (1 Cor. 16:9). He asked the Colossians to pray "that God may open up to us a door for the word, so that we

speak forth the mystery of Christ.” (Col. 4:3; also 2 Cor. 2:12; Acts 14:27; “a door of faith”). Paul speaks, also, of those times when the Lord prevented him from entering into a certain city. He and his companions “were trying to go into Bithynia, and the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them” (Acts 16:7; also Rom. 1:13; 15:22). How and why Jesus did this, we do not know. Even Paul may not have known the “why.” Jesus is not required to consult with us nor to explain His reasons to us. The reason was not that He never wanted the Gospel to be preached in these places. The door was opened to Bithynia (1 Pet. 1:1), but not for Paul. Jesus had work for him elsewhere.

It is good to note, also, the experiences of other faithful ministers of the Gospel. One man testifies that there were times when he was inundated with mission contacts, and there were times when, no matter what he tried, he could not begin so much as one adult instruction class. This is the same man in the same city preaching the same Gospel. We can only conclude that at certain times Christ opened the door before him, while at other times He closed it.

**8.** οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα – ἰδοὺ δέδωκα ἐνώπιόν σου θύραν ἀνεωγμένην, ἣν οὐδεὶς δύναται κλείσαι αὐτήν – ὅτι μικρὰν ἔχεις δύναμιν, καὶ ἐτήρησάς μου τὸν λόγον καὶ οὐκ ἠρνήσω τὸ ὄνομά μου.

I KNOW OF YOU THE WORKS - BEHOLD I HAVE GIVEN BEFORE YOU DOOR HAVING BEEN OPENED, WHICH NO ONE IS ABLE TO CLOSE IT - THAT LITTLE YOU HAVE POWER, AND YOU KEPT OF ME THE WORD, AND NOT YOU DENIED THE NAME OF ME.

οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα - As in the other six letters, Jesus makes it clear to the Philadelphians that He is fully aware of and intimately concerned with the things that are going on in their midst. He knew their works, all the things that they were doing and all the sufferings that they were enduring for the glory of His name. Although this was a church with “little power,” it was also a church with the mighty King of the heaven in its midst.

For people who live by their senses, it is so easy to forget that our Lord is constantly watching. We do not see or hear Him. It is faith that grasps the reality of His presence, faith which trusts His word, that “where two or three have gathered together in My name, there am I in their midst” (Matt. 18:20).

ἰδοὺ δέδωκα ἐνώπιόν σου θύραν ἀνεωγμένην - ἰδοὺ is an attention-getter, and in the lips of Christ it should make everyone sit up and take notice. Something of great importance is about to be revealed.

For any congregation, but especially a small one, the announcement that the Lord of the Church has set an open door before them should evoke immediate

celebration. Christ Himself had already opened (ἀνεωγμένην - perfect tense) the door for the proclamation of the Gospel. Apparently, in the past they had been hindered in their attempts to evangelize. But now they could go forth unhindered.

This is not to say that they would not face enemies. Paul found out that when doors were opened, enemies were waiting. "A wide door for effective service has been opened to me, and there are many adversaries" (1 Cor. 16:9).

ἦν οὐδεὶς δύναται κλεῖσαι αὐτήν - However, these enemies would not be able to stop the spread of the Gospel. No one would be able to close the door which Christ had opened. Not even Satan himself, nor the members of his "synagogue" could do such a thing. No matter what form of persecution they might have tried, the Philadelphians would be able to go into the fields and gather a harvest for their Lord.

ὅτι μικρὰν ἔχεις δύναμιν - According to Westcott and Hort, the ὅτι clause preceding this is parenthetical. Thus, W-H connect the ὅτι clause with the first clause in the verse: "I know your works: that you have little power . . ."— The *Textus Receptus* makes a major break between each of the clauses: "I know your works. Behold, I have placed . . . no one is able to shut. Because you have a little power, you also (?) have kept My Word . . ." — Luther makes a major break at the beginning of the ἰδοὺ clause and a minor break at the end: "*Ich weiss deine Werke, Siehe, Ich habe vor dir gegeben . . . niemand kann sie zuschliessen; denn du hast eine kleine Kraft, und hast mein Wort behalten . . .*" = "I know your works. Behold, I have presented before you . . . no one is able to shut it, because you have little power and have kept My Word . . ."

KJV: "I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no one can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name." (NKJV follows the same pattern.)

NIV: "I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name."

NASB: "I know your deeds. Behold, I have put before you an open door which no one can shut, because you have a little power, and have kept My word, and have not denied My name."

RSV: "I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut; I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name."

Beck: "I know what you are doing. See, I have opened before you a door nobody can shut. Although you have only a little strength, you have kept My Word and not denied Me."

In the autograph of Revelation, there were no markings to indicate punctuation or parentheses. Therefore, it befalls the interpreter to determine such things, if indeed such a determination can be made.

A literal translation without any punctuation would read: "I know of you the works behold I have given before you a door having been opened which no one is able to close it because (or "that") little you have power and you kept of Me the Word and not you would deny the name of Me." If we take the words just as they stand, the most logical thing to do is what Luther did: assume that the ὅτι clause modifies the immediately preceding clause.

ὅτι μικρὰν ἔχεις δύναμιν would, then, be causative. Christ has set an open door before them, because they had a little power and had kept His Word and would not deny His name.

How does having a little power become the cause for the open door? It depends on how one considers the words of Christ. If we take this to be an admonitory statement, then we would have difficulty with the causal concept. However, if we understand this as praise, then it is understandable.

Does the μικρὰν δύναμιν refer to their inner strength or their outward strength, i.e., strength of heart or strength of size? I take it in the latter sense. This was a small congregation. They did not possess great "physical" strength. The big "church" of the city was pagan. However, this did not hinder the faithfulness of this small congregation. They faithfully kept His Word and faithfully confessed His name.

Where did they find the strength to abide faithful in the face of the numerically superior forces of the enemy? They could repeat the words of Paul: "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13). "For it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13). They were small in number, but God's strength is perfected in weakness (2 Cor. 12:9). In Philadelphia, the truth is once again born out: "God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty" (1 Cor. 2:27).

One man, Samson, was able to defeat superior forces, because the power of God was with him. Our warfare is not with flesh and blood but against the spiritual forces of darkness. It is, nonetheless, a fierce struggle, one which is in many ways more difficult to fight than were the battles of Samson. However, we have the same powerful God fighting with us. He strengthens us for battle and provides us with the whole armor of God (Eph. 6). Our strongest weapon is the Gospel, before which no man can stand. Either he is saved by it or he is condemned by it (Mark 16:15-16). Thus, though we be small in size, though we be alone against the world, yet we have more power than all enemies combined (and they are combined).

Woe be unto those who make their own arm their strength, who believe that bigness equals power. The ecumenical movement has often used this argument,

believing that combining the synodical forces gives them more power and greater ability to expand the kingdom.

It is not the strength of man, which opens the door, but the strength of Christ. It is not numerical power that rushes through that door, but the power of one Gospel in the mouth of one who keeps the Word and does not deny Christ's name. It has ever been the history of the Holy Christian Church that its greatest advances have taken place through the efforts of a "little flock."

καὶ ἐτήρησάς μου τὸν λόγον - "Keep" is probably the best translation of τηρέω. It is a term used with reference to a jailor "keeping" his prisoner (Acts 16:23). It is used also for "keeping" the commandments (Matt. 19:17), "keeping" Christ's sayings (John 8:51), "keeping" the unity of the Spirit (Eph. 4:3), "keeping" the faith (2 Tim. 4:17), "keeping" the sabbath (John 9:16), "keeping" the wine (John 2:10), "keeping" oneself from being a burden (2 Cor. 11:9), or free from sin (2 Tim. 5:22), or in the love of God (Jude 21).

The thought that comes to mind is that the Philadelphians carefully guarded the Word, kept a close watch on it so that it would not depart from their midst. They locked it away in their hearts so that they would not lose it.

Can those ecumenists who take pleasure in numbers also say that they have "kept" the Word? What sort of jailer would "keep" his prisoners the way they "keep" the Word? Would his superiors praise him for "keeping" three prisoners, while through carelessness he let ten escape? Even so, the ecumenists "could not care less" whether or not they "keep" the Word. *F* Lord, preserve us from such a careless way of keeping the Word!

οὐκ ἤρνησω τὸ ὄνομά μου - In their own midst they kept the Word. In the world they confessed His name. The fact that Christ praises them, saying, "You did not deny My name." implies that they were tempted to deny. Such temptation would not have come from within a congregation that kept His Word. It had to come from the outside.

Philadelphia had been chosen to be a Neocorate. They repeatedly showed their loyalty to Rome, which had already shown its animosity toward Christianity. It would be difficult to image that this congregation was not subject to the same kind of persecution that others, like Pergamos, were. Yet, they never denied the name of Christ, but steadfastly confessed it.

We understand τὸ ὄνομά Χριστός as referring to more than just the simple word, "Christ." It refers to His whole identity as revealed throughout Scripture. There are many who confess the title while denying the identity. *F* People would laugh to scorn the man who gives a full description of George Bush, including his position, his hopes and desires, but steadfastly denies that he is a Republican. Yet, there are people who deny much more concerning the identity of Christ and yet claim to confess His name.

The Philadelphian church publicly confessed the full identity of Christ. They refused to deny any portion of His Word and thus deny a portion of His identity.



9. ἰδοὺ διδωμι ἐκ τῆς συναγωγῆς τοῦ Σατανᾶ τῶν λεγόντων ἑαυτοὺς Ἰουδαίους εἶναι, καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν, ἀλλὰ ψεύδονται· ἰδοὺ ποιήσω αὐτοὺς ἵνα ἤξουσιν καὶ προσκυνήσουσιν ἐνώπιον τῶν ποδῶν σου, καὶ γνώσιν ὅτι ἐγὼ ἠγάπησά σε.

