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**The Fellowship of Kindred Minds**

Introduction\*

*Daniel Fleischer*

\* An excerpt from the "President's Report" presented to the 23rd Convention of the CLC, June 15-19, 1998, at Immanuel Lutheran College, Eau Claire, Wisconsin (1998 Proceedings, 53-54). – Ed.

In one of our hymns we sing, "The fellowship of kindred minds is like to that above. . ." Would God we were enjoying the perfect peace and unity that is distinctive of the fellowship between God and His people in heaven. Indeed, we could wish for such perfect unity even now among ourselves. We know that the fellowship we enjoy within the "Una Sancta" is perfect inasmuch as it is a fellowship in Christ, and there is no fracture within the spiritual body of which Christ is the head. But the manifestation of it among the same people within the church organization on earth is always tenuous and under fire. The fellowship we enjoy here is a fragile entity. Satan seeks daily to destroy it. By reason of our flesh it is a daily struggle to maintain it. Nevertheless, the fellowship we enjoy on earth through a common bond of faith in Christ and confession of His Word is not to be thought of lightly. It surely is to be guarded jealously. Though tried and tested and at times frayed on the edges, it is a relationship dear to our hearts. For this reason we implore the Holy Ghost to keep us in it through His precious Word, for what positive fellowship manifestations exist are the work of the Spirit and of Him alone.

Fellowship, as it is exercised in the church militant, does not produce clones. It does allow for individuals and individuality as diverse as that of the apostles Peter and Paul. It does not stifle private study of the Word but fosters it in order that each member of the body might grow stronger in understanding and faith and thus under the Spirit be a strong confessor and willing worker within the fellowship. It does not resent questions of one to the other but encourages them so that brethren will understand each other and both will profit from the exercise through mutual study of the Word. Exercise of fellowship of brethren does not blindly trust the other, but it does ascertain carefully the meaning and intent of the brother's words before making judgment of his words, expressed thoughts, or actions. Exercise of fellowship is not fellowship at the cost of truth or conscience, but neither is it ready to waste the fellowship for the sake of personal satisfaction. The exercise of fellowship is not a fellowship for the sake of exclusivity but for the sake of faithful and common confession of the gospel of our Lord out of concern for precious souls.

The very nature of fellowship is that it takes two to practice it. There is no fellowship with self. The essence and blessed nature of fellowship was expressed in Acts 2, "*They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.*" Our desire is to have fellowship with one another because we need the support, encouragement, and admonition that is inherent in a fellowship in Christ. Our commitment is to have fellowship with those with whom we find mutual agreement in the substance of the Word and the doctrines set forth from the Word of God and faithfully set forth in the Lutheran Confessions. But continued exercise of such blessed fellowship calls for carefully guarding the fellowship that has existed heretofore in our midst—a fellowship stressed and strained over the years but never fractured. Why should we expect that it will be otherwise? Even Paul lamented the contentions among the Corinthians which moved him to say even as we would today, "*Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment*" (1 Cor. 1:10).

I am continually amazed and appreciative of the beauty inherent in the fellowship of kindred minds as over the years we have gathered for synodical meetings, conferences, and activities—many on this campus—concerts which are always worshipful, graduations which are always blessed by the Word. Truly it is of the Spirit. Yes, even the other activities that bring us together have the ring of a family reunion as people of like mind gather from all over the country. Surely what undergirds these reunions, spoken or unspoken, is the fact that the Spirit of God has created this fellowship of mutual faith and hope built upon a solid rock which is Christ. We are confident that by the same Spirit we shall find unanimity on matters before us at this convention, first of all because God is faithful, secondly because each of us here desires to set forth nothing more than the Word of God, thirdly because we recognize that the fellowship of kindred minds is cherished among us, and finally because in this dying world the cause of the gospel witness deserves nothing less.

Our two essays assigned for this convention shall direct our hearts further to the exercise of brotherly fellowship for the cause of the gospel and that the name of the Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified among us and through us.

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Note: The following two papers have been edited for form, but not in substance or content. Any changes in wording are with the author's approval. – Ed.

## **The Exercise of Fellowship In The Early Church**

*Michael J. Roehl*

### **Introduction**

"*Aller Anfang ist schwer*" my German Grandmother would tell me. The sainted C. M. Gullerud, weighing in on behalf of the Norwegian community in one of his seminary lectures, put it a little differently: "*Men, the first 500 biscuits are always the hardest.*" There are indeed many first steps, many beginnings, and most of them might well prove difficult. Yet in all of recorded history has there

ever been a beginning more difficult than the task that stood before the fledgling Christian Church following their Lord's death and resurrection? By His sacrifice on the cross of Calvary and by His subsequent resurrection and ascension, their Guide, their Shepherd, their Lord had removed Himself from their midst. How they must have missed their Friend and Mentor, their Savior-God! What very likely loomed even larger and more perplexing than the departure of their Savior was His commission to them: Go and make disciples of all the nations ...

Imagine the task that lay before this rag-tag assortment of Galileans! They were to carry the message of the gospel *to the world*. Not figuratively. Literally. As the cloud hid their ascending Lord from their sight, they realized that they would have to accomplish this monumental assignment without Him. At least without the kind of presence to which they had grown accustomed. With His final words to them still ringing in their ears, "**You shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth ...**" the disciples returned to the upper room in Jerusalem where they had been staying. By this time the disciples had seen enough to know that nothing was impossible *for Jesus*. But Jesus was "gone." How would they, how *could* they, carry His message *to the end of the earth*? You and I may well never know a hard beginning like that beginning. The task before them was monumental.

Through the dark and desperate three days from Good Friday to Easter Sunday, during the joyfully confusing forty days prior to His ascension, and during the anxious times from the Ascension to Pentecost, the disciples had a sublime and essential gift that is often overlooked. It was, in fact, a gift that helped to sustain them. They had each other. They had *the blessed fellowship of kindred minds*. Acts 1:14 tells us that "**These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.**" Again in Acts 2:1 we read that "**when the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.**" With what casual recklessness we today often regard that precious gift to which they clung so tenaciously. They had seen their Lord executed for His message—the very same message *they* were now to carry to the ends of the earth. Their ascended Lord had promised to be with them, but not visibly. They had each other, and what a precious, vital gift true Christian fellowship was in their eyes.

When something is valuable in our eyes, we seek to protect and preserve it. When something is truly precious, *vitally important* to us, we would protect it by all means. So we might lock the doors of our cars or our houses, but we would give our very lives to defend our children. To those early Christians the common bond of fellowship they shared with each other in those tenuous early days of the Christian Church was more than just important. That fellowship was critically essential, and as such the early Christians sought to protect it by all means. It was so very important to them for at least two reasons. First, because virtually all that they had in those early days was their Lord and each other. Second, they knew full well that there were hard times ahead. Their Lord had warned them beforehand just what they should expect from the world into which He was sending them. "**Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves. But beware of men ...**"<sup>1</sup> Again our Lord warned them in Matthew 7:15, "**Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.**" Jesus had never lied to them. The wolves *were* coming, and a key element of their defense was the correct practice of church fellowship. It takes no imagination then to grasp how important was that fellowship in the early Christian Church, and how critical to those Christians that the gift be maintained.

But just how would they go about protecting it? With an acute sense of how they all needed to be built up by and in each other and protected from the wolves, how would they, how could they go about preserving and protecting this rare and precious gift? Interestingly, the correct practice of fellowship was in itself the best defense of it. For the early Christians to practice rightly (and thus defend) the fellowship principle, it was necessary that they understand both what it was and what was its purpose.

To the early Christians, as to us, the fellowship principle was simply *the joining together of like-minded Christians in the practice of their religion*. This practice of religion could take the form of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, prayer, the breaking of bread, prophesy, preaching, and so on. That these activities should be restricted to like-minded believers seems to have been clearly understood both by the early Apostolic era Christian Church, and by those who followed immediately

after them.<sup>2</sup>

## Part I - The More Sure Witness of the Word of God

### The Example of Jesus and His Disciples

We today cannot know all of the words Jesus spoke to His disciples. He lived in intimate contact with them for three wonderful years during his public ministry on earth. He might well have outlined for them in great detail exactly what was included under the practice of their Christian religion and with whom they ought to fellowship. Regardless of what He may have *told* the disciples, Jesus spoke volumes with His actions. Remember how perplexed the Scribes and Pharisees were when Jesus refused to join with them in their religious practices, and instead turned to the tax collectors and sinners.<sup>3</sup> This action on the part of the Savior was and is significant. In fact, many times Jesus' actions taught the coming generations His will with a clarity unsurpassed by human words. Our Lord, by His actions, spoke clearly that fellowship was not to be based on a man's knowledge of the Bible, for who could hold a candle to the Scribes and Pharisees? Nor did it depend on moral conduct alone, for Jesus chose to fellowship with the moral outcasts—the adulterers, prostitutes, thieves, and so on. Jesus demonstrated by His actions that fellowship was to be based on one simple test: *Is a man like-minded?* Remember, *like-minded* did not refer to depth or breadth of knowledge or understanding, nor to the relative ability to live and act according to one's right moral conviction. *Like-minded* was instead a spirit of on-going acceptance of Jesus as Lord and Savior and of all that He taught as perfect truth. This is the evidence Jesus offered to us through His actions. He neither cast out those who in weakness fell into sin,<sup>4</sup> nor tolerated those who taught falsely or continued in their sin without repentance.<sup>5</sup>

These actions on the part of the Savior, together with the inspired words that would follow, enable the Church to *define* fellowship. Our Lord did not stop there. He graciously also revealed to the Christian Church the *purpose* of fellowship. This was vital information if those early Christians were to value and protect this precious gift of God rightly. With words and actions our Lord Jesus demonstrated to His Bride that the *purpose* of fellowship was twofold. It was intended *positively* for the building up of the Church and *negatively* for the defense of both the Word of Truth and the Christian Church from the wolves.

