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## Sermon Series: The Ten Commandments

Frank Gantt

**The Fourth Commandment: *Honor your father and mother, that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.***

Readings: Deuteronomy 21:18-21, Luke 2:40-52

Sermon Text: Colossians 3:20-22

Grace, mercy, and peace are yours from God our Father and Christ Jesus, our Savior. Amen.

The older I get, the more I appreciate the wisdom of God as seen in many of the things He has created. For example, I knew as a child that plants were pretty and useful, but as I got older, I came to understand that they also have a vital function, which is to emit oxygen, a gas vital not only for human beings, but also for all the animals in the world. As we breathe in the oxygen which those plants emit, we then exhale carbon dioxide, the exact gas those plants need to keep producing oxygen.

As amazed as I am at God's wisdom in so many areas of His creation, two specific aspects of His creation are all the more amazing to me. One of them is the wisdom provided in the husband-wife relationship. The other, which is the subject of our meditation today, is the parent-child relationship. Isn't it wonderful that in creating parenthood, God not only provided the child with someone to nurture and love him in tender youth, but also that in so doing, He has provided the parent with someone to love and nurture him in old age? What wisdom for us to have and use!

Like marriage does, the parent-child relationship also has similarities to the man-God relationship. It is no wonder that Satan has been attacking this institution of God almost as vigorously as he has been assaulting the husband-wife relationship. Our Lord has therefore provided us with guidance and direction concerning this relationship, which, interestingly enough, is the first relationship addressed in the Ten Commandments after our relationship with God. The Apostle Paul echoes this commandment when he writes in Colossians 3:20-22:

**Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged. Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God.**

There is no question that parenthood is under assault in our society these days. It's hard to imagine a time when there was such a great disconnect between the youth and their parents as there is today. It may be more open and obvious to us, but this disconnect is certainly nothing new. Satan has been seeking to destroy the beauty of this relationship just as soon as he succeeded in bringing sin into the world. Thus we read of Ham mocking his father Noah, Jacob deceiving Isaac, and then Jacob favoring Joseph above his other sons.

Why has Satan directed such hostility against parenthood? It really comes down to this: just as the husband-to-wife relationship is parallel to the Christ-to-Church relationship (Eph. 5:22-33), so the parent-to-child relationship is parallel to the God-to-mankind relationship. In creating parenthood, God has revealed to all the world something about Himself: both His authority over all mankind and His goodness toward all mankind.

To fathers and mothers God has bestowed authority to act as His representatives. Children are not only to love their parents as such representatives but also to hold them in high honor. Luther notes in the Large Catechism:

It is a much greater thing to honor than to love. Honor includes not only love but also deference,

humility, and modesty, directed (so to speak) toward a majesty hidden within them. It requires us not only to address them affectionately and reverently, but above all to show by our actions, both of heart and of body, that we respect them very highly and that next to God we give them the very highest place.

Just like love does, honor reveals itself in actions. Here is the practical side of the commandment for children. They are, as Paul says, to **“obey (their) parents in all things.”** Children, understand well what this means. Obedience to your parents can not be replaced by hugs and kisses and whispers of “I love you.” God not only demands that you love your parents, but that you obey them in everything that does not involve sin. This you are to do without complaining, murmuring under your breath, or even harboring ill thoughts in your mind or heart. You are to listen to their commands and instructions as though it were God Himself commanding you.

Yet even obedience itself is not all there is to honoring your parents. Even as you are servants to God, so you are to view yourself as servants to your parents. In your youth it may take the form of washing the dishes or digging post holes. As you grow older, the form becomes even more demanding, as you will be required to care for them and put your own wants and desires on hold for them.

In this duty that God has laid upon you, He has also attached a great promise: **“that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.”** In these words He not only makes it plain that this is His immutable will for you, but that it is also a means by which He intends to bless your body and your life on this earth.

There is, of course, another side to this commandment which, while not specifically stated in the commandment, is stressed often in Scripture, just as it is in our text. Not only does God lay an obligation upon children to love and honor their parents, He also places a heavy responsibility upon the parents to care for and train their children. As head of the family this responsibility is laid directly on the shoulders of fathers. In essence, you fathers are to be as God to your children. Note well that you are not to be as the pagan gods, always demanding and threatening, but as the true God, always loving and sacrificing. Mothers, as helpmeets to your husbands, you share in this responsibility, as the prophet Malachi says, **“But did He not make them one, having a remnant of the Spirit? And why one? He seeks godly offspring”** (Mal. 2:15). We parents are essentially nannies, called by God to train up the children He has entrusted to our care as though they were His children, which He does intend them to be.

In this duty we will often find ourselves at odds with the world. We will be criticized for not allowing our children to engage in certain activities, for sheltering our children from certain dangers to their souls, and for teaching them to be more mindful of the things of God than the things of the world. It will often, because of sin, be a hardship on us. We may lose friends, personal freedoms, even the respect of others. Those things are not to be our concern, but we are to entrust ourselves into the hands of Him who judges righteously.

Along with this a special word of caution needs to be emphasized. Do not give up so lightly the responsibility God has laid upon you. Fathers, don't assume that because your children are enrolled in grade school, Sunday School, and confirmation classes that your responsibility is therefore met. These are certainly blessings to assist you in the nurture and training of your children, but they are not to be a replacement of your authority and stewardship as Christian fathers. When you stand before the judgment seat of Christ, it will be no excuse that you took your child to school and Sunday School so many days during his life. These avenues are but helps to you, not escapes for you.

Remember, fathers and mothers, you are God's representatives on earth; that is, you are in everything to be as God to your children. How much damage do we do to the souls of our children if our word is not trustworthy, for many parents threaten and do not chastise, promise but do not remain faithful, bribe but do not discipline. They act as though the raising of the voice and the mere threat of the rod is all that is required, yet they do not see that they are raising a generation of eye-pleasers. Worse yet is that they seldom speak a word of forgiveness and reconciliation, increasing anger and

hatred in the heart of the children toward any and all in authority, including God.

Let parents take their guide from the One who has given them such a noble and blessed responsibility. Does God threaten and not follow through? Does His anger boil, yet He speaks empty threats? Has He not declared in the Scriptures, **“Depart from Me all you workers of iniquity,”** and, **“They shall be cast into outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”** Yet the punishment is meant to be a curb and to reflect back to the disobedient their rebellion, so that they may know the futility of their ways and turn from it. It is His deepest desire, within a fatherly and divine heart, that they return to Him so that He may heal them of their sinfulness and cleanse them of their guilt. To this end He sent His Son, Christ Jesus, to bear the sins of the world that He may smile upon them and be a Father to them. What great grace and blessing are given when fathers and mothers thus exemplify God in their dealings with their children! Such children learn obedience and honor not only toward His earthly representatives, but also toward God.

What grace and blessing are also given to all the members of the family in the comforting Word of God’s forgiveness in Christ. To you children, who fail time and again to obey your parents in all things, the Father in heaven says:

Your sins of disobedience, along with all your other sins, have been placed on your Savior Jesus. He has obeyed Me for you. He has kept this Fourth Commandment for you. He has paid your debt and brought you into My family through His own blood. You are forgiven because of Him, and you have My promise to help you follow Me by obeying your parents, whom I have placed over you.

And to you parents, who have failed time and again to raise your children according to all that God requires of you, the heavenly Father says:

I have nailed your sins of negligence and irresponsibility, along with all of your guilt, to the cross of Christ. His sacrifice covers them all and removes them from My sight. You are still My forgiven children through Him, and you have My promise to work in you and through you in your calling as guardians of the children I have given you.

Praise God for His wisdom in the Fourth Commandment and His forgiving grace to us in Christ. AMEN!

#### **THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT: *You shall not murder.***

Readings: Genesis 4:1-12, 1 John 3:110-18

Sermon Text: Luke 10:25-37

Grace, mercy, and peace are yours from God our Father and Christ Jesus, our Savior. Amen.

In the New Testament Gospels we find many of the parables by which Jesus taught His disciples, both then and now, very important spiritual and heavenly truths. Few of them are as well known as the one which we shall consider today, the Parable of the Good Samaritan. In fact, this parable is not just well known within the Church; it is known outside of the Church. The largest and most successful RV club in the United States is named after this parable. It’s called the Good Sam Club, organized with the understanding and principle that the members are supposed to help one another.

However, the point of the parable of the Good Samaritan goes beyond what most people consider to be its point. If you were to ask a hundred people what the parable teaches, I suppose the majority of the answers would be something like “We should help people.” While that is true, it hardly gets to the depths of what Jesus intended to teach.

As we consider the Fifth Commandment today, I invite your attention as we use this parable for the basis of our consideration. We hear what Jesus said in Luke 10:25-37:

***And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?" So he answered and said, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind' and 'your neighbor as yourself.'" And He said to him, "You have answered rightly; do this and you will live." But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Then Jesus answered and said: "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.' So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?" And he said, "He who showed mercy on him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."***

In order to understand the point of this parable, we must also look at the context in which it was spoken. This is the reason why we have included the context as part of our text. One who was supposedly an expert in the Mosaic Law came to Jesus with a question, a sort of a test. ***"What shall I do to inherit eternal life?"*** I suppose the man thought it was a clever question. For there were Ten Commandments, and he seemed to ask Jesus for one essential good thing left to do that would give him eternal life. There is, of course, greater problems with the question as he stated it. For one, the man asked for something he could do to *inherit* eternal life. By definition an inheritance is not something one can earn; it is a gift. Secondly, the question apparently assumes that this man has almost done enough, but only lacks one more good deed.

Jesus sees through the test and into the man's heart and so gives him an answer that, at first, may cause us some confusion. Jesus directs the man back to the Law and then declares, ***"Do this and you will live."*** Is Jesus here saying that we can do something to gain eternal life? Of course not. Rather, He is hoping to reveal to this man that he needs another path. The man apparently does not get the point, for he skips over the first table of the Law, which deals with our obligations toward God and goes directly to the second table, which deals with our obligations toward our fellow man. That is, instead of examining the state of his love for God, he jumps to the question, ***"And who is my neighbor?"***

I suppose Jesus could have stopped the man at this point and asked, "Have you really loved God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength?" He doesn't, though. He takes the man's question and runs with it, telling the well-known *Parable of the Good Samaritan*.

We know the parable. It wasn't the priest or the Levite who stopped to help that man who was beaten, robbed, and left for dead on the road. It was the Samaritan, a natural born enemy of this Jewish man. If ever anyone had a reason, a provocation for animosity that people could understand, it was the Samaritans toward the Jews at the time of Christ. For the Jews referred to them as dogs. The Jews thought of the Samaritans as worse than pagans; they were spiritual half-breeds worthy of contempt. They wouldn't so much as travel through Samaria, to say nothing of befriending the people who lived there.

Yet as Jesus' parable continues, this despised Samaritan goes out of his way to help the man. He

has him ride on his own animal, cares for him through the night, and then assumes all financial responsibility for the man's recovery. Amazing!