BEHOLD I AM GIVING OUT OF THE SYNAGOGUE OF SATAN, OF THE ONES SAYING THEMSELVES JEWS TO BE, AND NOT THEY ARE BUT THEY ARE LYING; BEHOLD I WILL MAKE THEM THAT THEY WILL BE PRESENT AND WILL PAY HOMAGE BEFORE THE FEET OF YOU, AND THEY WILL KNOW THAT I LOVE YOU.

ἰδοὺ - Again, Jesus draws their attention to an announcement of great significance. What He is about to say is out of the ordinary.

ἐκ τῆς συναγωγῆς τοῦ Σατανᾶ τῶν λεγόντων ἑαυτοὺς Ἰουδαίους εἶναι, καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν, ἀλλὰ ψεύδονται - It would appear that the Jews in Philadelphia were creating trouble for the Christians. As was often the case, they placed a great deal of importance on their physical descendancy from Abraham: "We are Abraham's seed" (John 8:33). This is something that they must have used in an attempt to destroy faith. The Christians based much of their faith on the writings of the Old Testament. Who better than a Jew would know about these writings? Moreover, if a Jew did not recognize Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah, how could the Gentiles be sure?

Jesus tells the Philadelphians that these Jews were lying (ψεύδονται) about their identity. This does not mean that they did not have the blood of Abraham flowing in their veins. However, like so many Jews, they had developed their own, purely physical way of identifying the true Israel.

God has made it abundantly clear that the name "Jew" really belongs to those who are connected to Abraham through the promise. God had shown to Abraham that he was chosen to be the bearer of the Messianic promise. This meant that he had to have descendants, yet they were childless. Then came Isaac, not by way of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man. Ishmael, the child born in this fashion, the merely fleshly offspring of Abraham, was not a forefather of Israel. Isaac and Israel came by way of the promise of God. "God has granted it [the inheritance] to Abraham by means of a promise" (Gal. 3:18). Likewise, Isaac did not die on Mt. Moriah, but he lived—because of the promise. Thus, those who are only fleshly descendants of Abraham are more closely tied to Ishmael than to Isaac (cf. Gal. 4:21ff.). The true "Jews" are those (Jew or Gentile) who are tied to Abraham through the promise, believing in the promise as fulfilled in Jesus Christ. "You, brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise" (Gal. 4:28). "If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise"

(Gal. 3:29). "For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel. Neither are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants, but 'through Isaac your descendants will be named.' That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants" (Rom. 9:6-8).

Jesus pointed out to the Philadelphians that those who claim the name "Jew" were false Jews and did not worship at a synagogue of God. They were of "the synagogue of Satan." They followed "doctrines of devils" (1 Tim. 4:1), rather than the doctrines of God. Satan controlled their thoughts and desires.

Jesus accused the Jews of this same thing, when He was yet walking upon the earth: "You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature; for he is a liar, and the father of lies . . . He who is of God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear them, because you are not of God" (John 8:44-47). Needless to say, such accusations aroused the hatred and wrath of the Jews, and they wanted to kill Jesus (v. 59). Finally, according to the predestined purpose of God, they succeeded.

However, in Philadelphia things were to be different. Jesus promised to give to this congregation some "out of [ἐκ] the synagogue of Satan." (τῶν λεγόντων: "of the ones calling" shows that not all would come out of the synagogue."

ἰδοὺ ποιήσω αὐτοῖς ἵνα ἤξουσιν καὶ προσκυνήσουσιν ἐνώπιον τῶν ποδῶν σου, καὶ γνῶσιν ὅτι ἐγὼ ἠγάπησά σε - When Christ opened the door before this congregation, some of those who entered were former members of the synagogue. In the past they had denied Christ; now they would present (ἤξουσιν - ἦω emphasizes the arrival: be come, have arrived) themselves to the congregation and do homage before their feet. In other words, they would acknowledge that this congregation was correct in putting its trust in Jesus Christ. These Jews would know that Jesus loved this congregation, and in order to "know" this, they would have to acknowledge that Jesus had indeed risen from the dead; for how can one who is dead love anyone? These Jews would become **Jews** indeed.

ὅτι ἐγὼ ἠγάπησά σε - How precious are these words in the heart of the believer. We need to hear, again and again, Christ's assurance that He loves us. We are sinners and, because of this, have such little love for ourselves: "Wretched man that I am . . ." (Rom. 7:24). We can so easily fall into the trap of thinking that God feels about us the way we feel about ourselves. His declaration of love, therefore, is precious in our ears.

ἠγάπησά states a perpetual fact (constative aorist). Christ does not say, "I was loving you" (imperfect) or "I have loved you" (perfect), for this would leave them in doubt about the present and the future. Neither does He say, "I will love

you" (future), for this would leave them in doubt about the present. He doesn't even say, "I am loving you" (present), for this might cause doubts about the future. The aorist states perfectly that His love is a fact unaffected by time.

**10.** ὅτι ἐτήρησας τὸν λόγον τῆς ὑπομονῆς μου, κἀγὼ σε τηρήσω ἐκ τῆς ὥρας τοῦ πειρασμοῦ τῆς μελλούσης ἔρχεσθαι ἐπὶ τῆς οἰκουμένης ὅλης, πειράσαι τοὺς κατοικοῦντας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς.

BECAUSE YOU KEPT THE WORD OF THE ENDURANCE OF ME I ALSO YOU WILL KEEP OUT OF THE HOUR OF THE TRIAL THE ONE ABOUT TO BE COMING UPON THE INHABITED WORLD WHOLE TO TEST THE ONES DWELLING UPON THE EARTH.

ὅτι ἐτήρησας τὸν λόγον τῆς ὑπομονῆς μου - ὑπομονῆ = "an abiding under," "a bearing up under," "endurance," "perseverance." It refers to the courageous bearing up under the burden of suffering, without getting "hands that are weak and knees that are feeble" (Heb. 12:12).

This phrase could be understood in various ways: "the word about My own endurance," "the word about My kind of endurance," "My word about endurance," or "My word which produces endurance." Which of these is meant? Any of them. All of them.

The entire Word centers on the things that Christ endured for our salvation (1 Pet. 1:11). His endurance stands as an example and encouragement for us (1 Pet. 2:21). His Word teaches us about endurance (1 Pet. 4:12ff.). His Word produces endurance (Rom. 15:4,5).

κἀγὼ σε τηρήσω ἐκ τῆς ὥρας τοῦ πειρασμοῦ - Christ promises that He will reward their keeping of His Word with His keeping of them. He will guard them, so that "no one shall snatch them out of [His] hand" (John 10:28).

πειρασμος (and related words) is *usually* used of those testings which are intended to discover the weaknesses in a man for the purpose of using them to lead him into sin. (δοκιμη is always used of a test that is used with the intention and expectation that the one tested will emerge victorious.)

He will keep them "out of the hour of testing." The preposition ἐκ ("out of") is important in considering what Christ does for the Christian when "tests" ("trials," "temptations") arise. He is not saying that the Philadelphians will not be faced with trials, but that He will keep them *out of* these trials.

Trials might be compared with quicksand along the pathway of life. Christ

urges us to watch and pray "that you may not enter into (εις) temptation" (Matt. 26:41). Thus the Christian prays, μὴ εἰσενέγκῃς ἡμᾶς εἰς πειρασμόν: "lead us not into temptation" (Matt. 6:13). He prays that the Lord, who leads him through life, would lead him in such a way that he does not fall *into* (εις) the quicksand of temptation. James (1:2) says that we should "consider it all joy" when we "encounter various trials" (πειρασμοῖς περιπέσητε ποικίλοις - περι = "around"). Thus we see that trials will be found all around us, but this does not mean that we will fall *into* them. "The steps of a man are established by the Lord; and He delights in his way. When he falls, he shall not be hurled headlong; because the Lord is the One who holds his hand" (Ps. 37:23,24). Satan is *beneath* the trial, hoping that we will fall in, so that he can grab us and pull us under. God is *above* the trial, waiting to lift us up when we begin to fall (cf. Peter on the Sea of Galilee: Matt. 14:30,31). Always, with every trial, God provides "the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it" (1 Cor. 10:13).

The Philadelphians were assured that the trial that would come upon the whole world would not swallow them up. They would come face to face with it, but Christ would save them *out of* it.

τῆς ὥρας τοῦ πειρασμοῦ τῆς μελλούσης ἔρχεσθαι ἐπὶ τῆς οἰκουμένης ὅλης, πειράσαι τοὺς κατοικοῦντας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς - What is this trial? Since it is one that would come upon the whole world and test *everyone* on earth, we conclude that it is not the type of trial that would be aimed at the Christian Church alone.

One trial that came upon the entire inhabited world, the civilized world of that day, was the onslaught of the Moslem hordes. Everyone in their pathway was affected by this. As I pointed out in the "background," the church in Philadelphia was spared, even though it was in the midst of the Ottoman Empire.

However, I do not believe that this is the trial Christ is referring to. He says that this trial is "about to come" (μελλούσης ἔρχεσθαι). μελλω implies that this trial was on the verge of coming already in those days. Christ uses this word in 1:19, speaking of things about to commence already in the days of John and some of which would continue to the End.

Looking for such a world-wide trial, affecting all people, we come upon the Antichrist. Certainly his evil tentacles have reached to the ends of the earth. This is a trial which has affected everyone, for the Pope considers himself to be not only a religious leader, but also a secular leader. Under his rule armies used physical force. Believer and unbeliever alike have suffered. Moreover, the rise of the Antichrist had already commenced in the days of John. He writes of "the *spirit* of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world" (1 John 4:3). Paul, also, writes that "the mystery of lawlessness is already at work" (2 Thess. 2:7).