Jesus once told His disciples, "***Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees ... [The disciples] understood that He did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees.***"<sup>6</sup> Holy Scripture also answers clearly *why* this leaven or doctrine was so deadly when it says, "***A little leaven leavens the whole lump.***"<sup>7</sup> It was self-evident that the godly practice of fellowship would help to build up and strengthen the early Christians. Even the world today recognizes the benefit of support groups. As the disciples knew to eat and sleep and breathe without the Lord's command to do so, so also they would naturally cling to one another during those desperate early days. No command was necessary. What was perhaps less clear was the fact that fellowship not only built up, it protected. Thus we see Jesus, and the disciples who came after Him, emphasizing the less obvious protective benefit of Church fellowship. This instruction was vital to the correct practice of fellowship in the centuries to follow.

Imagine for a moment that fellowship was originally intended to be what most of the Christian community today believes it is—a one-dimensional support group for those who share some similar religious conviction. If indeed the fellowship principle, as God established it, was not two-dimensional (a building up *and* a defense system) then it would indeed be hard to dispute the position of the ecumenical community today. The fact is neither Jesus, nor the apostles, nor the Church fathers who followed them taught such a one-dimensional view of fellowship. Indeed it could be argued that it was precisely in the second aspect of fellowship, the *protection* it offered, that the Church was best served in the centuries to come.

A recent CLC General Pastoral Conference paper referred to the fellowship principle as the "immune system [lightning rod?] of the Church"<sup>8</sup>—a particularly appropriate analogy. The earliest Christians, however, had little experience with this service or benefit of the fellowship principle. They knew well the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees, and they had witnessed firsthand how savage could be the attacks from those without, but they had little experience when it came to attacks from

within. Judas provided a taste of what lay in store. In keeping with this fact it seems that the disciples placed much more emphasis on the positive *building up* aspect of fellowship. It is little debated that the earliest Christians, including Paul, first took a very short range view of the Second Coming of Christ.<sup>9</sup> Accordingly their immediate need was strength and courage to carry out the Great Commission in the “short time” they had left. It could well be argued that the identification of, and separation from, heretics ran a distant second in their minds. This was soon to change, as the Holy Spirit knew all too well. The wolves soon made their appearance. As a result, and knowing that the end of the world was at least centuries away, that same Holy Spirit did not leave us without instruction—from the very pens of the men who apparently believed the end of all things to be near at hand.

### **The Evolution of Appreciation and Understanding**

There were many passages included by the Holy Spirit in His Word which taught the early Christians that the fellowship principle was also given as the immune system of the Church. We are, of course, very familiar with these passages. ***“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.”***<sup>10</sup> There had indeed been many false prophets prior to Jesus’ day. The attacks against the early Church, however, were carried out by wolves dressed like wolves. There was little guile or pretense in being shackled in a dungeon, fed to the lions, or burned alive in the arena. The earliest enemies of the Christian Church were obvious outsiders who made no pretense of agreement. This situation changed very quickly, and therefore it is not surprising that there was an evolution in the appreciation and understanding of the fellowship principle on the part of the disciples. The will of God did not change. Man’s understanding of that will grew. We see the apostles first with their misguided zeal attempting to silence the man who spoke of Christ but was not “one of them.” Jesus used the event to teach them, and us, a valuable lesson. We are called to separate, but not to tear down. Remember how John came to Jesus and said, ***“Teacher, we saw someone who does not follow us casting out demons in Your name, and we forbade him because he does not follow us.”*** John had the separation part down, but he and the other disciples had taken it a step too far. ***“But Jesus said, ‘Do not forbid him, for no one who works a miracle in My name can soon afterward speak evil of Me. For he who is not against us is on our side.’”***<sup>11</sup> Jesus here makes it clear that we are not to tear down the Christian ministries of those who are not one with us, but we are to separate. Is then one ministry as good as the other? Taking no chance that someone might be left with this impression, Jesus continues with these ominous words: ***“But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea.”***<sup>12</sup> We pray God that we will one day share heaven with millions brought to faith through the gospel spoken by the heterodox. How many, on the other hand, will be destroyed by the cancer of their error? What a delicate balance the Child of God is to maintain. Separate, but do not seek to eliminate. Turn away, but do not tear down.

As the Church grew, so did the problems. The wolves had arrived, and the early Christians learned just how destructive they could be. They learned, in fact, that decay from within could accomplish what Rome and the fire and wild beasts of the arena were unable to do - weaken the Church. So also Paul warned Timothy, ***“And their message will spread like cancer. Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort, who have strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past; and they overthrow the faith of some.”***<sup>13</sup> Nor did it take the Church long to apply the *protective* aspect of the fellowship principle in their dealings with those who professed to be Christians. Remember how it was only after careful examination in Jerusalem that James and the rest of the brothers ***“gave [Paul] and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship.”***<sup>14</sup> So also Peter was called to give account in Jerusalem of his dealings with Cornelius and other Gentiles in Acts 11.

### **The Scriptures Speak**

Yet as the problems increased, so also the “more sure witness” increased. The Holy Spirit recorded for the Church of all times the passages that today help to guide, strengthen, and protect us.

(Romans 16:17-18 NKJV) ***“Now I urge you, brethren, note (KJV, “mark”) those who cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those***

*who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple.”* (Titus 3:10-11 NKJV) *“Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned.”* (2 John 1:9-11 NKJV) *“Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.”*

The Holy Spirit here clearly taught the Church that the fellowship principle was to be applied to protect against false teachers. This, again, is the negative aspect of the fellowship principle. It did not replace the positive aspect. In fact the passages we today lump under the general category of fellowship passages in reality deal with two separate issues. Passages such as Romans 16:17 deal with the separation from those not one with us. Other passages deal with the sin of separating from those who *are* one with us. One of the best examples is 1 Corinthians 1:10-11:

*Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren... that there are contentions among you.* (NKJV)

Note that Paul calls them “brethren.” He is thus not dealing with heretics, but with brothers who have fallen prey to sectarianism. Paul is here promoting the positive aspect of fellowship: On the basis of a unified confession, cling to, rather than separate from, those who are one with you. Paul’s rather forceful condemnation of the sectarians in Corinth emphasizes once again the delicate balance inherent in the fellowship principle. It is always a great tragedy, therefore, whenever Christians demonstrate more zeal for separation than for avoiding the sin of schismatism.<sup>15</sup>

It immediately became clear in the Apostolic Christian Church that fellowship was determined by God, not by man. It was therefore the responsibility of the Christian not to *establish* fellowship, but to practice it whenever, wherever, and only where truly like-minded Christians could be found, or brought to faith. John said in his First Epistle, *“That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.”* The real work, in connection with the application of the fellowship principle, came in struggling to determine if and where fellowship truly existed.

## **Part II - The Less Sure Witness of the Ante-Nicene Church Fathers**

### **The Purpose and Scope of the Study of the Church Fathers**

At this point we take a cautious step from the “more sure witness” to the “less sure witness” of the uninspired writings of the Church Fathers. Thus we move from *“Thy Word is truth!”* into the area of subjective history and fallible human opinion. Dyed-in-the-wool *sola scriptura* Lutherans might well wonder why take such a step at all. The fact is by doing so we enter into a win-win situation. Having first firmly established on the basis of the Word of God the correct definition and purpose of the fellowship principle, one cannot help but wonder if this was indeed the understanding and practice of the early Church Fathers. The win-win situation is just this: If we find that the Church Fathers understood and practiced fellowship as we do today, we will of course feel greatly encouraged. On the other hand, if they did not, it would be a simple matter for us to shake our heads in somber condescension and lament, “How soon they lost the truth.” After all, isn’t it true that somewhere along the line the Apostolic Christian Church became the Roman Catholic Church? The slide no doubt took place incrementally, but when did it start? The answer is the slide began in certain areas almost immediately, but not in the area of fellowship.

Church historians routinely group the earliest Church Fathers under the general heading *Ante-Nicene*. Since the First Ecumenical Council was convened by Emperor Constantine at Nicaea, in Bithynia, in 325,<sup>16</sup> this includes the Fathers who wrote between AD 60 and 325. Consider for a moment how much has been written by just the conservative Lutheran Fathers since the middle of the 18th Century and one can begin to appreciate the body of writings that can be produced in any 265 year period. The Ante-Nicene Church Fathers were no different. Sheer volume necessitated that only

the earliest writings be included in this paper. Included therefore are the writings of men such as Clement, Barnabas, Ignatius, Polycarp, Justin Martyr, and Irenaeus.<sup>17</sup> The exact number of men whose writings have been preserved from this period is not even known, since many of the extant works were written anonymously, as was our New Testament Letter to the Hebrews. Below you will find a listing of the most important writings from what we will refer to as the post-Apostolic Church Father period,<sup>18</sup> and in Appendix A you will find a brief biography of the known authors.