Yes, it's amazing, but how does it fit in with the man's question, and more importantly, how does it help us apply the Fifth Commandment to ourselves? What the commandment and the parable both teach is that not only are we to do no harm to our neighbor, but also that we are, in Luther's words, *"to help and be a friend to him in every bodily need,"* even if he is our enemy. We are forbidden by God not only to do physical harm to our neighbor, but also forbidden to withhold from him our love, even if he has wronged us. The Fifth Commandment, then, speaks directly to the heart in that it forbids all thoughts of hatred, anger, bitterness, and evil, as well as any thoughts of revenge. At the same time it demands of us steadfast love, peace, meekness, and goodness in regards to all people and to leave vengeance where it belongs—in the hands of the Lord God. Yes, God does in some cases, primarily through fathers and governments, entrust men with the authority to carry out punishment upon those who do wrong. Yet it is not our responsibility or prerogative to get even with any one who has wronged us personally.

All of this is contrary to the philosophy of the world. In fact, the world stands on the opposite side of the fence. "Don't get mad; get even!" is the world's mantra. That is the order of the day, while fatherly discipline and corporal punishment are decried. Worse yet is that within each of us reside those very same tendencies. The Old Adam would just as soon have his arm cut off than to permit another person to do him wrong without retaliating in some manner.

Here we stand condemned by the commandment and by the parable. We treat those who love us with spite and hatred, to say nothing of those who have harmed us. We, with the lawyer in our text, are not deserving of eternal life, but only of eternal condemnation. The Fifth Commandment confines each one of us under sin and exposes to us the deserved penalty that "the soul that sins, it shall die."

Still, there is yet more to this parable which so many miss. When we look for ourselves in the parable, we may be tempted to think that we are supposed to be the good Samaritan. According to God's Law, however, we are different characters in the plot. We are the robbers. We are the priests and the Levites. Who, then, is the Good Samaritan? Who is the one who has bound up our wounds and paid for our healing, though we have often treated him with contempt? Surely it is Jesus.

Though not in reference to this text, Martin Luther captures the essence of the Good Samaritan in his Large Catechism:

At the heart of this commandment is the heart of God Himself, for God is love—and kindness and gentleness. See what great love God had for us that even while we were His enemies, He loved us, stooped down to us, took our burden to Himself, bandaged our wounds through His Son, and by His cross paid the debt which we could not. Look again at the scene of the cross and see how great an injury the Son of God permitted to come upon Himself without the least thought of revenge. Did He cry out, "Father, punish them for their evil deed?" Rather He prayed, "Father, forgive them." The malefactors, with the crowd, took their turns at mocking their Lord, yet Jesus extended to the one a welcome into the Paradise of God.

This same love your God has for you—you who, also, from birth, were counted as enemies of God. Has He not called you into the fellowship of His Son through baptism, washing away your sin and binding up your soul? Even now, when Satan and your flesh draw you away from Him through temptation, He assures you through the Holy meal, that He has pardoned your iniquity for the sake of His dear Son. What is that except the very love which He requires of us in this commandment? Such great things He has done and continues to do, not by compulsion, but because of the love which is His essence. So He would have you do as well.

May the God who demonstrated His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died

for us, work in us that love which reflects His love for us, not as a means to gain eternal life, but because we are, by His grace, heirs of eternal life. In Jesus' name. AMEN!

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# The Church of the Lutheran Confession—Fifty Years

David Lau

Editor's Note: In anticipation of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Church of the Lutheran Confession in 2010, the 2008 CLC Convention directed David Lau, synod archivist, to write a history of our church body. We look forward to the finished product, as titled above, becoming available next year. In the meantime readers of the *Journal* have the present opportunity to examine introductory chapters as they are printed in volume 49.

## Chapter 1: The Grace of God

**“By the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain”** (1 Cor. 15:10). What the Apostle Paul wrote concerning himself in these words can well be said by the members of the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC), as we remember the past fifty years of our existence as an organized church body. By the grace of God we are what we are, and God’s grace towards us has not been in vain. We wish we could continue in applying and paraphrasing the next words of the apostle: “We labored more abundantly than they all.” But the record of the past fifty years does not allow us to say that much. Suffice it to say that we did labor, and much was accomplished and continues to be accomplished. We certainly can agree with the apostle’s next words: **“Yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me”** (1 Cor. 15:10). Whatever good has been accomplished by us or through us in the past fifty years is the work of our gracious God. For it is written: **“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them”** (Eph. 2:10).

In the following pages we will be talking about the words and actions of men and women, pastors and teachers and lay members, small congregations and large congregations. These persons and congregations are going to be mentioned by name, even as the Bible speaks about Abraham and Sarah, Peter and Paul, Mary Magdalene and Joanna, Aquila and Sapphira, Israelites and Ephesians. It would be somewhat clumsy as we recount this history to spell it out in every circumstance that whatever good was done by the persons or congregations was the working of the grace of God. But we want our readers to understand right from the beginning that this is absolutely true. It is only by the grace of God that our church body came into existence, and it is only by the grace of God that we continue to exist, and it is only by the grace of God that we will continue to exist, if such is God’s will for us. We want to emphasize this point so that this account does not become a vehicle for self-congratulation. The Apostle Paul testified often that he was a sinner, yes, even the chief of sinners, and any honest account of our history as a church body will have to reckon with the sad fact that we are sinners also and that our response to God’s grace has been tainted by the thoughts, words, and actions of our sinful flesh, which ever remains with us.

By the word *grace*, then, we understand that love from our God which He showed toward us sinners, even though we did not deserve it. In fact, we deserved eternal punishment because of our disobedience. But here now is the good news from God: **“For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works”** (Titus 2:11-14). The grace of God is evident in His sending Jesus, our great God and Savior, into the world to redeem us by His life and death. The grace of God is evident in His sending of the Holy Spirit into our world with the message of forgiveness in Jesus and the sure hope of eternal salvation. The grace of God is evident in His changing us from being ungodly people of the world into His own special people, able and willing to say No to sin and actually to say and do things that are good in His sight as persons who trust in Jesus for

our salvation.

It is clear that by stressing the grace of God in our lives, God wants to remove from us any basis for us taking credit for any aspect of our own salvation. We did not establish our own righteousness or pay the price for our sins. None of us chose by his own free will to begin to believe in Jesus. Without a spiritual connection to Jesus Christ, which God Himself has created, none of us is able to do anything that God recognizes as good. In fact, God even informs us that if we find ourselves trusting in Jesus as our Savior from sin, it is only because God from eternity chose us to be His own and in His own time called us out of darkness into His light. **“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved”** (Eph. 1:3-6).

We then can indeed call ourselves God’s chosen ones, His elect. But here we ever need to be careful lest we give the impression that only we who are members of the Church of the Lutheran Confession are God’s chosen ones. Rather, we confess in the *CLC Statement of Faith and Purpose*: “We teach that the Holy Spirit creates one Holy Christian Church which consists of all believers in Christ who, by God’s mercy, were from eternity appointed in Christ for eternal life. Faith in Christ makes one a member of the Holy Christian Church. Since we cannot see faith in the heart, it is impossible for us to determine which individuals are members of Christ’s Church. We cannot identify this Church with a particular organization or church body. Only God, who has the ability to look into the heart, knows who the members of His Church are” (Article V).

The same document goes on to say in Article VI: “We are confident that there are many who, though they may be members of other church bodies (visible church) and do not openly share with us the profession of the true Bible teachings, nevertheless are Christians and children of God through faith in Christ. . . . We are also aware that in any church there may be hypocrites who in spite of their outward confession are not true believers in Christ. . . . We joyfully acknowledge that the Lord knows His elect children even though some are members of false-teaching churches. . . . We pray that all who believe in the Lord Jesus may be preserved in this faith to their end and finally receive, by His merits and mercy, the crown of eternal life.”

This statement reminds us that in telling the story of our church body’s first fifty years, we dare not judge the hearts of the persons involved in our history, whether for us or against us. God is the only One who can judge the hearts and motives of men. He will reveal His judgment on the Last Day. In telling our history we will be recounting what was said and done by various individuals and congregations at certain times and in certain places. We will be comparing these words and actions with what God says in His Word. This is the kind of judging required of us and necessary for us Christians during this time of grace. But we will not be judging hearts or motives, for that is God’s prerogative.

## **Chapter 2: Confessional Lutheranism**

It is obvious that by naming ourselves the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC), we are declaring to the world not only our desire to be Lutherans, but our desire to be confessing Lutherans, or to use another term, confessional Lutherans. In Article III of the CLC Constitution, after declaring our acceptance of the canonical Scriptures as the verbally inspired Word of God, we say: “We confess the Apostolic, Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds and the Particular Symbols of the Lutheran Church as published in the *Book of Concord* of 1580, because they are a true exposition of the Word of God.”

It is true that most members of the CLC can trace their ancestry back to forefathers who came to this country from Germany, Norway, Sweden, Finland, or Denmark. But our Lutheranism is more than

a cultural heritage. We today are Lutherans by conviction, not because our ancestors came from traditionally Lutheran countries. We are confessional Lutherans in that we agree wholeheartedly with the Lutheran Confessions contained in the *Book of Concord*. Our pastors and teachers study these documents as part of their training in our schools. All of our congregations make regular use of the ancient creeds and subscribe to the Lutheran Confessions in their church constitutions. Our young people still study and memorize portions of Martin Luther's Small Catechism in preparation for their reception as communicant members in our congregations.

We believe that God granted a very special gift to His Church in the person of Martin Luther and those associated with him in the Reformation of the sixteenth century. Conditions in the visible churches of that age were horrendous. The good news of God's grace in Jesus Christ was hard to find in the midst of so many unscriptural traditions and ungodly practices. In His mercy God prepared Martin Luther to be the restorer of true gospel teaching in His Church. God accomplished this through Luther's experiences as a Roman Catholic monk and priest struggling to find assurance of his own salvation. The Preface to the *Book of Concord* expresses it well: "In these last days of this transitory world the Almighty God, out of immeasurable love, grace, and mercy for the human race, has allowed the light of his holy gospel and his Word that alone grants salvation to appear and shine forth purely, unalloyed and unadulterated out of the superstitious, papistic darkness for the German nation, our beloved fatherland" (Kolb-Wengert 5).

What are the blessings of the Lutheran Reformation? First and foremost of these blessings was the recovery of the true Gospel of salvation by grace alone through faith in Jesus Christ. Another blessing was the clear distinction between God's law and God's gospel. Luther's emphasis on the bondage of man's will was very important, as stated so plainly in his explanation of the Third Article: "I believe that by my own understanding or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to Him, but instead the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel . . ." (Kolb-Wengert 355). For Luther and those who agreed with him, the Holy Scripture was the only source for Christian doctrine; "this means that the Word of God—and no one else, not even an angel—should establish articles of faith" (Kolb-Wengert 304). Against Ulrich Zwingli and his adherents as well as the so-called Enthusiasts, Luther taught that the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper are true means of grace, along with the written and oral gospel, and that "God does not want to deal with us human beings, except by means of His external Word and sacrament" (Kolb-Wengert 323).

The revealing of the Roman Catholic papacy as the foretold Antichrist of 2 Thessalonians 2 and other Scriptures was an outstanding element of Luther's legacy. His definition of Christ's Church as "holy believers and 'the little sheep who hear the voice of their shepherd'" (Kolb-Wengert 324-325) provided a wholesome and necessary correction to the Roman Catholic view of the Church as an earthly organization under the direction of the pope. Along the same line Luther's recovery of the doctrine of the royal priesthood of all believers in Christ brought to an end the strict division between clergy and laity that had prevailed in the late Middle Ages.