Christ promises to keep this congregation out of this trial. How did He

accomplish this? The history books do not give the answer, although we do know that the churches in Asia Minor were among those that broke away from the Western Church. They were not under the domain of the Antichrist during the darkest ages of the Western Church. This much can be said: when the errors of the Antichrist began to sweep over the world, Christ spared this congregation. They did not fall *into* those errors.

The manner in which He spared them is revealed in this verse: "Because you kept the Word of My endurance." It is His Word, which is the chief means by which He keeps us out of trials. Through the Word He strengthens us for the battle. Through it He enlightens us to see the truth and the error, the righteousness and the sin. Thus, seeing the danger and being strengthened to stand firm in the truth, we can circumvent the quicksand and thus be kept out of the trial. Thus, this clause not only reveals the reason why the Lord keeps us, but also the means by which he does it.

Those who set aside the Word, or portions of it, deprive themselves of the means. How shall Christ keep them? How shall He make the root and aim of trial evident to them? How shall He strengthen them so that they do not fall into the trap? Oh, how blind and self-destructive is he who substitutes his own wisdom for that of Scripture!

When the Moslem hordes came and threatened all "infidels" with death, what did those church members do, who had discarded the truth? No doubt they embraced Islam.

When the Antichrist promulgated his deadly errors, what did those church members do, who had discarded the truth? No doubt they embraced his errors and headship.

When a false teacher brings a new error into a church that has discarded the truth, what do the members do? No doubt they "roll over and play dead," allowing the error to take root.

**11.** ἔρχομαι ταχύ· κράτει ὃ ἔχεις, ἵνα μηδεὶς λάβῃ τὸν στέφανόν σου.

I AM COMING QUICKLY; HOLD FAST WHAT YOU HAVE, SO THAT NO ONE SHOULD TAKE THE CROWN OF YOU.

ἔρχομαι ταχύ - In 2:16, Jesus used these words to speak of a temporal coming for a specific purpose having to do with Pergamum alone. In 22:20, these words are used to speak of the final coming of Christ. The context must reveal the meaning.

In this letter, Jesus is speaking of His final coming. As in all such declarations, this is a word of encouragement to the embattled people of God: "Hang on! I'm coming!" The ragged remnant, surrounded on all sides by the fierce enemy,

stands together and continues to fight against seemingly impossible odds, waiting for reinforcements. With His promises, Christ temporarily reinforces them. This makes the impossible possible, as the Church Militant lives in hope of the final reinforcement, which will bring an end to all warfare.

κράτει ὃ ἔχεις - κράτεω = "be strong," "prevail," "hold fast." - The Philadelphian Christians were exhorted to get a firm grip on the things that they had. The very fact that they must do this indicates that there was a danger of losing these possessions. One does not have to keep a firm grip on something that is not in danger of slipping away. "For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it" (Heb. 2:1).

What did they possess that they might lose? Verse 8 speaks of some things: their little power, their keeping of the Word, and their refusal to deny Christ's name. Implicit in these things are all the fruits of the Spirit, which make such dedication possible.

The Christian dare never take for granted that he shall always have what he now possesses. We must daily concentrate on keeping a firm grip on what we have. We must pray to Him who gives us the strength to do so. We must daily heed His Word, which reinforces our belief that what we have is of value and which gives us the strength to hold fast.

ἵνα μηδεὶς λάβῃ τὸν στέφανόν σου - Our greatest concern should be that we do not lose our "crown." The στεφάνος was a wreath woven from branches and placed on the head of the victor in an athletic or military contest. The crown that we receive from the Lord is not awarded to the victor in some insignificant contest, but to the victor in the contest of life itself, for this is "the crown of life" (2:10). It is not only the crown given to those who gain the victory in life, but the crown is life itself, eternal life (genitive of apposition). "Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable" (1 Cor. 9:25).

The crown is also referred to as "a crown of glory" (1 Pet. 5:4) and "a crown of righteousness" (2 Tim. 4:8). These are not different crowns. Life, glory, and righteousness are different jewels on the same crown.

To lose the crown is to lose life and glory and righteousness. The Spirit has been given to us so that we can keep a firm grip on all the gifts which help us to keep our crown. Christ is the strength of our hand. Had the Philadelphian Christians rejected His Word and denied His name, they would have lost their only source of strength. All spiritual gifts would have slipped through their flaccid fingers, and their crown would have been lost. Christ's exhortation calls their attention to a need which can be so easily forgotten, the need to hold fast, so that they do not lose their crown.

We are not like some in the Reformed circles, who believe that "once saved, always saved" and that even apostasy will not deprive the "saved" of their ultimate salvation. The doctrine of election was not given to croon the uncertain

into a state of apathy. This doctrine is intended to make us certain, but not "certain, no matter what." The Lord shows us that our election is carried out through His continuing activity in us. This is not an election without faith, but through faith (Rom. 8:29f.; 1 Pet. 1:1f.). Therefore, there must be activity generated in order to bring us to faith. Neither is this an election, even if faith gives way to apostasy, but an election with endurance to the End (Matt. 10:22). Therefore, there must be activity generated to keep us unto the End (1 Pet. 1:5; Phil. 1:6).

It is through the Means of Grace that the Lord carries out His election-activity (1 Pet. 1:1f.; Rom. 1:16; Jas. 1:21). Thus those who know their election will make sure that the Gospel does not slip out of their grasp. To those who are ignorant it may seem that these efforts of the elect contribute toward their election. But the elect realize that the very will to hold fast to the Gospel is something that God Himself works in them (Phil. 2:13). It is God who makes their election sure by working in them both the faith and the will to keep that faith through the use of the Means of Grace.

It is the recognition of and the treasuring of this activity of God that serves to make us personally more certain of our election. Those who recognize and treasure will do everything that they are able (by the ability graciously given by God) to keep a firm grasp on what the Spirit has given to them. "Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make (middle: "for yourself") certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you" (2 Pet. 1:10).

**12.** Ὁ νικῶν, ποιήσω αὐτὸν στῦλον ἐν τῷ ναῷ τοῦ Θεοῦ μου, καὶ ἔξω οὐ μὴ ἐξέλθῃ ἔτι, καὶ γράψω ἐπ' αὐτὸν τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ Θεοῦ μου, καὶ τὸ ὄνομα τῆς πόλεως τοῦ Θεοῦ μου, τῆς καινῆς Ἱερουσαλήμ, ἣ καταβαίνει ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ μου, καὶ τὸ ὄνομά μου τὸ καινόν.

THE ONE OVERCOMING I WILL MAKE HIM A PILLAR IN THE TEMPLE OF THE GOD OF ME, AND OUTSIDE NOT NOT HE SHOULD GO OUT ANY MORE AND I WILL WRITE UPON HIM THE NAME OF THE GOD OF ME AND THE NAME OF THE CITY OF THE GOD OF ME, THE NEW JERUSALEM THE ONE COMING DOWN OUT OF THE HEAVENS FROM THE GOD OF ME, AND THE NAME OF ME THE NEW.

Ὁ νικῶν - All, who are engaged in the struggle to hold fast to the faith that has been delivered to them, need to be reassured that it will all be worth it in the end. It is not the first leg of the race that counts, nor the second, but the whole race. Reaching the final goal victoriously is the important thing. However, if there is no reward awaiting the victors, then why endure the pain of running? "If

we have only hoped in Christ in this life, we are of all men most to be pitied" (1 Cor. 15:19).

ποιήσω αὐτὸν στῦλον ἐν τῷ ναῷ τοῦ Θεοῦ μου - Pillars were constructed for two purposes: function or decoration. Functional pillars are constructed to hold up a portion of the building. Decorational pillars are constructed to add some visual attraction to the building.

The decorational pillar may also serve as a monument. Earthly rulers have erected monumental pillars to commemorate some great event, such as a victory over an enemy. On the pillar they record their names, their places of origin, and their accomplishments.

In the temple of Solomon, there were only two pillars that had any prominence. These were the two bronze pillars erected to beautify the temple and to be monuments to the glory of God. For this reason they were named. The right pillar was named יָכִיֵן, which means "he shall establish." The left pillar was named בְּעֹז, which means "in him is strength." The worshiper coming into the temple and seeing these pillars would be reminded of the fact that Jehovah is the One who makes them firm and strong.

As a pillar in the temple of God, the victorious Christian stands as a monument to the glory of God. God is the One who established him in the faith and who kept him strong throughout his earthly life. — God is our "Jachin" and our "Boaz."

γράψω ἐπ' αὐτὸν τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ Θεοῦ μου, καὶ τὸ ὄνομα τῆς πόλεως τοῦ Θεοῦ μου, τῆς καινῆς Ἱερουσαλήμ, ἣ καταβαίνει ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ μου, καὶ τὸ ὄνομά μου τὸ καινόν- Upon this pillar will be engraved the name of Him to whom this victor belongs, the name of the heavenly city in which the victor holds his citizenship, and the name of the One who led him to victory. Thus, he stands forever as a monument to the grace, the mercy, and the power of God.

ἔξω οὐ μὴ ἐξέλθῃ ἔτι - As was stated in the "background," the citizens of Philadelphia were accustomed to dashing out into the streets, because of the frequent earthquakes. Jesus might be alluding to this continuing fear when He assures the believers that nothing, absolutely nothing (οὐ μὴ), will cause them to go out of the heavenly temple. The pillars are permanent. Once in heaven, forever in heaven.