### **Themes In the Writings of the Church Fathers**

Three themes or patterns readily suggest themselves in the writings of these earliest Church Fathers. They are:

1. The plea for guidance and structure in the Church.
2. The exhortation to good works.
3. The call for unity in the Church.

### **Misguided Guidance - "Obey the Bishops!"**

The earliest Church Fathers were faced with some daunting problems. One of the greatest was the education of the members of the Christian Church. Though there were gifted students eager to learn, there was an obvious shortage of qualified teachers. This problem was eventually solved by the organization of the earliest seminaries.<sup>19</sup> Before that time the problem was significant. Though the crisis was alleviated somewhat in the centuries to follow, the problem has never really gone away. We see evidence still today when those who have been called to faith in some of the Reformed Churches are called almost immediately into the public ministry, with little or no formal training. The result is often painfully evident.

Fearful of what might result in the fledgling Christian Church if unqualified, untrained men took it upon themselves to lead, the post-Apostolic Church Fathers adopted a rather simple solution. Their solution, intended to safeguard the Church, nearly destroyed it in the centuries to come. That solution, a mantra repeated again and again in their writings, was summed up simply, "Obey the Bishops." With nearly two millennia worth of history laid out before us, it is no difficult task for us to see both the wisdom and the folly in this advice. Those who promoted this policy knew the solid character of the bishops to which they encouraged allegiance and obedience, but only the bishops of their day. The problem was their advice was both short-sighted, and it depended on man, rather than on the clear and certain Word of God, for its success.

While the majority of post-Apostolic writings contain some reference to obeying the bishop, this advice was not, at first, universal. I could find no such reference, for example, in the writings of Clement or Polycarp.<sup>20</sup> The folly, however, did not skip this first generation after the Apostles. Ignatius, the student of John and contemporary of Polycarp, in his Epistle to the Magnesians dwells almost exclusively on the topic. There we read in Chapter 3, "*It is becoming, therefore, that ye also should be obedient to your bishop, and contradict him in nothing; for it is a fearful thing to contradict any such person.*"<sup>21</sup> Again in Chapter 7 Ignatius writes to the Magnesians:

*As therefore the Lord does nothing without the Father...so do ye, neither presbyter, nor deacon, nor layman, do anything without the bishop. Nor let anything appear commendable to you which is destitute of his approval. For every such thing is sinful, and opposed [to the will of] God.*

Thus the seeds were sown for what grew to plague the Church until the Reformation. "Obey the Bishops" became a tried and true doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church down through the ages. Papal, Ecclesiastical, and Council authority in the Roman Catholic Church are direct descendants of this well-intentioned but ill-begotten advice. Even down to Reformation times, no less than the brilliant Erasmus is said to have believed that what the Church lays down may safely be accepted, whether right or wrong.<sup>22</sup>

### **Hints of Work Righteousness**

The second theme uniting the writings of the Church Fathers represents yet another example of good intentions gone awry. Christians from Apostolic times have been keenly aware of the fine line

drawn in Holy Scripture between encouraging good works and elevating good works to a means of grace. With careful precision that could only be the product of divine inspiration, the Scriptures draw this critical line.

(1 Corinthians 13:3 NKJV) *“And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.”* (Galatians 2:10 NKJV) *“They desired only that we should remember the poor, the very thing which I also was eager to do.”* (1 Timothy 5:25 NKJV) *“Likewise, the good works of some are clearly evident, and those that are otherwise cannot be hidden.”* (Titus 2:14 NKJV) *“(Jesus Christ) 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.”* (1 Peter 2:12 NKJV) *“Having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.”*

And yet all of these passages stand in perfect harmony with, for example, Ephesians 2:8-9: *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.* (NKJV)

This fine line, however, could not be universally held even by the earliest Church Fathers. Here again Clement held the line, but he is rare. In his Epistle to the Corinthians (Chapter 32) he writes:

*And we too, being called by His will in Christ Jesus, are not justified by ourselves, nor by our own wisdom, or understanding, or godliness, or works which we have wrought in holiness of heart; but by that faith through which, from the beginning, Almighty God has justified all men; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

Immediately following Clement strikes the balance between saving faith and good works when he says:

*What shall we do then, brethren? Shall we become slothful in well-doing, and cease from the practice of love? God forbid that any such course should be followed by us! But rather let us hasten with all energy and readiness of mind to perform every good work.*

Perfect balance. Too perfect for Satan to ignore. Soon afterwards one of the wolves counterfeited the “Second Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians.” This letter is work righteous from start to finish. In it we read passages such as:

*“For this (conversion of perishing souls) is the recompense which we are able to pay to God who created us ...”* (2 Clement 15:2) Again, *“For if we bid farewell to these enjoyments and conquer our soul in refusing to fulfill its evil lusts, we shall be partakers of the mercy of Jesus.”* (2 Clement 16:2) And again, *“Let us therefore practice righteousness that we may be saved unto the end. Blessed are they that obey these ordinances. Though they may endure affliction for a short time in the world, they will gather the immortal fruit of the resurrection.”* (2 Clement 19:3)

This letter, today regarded almost universally as counterfeit, was successfully introduced by Satan and used by the Catholic Church to counter the good witness of Clement in his authentic Letter to the Corinthians.

Though it is not our place to judge the heart, many other writings tended to blur the fine line drawn in Scripture between faith and works. So also in his Epistle to Polycarp, Ignatius writes, *“If indeed by means of suffering I may attain to God, so that, through your prayers, I may be found a disciple of Christ”* (ch. 7). Typical also of the book known simply as Didache is the addition to Scripture quoted therein: (Didache 1:4) *“Abstain thou from fleshly and bodily lusts. ‘If any man give thee a blow on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also,’ and thou shalt be perfect.”* Note how man’s addition only served to taint what the Lord had written. So also Barnabas<sup>23</sup> wrote, *“... by thy hands thou shalt labor for the redemption of thy sins.”*<sup>24</sup>

### **Protection From the Enemy Within**

This brings us to the third theme in the writings of the early Church Fathers, *the call for unity in the Church*. It is this particular element that is of the greatest interest to us in this paper. However this call for unity cannot be rightly appreciated and understood in its historic setting without first understanding the other two themes. There is little doubt, as we shall soon demonstrate, that the Church Fathers were in agreement with our current stand on church fellowship. The fatal flaw was not



fellowship, it was the establishment of men, rather than the Word of God, as that which was to determine the point of unity. "Obey your bishops" failed the Church miserably the first time a bishop (or presbyter or deacon) turned from the Word of God. Since Christians had been told to hitch their wagon to their bishop, but had not been told how to use the bit and the reins of the Word of God, the bishops soon pulled them into heterodoxy. Again, fellowship was not the issue. There can be little doubt that heretics, together with the manifestly impenitent, were summarily cast out of the early Church. The issue, in a Church that very likely had limited access to the written Word, was allegiance. It was, in fact, the very same issue handled so masterfully by Paul in Corinth. Men there had developed an allegiance to individual "bishops." *"Now I say this, that each of you says, 'I am of Paul,' or 'I am of Apollos,' or 'I am of Cephas,' or 'I am of Christ.' Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?"*<sup>25</sup> The Church Fathers, led perhaps unwittingly by Ignatius, were drawn right back into this same foolishness.

The problem, as has been said, was not an incorrect understanding of the fellowship principle. In fact one cannot help but be overwhelmed by the sheer number of references to the practice of fellowship in the writings of the Church Fathers. An honest study of these early writings will leave the reader convinced just how important this principle was in the day to day practice of the early Christian Church. The Fifteenth Chapter of Clement's Letter to the Corinthians is typical: *"Let us cleave, therefore, to those who cultivate peace with godliness, and not to those who hypocritically profess to desire it."*

It also becomes readily apparent that the Fathers emphasized both the positive and negative aspects of fellowship, warning both about the sins of sectarianism and sedition, and the need to separate from false teachers. In condemning the separation from like-minded believers Clement wrote, *Why are there strifes, and tumults, and divisions, and schisms, and wars among you? Have we not all one God and one Christ? Why do we divide and tear to pieces the members of Christ, and raise up strife against our own body, and have reached such a height of madness as to forget that "we are members one of another?"*

He goes on at the end of Chapter 46 to give the result of such internal dissension, *Your schism has subverted [the faith of] many, has discouraged many, has given rise to doubt in many, and has caused grief to us all. And still your sedition continueth.*

Clement's solution if the strife cannot be resolved? *Let [the noble-minded, compassionate man] declare, "If on my account sedition and disagreement and schisms have arisen, I will depart, I will go away whithersoever ye desire, and I will do whatever the majority commands; only let the flock of Christ live on terms of peace with the presbyters set over it."*

Note that Clement calls for separation, even self-imposed separation, as a final resolution of the sedition. He does not, however, demand such separation in the case of weak brothers caught up in sin: *Let us then also pray for those who have fallen into any sin, that meekness and humility may be given to them, so that they may submit, not unto us, but to the will of God... Let us receive correction, beloved, on account of which no one should feel displeased. Those exhortations by which we admonish one another are both good and highly profitable, for they tend to unite us to the will of God. (ch. 56)*