We could go on to speak of the blessings God brought to His Church through Luther in the area of liturgics, hymnology, and catechesis, not to speak of the tremendous blessing of having the whole Bible available in a German translation that could be understood by the common people. But perhaps what we in the Church of the Lutheran Confession most appreciate about Martin Luther today is his unswerving loyalty to the text of Scripture, regardless of the arguments brought against it by church authorities, tradition, or human reason. The earliest covers of the *Lutheran Spokesman*, the monthly magazine that became an official publication of the Church of the Lutheran Confession, pictured Martin Luther sternly pointing to a text of the Bible, with John 10:35, "The Scripture cannot be broken," on the cover in large print. Especially treasured are those comments of Luther that exalted truth above love and doctrine above life. For example, there were these words from his 1535 lectures on Paul's letter to the Galatians: "The sectarians who deny the bodily presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper accuse us today of being quarrelsome, harsh, and intractable, because, as they say, we shatter love and harmony

among the churches on account of the single doctrine about the Sacrament. They say that we should not make so much of this little doctrine. . . . In philosophy a tiny error in the beginning is very great at the end. Thus in theology a tiny error overthrows the whole teaching. Therefore doctrine and life should be distinguished as sharply as possible. Doctrine belongs to God, not to us; and we are called only as its ministers. Therefore we cannot give up or change even one dot of it" (Luther 27: 36-37).

Luther, of course, was concerned not only about doctrine, but about life as well. There was in his writing, for the most part, an admirable balance and completeness of presentation, as, for example, in his explanation of the First Petition of the Lord's Prayer in his Small Catechism. In answer to the question of how God's name is hallowed among us, Luther says: "Whenever the Word of God is taught clearly and purely and we, as God's children, also live holy lives according to it" (Kolb-Wengert 356). Doctrine comes first, but life is important also.

As confessional Lutherans we believe that the Formula of Concord of 1577 presents the right interpretation of Luther's teachings and of the Augsburg Confession of 1530 over against the followers of Philip Melancthon, who were willing to compromise various teachings and practices for the sake of external peace. Nevertheless, we do not want to make the mistake of making an idol of Martin Luther and thinking of his age as a golden age when everything that was said and done was in total agreement with the will of God. We cannot agree with Luther's recommendations on how to deal with the Jewish people in Germany, nor can we commend the rough language he sometimes used to describe his opponents. But there is no doubt that Martin Luther has been and still is a gift from God to His Church, and we should be deeply appreciative of this blessing.

Confessional Lutheranism in Europe began to deteriorate in the seventeenth century, although Lutheran orthodoxy was predominant in Germany and the Scandinavian countries. One apparent weakness was its strong ties to the secular government. Even though the Augsburg Confession rightly separated church from state, in actual practice the two became intertwined. The result was that the priesthood of believers was not exercised. The Christian discipline that should have been practiced by the believers was left to the government.

We believe Martin Luther would have preferred something different from what actually developed. In his preface to the German Mass (Order of Service) in 1526, he suggested an ideal kind of congregational life that he was unable to put into effect in his time. It is amazing how he anticipated the kind of congregations that we enjoy today. These are his words: "The third kind of service should be a truly evangelical order and should not be held in a public place for all sorts of people. But those who want to be Christians in earnest and who profess the gospel with hand and mouth should sign their names and meet alone in a house somewhere to pray, to read, to baptize, to receive the sacrament, and to do other Christian works. According to this order, those who do not lead Christian lives could be known, reprov'd, corrected, cast out, or excommunicated, according to the rule of Christ, Matthew 18 [:15-17]. Here one could also solicit benevolent gifts to be willingly given and distributed to the poor, according to St. Paul's example, II Corinthians 9. Here would be no need of much and elaborate singing. Here one could set up a brief and neat order for baptism and the sacrament and center everything on the Word, prayer, and love. Here one would need a good short catechism on the Creed, the Ten Commandments, and the Our Father. In short, if one had the kind of people and persons who wanted to be Christians in earnest, the rules and regulations would soon be ready. But as yet I neither can nor desire to begin such a congregation or assembly or to make rules for it. For I have not yet the people or persons for it, nor do I see many who want it" (Luther 53: 63-64).

Such congregations in Europe, however, did not come into existence until much later. We can see now that it was in the United States, where church and state are legally separated, that Martin Luther's ideal congregational life could finally be experienced.

In addition to the weakness mentioned above, another weakness of confessional Lutheranism was its failure to develop a pattern or method of participating in the privilege of spreading the good news of Jesus in other places of the world. Martin Luther himself had a strong desire to see the gospel

spread through all the countries around the world. For example, his Large Catechism explanation of the Second Petition refers to global evangelization in these words: “This we ask [that His kingdom come], both in order that we who have accepted it may remain faithful and grow daily in it and also in order that it may find approval and gain followers among other people and advance with power throughout the world. In this way many, led by the Holy Spirit, may come into the kingdom of grace and become partakers of redemption.” A bit later he adds: “Dear Father, we ask You first to give us Your Word, so that the gospel may be properly preached throughout the world” (Kolb-Wengert 447). But confessional Lutherans in the years that followed did very little to bring this about, and some of their theologians even restricted the great commission of Matthew 28:16-20 to the original apostles, stating that Jesus’ words at that time do not apply to us today. In this regard Werner Elert says: “The idea of many later theologians—that the church of the present time is no longer obligated to preach among the heathen, because the apostles have already reached all—is totally foreign to him [Luther], just as it is to Melanchthon” (Elert 1: 387).

In the years after the Reformation confessional Lutheranism gradually deteriorated in Europe. Pietism and then rationalism became prevalent in the eighteenth century, and confessional Lutheran orthodoxy was almost extinguished. The gospel continued to thrive in certain places, such as in Leipzig in the days of Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750), who treasured the gospel and the teachings of Luther and brought them into his cantatas and other choral writings, which continue to influence countless individuals throughout the whole world. Simple Christians in the congregations had their faith nourished by the gospel-exalting Lutheran hymns written by hundreds of gospel-believing Lutheran poets and musicians such as Paul Gerhardt (1607-1676). But for the most part it was *Ichabod* (“The glory has departed”) for Lutheranism during these years until the revival of confessional Lutheranism in the nineteenth century.

But now we must turn our attention to the United States and see how confessional Lutheranism made its way to this country. It seems that the very earliest Lutherans set foot in New Netherland (New York) and New Sweden (Delaware) in 1623 and the years following. These very early Lutherans were still confessional Lutherans. “The Lutheran ministers who were sent to New Netherland by the Consistory at Amsterdam were pledged to teach in accordance with the entire Book of Concord” (Wentz 25). But most of the Lutherans who came to this land and settled in the eastern states in the century that followed were deeply influenced by pietism or rationalism. Henry Muhlenberg, for example, generally regarded as the chief organizer of the early Lutherans in America, was sent to this country by August Francke, a Pietist leader.

A revival of confessional Lutheranism took place in this country as in Europe in the early nineteenth century. The Tennessee Synod, for example, was founded in 1820 by four pastors who objected to the laxity in doctrine and practice of their former organization. This group, led by Paul Henkel and his sons, came out with an English translation of *The Book of Concord* in 1851. Abdel Wentz says: “By 1850 the return to historical Lutheranism was well under way. The Lutherans began to withdraw from cooperation with other churches in benevolence. . . . In matters of doctrine also the day of indifferentism among Lutherans was over” (Wentz 105). Lutherans in Ohio and Pennsylvania and New York also began to have a stronger appreciation for the genuine Lutheranism of the *Book of Concord*.

We are so used to seeing churches move from conservatism to liberalism in our time that it is difficult to imagine a trend moving in the opposite direction. One of the contributing factors in this reversal was the decision of the king of Prussia in 1817 to unite the Lutherans and the Reformed in his country under the so-called “Prussian Union.” In 1830 he tried to enforce a new liturgy that combined Lutheran and Reformed elements and was neither Lutheran nor Reformed. The term “unionism” that we still use today to describe the practice of worshiping together with others where there is no agreement in doctrine first came into use at this time. Those who favored or went along with the

Prussian Union were called unionists, whereas those who wanted to remain Lutheran in their confession opposed this forced union.

Eventually, many confessing Lutherans who objected to the prevalent rationalism in Europe as well as the forced union with the Reformed made their way to the United States. Saxon Lutherans under the leadership of Martin Stephan arrived in Missouri in 1839. After a short time Stephan was removed from his leadership position because of his adultery and authoritarianism, and Pastor C. F. W. Walther emerged as the new leader. Also in 1839 J. A. A. Grabau led the so-called "Old Lutherans" to New York and Wisconsin. Pastor Wilhelm Loehe of Bavaria trained and sent many young men as pastors to serve the large numbers of immigrants coming to this country. Almost all of these newcomers were confessional Lutherans, who strengthened the cause of confessionalism in this country.

Various synods of German Lutherans came into existence during this period. The Ohio Synod was organized as early as 1818. The Buffalo Synod was organized in 1845, the Illinois Synod in 1846, the Missouri Synod in 1847, the Wisconsin Synod in 1849, the Iowa Synod in 1854, and the Minnesota Synod in 1860. In the eastern states most Lutherans belonged to the General Synod, organized in 1820. As confessionalism gained strength, some Lutherans under the leadership of Charles Porterfield Krauth withdrew from the General Synod to form a more confessional Lutheran church body called the General Council, organized in 1867.

During these same years many Lutherans were coming into the United States also from the Scandinavian countries. Confessional Lutheranism was especially strong among Lutherans coming from Norway. An influential teacher in Oslo, Gisle Johnson, had persuaded many young pastors in the direction of orthodox Lutheran teachings. Some of these confessional Lutherans who came to this country formed the Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in 1853.

We cannot use this space to detail the history of all of these various Lutheran immigrants. Suffice it to say that there were many differences that needed to be resolved. The Missouri Synod differed from the Buffalo Synod on the question of church and ministry. The Iowa Synod and the Missouri Synod did not agree on open questions. The early Wisconsin Synod was unionistic, and it was not until 1868 that fellowship was established between the Wisconsin Synod and the Missouri Synod.

At first it was hoped that the General Council, with its strong emphasis on the *Book of Concord*, would serve to unite all the various confessional Lutheran synods in America. This did not happen, however, chiefly because the General Council was unable to give satisfactory answers to four questions raised by the Ohio Synod. "1. What relation will this venerable body in future sustain to Chiliasm? 2. Mixed Communion? 3. The exchanging of pulpits with Sectarians? 4. Secret, or unchurchly Societies?" (Schuetze 16). As a result the Ohio Synod, the Iowa Synod, the Missouri Synod, and the Norwegian Synod did not become members of the General Council. The Wisconsin Synod withdrew from the General Council very soon after joining in its organization.