## **SUMMARY**

Here is a message of encouragement to small, faithful churches. Christ is the Lord of the Church and therefore the Lord of their church. Their "little power" is not frowned on by Him, as though He revels in bigness, but He delights in it and



in their faithfulness. The Lord can easily open doors of mission opportunity to such a church, knowing that it has the Means to make use of these opportunities. Such is the power of the Holy and Genuine One that He can even bring their enemies in through the door, making them into brethren. As for the times of trial, these churches with “little power” will be enabled to stand firm and not fall into the temptation, for in their faithfulness they have retained the Word that gives them endurance. Throughout their struggles, they can rest assured that Christ will return and take them to their heavenly home. There they shall dwell forever in the presence of the almighty God.

Ὁ ἔχων οὖς

ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ Πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις.

HE THAT HATH AN EAR,  
LET HIM HEAR WHAT THE SPIRIT SAITH UNTO THE CHURCHES.

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## **“A Lamb Goes Uncomplaining Forth”**

*David Lau*

Mid-week Lenten services are customary in our churches. In these six services, beginning on Ash Wednesday, the complete account of our Lord's suffering and death is read, and “before our eyes Jesus Christ is clearly portrayed among us as crucified” (Gal. 3:1) by means of the Lenten sermon.

Many six-part Lenten sermon series have been devised and are available for our use. The six sermons printed below follow the outline of the six stanzas of Paul Gerhardt's great Passion hymn, “A Lamb Goes Uncomplaining Forth” (The Lutheran Hymnal #142). When these sermons were delivered a few years ago, the following hymns were sung in the services:

I. Text: Isaiah 53:6-7

Theme: The Uncomplaining, Sin-Bearing Lamb

Hymns: 388, 150:1-3, 141, 142:1

II. Text: First Peter 1:19-20

Theme: The Lamb OF GOD

Hymns: 156, 367, 146, 142:2

III. Text: Hebrews 10:9-10

Theme: The Perfectly Willing Lamb

Hymns: 328, 652, 371, 142:3

IV. Text: Romans 12:1-2

Theme: The Lamb Worthy To Be Praised

Hymns: 358, 171:1-6, 344, 142:4

V. Text: First Corinthians 15:56-57

Theme: The Death-Defeating Lamb

Hymns: 157, 153, 176, 142:5

VI. Text: Revelation 21:9-11

Theme: The Lamb's Bride

Hymns: 360, 165, 656, 142:6

## I

*A Lamb goes uncomplaining forth, The guilt of all men bearing  
And laden with the sins of earth, None else the burden sharing!  
Goes patient on, grows weak and faint, To slaughter led without complaint,  
That spotless life to offer; Bears shame, and stripes, and wounds, and death,  
Anguish and mockery, and said, "Willing all this I suffer."*

Where did the hymn writer Paul Gerhardt get the idea of picturing Jesus as an UNCOMPLAINING, SIN-BEARING LAMB? Certainly this picture of Jesus as an uncomplaining Lamb is derived from the prophecy of Isaiah, who lived over 700 years before Jesus went forth uncomplaining to Gethsemane and to the cross. This picture of Jesus as an uncomplaining Lamb is recorded in Isaiah 53, where the prophet was inspired by God to describe the suffering of the promised Messiah and also the cause of that suffering.

The reason that any lamb would go to slaughter without complaint would no doubt be the unawareness of the animal that anything bad would happen to it. Lambs are apparently rather trusting and unsuspecting animals. That is why the prophet chose a lamb to illustrate the sufferings of the Messiah. "He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He

openeth not His mouth. . . . He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth."

But Jesus' reason for not complaining was not stupidity on His part or unawareness of the dangers threatening Him. Jesus knew very well what was going to happen to Him. He knew He was a sacrifice to be slaughtered. He knew He was going to His death. He had told His disciples all about it long before it happened. Not only did He know that it would happen; He knew how terrible it would be when it did happen. That is why He prayed so fervently in Gethsemane that, if possible, this cup of suffering might yet be removed from Him. He was not complaining. He was praying to His heavenly Father. When His Father made it clear that His suffering was absolutely necessary, there was no hesitation on Jesus' part. He was ready to drink the cup of suffering His Father wanted Him to drink. He went uncomplaining forth like an unsuspecting lamb. Though weak and faint, He patiently went on. He was led to slaughter without complaint. Though oppressed and afflicted, He did not open His mouth to complain about the way His Father was treating Him, nor did He open His mouth to curse those who were hurting Him and mistreating Him and condemning Him.

When Judas and the band of soldiers came to arrest Him, Jesus went forward to meet them. He made no attempt to resist them. He rebuked Peter for pulling out his sword in Jesus' defense. He testified against the sin of His enemies, but He did nothing to restrain them from hurting Him. He did not retaliate either in thought or word or deed. An attendant slapped Jesus on the face; Jesus did not slap him back or curse Him. When the false witnesses lied against Him, Jesus was silent. He said nothing in His own defense. When they made fun of Him and spit at Him, He did not secretly plot to get even with them. He took everything they handed out—patiently, like an uncomplaining lamb. Even when Pontius Pilate ordered him scourged, Jesus did not resist. "He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth." He answered Pilate's questions quietly and calmly, and when Pilate gave orders for crucifixion, Jesus again went uncomplaining forth, bearing His cross to the place of execution. He was so weak and faint that they had to find another to carry His cross for Him, but He did not complain. His response to the action of the soldiers in nailing His hands and legs to the cross was not a hateful cry for vengeance but a prayer that they might be forgiven. "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." He bore shame and stripes and wounds and death, anguish and mockery, and through it all He did not complain. "He committed no sin, nor was guile found in His mouth. When He was reviled, He did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to" His Father in heaven. He suffered wrongfully, but He took it patiently. "He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth: He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth."

But why was Jesus so uncomplaining? Why did He not call for judgment on His enemies as the prophet Elijah had done when he called down fire from heaven to destroy the soldiers who came to arrest him? Why did He not curse those who made fun of Him as the prophet Elisha had done? Then the bears came out of

the woods and tore up the Bethel boys who had dared to ridicule the bald head of God's prophet. Why was Jesus so patient?

The answer is in Isaiah's prophecy. Jesus was patient and uncomplaining because "the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all." As innocent as Jesus was personally, He was now guilty by God's decree, because He was made to be personally responsible for the sins of the whole human race. And that is a heap of sin. For "all we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way." Look at all the characters in the Passion history. Examine them one by one. Every last one of them had flaws and failings. Every last one of them was a sinner. All His disciples forsook Him and fled. Peter disowned Him. Judas betrayed Him. Caiaphas and Pilate unjustly condemned Him. And are we any better than they? "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all."

So that is why the Lamb went uncomplaining forth. He had nothing to complain about, for He was guilty of all sin, and He was worthy of every punishment laid upon Him, including being forsaken by His Father on the cross. He was guilty, for He was bearing the guilt of all men. He was laden with the sins of earth, none else the burden sharing. In His own life He was spotless, but now He was offering to God that spotless life as a sacrifice to set us free. Willingly He suffered all that suffering, so that He might be our Savior. For the punishment that came on Him has brought us peace. With His stripes we are healed. Behold THE UNCOMPLAINING, SIN-BEARING LAMB, the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. Behold Him and believe. Amen!

## II

In the first stanza of his Passion hymn, Paul Gerhardt describes Jesus as an uncomplaining Lamb, bearing the sin of the world. This description is in keeping with the prophecy of Isaiah, that described the coming Messiah as one brought as a lamb to the slaughter without opening his mouth. Now in the second stanza Paul Gerhardt goes on:

*This Lamb is Christ, the soul's great Friend, The Lamb of God, our Savior;  
Him God the Father chose to send To gain for us His favor.  
"Go forth, My Son," the Father saith, "And free men from the fear of death,  
From guilt and condemnation. The wrath and stripes are hard to bear,  
But by Thy Passion men shall share The fruit of Thy salvation."*

Surely the main point the hymn writer wants us to understand here is that Jesus is THE LAMB OF GOD, that is, the Lamb appointed and chosen by God to do this necessary but most difficult work of saving the human race from sin and death. This was a point made already by the prophet Isaiah when he wrote in advance: "The . . . Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all," and again when he said: "It pleased the . . . Lord to bruise Him; He hath put Him to grief." When

Jesus began His teaching ministry, John the Baptist pointed to Him and said: "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." This is as much as to say: Here is the One God has chosen and sent for this task of removing human sin. This same thought is stated by Peter in our text: Christ is the "lamb without blemish and without spot who verily [or truly] was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you."

Jesus was foreordained to be the sacrificial Lamb. That is, God planned and decided in advance, yes, even before the creation of the world, to send His Son Jesus into the world as an atoning sacrifice. Thus He is indeed the Lamb of God, and He has been the Lamb of God even from all eternity. "Him God the Father chose to send To gain for us His favor. `Go forth, My Son,' the Father saith." Because Jesus knew that He was the Lamb of God, He kept on referring to Himself as the One sent by the Father from heaven into this sinful world of ours.

This certainly implies, of course, that God knew in advance what was going to happen to the world He created. God knew before He made the world that, even though He made Adam and Eve in His own image, they would rebel against Him at the instigation of Satan and plunge the whole world into the most horrible sin and guilt and fear and distress. And yet He also knew in advance what He would do to save the world from this sin and guilt. This does not at all imply that God caused the world to sin. Rather, it is our confession based on the Holy Scripture that "sin is caused in all wicked men and despisers of God by the perverted will of the devil and of all ungodly men." Jesus said: The devil is the father of lies, and the devil was a murderer from the beginning. But since God knows all things in advance, He knew how Satan would plunge the world into sin, and so He from the beginning—before the foundation of the world—decided to send His Son to be our Savior. That is why God was ready, as soon as men fell into sin, to announce His plan of salvation: The woman's Seed would come into the world to crush the head of the serpent and take away his power.