Ignatius emphasizes the good and positive aspects of fellowship when he writes, *"Labor together with one another; strive in company together; run together; suffer together; sleep together; and awake together, as the stewards, and associates, and servants of God."*<sup>26</sup> Again in Chapter 1 of this same work he writes, *"Have a regard to preserve unity, than which nothing is better. Bear with all even as the Lord does with thee."*

The separation from false teachers is also clearly taught by the Church Fathers. In Didache 11:1-2 we read:

*Whosoever therefore shall come and teach you all these things that have been said before, receive him; but if the teacher himself be perverted and teach a different doctrine to the destruction thereof, hear him not.*

Again in Didache 12:1 we read:

*But let every one that cometh in the name of the Lord be received; and then when ye have tested*

*him ye shall know him, for ye shall have understanding on the right hand and on the left.*

Ignatius speaks bluntly and forcefully when he says:

*I give you these instructions, beloved, assured that ye also hold the same opinions [as I do]. But I guard you beforehand from those beasts in the shape of men, whom you must not only not receive, but if it is possible, not even meet with;<sup>27</sup> only you must pray to God for them, if by any means they may be brought to repentance, which, however, will be very difficult. Yet Jesus Christ, who is our true life, has the power of [effecting] this.<sup>28</sup>*

Ignatius in chapter 5 identifies the error from which they were to flee as “*not confessing that [Jesus] was truly possessed of a body.*” Again in chapter 7, speaking of those who “*are ashamed of the cross, mock at the passion, and make a jest of the resurrection*” he writes:

*It is fitting, therefore, that ye should keep aloof from such persons, and neither in private nor in public to talk with them; but to give heed to the law, and the prophets, and to those who have preached to you the word of salvation. But flee from all abominable heresies, and those that cause schism, as the beginning of evils.*

Note also this gem from Ignatius’ Epistle to the Philadelphians, chapter 2:

*Wherefore, as children of the light and truth, avoid the dividing of your unity, and the wicked doctrines of the heretics, from whom ‘a defiling influence has gone forth into all the earth.’ But where the shepherd is, there do ye as sheep follow. For there are many wolves in sheep’s clothing, who, by means of a pernicious pleasure, carry captive those that are running towards God; but in your unity they shall have no place.*

Not only does Ignatius include here the false teachers themselves, but also all who follow them in their error:

*... but as many as fall away from him, and embrace communion with the accursed, these shall be cut off along with them. ... Brethren, be not deceived. If any man follows him that separates from the truth, he shall not inherit the kingdom of God; and if any man does not stand aloof from the preacher of falsehood, he shall be condemned to hell ...*

The motivation here is clearly love for the sinner, for Ignatius goes on:

*I therefore exhort you in the Lord to receive with all tenderness those that repent and return to the unity of the Church, that through your kindness and forbearance they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, and becoming worthy of Jesus Christ, may obtain eternal salvation in the kingdom of Christ.*

Permit one more key passage from Ignatius’ Letter to the Philadelphians, chapter 3:

*If any one walks according to a strange opinion, he is not of Christ, nor a partaker of His passion; but is a fox, a destroyer of the vineyard of Christ. Have no fellowship with such a man, lest ye perish along with him, even should he be thy father, thy son, thy brother, or a member of thy family. ... I do not mean that you should beat them or persecute them, as do the Gentiles “that know not the Lord and God”; but that you should regard them as your enemies, and separate yourselves from them, while yet you admonish them, and exhort them to repentance, if it may be they will hear, if it may be they will submit themselves. For our God is a lover of mankind, and “will have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”*

What a powerful and clear exposé of how and why fellowship was—and is—to be practiced in the Church. The proper regard for those who teach error is further pointed out in Ignatius’ Letter to the Ephesians when he tells his readers to “*avoid ... those who hold opinions contrary to the doctrine of Christ ... as ye would wild beasts ... they labor under an incurable disease.*”<sup>29</sup>

Examples from the Fathers are limited only by space in this paper. Suffice it to say that the earliest Church Fathers were by all evidence one with our conservative position on church fellowship. Consider also the clear and simple witness of the evolving and ever widening creeds. To the Church Fathers, a simple “I believe in Jesus” was quite obviously not sufficient for the determination of true and complete agreement. Nor would they allow a man to hide in the crowd with a “we believe ...” Always it was “I believe ...” The basis for fellowship was specific, and the constituent part of that fellowship was the individual.

### **Part III - Lessons from Scripture and History**

Two distant beacons stand in the mists of history as orthodox positions on the question of church fellowship: the “more sure witness” of Holy Writ, and the “less sure witness” of the Early Church Fathers. A third could be added in the witness of the orthodox Reformation Fathers speaking through the Book of Concord. How encouraging to find that we stand in line with all three. Yet how foolish to forget that where there are beacons, there are also dangers. On the one hand are the rocks of sectarianism that can dash a church body to pieces with factions, schisms, and endless quarrels over words. On the other is the corruption that will rot our church body from within if we fail to separate from those who truly are not one with us in doctrine and practice. We might also list a third danger, that of dead orthodoxy. Though we do all things “right,” but do not act out of love for our Savior, love for the truth, love for the cross, and love for neighbor, then too we have made shipwreck of our faith and have turned to a “different gospel.”

One of the most beautiful descriptions of the life of the Christian and the Christian community is found in the Epistle to Diognetus, the Fifth Chapter:

*For the Christians are distinguished from other men neither by country, nor language, nor the customs which they observe. For they neither inhabit cities of their own, nor employ a peculiar form of speech, nor lead a life which is marked out by any singularity. The course of conduct which they follow has not been devised by any speculation or deliberation of inquisitive men; nor do they, like some, proclaim themselves the advocates of any merely human doctrines. But, inhabiting Greek as well as barbarian cities, according as the lot of each of them has determined, and following the customs of the natives in respect to clothing, food, and the rest of their ordinary conduct, they display to us their wonderful and confessedly striking method of life. They dwell in their own countries, but simply as sojourners. As citizens, they share in all things with others, and yet endure all things as if foreigners. Every foreign land is to them as their native country, and every land of their birth as a land of strangers. They marry, as do all [others]; they beget children; but they do not destroy their offspring. They have a common table, but not a common bed. They are in the flesh, but they do not live after the flesh. They pass their days on earth, but they are citizens of heaven. They obey the prescribed laws, and at the same time surpass the laws by their lives. They love all men, and are persecuted by all. They are unknown and condemned; they are put to death, and restored to life. They are poor, yet make many rich; they are in lack of all things, and yet abound in all; they are dishonored, and yet in their very dishonor are glorified. They are evil spoken of, and yet are justified; they are reviled, and bless; they are insulted, and repay the insult with honor; they do good, yet are punished as evil-doers. When punished, they rejoice as if quickened into life; they are assailed by the Jews as foreigners, and are persecuted by the Greeks; yet those who hate them are unable to assign any reason for their hatred.*

*To sum up all in one word-what the soul is in the body, that (is what) Christians are in the world. The soul is dispersed through all the members of the body, and Christians are scattered through all the cities of the world. The soul dwells in the body, yet is not of the body; and Christians dwell in the world, yet are not of the world. The invisible soul is guarded by the visible body, and Christians are known indeed to be in the world, but their godliness remains invisible. The flesh hates the soul, and wars against it, though itself suffering no injury, because it is prevented from enjoying pleasures; the world also hates the Christians, though in nowise injured, because they abjure pleasures. The soul loves the flesh that hates it, and [loves also] the members; Christians likewise love those that hate them. The soul is imprisoned in the body, yet preserves that very body; and Christians are confined in the world as in a prison, and yet they are the preservers of the world. The immortal soul dwells in a mortal tabernacle; and Christians dwell as sojourners in corruptible [bodies], looking for an incorruptible dwelling in the heavens. The soul, when but ill-provided with food and drink, becomes better; in like manner, the Christians, though subjected day by day to punishment, increase the more in number. God has assigned them this illustrious position, which it were unlawful for them to forsake.*

Oh that every one of God’s children might live such lives of harmony and love; in the world, but not of the world; in perfect harmony with each other. Sin and Satan have perverted God’s holy plan for his Church. As a result we must separate from those who continue to live and teach contrary to the doctrines we have learned. What a tragic mistake, however, if we do not separate from the heterodox

and unrepentant *for all the right reasons*. So also we were reminded during a Special CLC Pastoral Conference in 1982:

*If we are reconciled to God through the substitutionary death of our Lord, we should be separate from the unclean thing whatever form or shape it may take. That is the separation FROM, the negative! The correlate to that is separation UNTO. That is the part that is so frequently forgotten and so neglected among us... Separation FROM in order that there might be separation UNTO! The separation UNTO is not a postscript or an after-thought, but the climax! So frequently the negative aspects of fellowship, the avoiding, the coming out, the having no company with are stressed with such intensity and with such repetitiveness that the whole point and reason for the separation is lost. Separation FROM has meaning and purpose only when it leads to and is consummated with a more intimate, a stronger, and more vital Father - sons and daughters relationship: 'I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.' 2 Corinthians 6:17-18 ...What we are against, we must be against solely and alone because we are for the Lord Jesus and His precious gospel. The accent must be on the positive, for we have been called to preach Christ crucified. If it isn't, we may have won the battle but lost the war. What is at stake is whether we remain an evangelical church or become just another sect.<sup>30</sup>*

Thus the bond of fellowship among like-minded Christians ought to be at least as strong as is the wall of separation we erect against those who are not in agreement with us.<sup>31</sup> God grant that we cling ever more tightly to those who are our true brothers and sisters, as did those early Christians, and share with all the saints to the fullest the precious gift of Christian fellowship we have been given.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Matthew 10:16-17a (NKJV).