What happened instead was the formation of the Synodical Conference in 1872 as a truly confessional Lutheran organization, uniting at the time the Ohio Synod, the Missouri Synod, the Wisconsin Synod, the Norwegian Synod, the Illinois Synod, and the Minnesota Synod. Prof. F. A. Schmidt of the Norwegian Synod had been assigned the task of presenting the reasons for organizing the new conference. Our Church of the Lutheran Confession today is based on the same principles as those put forward by Professor Schmidt in his paper, "Memorandum." For we are determined, as they were, "to cling to the precious treasure of the pure doctrine . . . unchanged and unadulterated as a whole and in all its parts, as set down from the Word of God in the Confessions of our Lutheran church, and with God's help faithfully to testify and do battle against every falsification of this priceless treasure. . . . As faithfully confessing Lutherans we want to stand, teach, confess, work, and battle in one spirit with our orthodox fathers who taught us, and hence we also seek conscientiously to follow in their footsteps. Without violating our consciences we can have nothing to do with this unionistic spirit nor with the errors, false principles, and sins against the Word of God which are connected with it. . . . By virtue of

our conscience bound by the Word of God we cannot agree to carry on church fellowship with obviously false teachers and un-Lutheran spirits for the sake of outward church union or to pull on one synodical yoke with such with whom we have no true unity of spirit” (qtd, in Schuetze 54, 56, 58).

### Chapter 3: Synodical Conference Controversies

One of the aims and purposes of the Synodical Conference, according to its constitution, was to unite “all Lutheran Synods of America into one orthodox American Lutheran Church” (qtd. in Schuetze 59). But as Philip Melancthon once wrote, “The ancient Dragon is their foe; His envy and his wrath they know. It always is his aim and pride Thy Christian people to divide” (*The Lutheran Hymnal* 254:4). Satan was hard at work to spoil the intentions of the founders of the Synodical Conference by stirring up controversies both within the Synodical Conference itself and between the Synodical Conference and other Lutheran bodies.

The Synodical Conference was organized because the other two major Lutheran church bodies at the time were not sufficiently confessional. The General Synod, it was charged, “clings to the Lutheran name but in reality is completely devoid of the essence and character that corresponds to that name” (qtd. in Schuetze 55). We would say a similar thing today about the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA).

The other major Lutheran church body was the General Council, whose initial aim was to be a confessional Lutheran church, led by such a stalwart theologian as Charles Porterfield Krauth, author of *The Conservative Reformation and Its Theology* (1871). But the General Council was unable to answer satisfactorily the four questions asked by the Ohio Synod, the so-called “four points.” Hence there was a continuing controversy between the General Council and the Synodical Conference on these four points. The General Council tolerated chiliasm or millennialism, the teaching that Christ will rule over an earthly kingdom for a thousand years when He returns. The Synodical Conference rejected millennialism. We of the Church of the Lutheran Confession reject it today, as our acceptance of the *Brief Statement* of 1932 confirms.

The General Council also tolerated lodge membership on the part of its members. The Synodical Conference did not. One result of this distinction was that throughout the Midwest there were many towns with two Lutheran churches, one for Lutherans who wanted to remain lodge members and one for those who did not receive lodge members. The Church of the Lutheran Confession occupies the same position as the Synodical Conference did on this issue.

The two other points had to do with pulpit and altar fellowship. The General Council tolerated the exchange of pulpits with clergymen who were not entirely in agreement in doctrine, and it was also willing at times to receive communicants at the Lord’s Table who were not in agreement in all points of doctrine. The General Council did succeed in adopting the Galesburg Rule in 1875. “The Rule is: Lutheran pulpits are for Lutheran ministers only. Lutheran altars are for Lutheran communicants only” (qtd. in “Galesburg Rule”). But this was not sufficient for at least two reasons. Exceptions were allowed, and the name Lutheran in itself did not mean that the church body was truly orthodox.

Another controversy had to do with the doctrine of universal or objective justification, which had become a matter of debate between the Norwegian Synod and the Augustana Synod. At the first convention of the Synodical Conference in 1872, F. A. Schmidt of the Norwegian Synod presented and discussed several theses on justification. Thesis 5 is worded as follows: “As by the vicarious death of Christ, the guilt of the whole world was canceled, and the punishment thereof was borne; even so by the resurrection of Christ, righteousness, life, and salvation is restored for the whole world, and in Christ, as the Substitute of all mankind, has come upon all men” (qtd. in Curia 36). Opponents of this position from other church bodies could not accept this; they insisted “that no man is justified before he has faith” (qtd. in Curia 42). This controversy continued through the years and contributed to the final

demise of the Synodical Conference.

At this time there were two synods which did not join the General Council or become part of the Synodical Conference either. The Buffalo Synod was led by J. A. A. Grabau, who had hierarchical views similar to those of Martin Stephan, the ousted former leader of the Saxon Lutherans in Missouri. "Grabau considered pastoral ordination a divine institution, and downgraded the priesthood of all believers. He held the extreme position that a congregation owes obedience to the pastor in everything not contrary to the Word of God" (Schuetze 31-32). Controversy on these issues continued for many years.

The Iowa Synod held some of these same hierarchical views and besides that differed from the Synodical Conference on the doctrine of open questions. "It also held that a distinction must be made between essential and nonessential doctrines, with agreement on only the former necessary. The doctrines of the Antichrist, the observance of Sunday, chiliasm, the resurrection of the martyrs, and the conversion of the Jews they considered 'open questions,' allowing for differences of opinion" (Schuetze 32). The Synodical Conference, on the other hand, considered these doctrines clearly stated in the Scriptures and therefore could not permit varying views. Differences on open questions continued down through the years and also contributed to the eventual demise of the Synodical Conference.

At the beginning the above controversies involved differences between the Synodical Conference and other Lutherans, although in time the errors of the others infiltrated the Synodical Conference as well. But the major controversy troubling the Synodical Conference in its early years was one that split the conference and continued for many years. This controversy had to do with the doctrine of predestination or the election of grace. It was called the *Gnadenwahlstreit*. This doctrine really should not have become a matter of controversy among confessional Lutherans, for the Formula of Concord of 1577 had made a clear, Scriptural presentation that did not veer toward Calvinism, on the one hand, nor toward synergism, on the other hand. Nevertheless, it is not too surprising that a controversy on this issue would develop, for we note how Philip Melancthon in his later years did not agree with Martin Luther concerning this teaching.

In their desire to oppose Calvinism some of the Lutheran theologians of the seventeenth century began to use expressions that clouded the issue. They stated that God elected individuals *intuitu fidei* (in view of faith). The first ones who used this expression probably understood it in a Scriptural sense. But eventually, it was understood by some to mean that God carried out His election or choosing by looking ahead and seeing which persons would respond to the gospel in faith and then choose them in view of their foreseen faith. This meant that their faith would actually come before God's election and be a cause of their election. The Bible, however, teaches that God's election is a cause of our faith. We read in Acts 13:48: **"And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed."** The Formula of Concord therefore says that predestination "is a cause of their salvation" and specifically rejects the teaching "that there is also a cause in us, because of which God has chosen us for eternal life" (Kolb-Wengert 517, 519).

C. F. W. Walther, the first president of the Missouri Synod and its theological leader for many years, was a serious student of Martin Luther and the Lutheran Confessions as well as of the seventeenth century Lutheran dogmatists. In fact, he was often accused of being a reprinting or a citation theologian because he was always quoting the fathers. But in this instance Walther realized that the later theologians had not been very clear in their teaching of predestination. Therefore he went back into Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions to establish that God's predestination is altogether a matter of grace and that there is nothing in us, not even foreseen faith, that would lead God to choose any one of us. "For some years Prof. Walther had been presenting a series of essays on the general theme: 'The Doctrine of the Lutheran Church Alone Gives All Glory to God—an Irrefutable Proof That Its Doctrine Is the Only True Doctrine.' He had treated the doctrine of election in 1877 under the theme: 'Also in Its

Doctrine of Election the Evangelical Lutheran Church Gives God Alone All Glory.’ In this essay, based on the Formula of Concord, Dr. Walther emphatically rejected every teaching which would ascribe anything to man as a cause of his election and thus rob God of His glory” (Aaberg 19-20).

Walther’s teaching was attacked by F. A. Schmidt, who taught: “When God finally chose a number of sinners to eternal life, this took place from the viewpoint of His eternal foreknowledge of their faith in Christ” (qtd. in Aaberg 20). Schmidt accused Walther of being a Crypto-Calvinist, that is, of being a secret Calvinist. This was a false accusation, however, for Walther in his presentation had condemned John Calvin’s double predestination theory that God elected some from eternity for salvation and others from eternity for damnation.

Walther found support for his teaching among the theologians of the Synodical Conference, but Schmidt also gained followers who agreed with his accusations of false doctrine. The Wisconsin Synod, under the leadership of its theologian, Adolf Hoenecke, supported Walther, and so did Walther’s own synod, Missouri. But the Ohio Synod agreed with Schmidt, while the Norwegian Synod was bitterly divided between the followers of Walther and the followers of Schmidt. The situation in the Norwegian Synod was made worse by the fact that a popular catechism used in that church body presented the doctrine in a way that agreed with Schmidt, namely, in declaring that “God has appointed all those to eternal life whom he from eternity has seen would accept the grace proffered them, believe in Jesus and persevere in this faith unto the end. Rom. 8:28-30” (qtd. in Aaberg 17).

The doctrine of conversion also came into dispute in connection with the election controversy. The old question of why some are converted and others are not was answered by some in this way: some were converted because they did not resist as much as the others. Or: some were converted because they did not resist willfully but only naturally. Both of these unscriptural views gave some credit to man for his own conversion and were thus a denial of grace.

The end result of this controversy was that the Ohio Synod withdrew from the Synodical Conference in disagreement with Walther’s teaching. The Norwegian Synod also withdrew from the Synodical Conference in order to resolve its internal disagreements. Schmidt was opposed in the Norwegian Synod by Ulrik Koren, who in 1884 presented 63 theses that carefully and thoroughly rejected both Calvinism and synergism. But Schmidt still maintained that “it is not synergistic error, but a clear teaching of God’s Word and our Lutheran Confessions, that ‘salvation in a certain sense does not depend on God alone’” (qtd. in Schuetze 110).

Those who agreed with Schmidt withdrew from the Norwegian Synod in 1887 and formed the Anti-Missourian Brotherhood. Eventually, these Lutherans together with others organized the United Norwegian Lutheran Church. After the Norwegian Synod officially rejected the views of Schmidt, it remained in fellowship with the Synodical Conference, but never rejoined it. Eventually, the Norwegian Synod reversed itself by returning to fellowship with the United Norwegian Lutheran Church in 1917 on the basis of the so-called *opgjoer* (settlement) of 1912, which supposedly resolved the doctrinal differences between the two groups. Basically the settlement said that both sides were right and that there were two equally acceptable ways of teaching the doctrine of election.

The new church body formed in 1917 by the merger of the two groups was called the Norwegian Lutheran Church in America. But a small minority refused to accept the settlement and become part of the merger. They organized a new synod at Lime Creek, Iowa in 1918. The official name of the new group was the Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church, but they became popularly known as the “Little Norwegians.” Eventually, this synod took on the name Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS), by which it is still known today. In 1920 the Synodical Conference received this small synod as a member church body.