Now, where do we fit into all of this? We are the descendants of Adam and Eve, and therefore we are the ones described by Paul Gerhardt as guilty, condemned creatures afraid of death. We are the ones who need to be set free. As the writer to the Hebrews says: We human beings are "through fear of death . . . all our lifetime subject to bondage," and that is why we need to be delivered.

But can we not free ourselves by using our God-given intelligence to think up ways to gain God's favor? Can we not please Him by our worship and behavior so that He is bound or obligated to forgive us our sins and set us free? Will He not honor the sincerity of our worship and take pity on us and release us from our fears and woes?

Men have thought so, and that is why they have endeavored to practice all kinds of religions from the beginning of time until now. The object of most of these religions has been to gain God's favor, but every last one of them has failed. Most likely most practitioners have realized these failures when they come face to face with death and are still afraid and have no way to quiet their fears.

And do you think we can quiet our fears as we face death by submitting to

God a list of our accomplishments? Look, God, I went to church 5,432 times; I contributed \$67,532.56 to the church treasury; I served as an usher for 36 years; I was on the church council; I taught Sunday School; I sent three children to Christian Day School. Do you think God will be impressed? No, He can say to us: I see that you want to deal with Me on the basis of your accomplishments. Well then, let Me point out a few facts on the records: You deliberately cheated on your income tax 23 times; you used My name in vain 4,632 times; you gave lousy excuses for missing church services 896 times; you drank yourself drunk 2,613 times; you lusted after other women in your heart more times than I want to say; you dishonored your parents in one way or another every day of your life; you failed to show love to your neighbor even though you had many, many opportunities; you lied and you deceived and you gossiped; you complained about how I treated you; your worship of Me was sham; and now you have the gall to expect Me to reward you for your accomplishments. If you want Me to judge you strictly by the Law, know therefore that your grade is zero. You are a failure, for you are not perfect in My sight.

Peter knew he was a failure as Jesus' disciple, and he went out and wept bitterly. We are all failures. And that is the very reason that, when Jesus prayed in Gethsemane that the cup might be removed from Him, if possible, God's answer was NO. God's answer to His Son was this: You are the Lamb of God; You are the One I chose to send from eternity to gain My favor for the human race. They cannot do it; they are all guilty; there is not one that does right in My sight, not even Your disciples, for they will all forsake You and flee this very night. You are the One, My Son, that must set them free. It will be hard for You to bear My wrath as man's Substitute; it will be hard for You to bear the stripes of the scourge and all the other physical sufferings. But by Your suffering You are going to save the world, and there will be some who will enjoy the fruits of Your work. There will be some persons here and there throughout the world who will not come to Me on the basis of their own so-called accomplishments but will trust only in You as the Lamb of God bearing their sin. Go forth, My Son, free men from the fear of death. You and You alone are the Lamb of God. Amen!

### III

In our midweek Lenten services we have been following the outline of Paul Gerhardt's Passion hymn, "A Lamb Goes Uncomplaining Forth." The first stanza describes Jesus as an uncomplaining lamb, bearing the sin of the world, just as the prophet Isaiah had said: "He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth." Why not? Because "the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all." The second stanza declares Jesus to be the Lamb OF GOD, that is, the lamb "without blemish and without spot, who was foreordained before the foundation of the world" to redeem lost mankind with His precious blood. The Father said: "Go forth, My Son, and free men from the fear of death, from guilt and condemnation." And now in the third stanza we have the Son's answer to the Father's command:

*“Yea, Father, yea, most willingly I'll bear what Thou commandest;  
My will conforms to Thy decree, I do what Thou demandest.”  
O wondrous Love, what hast Thou done! The Father offers up His Son!  
The Son, content, descendeth! O Love, how strong Thou art to save!  
Thou beddest Him within the grave Whose word the mountains rendeth.*

In this stanza Jesus is described as THE PERFECTLY WILLING LAMB, whose will conforms to the will of His heavenly Father in every detail. Moreover, the will of both the Father and the Son is described as a loving will, determined to save the human race from destruction, no matter what the cost might be.

Jesus was perfectly willing to do the work that had been assigned to Him from eternity. In this way Jesus showed Himself to be very much different from us. Is it not true that, when we do something good in our lives, we do not always do that good thing with perfect willingness? Take a child, for example, who has been told to do some kind of chore around the house. Even if the child finally does what he or she has been told to do, it is very seldom that anyone could say that the child was perfectly willing to do it. There is always a part of us that holds back, that resents being told what to do, that has to be forced or compelled to do something good. God wants all of our good works to be done cheerfully, willingly, out of love for Him and for our neighbor. But the flesh in us is so strong that it just never happens that we do one good thing with a perfectly willing mind. It is written: “There is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.” It is true therefore that a Christian sins even when he is doing good, because he is unable to do good with a perfectly willing heart.

But in the 40th Psalm David describes the coming Messiah as One who would be willing to do God's will in every way. In David's words the Messiah says: “Sacrifice and offering Thou didst not desire; Mine ears hast Thou opened; burnt offering and sin offering hast Thou not required. Then said I, `Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do Thy will, O My God: yea, Thy law is within My heart.”

In this psalm the outward acts of bringing sacrifices to God are not the important thing. What is important is that the coming Messiah would have open ears to listen to God's will and who would therefore offer Himself to do whatever God wanted Him to do. He would not only do what God wanted; He would do it with delight. He would be happy to do whatever would be required.

According to our text from the letter to the Hebrews, this prophecy of David is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. “Then said He, `Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God.” This was Jesus' attitude throughout His life. Even when He was twelve years old, He told Joseph and Mary that He must be about His Father's business. Yet He was obedient to them at that time because it was His Father's will. When He was thirty years old and the time came for Him to begin His teaching ministry, He was baptized by John the Baptist because that is the way He was to fulfill all righteousness. He wanted to do whatever was right. After He gathered His disciples together, they were constantly amazed by what He said and did. But His standard answer was that He was doing His Father's will. For example, when He

conversed with the woman of Samaria at the well, they were puzzled, but Jesus explained His course by saying: "My food is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work." His work was to seek and to save lost sinners, and He delighted in that work because it was His Father's will. Surely Paul Gerhardt is right in putting these words into Jesus' mouth: "Yea, Father, yea, most willingly I'll bear what Thou commandest; My will conforms to Thy decree, I do what Thou demandest."

Jesus was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Even as He anticipated the horrible suffering to come on Him and prayed in Gethsemane that, if possible, the cup of suffering could be removed from Him, He was PERFECTLY WILLING to drink that cup of suffering if it truly was His Father's will. "Not My will, but Yours be done," He said. Not even in Gethsemane did Jesus sin, for it is written that He was tempted like us in every way, yet without sin. Pontius Pilate's verdict was more true than he himself realized when he said: "I find no fault in Him at all." For this is also the verdict of Holy Scripture: "He is pure. . . . In Him is no sin." He did His Father's will in every way, even in being perfectly willing to do it, finally even giving His life into death as a willing sacrifice to atone for our sins.

Our text says: "By this will we are sanctified [or made holy] through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." In His willingness to do His Father's will Jesus gave His life as a ransom for all. Jesus' willingness makes up for our frequent unwillingness. His perfection more than compensates for our imperfections. Through Jesus' perfect willingness we are declared holy in God's sight. "He taketh away the first, that He may establish the second." The first is the Law, that stood against us, condemning us for our sins. This is taken away through Jesus' perfect obedience, so that now the second is established, namely, the Gospel of free forgiveness through Jesus Christ.

This is wondrous love indeed. "O wondrous Love, what hast Thou done! The Father offers up His Son." This was God's will from the beginning, and now it is carried out. "The Son, content, descendeth." Yes, He is content. He is happy to come down to earth to do this work. "O Love, how strong Thou art to save!" Both the Father and the Son in their willingness to save us went to the extreme of death for Jesus and burial in the earth. "Thou beddest Him within the grave Whose word the mountains rendeth." Jesus, although being almighty God, being able to rip apart all mountains, was perfectly willing to die and be buried, since it was His Father's will to save us in this way. Praise the Lord for THE PERFECTLY WILLING LAMB, Jesus Christ. Amen!

(To be continued)

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# **PANORAMA**

## **Voices From The Past**

*John Lau*

Sometime during 1985 I received a catalog from LCUSA (Lutheran Council in the USA) offices in New York. The catalog was entitled "The Oral History Collection of the Archives of Cooperative Lutheranism," and offered to "qualified researchers" access to written transcripts of oral history interviews held with individuals who have been influential in the history of modern American Lutheranism. The transcripts have been edited for accuracy by the persons interviewed. I was especially interested in obtaining access to transcripts of interviews with Oscar J. Naumann and Carl J. Lawrenz, of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS). The interview with former-President Naumann was "open"; i.e., it had been cleared for research without restriction by the respondent before his death in 1979, the same year the interview was held. "Open" also means that permission to cite or quote for publication is not required. The transcript of the Lawrenz interview, on the other hand, was described in the catalog: "Permission required to cite or quote."

I attempted, through correspondence and telephone conversation, to obtain copies of the transcripts in which I was interested, but soon learned that access to the material had to be made in person. After the formation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) in 1988, the Oral History Collection became a part of the ELCA Archives, located near the ELCA headquarters in Chicago. My desire to read the Naumann/ Lawrenz transcripts was reactivated during 1990-91, and finally, in October 1991, I made use of the invitation I received to speak at the 25th anniversary of the CLC congregation in Addison, Illinois, to spend an entire morning at the ELCA archives. I learned that since Prof. Lawrenz was now deceased, there were no longer any restrictions as to reading, citing or quoting from the transcript of his interview, which had taken place in 1983.