<sup>2</sup> Including at least the Post-Apostolic Ante-Nicene church fathers (the first third of the period that extends up to AD 325). Part II of this paper will expand on this position.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 9:11-13; Mark 2:16-17; Luke 15:1-2.

<sup>4</sup> James and John were not cast out for their prideful desire to be first, and in John 8:7, the account of the woman caught in adultery, Jesus said, "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first." And again, when all had left, he said, "Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you."

<sup>5</sup> Yet in the account of the woman caught in adultery Jesus went on to say to the her, "Go and sin no more." Cf. also Jesus' separation from the Scribes and Pharisees and other false teachers of his day.

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 16:6,12 (NKJV).

<sup>7</sup> Galatians 5:9 (NKJV).

<sup>8</sup> "Encouraging the Positive Aspects of Church Fellowship," by James Albrecht. Written for the CLC General Pastoral Conference in Eau Claire, WI. June 22-24, 1993 (p.6), published in *Journal of Theology*, 33:4 (December 1993), 2-13.

<sup>9</sup> Romans 13:11-12; 1 Thessalonians 4:15ff.; Revelation 1:3. But see also 2 Thessalonians 2:3ff.

<sup>10</sup> Matthew 7:15 (NKJV).

<sup>11</sup> Mark 9:39-40 (NKJV).

<sup>12</sup> Mark 9:42 (NKJV).

<sup>13</sup> 2 Timothy 2:17-18 (NKJV).

<sup>14</sup> Galatians 2:9.

<sup>15</sup> "Schismatism" is the sin of refusing or severing fellowship for non-scriptural reasons.

<sup>16</sup> Historical Introduction to the Book of Concord, by F. Bente. Concordia Publishing House (p. 13).

<sup>17</sup> This group is often referred to as the Apostolic Fathers, the earliest writers among the Ante-Nicene Fathers.

<sup>18</sup> These works include: The First (and Second) Epistles of Clement to the Corinthians, The

Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians, The Epistles of Ignatius to the Ephesians, to the Magnesians, to the Romans, to the Philadelphians, to the Smyrnaeans, Ignatius' Epistle to Polycarp, Didache, The Epistle of Barnabas, The Encyclical Epistle of the Church at Smyrna, The Epistle to Diognetus, The First and Second Apology of Justin Martyr, and the five Books Against Heresies by Irenaeus.

<sup>19</sup> The earliest "seminaries" were formed when Apostle-trained men took upon themselves the instruction of other qualified candidates. Thus Pothinus and Irenaeus studied under Polycarp who, together with Ignatius, is widely believed to have studied under the Apostle John.

<sup>20</sup> The so-called "Second Epistle of Clement" is rank heresy and is obviously not from the same pen as the First Epistle. This position seems to have been almost universally adopted by those who study early Church writings. Also, in the Fifth Chapter of his Epistle to the Philippians, Polycarp does exhort the reader to be "subject to the presbyters and deacons, as unto God and Christ." This, however, differs greatly from "obey your bishop."

<sup>21</sup> All quotes from the Church Fathers were taken from translations found on one of two web sites: <http://ccel.wheaton.edu/fathers> or <http://www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/christian-history.html>

<sup>22</sup> From J. I. Packer's Historical and Theological Introduction to Martin Luther's *Bondage of the Will* (p. 43).

<sup>23</sup> Note that this is not the Barnabas that accompanied Paul on his missionary journeys. Cf. his biography in Appendix A.

<sup>24</sup> The Epistle of Barnabas (ch. 19).

<sup>25</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:12-13 (NKJV).

<sup>26</sup> Epistle of Ignatius to Polycarp (ch. 6).

<sup>27</sup> The "Longer Version" translation of this verse has, "...from whom you must not only turn away, but even flee from them."

<sup>28</sup> Epistle of Ignatius to the Smyrnaeans (ch. 4).

<sup>29</sup> The Epistle of Ignatius to the Ephesians (ch. 7).

<sup>30</sup> "How The Apostle Paul Dealt With Error and Errorists in the Corinthian Congregation, With Special Emphasis on the Fellowship Passages," a Special CLC Pastoral Conference Paper from January, 1982, by Paul F. Nolting (pp. 9 and 12).

<sup>31</sup> Werner Elert in *Eucharist and Church Fellowship* writes, "The motive that underlies and prompts (*koinonia*) is *agape* or more specifically "brotherly love" (Rom. 12:10; 1 Thess. 4:9; Heb. 13:1). The *koinonia* is not merely being with one another, but also for one another, for all the members of the congregation...The brother is not to be harmed ...not to be taken advantage of in business ... nor to be allowed to suffer want ...let alone to be hated. "Brothers" and "saints" are interchangeable names for the Christians. They greet one another with the holy kiss. The strength of their ties with one another is matched by the strength of the boundary they draw to the outside ...One is to throw in one's lot with those who fear the Lord, consider their common good, and daily visit the saints face to face" (p. 66).

## **Appendix A - Short Biographies of Several Early Church Fathers**

### **Clement of Rome**

The author of *First Clement* or *The First Letter of Clement to the Corinthians*, he is believed to have been born about AD 30 and to have died about AD 100. In his Letter he makes reference to a personal association with the Apostle Paul, which has led many to believe that he is the same Clement mentioned by Paul in Philippians 4:3. Extant evidence makes this seem likely. Other works attributed to Clement, such as *Second Clement*, are undoubtedly spurious. Many believe Clement was a Roman gentile. It also seems clear that he served with Linus and Cletus as presbyters in Rome. When these two men were martyred, Clement ascended to the office of Bishop of Rome. He is believed to have died peacefully not long after writing his Letter to the Corinthians.

### **Barnabas**

This "Barnabas" is not to be confused with the faithful Barnabas who accompanied Paul on his missionary journeys. This man was evidently an Alexandrian Jew who lived during the times of Trajan and Hadrian. The single date ascribed to him is AD 100. Unlike the former Barnabas, this man

turned again to the same Judaizing errors first discovered and repudiated by the Apostle Paul.

### **Ignatius**

(AD 30-107) There is an unsubstantiated report from antiquity that this same Ignatius is the youth placed by Jesus himself into the midst of the disciples in order to teach them a lesson about humility. Whether true or not, it seems certain that Ignatius served for many years as the Bishop of Antioch, and that together with Polycarp he studied under the Apostle John. Ignatius is well known for his forceful style of writing, and for his colorful images: “Find time to pray without ceasing.” “Every wound is not healed with the same remedy.” “The times demand thee, as pilots the haven.” “Stand like a beaten anvil.” “Consider the times: look for Him who is above time.” Ignatius was so eager to be martyred, he begged the Christians in Rome not to prevent it.

### **Polycarp**

(AD 60-146 ) Polycarp, who together with Ignatius studied under the Apostle John, served for many years as the Bishop of Smyrna. He was eventually martyred there at the age of 86 when he was burned alive. He is well known for his rebuke of Marcion and defense of the truth. His martyrdom is recorded in the Encyclical Epistle to the Church in Smyrna.

### **Justin Martyr**

(AD 110-165) A convert from paganism, Justin Martyr is probably the greatest early apologist. He was a gentile born in Samaria. Greatly impressed with wisdom and logic from his youth, he studied the great philosophers of his day, including Plato and Aristotle. He was thus prepared for his later role as apologist for the Christian Church. His First Apology is an extremely skillful attempt to remove the prejudice and misunderstanding concerning Christianity. As can be expected from his name, Justin was martyred in Rome about AD 165.

### **Irenaeus**

(AD 120-202) Irenaeus studied under Polycarp and later served as Bishop of Lyons in AD 177. His writings were directed against the heresies of the Gnostics. He fought valiantly against the rising tide of error, but he himself did not remain untouched by it. He was martyred in AD 202 during the slaughter that also claimed several thousand members of his flock.

## **Appendix B - The Value of the Study of the Church Fathers**

[AD 100-200] The Apostolic Fathers are here understood as filling up the second century of our era. ...Those were times of heroism, not of words; an age, not of writers, but of soldiers; not of talkers, but of sufferers. Curiosity is baffled, but faith and love are fed by these scanty relics of primitive antiquity. Yet may we well be grateful for what we have. These writings come down to us as the earliest response of converted nations to the testimony of Jesus. They are primary evidences of the Canon and the credibility of the New Testament. Disappointment may be the first emotion of the student who comes down from the mount where he has dwelt in the tabernacles of evangelists and apostles: for these disciples are confessedly inferior to the masters; they speak with the voices of infirm and fallible men, and not like the New Testament writers, with the fiery tongues of the Holy Ghost. Yet the thoughtful and loving spirit soon learns their exceeding value. For who does not close the records of St. Luke with longing; to get at least a glimpse of the further history of the progress of the Gospel? What of the Church when its founders were fallen asleep? Was the Good Shepherd “always” with His little flock, according to His promise? Was the Blessed Comforter felt in His presence amid the fires of persecution? Was the Spirit of Truth really able to guide the faithful into all truth, and to keep them in the truth?