From 1920 until 1963 the Synodical Conference had four member synods: the Wisconsin Synod, the Missouri Synod, the Norwegian Synod (later ELS), and the Slovak Synod, which was received into

membership in 1908. There were no major controversies during the years from 1920 to 1938. There were extended discussions on the doctrine of church and ministry between representatives of the Missouri and Wisconsin Synods. We shall consider this controversy in a later chapter.

The four synods worked together in mission work and in other projects, such as *The Lutheran Hymnal*, which became a reality in 1941. The Missouri Synod's "Brief Statement" of 1932 was a fine orthodox statement of confessional Lutheranism produced at this time, and all the synods of the Synodical Conference were in agreement with it and with each other. Lutheran orthodoxy in America had reached a zenith of sorts, for the United States was dotted with Synodical Conference congregations in all the states, and there were few places where one could not find within easy driving distance a confessional Synodical Conference congregation to join. These favorable circumstances, however, did not last long.

Noted earlier in this chapter was the dispute between the Missouri Synod and the Iowa Synod in the matter of open questions. The Iowa Synod regarded doctrines such as the Antichrist, millennialism, and the conversion of the Jews to be open questions, whereas the Missouri Synod affirmed that the Bible's teaching on these matters was clear and that opposing views could not be tolerated. But in 1938 the Missouri Synod changed its position by declaring that deviations in these doctrines were permissible. The following paragraphs were adopted by the 1938 convention:

While the Missouri Synod teaches on the basis of 2 Thess. 2:3-12 and in accord with the Smalcald Articles . . . that the Pope is the very Anti-christ for the past *and* the future, your Committee finds that the synodical fathers have declared that a deviation in this doctrine need not be divisive of church-fellowship (1938 Proceedings 229).

While the Missouri Synod teaches on the basis of the Scriptures that we are not to look forward to a universal conversion of all Jews before the end of the world, your Committee finds that the synodical fathers have declared that such deviation in this doctrine need not be regarded as a cause for division (229).

In regard to this assumption of a physical resurrection of the martyrs before Judgment Day the Missouri Synod teaches that this is a misinterpretation of Rev. 20:4, since according to the statements of the Scriptures and the confessional writings there will be only one resurrection, and that on Judgment Day. Your Committee finds that the synodical fathers have declared that this erroneous assumption need not be divisive of church fellowship (230).

The above mentioned declarations of the "synodical fathers" were mentioned indirectly in parenthetical reference to articles from the 1868, 1872, and 1879 issues of *Lehre und Wehre*.

It is truly amazing that the Missouri Synod could have adopted the above paragraphs "unanimously through a rising vote" at its 1938 convention (qtd. in Schaller 4). For just six years earlier the same synod had adopted the *Brief Statement*, which specifically declares in its section entitled "Of Open Questions": "Not to be included in the number of open questions are the following: the doctrine of the Church and the Ministry, of Sunday, of Chiliasm, and of Antichrist, these doctrines being clearly defined in Scripture."

The idea that there can be doctrines of Scripture in which opposing views are non-divisive is contrary to the teaching of the Formula of Concord of 1577, where we read: "The churches are not to condemn one another because of differences in ceremonies when in Christian freedom one has fewer or more than the other, as long as these churches are otherwise united in teaching and in all the articles of the faith as well as in the proper use of the holy sacraments" (Kolb-Wengert 640). Likewise, the Formula of Concord explains this unity in these words: "This unity keeps God's honor intact, does not abandon the divine truth of the holy gospel, and concedes nothing to the slightest error" (Kolb-Wengert 655). In his 1958 Wisconsin Synod conference paper Egbert Schaller concludes: "That the concept of 'non-divisive doctrine' is in itself heterodox ought to be clear to all genuine Lutheranism" (Schaller 4).

Why was the Missouri Synod willing to change its position on this matter in such a short time? It seems it was their desire to enter into fellowship with church bodies outside the Synodical Conference

that was behind their 1938 resolution. The thirties were a time when the various Lutheran church bodies were striving to attain greater unity. In 1930 the Buffalo Synod, the Iowa Synod, and the Ohio Synod joined together to form the American Lutheran Church, which in turn joined four other church bodies to form the American Lutheran Conference. Previously, the more liberal Lutheran church bodies, including both the General Synod and the General Council, had merged to form the United Lutheran Church in America.

The synods of the Synodical Conference had also been involved in attempts to attain unity in the various doctrines that had been in dispute, such as predestination and conversion. The Intersynodical Theses, also known as the Chicago Theses, had been produced by representatives of five synods, including the Missouri Synod and the Wisconsin Synod. But a committee from the Missouri Synod reported in 1929: "Your Committee considers it a hopeless undertaking to make these theses unobjectionable from the view of pure doctrine. It would be better to discard them as a failure" (qtd. in Wolf 370). The 1929 convention then authorized a committee to draw up a statement of doctrine dealing with all the controverted issues. The resulting statement authored by a committee which included Francis Pieper became known as the *Brief Statement* and was accepted by the Missouri Synod in 1932. It is also listed in the constitution of the Church of the Lutheran Confession as a statement of our confession today.

The American Lutheran Church responded to the *Brief Statement* by drawing up *A Doctrinal Declaration* in 1938. This document declared that disagreement on certain doctrines need not be divisive, and as noted above, the Missouri Synod in 1938 was willing to agree with the American Lutheran Church on this point. The Missouri Synod went even further in adopting the following: "That Synod declare that the *Brief Statement* of the Missouri Synod, together with the *Declaration* of the representatives of the American Lutheran Church and the provisions of this entire report . . . be regarded as the doctrinal basis for *future church-fellowship* between the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church" (qtd. in Wolf 399). For its part the American Lutheran Church then replied: "That we declare the Brief Statement of the Missouri Synod, together with the Declaration of our Commission, a sufficient doctrinal basis for Church fellowship between the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church . . . and that we are firmly convinced that it is neither necessary nor possible to agree in all non-fundamental doctrines" (qtd. in Wolf 400-401).

The Wisconsin Synod in 1939 reacted to this supposed doctrinal agreement between the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church by saying "that the doctrinal basis established by the Missouri Synod and by the American Lutheran Church . . . is not acceptable. Not two statements should be issued as a basis for agreement; a single joint statement, covering the contested doctrines thetically and antithetically and accepted by both parties to the controversy, is imperative. . . . We hold that the Sandusky resolutions and the Pittsburgh Agreement have made it evident that there is no real doctrinal basis for church fellowship between the Honorable Synod of Missouri and the American Lutheran Church" (qtd. in Wolf 402-403). The Pittsburgh Agreement was between the American Lutheran Church and the United Lutheran Church in America, uniting the two bodies in a denial of the true teaching of the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture. The American Lutheran Church, in other words, was going in two directions at once, trying to reach agreement with the Missouri Synod, on the one hand, and at the same time moving toward agreement with the very liberal United Lutheran Church in America.

In the years that followed, the very years when World War II was being fought, objections were brought forward that stalled any attempts at church fellowship between the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church. In 1947 the Missouri Synod even set aside its 1938 resolutions on union with the American Lutheran Church. But negotiations continued, and eventually the argument prevailed that one single document should be accepted by both parties. Thus representatives of the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church drew up the *Common Confession*, which was accepted by the Missouri Synod in 1950 as a complete settlement of the past differences between the Missouri Synod

and the American Lutheran Church. The other synods of the Synodical Conference were asked to study this document to see whether they also could accept it as a settlement of past differences and likewise declare fellowship with the American Lutheran Church.

The 1951 convention of the Wisconsin Synod declared in its unanimous resolution: “ We not only find the Common Confession to be inadequate in the points noted . . . , but that we also hold that the adoption of the Common Confession by the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod involves an untruth and creates a basically untruthful situation since this action has been officially interpreted as a settlement of past differences which in fact are not settled” (“Proceedings Thirty-first Convention” 147).

One may wonder whether any good could come out of such prolonged controversy in the church. But one clear benefit of the controversy on the *Common Confession* was that the doctrines discussed in the *Common Confession* were subjected to careful study by many pastors and church members. Certainly the ensuing study of doctrines such as justification, conversion, and predestination in the light of Holy Scripture led to a strengthening of faith and doctrinal convictions on the part of many, and this proved to be a benefit even to present members of the Church of the Lutheran Confession. For example, the debate on the *Common Confession* led to the preparation, publication, and distribution of eleven popular tracts written by members of the Wisconsin Synod on the various doctrines treated in the *Common Confession*. These tracts, under the general title of “*Continuing in His Word*,” showed clearly the inadequacies of the wording of the *Common Confession* and helped many members realize what was at stake with the doctrines of justification, conversion, and predestination. Many of the older members of the Church of the Lutheran Confession can remember how they reached clarity on these and other doctrines through their study of these Bible-based tracts.

Meanwhile, other issues had also come to the foreground. At one time the Synodical Conference uniformly held the position that there could be no fellowship between church bodies that differed in doctrine. For example, *The Concordia Cyclopedia* of 1927, a Missouri Synod publication, defined Unionism in this way: “In the light of these texts [including Matt. 7:15, Rom. 16:17, and 1 John 4:1] all joint ecclesiastical efforts for religious work (missionary, educational, etc.) and particularly joint worship and mixed (promiscuous) prayer among those who confess the truth and those who deny any part of it is sinful unionism” (“Unionism”).

However, as the Missouri Synod representatives continued to meet with American Lutheran Church representatives in an effort to resolve their differences, they practiced prayer fellowship by opening their meetings with joint prayer. The Missouri Synod defended this practice by adopting the following resolution at its 1944 convention: “Joint prayer at intersynodical conferences, asking God for guidance and blessing upon the deliberations and discussions of His Word, does not militate against the resolution of the Fort Wayne Convention [‘that in the meantime it be understood that no pulpit, altar, or prayer fellowship has been established between us and the American Lutheran Church; and until such fellowship has been officially declared by the synods concerned, no action is to be taken by any of our pastors or congregations which ignores the fact that we are not united’], provided such prayer does not imply denial of truth or support of error” (Proceedings 251-252). In the situation that prevailed between the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church, the Missouri Synod declared that there was a difference, somehow, between prayer fellowship, which was wrong, and joint prayer, which was allegedly correct or acceptable.

John Meyer of the Wisconsin Synod pointed out the fallacy of such thinking in a 1950 *Quartalschrift* article: “There are some who would make a distinction between church fellowship as it appears in the form of pulpit and altar fellowship, on the one hand, and between prayer fellowship, on the other. . . . Joint prayer which two Christians arrange is an expression of the brotherhood, an act of church fellowship. There are some that try to make a distinction between an occasional joint prayer and regular prayer fellowship.

. . . Can something be God-pleasing when committed only occasionally, and become an offense to God when repeated regularly?

. . . With all people with whom we may arrange a joint service, be it a preaching service, or a Communion service, with all these, and with these alone, we may arrange joint prayer” (294). This way of teaching became known as the unit concept, namely, that when there is agreement in all articles of doctrine, all forms of fellowship are acceptable, but when there is disagreement in any doctrine, no forms of fellowship are acceptable. The Missouri Synod did not accept this unit concept at that time and still does not accept it. The Church of the Lutheran Confession does accept it, as is clear from *Concerning Church Fellowship*, pages 34-37.