### I.

Both Professor Lawrenz and President Naumann discussed some issues that came into conflict in the Synodical Conference in the 1940s and 1950s.

**"Cooperation in Externals"** Lawrenz (p. 16):

Another issue that was already there in 1944 was the matter of so-called

“cooperation in externals” with those who were not in doctrinal agreement and in church fellowship relationship. Actually these examples of cooperation in externals involve forms of joint worship and church work. Joint endeavors, according to WELS conviction, do not remove doctrinal differences, but they lead those who are still sensitive about doctrinal differences to forget them, to grow indifferent to the authority of the Word of God.

The understanding of the very real dangers inherent in so-called “cooperations in externals” revealed by Prof. Lawrenz' statement finds full support among members of the CLC. Note that the statement also includes joint endeavors as forms of church work not to be engaged in by those who are not in doctrinal agreement and in church fellowship relationship. A confessional statement of the CLC declares: “. . . when this expression [“cooperation in externals”] is used to allow working together with heterodox bodies in religious matters, then we condemn the expression as a cloak for sinful disobedience to the Word of God, and a procedure which confuses and offends the simple Christian” (*Concerning Church Fellowship*, Par. 81, p. 37). In view of the “Lutheran Leadership Consultation,” involving 130 leaders from the ELCA, LCMS, and WELS, held last July under the sponsorship of Lutheran Brotherhood, a fraternal insurance and financial planning organization, one cannot help wondering if WELS still agrees with what Prof. Lawrenz said about joint endeavors.

**Prayer Fellowship and Joint Prayer** Lawrenz (p. 33):

Scripture also gives no warrant for distinction between prayer fellowship and an occasional joint prayer that is not prayer fellowship. True prayer, in our conviction, is an expression of Christian faith, and joint prayer is a joint expression of such faith, thus always prayer fellowship. The question in each instance must always remain whether, according to Scripture, it is proper or improper prayer fellowship, not whether it is prayer fellowship.

We can appreciate the careful wording of this statement, especially since there is very little interest among “main-line” Lutherans today in scriptural clarity in the theology of church fellowship. The ELCA is not even making a pretense at limiting the practice of fellowship to those who are confessionally agreed; it reveals a far greater interest in establishing fellowship relations with the Protestant Episcopal and Roman Catholic churches. It remains to be seen how pervasive the widely-touted “levels of fellowship” doctrine of the LCMS leadership has become, or whether more confessional elements will prevail. We hope that WELS still retains the concern in this matter demonstrated by its former professor.

**“Theology of Fellowship”** Naumann (p. 15):

At that time [1954] they [LCMS] asked Dr. Martin Franzmann . . . to draw

up a statement which became part of what was later known as the *Theology of Fellowship*; this was *Part II*. And in that of course the new position of Missouri [LCMS] became evident. They made the statement in that *Theology of Fellowship, Part II* that passages such as Rom 16:17-18 do not apply to erroristic church bodies, the passage does not apply to them, but to unbelievers and infidels only. That demonstrated to us that the position of the Missouri Synod with regard to church fellowship had definitely changed and showed to us also why they had hesitated so long to put themselves in writing. But we reached an impasse at that time. That which caused the impasse has not been removed to this day.

It was in 1955, then, that the WELS Standing Committee in Matters of Church Union brought its unanimously adopted recommendation that the WELS convention break off fellowship relations with LCMS on the basis of Romans 16:17-18. It is interesting that Pres. Naumann used the expression "reached an impasse" to describe the situation back in 1954, and, speaking in 1979, added: "That which caused the impasse has not been removed to this day." Since that expression was the one also used in 1961, when WELS did break fellowship with LCMS, there is no doubt but that Pres. Naumann was already convinced in 1954 that LCMS was causing divisions and offenses and was to be avoided at the next WELS convention in 1955. How sad that this conviction was not fulfilled! The 1955 WELS convention unanimously adopted the following resolution:

In view of these facts your Floor Committee, together with the Standing Committee in Matters of Church Union, affirms "our position that the Missouri Synod . . ." has brought about a break in relations and that our Synod, bound by the Word of God, should now declare itself on the matter. . . . A church body which creates divisions and offenses by its official resolutions, policies, and practices not in accord with Scripture also becomes subject to the indictment of Romans 16:17-18. The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod has by its official resolutions, policies, and practices created divisions and offenses both in her own body and in the entire Synodical Conference. Such divisions and offenses are of long standing. (1955 *Proceedings of WELS*)

Even though, as its adopted resolution declared, the WELS was fully convinced that the LCMS was causing divisions and offenses, yet, with a two-to-one majority vote, the WELS delegates decided not to avoid, as Romans 16:17-18 requires, but to postpone the decision to sever fellowship relations with the LCMS. The postponement lasted six years! And when WELS did sever fellowship relations with LCMS in 1961, it did so on the basis of a statement it had approved in its 1959 convention: "Termination of church fellowship is called for when you have reached the conviction that admonition is of no further avail and that the erring brother or church body demands recognition for their error." This is the situation that WELS once again described by declaring, "An impasse has been reached." This incorrect interpretation of Romans 16:17-18 has now become the very fabric out of which the WELS theology of church fellowship has been woven.

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## II.

### The "Lawrenz Interpretation"

There was no doubt from 1955 to 1957 as to what WELS had said and done in its 1955 convention. This can be shown from three sources of the time. The *Post-Convention News Bulletin*, published to interpret for WELS members the meaning of the synodical resolutions, reported, in part:

Agreement on the fact that Romans 16:17-18 applied to the situation in the Missouri Synod was almost unanimous. [Actually, the record indicates that the vote was unanimous. - J.L.] The divisions and offenses are clear. There was an honest difference of opinion on whether it was necessary to break relations completely with the Missouri Synod now or whether we, in the words of our President, "still have an unpaid debt of love to those whose fellowship we have cherished so many years." The body, by a vote of two to one, decided to wait a year. (Emphasis in the original. - J.L.)

The second of two official interpretations was published in *The Northwestern Lutheran*:

The preamble (of the 1955 resolution), which reiterated the 1953 charges of our Synod and applied Romans 16:17-18, was unanimously adopted. All were firmly convinced and fully agreed that the charge of unionism against the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod was valid and that the Romans passage is applicable, even though some could not agree that action be deferred until the next meeting of that Synod.

The third source is from the report of the "Protest Committee" presented to and approved by the 1957 WELS convention. Even as late as 1957, then, the WELS acknowledged:

While there exists in our midst confusing divergence of opinion regarding the interpretation of Romans 16:17-18, especially with regard to the meaning of the expression "avoid them"; while essays were delivered and it would appear were officially or tacitly accepted in our midst, which are not in harmony with one another; yet the Synod did speak a very clear language concerning this passage at the Saginaw Convention in 1955 when it passed a resolution unanimously, stating that the passage did apply to the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, though the voting on the break was delayed, for the reasons given, for another year.

By 1958 a line of argumentation developed by Prof. Lawrenz was beginning to prevail in WELS. It was now argued that the 1955 WELS convention did not "conclusively" apply the judgment of Romans 16:17-18 to the LCMS at that time but, rather, postponed its entire judgment on the matter. As can be seen from the above quotations, this new interpretation was very different from the official interpretations at the time the 1955 resolution was adopted and as late as 1957. Even the "Protest Committee," in its "Letter to the Protesting Brethren" of the

WELS dated June 27, 1958, after quoting Prof. Lawrenz' interpretation, declared:

It is true that many did not understand the resolution in that way originally. The members of your Protest Committee will need to admit that they did not understand it that way at the time.

In the transcript of Prof. Lawrenz' oral interview, his recollection and interpretation of the events of 1955-56 are as follows (p. 57):

. . . The indictment expressed in the preamble [1955 WELS *Proceedings*] and in the wording of the resolution that was to be voted on in '56 were [sic] made conditional by Stipulation 2. According to this Stipulation 2, we still awaited the additional evidence of Missouri's answer to our charges in its delegate convention of 1956.

We adopted the stipulation: "That we might continue to heed the scriptural exhortations to patience and forbearance in love by giving the LCMS opportunity to express itself at the 1956 convention." Our Synod did not want to put the Missouri Synod under the indictment of Romans 16:17 and terminate fellowship, which would have far-reaching consequences, until it had been assured that the position taken by the officials and the official committees of the Missouri Synod was, in spite of our intensified testimony since 1953, really shared also by the majority of the delegates from Missouri Synod congregations throughout the country. The 1955 resolutions, therefore, still kept us in a state of confession over against Missouri; however, one of very vigorous protest.

Since we had not conclusively applied Romans 16:17-18, we had also not disobeyed its injunction. . . . That was, and still is, my understanding of the action of the 1955 convention. Who would say that the Saginaw resolutions [1955] did not leave room for greater clarity?

In stating that "Our Synod did not want to put the Missouri Synod under the indictment of Romans 16:17 . . . until . . .," Prof. Lawrenz was implying that WELS was not at that very time putting the LCMS under the indictment, etc. One need only read the actual, unanimously adopted resolution and its official interpretations to realize that he was mistaken: "A church body which creates divisions and offenses by its official resolutions, policies, and practices not in accord with Scripture also becomes subject to the indictment of Romans 16:17-18. The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod has by its official resolutions, policies, and practices created divisions and offenses both in her own body and in the entire Synodical Conference." (Emphasis added - J.L.)

### III.

#### **Why Lawrenz changed his position in 1955**

The WELS Standing Committee in Matters of Church Union, of which Prof.