And what had become of the disciples who were the first-fruits of the apostolic ministry? St. Paul had said, “The same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.” How was this injunction realized? St. Peter’s touching words come to mind, “I will endeavor that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance.” Was this endeavor successfully carried out? To these natural and pious inquiries, the Apostolic Fathers, though we have a few

specimens only of their fidelity, give an emphatic reply. If the cold-hearted and critical find no harm in the simple, childlike faith which they exhibit, ennobled though it be by heroic devotion to the Master, we need not marvel. Such would probably object: "They teach me nothing; I do not relish their multiplied citations from Scripture." The answer is, "If you are familiar with Scripture, you owe it largely to these primitive witnesses to its Canon and its spirit. By their testimony we detect what is spurious, and we identify what is real. Is it nothing to find that your Bible is their Bible, your faith their faith, your Savior their Savior, your God their God? "Let us reflect also, that, when copies of the entire Scriptures were rare and costly, these citations were "words fitly spoken, apples of gold in pictures of silver." We are taught by them also that they obeyed the apostles precept, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing," etc. Thus they reflect the apostolic care that men should be raised up able to teach others also.

Their very mistakes enable us to attach a higher value to the superiority of inspired writers. They were not wiser than the naturalists of their day who taught them the history of the Phoenix and other fables; but nothing of this sort is found in Scripture. The Fathers are inferior in kind as well as in degree; yet their words are lingering echoes of those whose words were spoken "as the Spirit gave them utterance." They are monuments of the power of the Gospel. They were made out of such material as St. Paul describes when he says, "Such were some of you." But for Christ, they would have been worshippers of personified Lust and Hate, and of every crime. They would have lived for "bread and circus-shows." Yet to the contemporaries of a Juvenal they taught the Decalogue and the Sermon on the Mount. Among such beasts in human form they reared the sacred home; they created the Christian family; they gave new and holy meanings to the names of wife and mother; they imparted ideas unknown before of the dignity of man as they infused an atmosphere of benevolence and love; they bestowed the elements of liberty chastened by law; they sanctified human society by proclaiming the universal brotherhood of redeemed man. As we read the Apostolic Fathers, we comprehend, in short, the meaning of St. Paul when he said prophetically, what men were slow to believe, "The foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.... But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to naught things that are."

A. Cleveland Coxe. December, 1884

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The following Web Sites provided the vast majority of the material on the Church Fathers used in this paper:

Early Church Fathers Web Site: <http://ccel.wheaton.edu/fathers/>

The Institute for Christian Leadership: <http://www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/christian-history.html>

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## **The Exercise Of Brotherly Fellowship In The Waning Days Of The Church Imitant.**

*Mark Gullerud*

Blest be the tie that binds  
Our hearts in Christian love;  
The fellowship of kindred minds  
Is like to that above.  
(TLH, 464:1)

The delightful message found in this opening stanza of Hymn 464 is not expressing fanciful thoughts that are dreamlike, unrealistic, and unattainable in this world's life. While there are many church groups these days which think the contrary and therefore have been willing to compromise God's Word of truth in order to settle for a fellowship of disagreeing religious minds, still God the Holy Spirit certainly has and will continue to bless God's faithful people with that special union of Christian likemindedness and mutual Christian love.

By the grace and mercies of God, the fellowship of the Church of the Lutheran Confession was originally established on the basis of complete agreement in the teachings of God's Word, and with God's help the brethren have zealously sought to preserve this blessed unity these past 38 years. Each generation has diligently endeavored to pass on the torch to the next generation through a careful indoctrination in the Word of God. By the gracious working of God, our church body has now come to the third generation of Christian witnesses who are concerned about proclaiming the pure Word of God. In this present world, with the many contrary religious voices being sounded and man-made teachings being promoted both far and wide, it is a great blessing of God to be able to attend worship services in any of our churches and hear a Bible-based gospel message that is true to the Word of God, for our children to attend Christian schools in our midst where the teachings of God's Word are faithfully taught, or to pick up any of our church publications and find Bible-oriented articles that are faithful presentations of divine teachings.

The apostle John in his first epistle reminds us of how it is that such a Christian fellowship of likemindedness has been made possible as he writes:

*That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life--the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us--that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write to you that your joy may be full. This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. (1:1-7)*

It is through the inspired record of Holy Scriptures that God the Holy Spirit enables us to be united together in a blessed fellowship with God and with one another. The testimony of the holy writers makes known to us "*the Word of life,*" that is, the Incarnate Word - Jesus Christ Who as our Lord and Savior has redeemed us unto God through the shedding of His precious blood and has revealed to us the message of reconciliation. As we are led by the Spirit of God to walk by faith in the light of God's saving word, we enjoy a wondrous fellowship with God and with each other.

Where the Word of Christ lives and reigns in the hearts of believers, there will also be found



spiritual life which manifests itself in the ways of Christian love. This greatest of all spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 13:13), namely Christian love, is not simply an emotion or feeling, but is a spirit of heart that involves activity of words and actions. Consider the supreme example of this found in the heavenly Father when it is said of Him, “*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life*” (John 3:16). The apostle Paul writes in 1 Corinthians of how indispensable Christian love is in the life and work of the believer which includes his relationship with fellow believers in the Christian fellowship. He declares, “*Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing*” (13:1-3).

The precept of loving one’s neighbor is an old one that goes back to the beginning of human history. However, in regard to followers of Jesus Christ, there is a newness about the command to love one another. Jesus spoke of this when He said to His disciples, “*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another*” (John 13:34,35). The newness of the command consists in this, that believers, in whose hearts the love of God is at work, are enabled to show forth a reciprocal, mutual love for each other. This, however, could not be said of all people in the world at large, because the many unbelievers do not possess the gift of Christian love in their hearts. This reciprocal, mutual love that children of God have and show to each other is therefore a distinguishing feature that sets them apart from the unbelieving world and serves to identify them as disciples of Christ. And this reciprocal, mutual love, which springs from faith in the saving truths of Jesus Christ, is a spiritual glue that bonds Christians together in a brotherly fellowship.

In what has been stated in the essay thus far, we are reminded that a brotherly Christian fellowship is established through God’s Word of truth, and is exercised in mutual Christian love.

## I

The assigned title of the essay “THE EXERCISE OF BROTHERLY FELLOWSHIP IN THE WANING DAYS OF THE CHURCH MILITANT” is intended, as I understand it, to focus our attention on the spiritual struggles to exercise brotherly fellowship in the latter times of this evil world. The term “Church Militant,” which refers to the Christian church on earth until the end of time, reminds us of the harsh reality that so long as this world endures, the Christian fellowship will continue to be under attack both from without and from within. In his textbook, *A Summary of Christian Doctrine*, Edward Koehler identifies those enemies as he writes, “The Church militant is so called, because here on earth Christians wage a spiritual war, or battle, against the devil (Eph. 6:10,11), the world (1 John 5:4), and their flesh (Gal. 5:17; 1 Cor. 9:26,27)” (238). From what we learn in Scripture, these spiritual assaults upon the Christian fellowship will increase and intensify as we draw ever closer to the end of the world (cf. 1 Tim. 4:1-3; 2 Tim. 3:1-7; Rev. 20:3).

Holy Scripture states concerning our adversary the devil, that he is constantly roaming about seeking to spiritually devour human souls (1 Pet. 5:8), for whom Jesus shed His precious blood to save. This archenemy would like nothing better than to divide and separate Christians from one another and finally from their Savior God. Throughout the New Testament era, the devil has employed the tactic of persecution against the Christian church in order to divide and conquer. In the face of this, Christian brethren have lovingly exercised brotherly fellowship by comforting, encouraging, and exhorting one another to look ever to Jesus, the author and finisher of their faith, so that with the Lord’s help they might patiently endure and persevere in the faith (Heb. 12:1,2). In response to such brotherly help, children of God have been prompted to continue to listen to the voice of their Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ, and to follow after Him in faith. Through the gracious working of the Lord then, instead of the devil being successful in severing the bond of fellowship that believers enjoy with God and with each other, children of God have been drawn ever closer to the Lord and to their Christian brethren (John 10:27-29).

Satan, the great deceiver, has also sought to disrupt and destroy the Christian fellowship by fostering the introduction, toleration, and promotion of false doctrine in the church. Being deluded by

his cunning lies and deceptions, there are many in our day who say that it is not necessary nor is it brotherly to expect there to be total agreement in the teachings of God in order for individuals to be united together in Christian fellowship. Working with this flawed rationale, in recent times different denominations have entered into full fellowship relations with one another, even though they officially hold to divergent beliefs. Another example of people disregarding the need for doctrinal unity in order to have fellowship relations, is the popular Promise Keepers organization which cuts across denominational lines. What such people fail to realize is that false teachings cause divisions and offenses in the fellowship (cf. Rom. 16:17), whereas the light of God's precious truths unites believers in the Lord's Church. Therefore we find the apostle Paul exhorting Christians in his first letter to the Corinthians, "*Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment*" (1:10).