Another issue that disturbed the Synodical Conference during these years was the difference between the Missouri Synod and the Wisconsin Synod in their stance toward the Boy Scouts and the Girl Scouts. The *Concordia Cyclopaedia* of 1927 stated: “Considering that the Boy Scout movement seeks to develop character and virtues and love to God, the organization not only has a religious character, but seeks to do on the basis of natural religion what can only be done by means of the Gospel” (“Boy Scouts”). In 1938 the Missouri Synod resolved in convention: “Because of the naturalistic and unionistic tendencies still prevalent in the Boy Scout movement, membership in non-Lutheran or sectarian troops cannot be sanctioned” (1938 Proceedings 341). But the 1944 Missouri Synod convention adopted the recommendation that “the matter of scouting should be left to the individual congregation to decide and that under the circumstances Synod may consider her interests sufficiently protected” (1944 Proceedings 257).

As unpopular as its decision was in some quarters, the Wisconsin Synod consistently rejected any kind of cooperation or participation in the Scouting movement. At the 1952 convention of the Synodical Conference members of the Norwegian and Wisconsin Synods declared: “In the unchangeable parts of the Scout program there are religious elements with which a Christian cannot identify himself without offending against the Word of God—namely, in the mandatory Scout oath and law Scouting endeavors to lead boys to do their duty to God without conversion. By means of its mandatory Scout oath and law, Scouting endeavors to train character without the motivation of the Gospel. The Scout oath or promise is an oath condemned by the Word of God. The twelfth Scout law is basically unionistic since it obligates every Scout, whether he is Christian, Jewish or Mohammedan, to faithfulness in his religious duties without defining these duties or the God whom he is to serve” (qtd. in Pless 10).

Another serious controversy between the Missouri Synod and the Wisconsin Synod during these years had to do with participation in the military chaplaincy. The Missouri Synod participated in the program during World War II, but the Wisconsin Synod did not. The Wisconsin Synod stated its reasons for refusal at its 1941 convention: “The application for, and appointment to, chaplaincy conflicts with our doctrinal stand on the divinity of the pastoral call. Also, the Training Manual of the War Department, entitled THE CHAPLAIN, specifies duties to the chaplain which are in direct violation of the divine call of a Lutheran pastor. The appointment to chaplaincy and the regulation of the chaplain’s duties by the War Department are a violation of the principle of separation of Church and State. The spirit of doctrinal indifferentism pervades the regulations of the War Department pertaining to the office of chaplaincy and fosters unionism” (1941 Proceedings 43-44).

Neither synod changed its views on this matter in the years that followed. The other two synods in the Synodical Conference became involved in these controversies as well. The Norwegian Synod generally was in agreement with the Wisconsin Synod, and the Slovak Synod was in agreement with the Missouri Synod. We should also note that within the Missouri Synod a substantial minority were recognizing the deterioration in doctrinal standards and the increase in unionistic practices and protested the actions of their own synod. The *Confessional Lutheran*, under the editorship of Paul Burgdorf, began publication in 1940 and continued to call for the repudiation of the *Common*

*Confession*. C. M. Gullerud, who later became a member of the Church of the Lutheran Confession, was involved in the publication of the *Confessional Lutheran* in its early years.

In spite of this protest, however, a strong movement within the Missouri Synod wanted to break with its confessional past and become more open to cooperation with other church bodies outside of the Synodical Conference. In 1945 some prominent leaders in the Missouri Synod drew up what became known as the "Statement of the Forty-four," in which they declared that church fellowship "is possible without complete agreement in details of doctrine and practice which have never been considered divisive in the Lutheran Church" (qtd. in Schuetze 289). This group also took direct aim at the past and current application of Romans 16:17-18, stating that this passage "does not apply to the present situation in the Lutheran Church in America" (qtd. in Schuetze 289). Many years earlier, a Missouri Synod missionary in India, Adolph Brux, had made a similar claim about Romans 16:17, but his claim was rejected by the Missouri Synod. Indeed, the stand of the 44 was exactly the opposite of the position taken previously by such Missouri Synod stalwarts as George Stoeckhardt and Francis Pieper. The Statement of the 44 stirred up much opposition within the Missouri Synod, including its president John Behnken, who tried to deal with the situation as best he could. The Statement was finally withdrawn but never rejected, and eventually its views came to prevail in the Missouri Synod.

A few members of the Missouri Synod withdrew from the synod as early as 1951 and organized the Orthodox Lutheran Conference. Paul E. Kretzmann, author of the *Popular Commentary of the Bible*, was one who withdrew. One of the early organizing meetings took place at St. John's Lutheran Church in Okabena, Minnesota, now a member congregation of the Church of the Lutheran Confession. Other CLC churches with a strong historical connection to the Orthodox Lutheran Conference include Faith Lutheran of Manchester, Missouri; Grace Lutheran of Fridley, Minnesota; Mt. Olive Lutheran of Detroit Lakes, Minnesota; and St. Paul's Lutheran of Ponsford, Minnesota. Many of the books in the library of Immanuel Lutheran Seminary in Eau Claire were originally part of the collection of the Orthodox Lutheran Conference seminary. The Orthodox Lutheran Conference did not last for many years. One group that came from the Orthodox Lutheran Conference called itself the Concordia Lutheran Conference (also using the acronym CLC) and is still in existence today.

The differences among the member synods of the Synodical Conference came to a head at the Synodical Conference meeting of 1952. The debate centered on whether the *Common Confession* did in fact resolve the past doctrinal differences between the Synodical Conference and the American Lutheran Church. By a vote of 154 to 62 the delegates voted to postpone action until the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church could present Part II of the *Common Confession*. This postponement of action was unacceptable to the representatives of the Wisconsin Synod and the Norwegian Synod. The Wisconsin Synod delegates met after the convention and solemnly stated: "We, therefore, declare, in order to guard our own faith and to remain true to our God, that, though we do not at this time disavow our fellowship with the Missouri Synod in the Synodical Conference, yet, because the confessional basis on which the synods of the Synodical Conference have jointly stood so far has been seriously impaired by the Common Confession, we continue to uphold our protest and to declare that the Missouri Synod by retaining the Common Confession and using it for further steps toward union with the ALC is disrupting the Synodical Conference. . . . Hence we find ourselves in a STATE OF CONFESSION" (qtd. in Schuetze 302). The Scriptural basis given for this state of confession was 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15, which had been previously explained by John Meyer of the Wisconsin Synod as meaning that there could no longer be any pulpit or altar or prayer fellowship (Meyer 135). There does not seem to be any evidence, however, that the practice of fellowship between the synods came to an end at this time nor in the following years prior to 1961.

In 1953 the Wisconsin Synod's conventions in August and October tried to deal with the continuing controversy by stating that "the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod . . . has brought about the present break in relations that is now threatening the existence of the Synodical Conference and the

continuation of our affiliation with the sister Synod” (qtd. in Schuetze 304). Pamphlets were written by synodical committees on both sides of the controversy. The 1954 convention of the Synodical Conference was devoted to a thorough study of the *Common Confession* and other matters in controversy. Norman Madson, Sr., of the Norwegian Synod, who later became a member of the Church of the Lutheran Confession, presented a paper entitled “The Norwegian Synod’s Reasons for Rejecting the *Common Confession*.” Wisconsin Synod essayists likewise found fault with the *Common Confession*, whereas the Missouri Synod essayists defended it. Scouting, military chaplaincy, and other unionistic practices were the subjects of other essays. The stalemate continued. The 1954 Synodical Conference convention did not pass judgment on the doctrinal content of the *Common Confession*, although it did ask the Missouri Synod not to use it as a functioning document.

In 1955 both the Norwegian Synod and the Wisconsin Synod held conventions. The Norwegian Synod met first and passed the following resolution: “We hereby declare with deepest regret that fellowship relations with the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod are suspended on the basis of Romans 16:17, and that the exercise of such relations cannot be resumed until the offenses contrary to the doctrine which we have learned have been removed by them in a proper manner” (qtd. in Aaberg 286). In spite of this resolution, however, the Norwegian Synod continued its membership in the Synodical Conference and through that relationship continued its fellowship with the Missouri Synod.

If the Wisconsin Synod had taken the same step as the Norwegian Synod in its 1955 convention, the Norwegian Synod would have been strengthened in its stand, and perhaps the two synods together could have moved forward together in sound confessionalism. Prof. Edmund Reim, later to become a member of the Church of the Lutheran Confession, was at that time secretary of the Wisconsin Synod’s Union Committee dealing with relations with the Missouri Synod. In commenting on the Norwegian Synod’s action of suspension, his report in the Wisconsin Synod’s official publication, *The Northwestern Lutheran*, included these words: “No one can fail to recognize the sturdy conviction, the bold determination, the simple sincerity of this confession. The Norwegians are a small group, but they have met a major test magnificently. They have measured up! God grant that we do as well when the time for our decision comes” (qtd. in Schuetze 322).

The Wisconsin Synod’s Union Committee recommended the following resolution: “Resolved: That with deepest sorrow, taking notice of the fact that the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod is causing divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which we have learned, we, in obedience to God’s injunction to avoid such, declare the fellowship which we have had with said synod to be terminated” (qtd. in Schuetze 323-324).

The 1955 convention of the Wisconsin Synod, meeting in Saginaw, Michigan, made a good beginning by unanimously passing the following statement: “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 85).

The rest should have been straightforward, for God’s Word tells us what to do when a group or individual is causing divisions and offenses contrary to Scriptural doctrine. We are to avoid them. This certainly means that we are not to practice fellowship with them. What other choice can there be? At this point, however, the convention decided to postpone action until 1956 for two reasons: “1. This resolution has far reaching spiritual consequences. 2. This continues to heed the Scriptural exhortations to patience and forbearance in love by giving the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod opportunity to express itself in its 1956 convention” (qtd. in Schuetze 325).

Since at a later time there came to be a different understanding of what was meant by the 1955 resolutions of the Wisconsin Synod, we print at this point the report of the convention resolutions found in the official “Post-Convention News Bulletin” put out by the Board for Information and Stewardship of

the Wisconsin Synod:

HISTORY of the “growing apart” in matters of doctrine and practice between us and the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod was restudied, showing that serious differences began already in 1939. Finally in our convention in 1953 we with heavy hearts had to declare that the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod “has brought about the present break in relations that is now threatening the existence of the Synodical Conference and the continuance of our affiliation with the sister synod.” The Floor Committee found no substantial change in the attitude of the Missouri Synod to date.

GOD’S WORD in Romans 16:17-18 was studied in relation to the present situation. It was agreed by the body that this passage with its injunction to “avoid them” applies not only to those who openly teach false doctrine, but also to “a church body which creates divisions and offenses by its official resolutions, policies, and practices not in accord with Scripture.” Thus it was declared that this passage does apply to the Missouri Synod because of its persistent adherence to its unionistic practices (Common Confession, Joint Prayer, Scouting, Chaplaincy, and others). Thus it was time for us to declare ourselves on this matter.