Lawrenz was a member, had come to the 1955 WELS convention with the stated "conviction" that the time had come for WELS to terminate fellowship relations with the LCMS. Yet Prof. Lawrenz, among others, changed that position of "conviction" during the convention and was willing to postpone terminating fellowship relations. When asked, in the oral interviews, for an explanation of this change, Prof. Lawrenz replied (p. 62):

. . . When the majority of my brethren, whose agreement with my confessional position I did not doubt, came to a different conclusion than that which their standing committee reported, I had to ask myself whether their variant judgment was sinful and unscriptural. . . . It was not a question as to whether I was personally convinced that the prevailing judgment was more sound; it was rather a question whether I found myself able to show from Scripture that the prevailing judgment of my brethren was a sinful one, and showed clear disobedience to God's word. I was not able to establish that; hence, I did not protest over this prevailing judgment of my brethren. After all, the fellowship with the Missouri Synod, though already a protesting one, was something that all my brethren in synod shared with me equally. I was not ready to make my judgment binding for them. I would have considered that presumptuous, lording over God's heritage; neither was I willing to make a decision by action on our fellowship with Missouri all by myself, unless it could clearly be convinced—I could be clearly convinced in my conscience that this was the only thing that I could do in obedience to my Lord; and I was not able to do that.

#### IV.

### **What keeps WELS and CLC apart?**

Both respondents, Pres. Naumann and Prof. Lawrenz were asked to comment on this question. It is interesting that both men revealed a concern about their perceived fear that the CLC demands some sort of statement of repentance going all the way back to the 1950s on the part of every individual WELS member who approaches the CLC in order to ascertain whether confessional agreement exists. Perhaps in the early years of the separation this fear had some basis—on both sides.

Since that time, however, we of the CLC have said over and over again that we are not concerned with a timetable. We ourselves did not all withdraw from WELS or other member synods of the Synodical Conference at the same time. Even today pastors who have been members of WELS or LCMS are joining the CLC by colloquy. Speaking for myself, I withdrew from WELS in 1959 and was involved in the organization of the CLC. I was never asked to make a statement of repentance for not having withdrawn earlier. Our concern in forming the CLC was to prepare confessional statements on the scriptural doctrine of church fellowship, particularly on the termination thereof, not to set timetables or to

demand sackcloth and ashes of those who joined us.

To those who maintain that the CLC demands repentance back to the 1950s, we can only repeat what we have declared before:

What is important, rather, is the Scriptural basis for separation from heterodox individuals and/or church bodies! The reason for withdrawing from fellowship is vital, whereas the time at which individuals may come to an awareness of the Scriptural necessity for withdrawing may depend upon a variety of factors, not least of which may be an unwillingness to face facts or even simple disobedience to God's Word. (*Journal of Theology*, June 1982)

The concern with a timetable actually stems, it seems to me, from statements coming out of WELS that claim that our withdrawal from fellowship with WELS was because of a time factor. Here is one example of such statements:

On February 17 the college was privileged to hear an address by the Rev. Carl Mischke, president of our Synod, on the Church of the Lutheran Confession. This group broke away from the Wisconsin Synod in the late 1950s during the controversy over fellowship with the Missouri Synod. These people claimed that the Wisconsin Synod didn't break fellowship with LC-MS soon enough; and as a result they formed their own church body, the CLC. (*Journal of Theology*, June 1982; quoted from *Northwestern Today*, April 1982; emphasis added.)

The following, then, is the statement made by Pres. Naumann in his oral history interview of January 24, 1979 (p. 26):

. . . The former brethren that now form the Church of the Lutheran Confession are convinced that we still have to repent of our failure to terminate as soon as they terminated. . . . Now they're asking us to repent back to the days when they left us so that our sins of stalling for time, carrying on our admonitions would be forgiven. We're not convinced that we were wrong in doing it as we did. I will say, however, that this matter was brought to their attention at one meeting that I attended and we mentioned to them that they did not reach that conviction as individuals and individual congregations at the same time. . . . And one of their pastors, a younger man at the time, said, "Well, we've all repented back to October '56." We didn't think the Lord wanted that kind of mechanical confessional action from us.

When the interviewer asked Prof. Lawrenz, "What keeps Wisconsin and the CLC apart?", the respondent had a lengthy reply in which he summarized his recollection of attempts at reconciliation between the two church bodies. (The first paragraph also dealt with the matter of a demanded repentance.)

The burden of answering this question should really be left to the men who terminated their fellowship with our synod. I had always hoped that those (of WELS) who in following their conscience broke fellowship with the Missouri Synod at an earlier date would seek to reestablish fellowship with

our synod when it had likewise terminated its fellowship with the LCMS. Those who did so and expressed their full agreement with our synod's position in doctrine and practice were fraternally received. They were not asked to repent for having felt bound in their conscience to break fellowship earlier. In a similar way we have fraternally received former LCMS members who sought our fellowship, expressing full agreement with our confessional position. We have not asked them to repent because they felt that they still had an admonitory testimony to carry out in the midst of their affiliation, when WELS had already terminated their fellowship with the LCMS.

The last WELS effort to reach agreement in the hope of re-establishing fellowship with those who had left us and who were now in the CLC, the Church of the Lutheran Confession, were [sic] made in a meeting on July 18-19, 1972, in Milwaukee. A difference in the field of church fellowship practice became evident when the discussion turned to dealing with a church body with whom you have been in fellowship, but in which false doctrine and practice have arisen. The CLC acknowledged no warrant for a transitional state of confession. Our WELS representatives held that such a state of confession is frequently called for before terminating fellowship with a group that has been infected by error, for the following reasons: (1) In order to offer opportunity for determining what the confessional position of the group for which it must be held responsible really is. It may become necessary because of mutually exclusive statements, pronouncements, resolutions made in such a group; because of conflicting positions contending for mastery in this group, one or the other of which may for good reason be considered to be only temporarily in control. (2) To offer opportunity to bring scriptural testimony against the error infecting the group to those brethren who are not themselves advocating and propagating the errors—before treating such brethren as responsible partakers of the error or false doctrine infecting their group.

Our representatives held such a procedure to be called for to satisfy the many scriptural injunctions quoted in our church fellowship statement bidding us to exercise patience and make earnest efforts to preserve the bond of confessional fellowship, to help the weak and confused. After WELS had made this declaration the CLC representatives declared that continued discussion would serve no further purpose.

A couple of statements of Prof. Lawrenz require comment. The first is: "The CLC acknowledged no warrant for a transitional state of confession." What we are declaring is simply that Romans 16:17-18 provides that Christians are to watch out for (*skopein*) those who in an on-going way cause divisions and offenses by their false doctrine and practice. When they have recognized that such is the case, there is no scriptural warrant for a state of confession, if by that is meant the continuation of the practice of fellowship. St. Paul simply says: "Avoid them!" In 1955 the question of LCMS causing divisions and offenses was no longer in doubt for WELS; its resolution said so! There was from then on no



warrant even for a “vigorously protesting” fellowship.

The second statement requiring comment is identified in Prof. Lawrenz' remarks as items (1) and (2). All of these activities may be the proper and God-pleasing things to do while one is attempting to determine whether the divisions and offenses going on are the responsibility of individuals or of a church body. They are no longer to be carried out within the framework of fellowship practice once the determination has been made. Again, in 1955 WELS expressed its judgment of the entire Missouri Synod: “The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod has by its official resolutions, policies, and practices created divisions and offenses both in her own body and in the entire Synodical Conference” (1955 *Proceedings of WELS*).

V.

### **Prospects for the Future?**

Both respondents answered the question, “Are there any possibilities or prospects for future contact with the CLC?” Both expressed the hope that there were. However, in each case that hope involved the CLC's coming around to the position of WELS in the controverted doctrines. This is how Prof. Lawrenz expressed it (p. 80):

It has been my hope that the future generation of the CLC who did not burn all their bridges when they left the fellowship of WELS will some day be able to see the scriptural warrant of the WELS position on a state of confession, and find themselves in agreement with the WELS position in doctrine and practice.

In Pres. Naumann's reply to the question, he expresses the opinion that the proof of the correctness of the WELS position in the matter of church fellowship is found, at least in part, in the activity and growth of his church body. “Are there any possibilities or prospects for future contact with the CLC?” He answers (p. 26):

I sincerely hope there are. I can't, I won't attempt to make any predictions, but I believe that if they study their church history of the last two decades they would have to say that the Lord has not withdrawn His hand from us, nor His Word from us. He is blessing the work that we are carrying on. I'm convinced that it was not sinful to put forth an effort of the magnitude that we tried to put forth in the hope of winning at least and convincing at least some in the sister synod if not the leaders and the entire church body. And I'm not convinced that this was a sinful action. I think it was an action that was pleasing to the Lord and I draw that conclusion from the manner in which He's blessing our church's activity and its growth at present, not by our effort or our dedication but certainly we must lay our growth and the unity within our church body to the grace of God and His

blessing and to nothing else.

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The transcripts contain remarks on many other subjects as well; I believe that I have fairly quoted material that deals with the history of the church fellowship controversy and the doctrinal issues involved. It is truly my intention to follow the motto: *De mortuis nil nisi bonum*. These men were my professor and my president; I learned from them and I revere their memory. Honesty compels me to show, as best I can, where their theology in the doctrine of church fellowship went astray and ought not to be followed.

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## **What Is Going On? (Revisited)**

*John Lau*

In the last issue of our journal (December 1991) we asked, "What is going on?" in reference to the "Lutheran Leadership Consultation," sponsored and financed by Lutheran Brotherhood, and to "Joy," a radio program of sacred classical music sponsored by Aid Association for Lutherans (AAL). Both these enterprises allegedly involved joint religious activities of three Lutheran church bodies: ELCA, LCMS, and WELS. Involvement on the part of WELS in the leadership consultation has been acknowledged by the editor of *The Northwestern Lutheran*, an official organ of WELS. However, the question still remained regarding "Joy": what is going on? We said in the last issue: "It seems apparent that the ELCA, at least, regards both of these activities as carrying out 'God's Mission' and as a 'joint venture into ministry.' If one of the partners in a joint undertaking understands it so, and the other does not, it behoves the denier to make his position clear."