Due to the human frailties that are ever present in us, there are times that we can unwittingly serve as agents of the devil, as did the apostle Peter (Matt. 16:21-23), whenever we would unintentionally introduce or embrace an idea or a practice that is inconsistent with Holy Scripture. On account of this, over the years our church body has had a number of religious controversies to contend with, such as the Kingdom of God Controversy, the AAL/LB Controversy, the Third Use of the Law Controversy, the Polygamy Controversy, the Doctrine of the Call Controversy, and in more recent times the Self-Love Controversy and the American Legion Controversy.

In regard to such spiritual struggles, we can say with absolute certainty that it was, is, and ever shall be the hope of the devil that such kinds of controversies would serve to divide and destroy our fellowship with one another and ultimately with God. If it had not been for the gracious help of God which enabled the brethren to address and to resolve such kinds of issues in a brotherly fashion, that is, in a Scriptural, loving, patient, and caring way, our cherished fellowship would have long ago been dissolved. And yet, instead of the controversies driving us apart, the process that was employed in resolving the issues served to strengthen our Christian bond in Christ Jesus. For in wrestling with these issues, the brethren have had to dig ever more deeply into the Word of God to learn of the Lord's divine counsel in such things. And through their use of the Word of God, the Holy Spirit has blessed the brethren with spiritual growth so that the various controversies could be resolved and the fellowship preserved and strengthened.

How was this achieved? Let me begin by listing some of the unbrotherly kinds of ways that could not and did not contribute to the resolution of the controversies. When controversies arise within a fellowship, it is not helpful for brethren to divide themselves up into religious factions wherein they would have a "we" against "they" mentality, and then proceed to try to bolster their side by meeting, discussing, and circulating materials only with those in their own faction. It is neither brotherly nor helpful to carry on a war of words, sounding a battle cry by writing in public religious newspapers that are widely distributed, and by writing in such a way that personal attacks are leveled against the perceived foe in one's own church body. It is unwise and unbrotherly for individuals to be quick to charge brethren with heresy and to be precipitous in severing fellowship with individuals, congregations, or a church body, before adequate time and opportunity have been given to study and discuss jointly, prayerfully, and thoroughly, and then to take a stand on a given issue. It is counterproductive if when joint meetings of the brethren are held, individuals are unwilling to give careful and thoughtful consideration in the light of Holy Scripture to a perspective that may be different from their own, but rather doggedly defend their position even though unbeknownst to them, they may be mistaken. And controversies are not properly handled by allowing an exposed faulty teaching or practice to remain in the fellowship, for such leaven is to be rejected and removed in a forthright, loving, timely, and evangelical manner. Looking back on our church body's history in order to observe how controversies were handled in our midst, it is my understanding that they were resolved in a God-pleasing manner. This involved the brethren meeting together, praying together, studying the Word of God together, and discussing the issues together. When joint discussions were held, the effort was made to be quick to listen and slow to speak, and when speaking to one another, to do so in a respectful and loving way. Since controversies in our church body have not always been so easily or so quickly resolved, there has been a need for adequate time to be given, and patience and

perseverance to be exercised. But then, after due consideration was given to the various issues at hand, a position was taken based upon the Word of God, and anything that was contrary to that Scriptural position was clearly rejected. In and through it all, it has been the Lord God working through His Word of grace and truth who has made it possible for controversies in our midst to be resolved in a God-pleasing manner, and thus true Christian unity has been preserved. While in the midst of these various controversies, were there any words spoken or any manner of behavior engaged in that was unbrotherly? Most likely so. Yet, in spite of the human weaknesses and human foibles, the Lord in His mercy enabled the brethren to overcome them for the good of the fellowship and for the glory of God. In regard to treating one another in a Christian way in the face of human weaknesses in order to preserve the unity of the Spirit, we find the apostle Paul writing these words of exhortation, “I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with long-suffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:1-3).

We thank God for the church fathers in our synod whom the Lord used as His instruments in preserving that blessed unity. I would like to draw your attention to a convention essay, which was delivered in our fellowship 30 years ago, that has a direct bearing on the present topic before this convention. The essay was “THE VIRTUE OF CHRISTIAN SOBRIETY,” and its presenter was Professor Egbert Schaller. The essayist led the convention assembly through a Biblical study of Christian sobriety, the virtue of which is so very needful if Christian brethren are to treat and to speak to one another in a brotherly manner.

Christian sobriety is identified in 1 Peter 5:8 as being important in battling the devil, who is roaming about seeking whom he may devour. It is identified as a virtue that is most needful in the latter days of this world (1 Pet. 4:7). It is listed as one of the qualifications for a bishop (or a pastor) in his being able to carry out his public ministry (1 Tim.3:2). Christian sobriety is also said to be needful for all Christians in serving in their respective stations in life, whether they are young men or old men (Titus 2:2), and whether they are young women or old women (Titus 2:4-5).

Professor Schaller pointed out in his essay that the virtue of sobriety involves having a stable and well-balanced spirit, and possessing wise judgment so as to avoid the kind of speech and action that tends to be extreme in one way or another. He stated concerning the Biblical use of the word “sober”:  
“The Holy Spirit employs it to call upon Christians to be free from every form of mental and spiritual drunkenness, from excess, inordinate passion, rashness, confusion, and thus always to be well-balanced, self-controlled” (4). The essayist drew attention to the fact that the New Testament Greek word for spiritual soberness (σωφρων) is closely related to another Greek word (σωζω) that has the meaning “to save.” Jesus Christ, who came “to seek and to save that which was lost,” was cited as a prime example of sobermindedness. Every aspect of Jesus’ life, work, and words had as its chief most purpose the saving of mankind. The essayist then said of Jesus that “He addressed himself, with all His powers and all his qualities, to saving them (sinful mankind). This determined action and reaction. He sized up every event, every act of others, every word and occasion from this posture. He did not swing wildly to and fro in His labors, His feelings, His expressions. Every task that lay at hand He discharged by fashioning impulse and response to meet it in a saving manner” (7). Since our Lord desires for us to share this same mind with Him (Phil. 2:5), the words and actions in our lives are ever to have a saving purpose behind them. Where this is found to be the case, our speech to and our treatment of our fellow Christians would most certainly be in a brotherly manner.

Permit me to quote a more lengthy section from Professor Schaller’s paper where he makes specific practical applications in exercising the Christian virtue of sobriety within the Christian fellowship:

But let us hasten on to another field that is perhaps more immediately related to the interests of a church convention. We have been reminded often enough of the fact that our church body was born out of a struggle for preservation of the Truth, and in much agony of spirit. Issuing from a womb agitated by a necessary disruption of fellowship and struggling to place its feet squarely upon the true foundation, it was but natural that our church should experience some of the distress that the weakness of human nature inflicts in such a situation. There would be, there was and is, a tendency of the pendulum to make wide and erratic swings from the perpendicular. We

have been in danger, on the one hand, of an immoderate super-orthodoxy which goes beyond faithfulness to the inspired Word by shouting “heresy” and threatening or claiming disruption of fellowship relations if a doctrinal sentence is uttered which may through inadvertence or carelessness not have the proper syntax or use traditional terminology. Coupled with this is the inclination to a rigorous demand for uniformity of action, sometimes extreme in concept, in difficult areas such as church-state relations. That such firmness is intended as the expression of a loyal resolve to permit no infringement of the majesty and sanctity of the inspired Word we have no reason to doubt. The question is whether we always exercise our devotion to the Truth under the rule of Christian sobriety. We need to be reminded of the significant fact that the majesty and authority of the Word of God needs no protection from us; it is well able to take care of itself and has done so throughout the ages. It will accomplish that which its author pleases, with or without any one of us. It comes into jeopardy only when we use it otherwise than for its saving power; when we employ the Gospel as though it were law and wield the Law as a club upon the hearts of God’s children; when we treat the Word, not as a precious trust but as a private preserve where all are adjudged trespassers who do not walk in absolute and slavish conformity with us. Godly soberness of mind and spirit will try the spirits indeed, whether they be of God; but it will do so in a context of healing and saving. We need its moderation, which is not weakness but true strength.

There is another direction in which the pendulum may swing; and the inherent danger of this is no less serious. It arises if we become correspondingly lax and tired of holding the line; if we forget the rock from which we were hewn and begin to ask whether the cause is worth the struggle. Have we perhaps heard voices among us suggesting that we must modify our attitude and our insistence upon position lest we lapse into obstinacy or vindictiveness? There are those in our fellowship who have been moved to charge the CLC with just these sins and have expressed doubts as to the quality of its leadership. Here too the exercise of soberness in judgment is urgently necessary. Such soberness will lead the God-fearing to the conclusion that, while purity of motive may at times have been colored by sinful thoughts, and judgments, even with the best of intentions, may sometimes have been faulty, it would save nothing and help no one were we to let such an awareness of our human frailty induce us to yield one iota of the Truth of God’s Word as upheld in the doctrinal position we confess; nor would it induce the gainsayers to recognize and repent of their error. A sound judgment anchored in the Word knows that health and healing comes with a “right” spirit which offers and heeds Christian admonition in love. Thus sobriety will lead us, on the one hand, to avoid the danger of denying or minimizing our own shortcomings or mistakes, and at the same time to persist firmly in a scripture-directed course of confession and admonition which alone holds promise of a salutary result. (14,15)

To the end that our Christian fellowship might be blessed and the name of God glorified through the virtue of Christian sobriety, the brethren would do well in giving heed to these words of exhortation by the apostle Peter, *“But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins”* (2 Pet. 1:5-9).