OUR ACTION is best summed up in the words of the resolution itself: “Out of love for the truth of Scripture we feel constrained to present the following resolution to this convention for final action in a recessed session in 1956: RESOLVED that whereas the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has created divisions and offenses by its official resolutions, policies and practices not in accord with Scripture, we, in obedience to the command of our Lord in Romans 16:17-18, terminate our fellowship with the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.” The deferment of action until 1956, in a special session, was decided on because of the far-reaching spiritual consequences of the resolution, and above all, to give the Missouri Synod, in convention assembled in the summer of 1956, an opportunity to express itself. This action was taken in all faithfulness to God’s Word and exercising patience and longsuffering.

AGREEMENT on the fact that Romans 16:17-18 applied to the situation in the Missouri Synod was almost unanimous. 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 cherished so many years.” The body, by a vote of two to one, decided to wait a year.

The *Northwestern Lutheran* of September 4, 1955 reported that the preamble was “unanimously adopted” and that “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. . .” (Friedrich 278). The vote on postponement was 94 to 47, with 24 voting delegates and 19 advisory delegates recording their names in protest (Schuetze 326).

The action of the 1955 Wisconsin Synod convention led to crises of conscience on the part of many Wisconsin Synod members, among them Edmund Reim of the Union Committee. He told the convention: “The decision of the Synod to continue its fellowship with the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod pending a vote to follow the convention of that body in 1956 (even while recognizing that there is full reason for a separation now) compels me to declare that I can continue in fellowship with my Synod only under clear and public protest” (qtd. in Schuetze 326). He was ready to resign from various synodical offices, but was persuaded to continue to serve as seminary president and as a member of the Union Committee.

Many Wisconsin Synod members who later joined the Church of the Lutheran Confession were convinced that the synod had made itself guilty of disobedience to the clear Word of God. Some began to use the designation “Wisconsin Sin-ner” with reference to the Synod’s 1955 decision. There were not many withdrawals from Synod yet, but the basic unity within the Wisconsin Synod was broken at this point.

We cannot understand the origin of the Church of the Lutheran Confession without understanding

the conflicts between the synods of the Synodical Conference that continued from 1938 to 1955 and beyond, which finally led to the termination of fellowship between the Wisconsin Synod and the Missouri Synod in 1961 and the eventual dissolution of the Synodical Conference in 1967. The hope expressed in 1872 for the formation of a united orthodox confessional Lutheran church body comprising all such Lutherans in America had now become an impossibility.

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**"This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."**

***Does Scripture demonstrate  
that the sacramental use of grape juice is valid?***

John Ude

Editor's Note: Content quoted in the body of this article is cited in parentheses by page number according to MLA Style for documenting sources. See the Works Cited section for title of the source and its publishing information. Endnotes in this article are given to provide explanatory or supplemental information.

There is only one way the Lord has given us to create and preserve saving faith in Christ; that is His gospel in the Word and Sacraments. What a treasure that gospel is, then, in each of its forms, a treasure to be possessed, proclaimed, and preserved.

Romans 1:16 *For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.*

In the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper the gospel is connected with earthly elements. As suggested in the subtitle above, we face the question of what form of earthly element may be used in the cup. Should it be only grape wine as the "fruit of the vine" used by Jesus on Maundy Thursday and

prescribed by Him for the continual use of His New Testament Church? Or is the use of grape juice permissible in some circumstances? As we turn to Scripture for the answer, we examine two viewpoints:

- A) The use of grape juice *is valid*;
- B) The use of grape juice *raises doubt*.

### **View A: The use of grape juice is valid**

The Spring 2008 issue of the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* contains an article that espouses the first viewpoint. Prof. John D. Schuetze concludes in his article, "Fruit of the Vine," that "when there is a need for nonalcoholic wine or grape juice, the term 'fruit of the vine' would allow us to accommodate such a person without putting the validity of the sacrament in doubt" (135). A similar position is upheld in the pastoral theology textbook, *The Shepherd Under Christ*, by Armin Schuetze and Irwin Habeck. A more detailed explanation of this view can also be found in the Dogmatic Notes used at the WELS seminary in Mequon, WI.<sup>1</sup> A few pertinent sections of the current Dogmatic Notes follow, as given under section F on the Lord's Supper and outlined under part III, which begins with the statement, "The visible (earthly) elements of the Lord's Supper are bread and wine":<sup>2</sup>

2. The second element is identified in Scripture as "the fruit of the vine" (γένημα τῆς ἀμπέλου).
  - a) This element is never mentioned directly by name in the words of institution. The word cup (ποτήριον) is used in metonymy for its contents and the contents are identified as "fruit of the vine."
  - b) "Fruit of the vine" refers to fruit of the grape vine and may be understood as a term wide enough to include grape wine or unfermented grape juice. Other so-called wines or other juices should not be used.
    - 1) We are quite confident that Jesus used grape wine when he instituted the sacramental meal, and it was likely that he used wine mixed with water. It is permissible but not necessary to dilute the wine with water when using it for the Lord's Supper.
    - 2) The conclusion that the term "fruit of the vine" is broad enough to cover unfermented grape wine and grape juice is drawn from biblical use of the terminology, not from agreement with those who favor abstinence from the use of alcohol as a matter of conscience.

At the end of part III comes the following, a quotation from *The Shepherd Under Christ* and a brief reference to Fritz's *Pastoral Theology*:

Compare Armin Schuetze and Irwin Habeck: Since the term used for the contents of the cup is "fruit of the vine," the use of unfermented grape juice in case of an emergency cannot be considered invalid. Nevertheless, the church will avoid all doubt on the part of its members by using fermented fruit of the vine and may at times do so also as a confessional action over against anyone who claims that the use of any alcoholic beverage is sin (*Shepherd Under Christ*, p 90). Parallel statement in John Fritz, *Pastoral Theology*, p 123.

We briefly note three things about the last quotation above before moving on. First, though the negative is not as clear, nevertheless, the statement that "the use of unfermented grape juice in case of an emergency cannot be considered invalid" would imply a claim of scriptural validity. Second, the church's need to "avoid all doubt" is a call to avoid grape juice in practice because of a Christian's need for certainty in this important aspect of his spiritual life. Third, it is my opinion that the "parallel statement in John Fritz" does not actually support the view that the use of grape juice is valid. More will follow on the Fritz reference in the next section.

We return to the *WLQ* article, "Fruit of the Vine," where Prof. John Schuetze marshals substantial evidence for his assertion that the use of grape juice in the Lord's Supper does not put "the

validity of the sacrament in doubt.” The following seven points are my summation of his arguments (131-135).

1. “Fruit of the vine,” like similar Jewish phrases, denotes the vine as the earthly source of certain blessings from God and is not a specific term for a specific item (131).
2. Though in the context of the Passover meal the Hebrew culture understood the “fruit of the vine” as wine, nevertheless, one cannot maintain that a Jewish person always thought of wine when he heard the term. Outside the context of the Passover meal “fruit of the vine” appears to have had a broader meaning, namely, “products of the grape vine” (131-132).
3. Usage in the Talmud, especially in connection with the Nazirite vow, uses “fruit of the vine” in reference to all products of the grapevine (131-132).
4. In the Lord’s statement, “this fruit of the vine,” given in Matthew 26:29, the word “this” does not specify the fruit of the vine in the cup as wine, but refers to “the entire Passover/Lord’s Supper celebration” (132, footnote 7).
5. Though the early church used wine in the sacrament, and Luther insists that wine only is to be used in the sacrament, and the Lutheran Confessions repeatedly refer to wine as what is being used in their celebration of the sacrament, yet Scripture alone determines doctrine and practice.
6. The temperance movement has claimed “a biblical mandate” to avoid all alcoholic beverages. As a matter of confession it may be necessary to use fermented wine in the Lord’s Supper. “Yet we have to [be] careful not to go too far in reacting” (134).
7. Some have such an aversion to alcohol that even a sip affects them. For these individuals the use of unfermented wine or juice may help them “to focus on the meaning of the sacrament rather than on the material elements” (134).

There is an interesting progression in the development of the viewpoint that the sacramental use of grape juice is valid. Adolf Hoenecke, an early dogmatics teacher and author in the old Wisconsin Synod, does not specifically address the validity of grape juice. He does declare the second material element to be wine (Hoenecke 120-121). John Meyer, who later filled the post of dogmatics professor at the WELS seminary in Thiensville, raised the question in his printed Dogmatic Notes, but did not answer it. John Schaller’s *Pastorale* says, “*Grape juice*, as one can now have it, is also ‘fruit of the vine’ so that nothing cogent could be argued against its use in emergencies.”<sup>3</sup> In more recent times the pastoral theology textbook of Schuetze and Habeck has also stated that the use of grape juice in emergency situations is not invalid. Currently, the Dogmatic Notes provided at the Mequon seminary state somewhat more broadly that the use of grape juice is valid.

#### **View B: The use of grape juice raises doubt.**

There is another view held by conservative Lutheran theologians and expressed in the dogmatics and pastoral theology texts of C. F. W. Walther, F. Pieper, and others. This view claims that its basis is firmly grounded in Scripture, in harmony with the practice of the early Christian church, and consistent with the stance taken by the Lutheran Confessions. According to this view the church should not use grape juice in its practice of the Lord’s Supper for three reasons:

1. To maintain a public confession against those who claim a biblical mandate to avoid all alcoholic beverages and also against those who claim that the material elements don’t matter, since they only symbolize the body and blood of Christ;
2. To avoid any misunderstanding on the part of communicants and others;
3. To be certain in our use of what the Lord has given us, for there is no clear indication that grape juice is in accordance with Jesus’ words, “This do, as often as you drink it. . . .” Its use, therefore, raises doubt about the validity of the sacrament administered with grape juice.

The following quotations either explicitly state or implicitly conform to the view that we cannot know whether the use of grape juice in the Lord's Supper is valid.

In his *Pastorale*, first published in 1872 as a pastoral theology book for American Lutheran pastors, C. F. W. Walther writes:

It is an error when the Greek and Roman churches want the holy Supper celebrated only with wine mixed with water; or when the Reformed Beza, following Calvin, wanted to permit the holy Supper to be celebrated with any substituted elements similar to the bread and wine; or when the Gnostic Enkratites from the second to the fourth centuries forbade wine and used only water in its place, even in the holy Supper, in which they have recently been followed in America by certain temperance fanatics (130).

Notice that Walther's last rejection covers the push for the use of grape juice by the temperance movement, which began in America in the early 1800's.

The concern expressed in the third reason above comes out clearly in the assertion made by Francis Pieper in *Christian Dogmatics*:

As we do not venture to substitute some other fluid for water in Baptism, so neither in the Lord's Supper do we dare to substitute aught for bread and wine. If something else is substituted, doubts must necessarily arise whether our celebration is the Supper instituted by Christ (354).

Then in a footnote on that same page Pieper continues:

In order not to introduce an element of uncertainty into the Sacrament, one should refrain from using grape juice. . . . Since no doubt can arise if we use genuine wine, the dignity of the Sacrament demands that we refrain from experimenting with all fluids of which it is not certain whether they are, or still are, "fruit of the vine" (footnote 94).<sup>4</sup>

In a similar vein J. T. Mueller echoes Pieper with this assessment in his one-volume dogmatics textbook ("handbook"):

While heretics in the ancient Church frequently used substitutes for wine (Encratites: milk, honey, unfermented grape-juice), the Christian Church has always condemned such surrogates as not permissible. The argument that the expression "fruit of the vine" is a generic term, which embraces all products of the vine and therefore also grape-juice does not hold, since Christ used the expression in question as a special term for wine, which was invariably used by the Jews at their sacred festivals (525).