A letter from President Carl Mischke of WELS, received by Pres. Daniel Fleischer of the CLC, referred in part to the ELCA news release about "Joy." The letter contained this comment: "After thinking about it for a time I recalled that about a year ago I was asked whether the WELS would endorse or be a sponsor of such a program. My answer was 'NO' for obvious reasons. . . . So the statement that this is the 'first joint venture into ministry' ever done by these three Lutheran Churches is simply not factual. It has been called to the attention of those who made it." The letter was dated January 22, 1992.

A notice titled "Radio program is not a joint venture" appeared on page 114 of the March 15, 1992, issue of *The Northwestern Lutheran*. We quote it in its entirety. There is no signature or any indication as to who is responsible for the notice.

Recently a news item appeared in several places in the religious press which referred to a new hour-long sacred classical music FM radio program, "Joy," as "the first joint venture into ministry that has ever been done" by the three largest Lutheran church bodies, of which the Wisconsin Synod is named as one.

The new radio program available to radio stations across the country is produced by KFYO-FM in St. Louis, an entity of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. The program, on a trial run, is funded by a grant from Aid Association for Lutherans. A word of explanation is in order since the news report places us in violation of Wisconsin Synod fellowship principles, based on Romans 16:17 and other Scripture texts, which forbid joint worship with those not in doctrinal agreement with us.

Occasional meetings by WELS divisional representatives with other church body representatives, hosted by AAL and Lutheran Brotherhood, have been going on since at least the mid-1970s. These meetings involved potential grants to all Lutheran bodies for specific purposes, and the advice of all Lutheran bodies is solicited by AAL or LB about the terms of the grants, since grants for a pan-Lutheran project often preclude WELS participation.

There is no expression of fellowship in such meetings *nor* joint prayer or worship. The 1961 resolutions of the synod, suspending fellowship with the Missouri Synod on the basis of Romans 16:17, will not permit a manifestation of a fellowship which does not exist.

When WELS persons have been present for other types of consultation hosted by AAL or LB, they have been present as observers, and it has been usually so noted in any publicity released in connection with such an affair.

Even in these meetings where WELS persons are present as observers, there is no expression of fellowship. With recent changes of personnel at both AAL and ELCA offices, this distinction may have been lost sight of. If there are future news releases in matters of this nature, and if WELS is present, WELS status will be carefully noted.

We are glad to take note of the effort that WELS is evidently making to refrain from prayer fellowship at AAL and/or LB meetings and consultations when WELS representatives are present. That is surely scriptural and, therefore, God-pleasing. The concept, however, that is being neglected is that it is in the very nature of fraternal insurance organizations to be fraternal; that is, those who are insured by such organizations are members, not merely policy-holders. They have voting rights, elect officers, approve programs, etc. WELS members who have insurance policies with AAL and/or LB are, therefore, involved in all those organizations' activities, including those which support religious programs aiding heterodox Lutheran church bodies in various and sundry ways. An honest examination of many of the programs carried on by AAL and LB surely reveals that these are not "cooperation in externals"; that is, purely secular programs.

Prof. Carl J. Lawrenz, former professor at the WELS Theological Seminary at Mequon, Wisconsin, as a part of an interview for the Oral History Collection of the Archives of Cooperative Lutheranism, located now in the ELCA Archives in Chicago, correctly pointed out the dangers of considering something to be "external," when in fact it is not. He used the expression "forms of church work" as well as "forms of joint worship" in showing what "cooperation in externals" meant back in 1944. He went on to say: "Joint endeavors, according to WELS conviction, do not remove doctrinal differences, but they lead those who are still sensitive about doctrinal differences to forget them, to grow indifferent to the authority of the Word of God" (See "Voices from the Past," this issue). We can only hope that the day will come when WELS will take a good, hard look at the unionistic involvement of its members in the unionistic work of fraternal insurance organizations and will take steps to extricate itself.

One of the individuals responsible for the ELCA news release about "Joy," the Rev. Richard Jensen, a member of ELCA communications staff and the Joy Advisory Committee, had called the "Joy" project "the first joint venture into ministry that has ever been done by these three Lutheran Churches." We contacted the Rev. Jensen by telephone after the letter from Pres. Mischke was received and asked him to comment. He replied that, as far as he was concerned, it was "a matter of semantics." He added that he believed that WELS was an "equal full partner" in the "Joy" enterprise and that he had felt that WELS had "no hesitancy in taking part." He was aware, he said, that WELS "does not like the term 'joint ministry,'" and asks to be called "observers." — And now we and our readers know "what is (or is not) going on"!

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# PAIDEIA

## **From a Pastor's and Professor's Notebook**

*Roland A. Gurgel*

XVI

**Isaiah**

Perfect Peace in an Imperfect World!

One of the questions man has frequently posed and for which he has attempted to give an answer is: Why does God reach out to help? The answer that usually comes from man's own reason and logic is that "God helps those who help themselves." That thought takes many directions, but at the heart of it always lies the contention that somehow **man must make an attempt** to win God's favor and then will come the needed help. What is it in man that catches God's eye and brings a favorable response? Again man gives a thousand answers, but at the core of each answer lies the thought that man somehow offers a spark, a semblance, a hint, a touch of something pleasing to God.

What must I do to win God's attention and help? If we were to look to ourselves for the answer, we would be **living in a constant search for the assurance** that we have in ourselves what is needed to obtain God's favor. We would constantly be asking the question of the young man who came to Jesus, "What lack I yet?" We would have no real peace in this imperfect world. We would find ourselves doing what Amos describes in the eighth chapter of his book: "And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, and shall not find it. In that day shall the fair virgins and young men faint for thirst."

In Isaiah chapter 43 God gives His very clear and plain answer to the question why He offers help. You will recall from our previous article that the Lord made it clear to the to-be-exiled kingdom of Judah that He would deliver them from that exile by His almighty power. In the 43rd chapter the Lord tells them why they can rely on that promise and His power.

Take a look at verses 21-28. There is no evidence that God found something in these people that awakened a response on His part. Listen as He describes what He sees (the translations offered here are from Pieper-Kowalke): "For you, O Jacob, did not call Me, . . . You only burdened Me with your sins And wearied Me with your iniquities . . . Your very first forefather sinned, And your mediators have broken faith with Me." What the Lord saw in these people is what He has seen in all mankind since Adam's fall. "Your very first forefather sinned." Although Adam might well come to mind with those words, or Abraham, the context most likely points to Jacob. Cf. verse 22, "O **Israel**," and verse 28, "**Jacob** to destruction." Jacob readily confesses that God reached out to help him, not because of something in Jacob, but he declares in Genesis 32:10, "I am **not worthy** of the **least** of all the mercies and of all the truth which thou hast shown to thy servant." And again in Genesis 47:9 he declares, "Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been . . ."

What the Lord is doing in these verses is giving Judah the assurance that help is forthcoming in their day of need, not because of something they have done or deserved, but because of a very firm foundation, namely, God's grace. Hear that assurance in verse 21ff., "The people **whom I have formed for Myself . . . I, it is, I who forgives** your transgressions **for My sake**, Who no more remembers your sin . . . **call it to My mind** [namely, that I **for My sake** forgive you your sin], and let us contend together, **Relate it** [that I **for My sake forgive you your sin**] **to yourself**, so that you may be justified."

Judah can be certain of God's help because it is based on His grace and His grace alone. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee." It is important to realize that that grace is not an arbitrary whim or fancy but is firmly founded on God's love in Christ Jesus.

God's dealing with Judah was always based on and centered in the Messiah, the Christ, who was to come from their midst and be born in their land. He would bring them back from the exile to come to the promised land that His promises in connection with the Messiah might be fulfilled. His dealing with the individuals of that people was in connection with that Messiah who would be wounded for their transgressions, who would be bruised for their iniquities; the chastisement of their peace would be upon him, and by his stripes they would be healed (Cf. Isaiah 53:5).

This testimony to an exiled Judah, that the Lord would be their help solely by reason of His grace in the Messiah, is not something peculiar to Isaiah, but it is the message of God to Israel and to all the world of all times and all places. Recall the words of Moses in Deuteronomy 7:6-8, "The Lord did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: But **because the Lord loved you**, and because he would keep the oath, which he had sworn to your fathers, hath the Lord brought you out with a mighty hand . . ." And again think of the words of the Lord to Adam and Eve after they had sinned, "And **I will put enmity** between thee and the woman . . ." Or recall the words of St. Paul in Romans 3:23-27, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being **justified freely by his grace** through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus; . . . Where is boasting, then? It is excluded."

Again and again, as we page through the verses of Scripture, the truth that it is "God who has formed us for Himself"; that it is "He who forgives transgressions for His sake. It is He who no more remembers your sins . . . so that you might be justified"—this truth is held before our eyes in answer to the question, "Why does God help us?"

Do you catch the full impact of God's answer to that question? Nothing in man, but entirely in God Himself is found the reason for help to man. Nothing man had to earn, nothing man had to deserve, but solely God's grace in Christ Jesus brings the God-given help we need.

Judah of old could live in perfect peace in an imperfect world awaiting God's hour of deliverance. That deliverance was certain because of God's grace and power. What was true then is still true today. In humble thanks we cast all our cares upon Him, knowing that His help is assured us by reason of His gracious love in Christ Jesus.

"Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee."

(To be continued)