As said in the previous section (View A), the Fritz reference will be stated and evaluated here. It comes from his *Pastoral Theology*:

It is unessential whether red or white wine be used or whether the wine be pure (*merum*) or mixed with water . . . , provided that what is used is a real drink that had been made from the fruit of the vine . . . , Matt. 26:29. It is with some a moot question whether the mere juice of the grape, which has not yet undergone the process of fermentation, may be used. There is no doubt, however, that the Lord used wine when He instituted the Lord's Supper and that the practice of our Lutheran Church in using only wine in administering the Sacrament should be continued. Only by so doing will every Christian have the absolute assurance that he is receiving that Sacrament which the Lord Himself instituted (123, underlining added).

The substance of the first sentence is the kind of wine to be used, namely, grape wine. While Fritz acknowledges that "with some" the use of juice was being argued as permissible, he clearly affirms the certainty to be gained by only using wine. Thus it is my opinion, as indicated earlier, that Fritz does not support the view that the use of grape juice is valid.

As part of a 1981 "Opinion of the Department of Systematic Theology" at Concordia Theological

Seminary (Ft. Wayne, IN), this statement in *Concordia Theological Quarterly* was made in view of the Scripture texts involved:

The point is that “fruit of the vine” is a technical term which in the stated contexts can have no other meaning than *wine*. The church has never, from that day forward, felt at liberty to alter the solemn testament given by Christ in conjunction with the bread and the wine of the Sacrament (cf. Matt. 28:20; Gal. 3:15). Whenever such altering or substitution was introduced, it was promptly repudiated, lest any doubt be cast upon the validity of the sacrament as Christ instituted it (77).

The “Opinion of the Department of Systematic Theology” article goes on to summarize the consistent stance taken by the early Church and by the Lutheran Confessions:

P. E. Kretzmann avers: “There never was any doubt in the minds of the teachers of the Church as to the meaning of the expression [fruit of the vine]. For this reason they resented the use of any substitute for wine.”<sup>5</sup> The consensus is virtually unbroken . . . .

The Lutheran Confessions stand as a phalanx behind Luther’s simple and beautifully clear definition in the Small Catechism, “under . . . the *wine*.” There is not a single concession, nor any implication, that anything else was ever to be substituted or understood for “wine.” The Small and Large Catechisms enjoy the support on this point of the Augsburg Confession (Article X), Smalcald Articles (III, vi), and the brilliant exposition and defense of the Lord’s Supper in the Formula of Concord and its Epitome (Article VII). There is total concurrence that in the Lord’s Supper Christ “offers His disciples natural bread and natural wine” (FC VII, 64). Countless other references in the Confessions attest the same fact (77-78).

Within our own fellowship we find this assessment made by Prof. David Lau in a dogmatics course handout he used at Immanuel Lutheran Seminary:

There seems to be no doubt that Jesus used unleavened bread and grape wine in His institution of the Lord’s Supper. . . .

Therefore the safest practice for Christians to follow in their celebration of the Lord’s Supper is to use what Christ Himself used: unleavened bread and grape wine. For the Christian wants to follow Jesus’ instruction: “Do this” (1 Cor. 11:24) and “this do” (1 Cor. 11:25). There can be no question of conscience with respect to our obedience on this matter if we use what Christ used.

Also of note is Prof. Lau’s observation made in a subsequent paragraph:

Since our Lord, however, did not Himself emphasize the use of grape wine or unleavened bread, but guided the first three Evangelists and the Apostle Paul to use the terms “bread” and “fruit of the vine,” we cannot absolutely and categorically declare that those who use leavened bread and grape juice together with the words of institution of the Lord are not receiving the Lord’s body and blood in the sacrament (emphasis Lau’s).

To recapitulate the two positions, View A states that the use of grape juice in the Lord’s Supper does not put the validity of the sacrament in doubt. View B, on the other hand, says that the use of grape juice in the Lord’s Supper does put the validity of the sacrament in doubt, and therefore only wine should be used. Similar to Lau’s statement above, however, it should be noted that the latter view does not deny that the sacrament could be valid with the use of grape juice, but there is no way for Christians to be sure of that.

The point at issue, then, is whether Scripture gives validity to the use of grape juice in Communion. In order to be sure that the sacrament is valid, it must be based completely on the LORD—His directions, His grace, and His promise. Basing our view and practice on human assumption leads to doubt about the validity of the sacrament. Thus we face a crucial question that we hope to answer. Is

there a clear word of Scripture to show that Jesus intended to include grape juice when He instituted the sacrament and referred to the contents of the cup as the “fruit of the vine?”

(To be continued)

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### **End Notes**

<sup>1</sup> The current notes provided by Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary are a revision of the dogmatics notes of Prof. John Meyer. The current revised version is available on the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary website. See “Works Cited” above for the pertinent URL. The downloading, formatting, and printing can affect pagination; thus page numbers of quoted material are not cited. Meyer’s original notes did not take the position on grape juice which the revised notes have, but only raised the question.

<sup>2</sup> The first section outlined under part III treats the “first element,” bread, and has been omitted in this article. The second section as quoted above does not include the Scripture passages and other quotations given in the online version of the “Dogmatic Notes.”

<sup>3</sup> John Schaller’s statement, originally made in German, was translated by Paul Schaller at the request of the writer. Emphasis is in the original on p. 45. See Works Cited for publishing information.

<sup>4</sup> In this same footnote Pieper quotes Walther’s *Pastorale* for support.

<sup>5</sup> P. E. Kretzmann, “Archaeology of the Sacraments,” *Concordia Theological Monthly*, 1939, p. 328.

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## Book Review

**Robert Kolb: *Confessing the Faith—Reformers Define the Church, 1530-1580*, Concordia Publishing House, 1991, paperback, 181 pages.**

Confessional Lutherans are well aware of the significance of the years 1530 and 1580. The Augsburg Confession was presented in 1530, and fifty years later the *Book of Concord* was published, containing not only the unaltered Augsburg Confession but also all the other confessions generally accepted by the Lutherans of that day, specifically also the Formula of Concord of 1577, which was designed as a Scriptural settlement of the major issues in contention from 1530 up to that time. What is not so well-known is the fact that between 1530 and 1580 many other confessions were drawn up by Lutherans in various places. This informative book by Robert Kolb, co-editor of the 2000 edition of *The Book of Concord*, traces the history and background of these other confessions: The Magdeburg Confession (1550), The Wuerttemberg Confession (1551), The Hamburg Confession (1557), The Saxon Book of Confutation (1559), The First Mansfeld Confession (1559), The Lueneburg Declaration (1561), The Bremen Confession (1561), The Second Mansfeld Confession (1564), The Carinthian Confession (1566), The Austrian Confession (1566), The Antwerp Confession (1567), and The Reuss-Schoenberg Confession (1567). Kolb states his purpose in these words: "The purpose of this study is to understand the nature of confession in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, how it developed, and the reason for it" (p. 17).

The first two chapters deal especially with the *Augsburg Confession* itself, pointing out in particular that the chief confessors at that point were not the theologians, but some of the ruling princes of Germany, such as Elector John of Saxony and Georg of Brandenburg. After Martin Luther's death in 1546 there was a long period of controversy between the followers of Philip Melancthon and the so-called Gnesio-Lutherans. In response to the Augsburg Interim and the Leipzig Interim, which made huge concessions to Roman Catholicism and were given some support by Melancthon, the Gnesio-Lutherans were convinced they had to take a stand and make their confession clear. "The Philippists sought peace within the church, and on occasion they chose silence over public expression of their views in order to preserve it. The Gnesio-Lutherans believed in bold and confrontational confession of the faith" (pp. 70-71).

Among those who stepped forward at this time with their confession of the truth and their rejection of error and compromise with error were such as Nikolaus Amsdorf, Joachim Westphal, Matthias Flacius, Johann Wigand, Johannes Brenz, and someone with whose name I was not familiar, Ludwig Rabus. In fact, nine pages of Kolb's book are used to present the testimony of Ludwig Rabus. "Teaching and confessing God's Word, Rabus wrote, is 'the highest service of God,' even when the witness to its truth must be confirmed 'with our blood' before an evil and wicked world. Through such witness God is glorified, His church edified and enlarged, and people are saved" (p. 84). Confession of the truth can be dangerous. Kolb states: "Although no Gnesio-Lutherans in Germany were actually executed for their faith in the period between Luther's death and the end of the century, many suffered deprivation of office, overnight deportation from their homes and congregations, and the harassment of government officials because they refused to compromise their confession" (p. 92). It is now about fifty years since some of the pioneers of the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) were likewise removed from their positions and homes because of their confession.

Kolb's fourth chapter presents one situation when even the Gnesio-Lutherans disagreed among themselves as to what would be the proper Christian confession. When Johann Gallus, a staunch Lutheran, was elected the rector of the university in Erfurt, a question arose as to whether the Roman Catholic clergy could participate in the inauguration ceremonies. Kolb reports: "Gallus believed that these ceremonies were mere formalities that would not suggest any compromise of faith on his part." But Andreas Poach, a university professor, disagreed. "He argued that participation in such university

ceremonies with Roman clergy would betray the Evangelical faith” (p. 100). It seems the majority agreed with Gallus, but the controversy raged for several years until Poach resigned and left the city. Later, the theologian Tilemann Hesshus wrote a tract that laid out a number of guidelines for such situations. Both parties in the controversy thought Hesshus was on their side. “Although Hesshus supported Gallus’s right to participate in the university’s inaugural ceremonies, as he did, Hesshus also shared Poach’s view of the need to confess forthrightly when the truth and clarity of the Word of God were under threat of being clouded and obscured” (p. 103). We are reminded that in specific cases otherwise like-minded confessors may find themselves in disagreement as to what is the best course to follow. Although we obviously do not have all the facts before us, it would seem that we in the CLC would most likely be on Poach’s side in this controversy.

The concluding chapter points out that “confessional” is a word Lutherans use much more than those in other denominations. “The Lutheran church was born in the public forum as princes and municipal representatives stood before their emperor and their world with a bold and forthright confession of their faith” (p. 132). The founders of like-wise the need for bold confession of the truth, not only with respect to the issues dealt with in the *Book of Concord*, but also with controversies that had arisen since that time. Thus our CLC constitution includes references also to the *Brief Statement of 1932, Concerning Church Fellowship*, and theses on church and ministry. “In a world of sin, eventually confession of the truth also leads to confrontation with human attempts to refashion God in human images. Some formulations of God’s message for His people are right, and some are wrong. In this world the church must still wrestle with the father of lies. Deceiving forms of religion, within and outside the church, are always trying to restrain the power of God’s Word. Therefore the church’s confession of faith must exclude deceivers as at the same time it invites and includes those whom the Holy Spirit opens to His Word” (p. 136).

There are two appendices with helpful information on chronology and on the lesser known confessions mentioned earlier in this review. Extensive endnotes, an index, and “Reflection Questions” bring this brief but informative volume to a close.

David Lau

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