## II

Bonded together in the spirit of Christian love, brethren in the Church of the Lutheran Confession have joined their hearts, hands, voices, and varied resources together for the purpose of mutual help and support in their collective lives, as well as for the cause of proclaiming abroad the gospel of Christ. So then, neither the individual Christian nor the individual congregation in our church body is an island unto himself or itself, but is united together with other like-minded Christians as fellow servants. In a brotherly fellowship, we endeavor to be of benefit to one another by helping each other grow in Christian knowledge, faith, and love, by comforting and encouraging one another in difficult and troubled times, and by aiding one another in our joint kingdom work.

In First Corinthians, the Holy Spirit has given the Christian church a divine maxim to follow in its fellowship with the brethren. This maxim is directed particularly to the worship life, but then also

has been employed beneficially in the broader context of joint endeavors in the church. The apostle Paul sets forth this maxim in very short and simple terms as he states, “*Let all things be done decently and in order*” (1 Cor. 14:40). According to this Christian principle, that which is done in the Christian fellowship should be carried out in a decent fashion, that is, in a way that is honorable, respectful, and considerate of others, as opposed to an egotistical, self-serving way. There is also the great need to follow good order in the church life, as opposed to that of having confusion, disorderliness, and chaos.

In the matter of joint church work, we can thank and praise the Lord for the good form and order that our church body has been blessed with over the years. Using sanctified judgment, wisdom, and foresight, the forebears of our synod set up an organizational form with various church representatives both on a local and synodical level, and have carefully laid out a mutually agreed upon order which would enable us to aid one another and to work together in the common cause of upbuilding and spreading the kingdom of God.

A key element in carrying out such joint spiritual endeavors in a brotherly fashion is the spirit of humble service to one another. There is, to be sure, no class system and no room for self-serving egos to be found in the Christian church where one is placed over another as lord and master, and this for the sake of personal aggrandizement. When Jesus washed the feet of the apostles at the last supper in the upper room, He provided them with a wonderful object lesson in serving one another humbly and selflessly. We read of this in the Gospel of John where it says, “*So when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again, He said to them, ‘Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them’*” (John 13:12-17). Whether a Christian holds an office in the church as pastor, professor, teacher, president, councilman, elder, or member of whatever congregational or synodical board, all such have been called to act as servants in the Lord’s church. Of the many fellow Christians who have been called upon to serve in various capacities in our fellowship down through the years, the Lord has graced us with individuals who have conducted themselves as humble servants who were genuinely interested in promoting the general welfare of the Lord’s church. This is a very rare and precious thing in the present church world.

The term ‘world’ in reference to the church at large could also be used in its negative sense of worldliness when speaking of various church groups of today. This is due to the simple fact that the ways of the world have been gradually and steadily creeping into the different denominations and church bodies. The apostle John was speaking of the latter sense of the term ‘world’ when he wrote in his first epistle, “*Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world--the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life--is not of the Father but is of the world*” (1 John 2:16). Examples of worldliness having made inroads in the liberal branch of Christendom are many and various, ranging from issues on human morality to leadership roles in the church and even to the very way in which a person is eternally saved. Concerning the area of our present topic, that of exercising a brotherly fellowship, there would appear to be elements of worldly-mindedness found in relatively conservative religious circles. An example of this is the situation where church leadership has operated and run church affairs just like a CEO would a secular company in the business world. It is quite common to hear of church leaders lording over others, being involved in highhanded dealings, intruding and interfering in areas outside of their sphere of responsibility, handing down ecclesiastical decrees, and resorting to political maneuverings in order to carry out their agenda. May God preserve our fellowship from such worldly ways, for they are disruptive and destructive in a Christian fellowship.

The Christian principle of following good order and decency in the church is not only to be observed by those in leadership roles, but also by the constituency of the church body. If the mutually agreed upon order is to work and serve for the benefit of the brethren, it is necessary for everyone to be willing to abide by that established order in the conducting of church affairs. For example, when a case of church discipline arises in a congregation, good Christian order would dictate that it be dealt with within that local congregation and this according to Holy Scripture (cf. Matt. 18:15-20). It would

be improper and disorderly for an individual to become involved in, interfere with, or sit in judgment of a case of church discipline that is being carried out in a congregation other than his own. If in a given situation a person feels that he/she has been wrongfully dealt with in a congregation or the synod, good Christian order should be followed so as to bring about a God pleasing resolution. To that end, our church body has set up a process of appeal wherein fellow Christians are called upon to be of assistance to one another. The brethren are willing to go to great lengths in order to arrive at a proper resolution, even to the point of bringing the case before the whole church body in convention, if need be. Having a desire to follow good order and possessing a spirit of Christian love, the injured party would be moved to pursue the established appeal process, rather than throwing up his hands in disgust or resorting to the unchristian practice of suing brethren in a civil court of law (1 Cor. 6:1-8). Also, when a given case is under appeal, it would be disorderly for brethren, who are not directly involved in the case, to short circuit the process by disseminating an appeal report without authorization or by appointing oneself as an investigator and judge in the case. Good order and Christian love would rather prompt concerned Christians to have due regard, trust, and confidence in the appointed representatives in the appeal case, and to remember them in their prayers that God would bless their efforts. May the Lord grant us the grace to carry out all things in the church decently and in order for the benefit of our Christian fellowship.

### III

Thus far we have alluded to various ways of the devil and the world which can be very harmful and destructive to the Christian fellowship. The third enemy of the church in this unholy trio, which should never be overlooked or underestimated as to its detrimental effect on the fellowship, is our own sinful flesh. Each and every one of us has this inner enemy to contend with in our daily lives. It is an unholy spirit of heart in us that wars against the new man which God has created in us through Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul speaks of this when he states, "For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish" (Gal 5:17). Out of our sinful heart (Matt. 15:19), can proceed all manner of evil ways in which we become guilty of hurting others and offending our God. Without a doubt, our old Adam can do great damage to our fellowship relations with the brethren and with our Lord. Disruptive ways of the flesh are manifested in a prideful and arrogant spirit which causes a person ever to be finding fault with others, while being unwilling to examine self and admit any personal error or wrongdoing; in a spirit of ill will toward others that can result in harsh and rash words, and vindictive actions; in the practice of evil speech, violating the eighth commandment in spreading around unverified rumors, the loveless exposing of the faults of others, and speaking in an unkind and abrasive way; and not dealing with the brethren in an evangelical spirit.

Because our fleshly nature rears its ugly head each and every day of our lives, just as Martin Luther taught in his catechism, it needs to be drowned in daily contrition and repentance and to die with all its sins and evil desires. And there is also the need for the New Man to daily appear and arise in us so that we might live before God in righteousness and true holiness. We need God's gracious and powerful help through His Word to enable us to put off from ourselves the old ways of the flesh and to put on the new ways of the Spirit of God. The apostle Paul was addressing this important concern in the Christian's life when he exhorted the Christians in Ephesus to "*put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.... Be angry, and do not sin: do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil ... Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you*" (Eph. 4:22-24,26,27,29-32).

The last Bible verse cited here in Ephesians 4 reminds us of how we are also to treat our fellow Christians, being mindful of the fact that they too have sinful flesh and are guilty at times of sinning against us because of it. Earlier in the essay we spoke of Christian love being like spiritual glue that bonds Christians together. Since we each possess a sinful nature that can cause Christian peace and

harmony to be disrupted and even in some cases completely destroyed, it is of paramount importance that we all exercise Christian love toward one another, being understanding, long-suffering, forbearing, patient, and forgiving toward one another in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior. The apostle Paul beautifully brings across this most needful practice, as he writes in his letter to the Colossians, *“Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, long-suffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him”* (Col. 3:12-17).

In the Apology of the Augsburg Confession we find Colossians 3:14 being discussed, as it relates to the need of exercising Christian love in order to preserve harmony in the Christian fellowship:

(Paul) is talking ... about fellowship in the church. He says that love is a bond and unbroken chain linking the many members of the church with one another. Similarly, in all families and communities harmony should be nurtured by mutual aid, for it is not possible to preserve tranquillity unless men cover and forgive certain mistakes in their midst. In the same way Paul commands that there be love in the church to preserve harmony, to bear, if need be, with the crude behavior of the brethren, to cover up minor mistakes, lest the church disintegrate into various schisms and the hatreds, factions, and heresies that arise from such schisms.

For harmony will inevitably disintegrate if bishops impose heavy burdens on the people or have no regard for their weakness. Dissensions also arise when the people judge their clergy's behavior too strictly or despise them because of some minor fault and then seek after some other kinds of doctrine and other clergy. On the other hand, perfection (that is, the integrity of the church) is preserved when the strong bear with the weak, when the people put the best construction on the faults of their clergy, when the bishops take into account the weakness of the people. All the books of the sages are full of these commands of fairness, that in everyday life we should put up with many things for the sake of mutual peace. Paul often enjoins this both here and elsewhere. (Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Art. IV, Justification #232-235 in Tappert, 139,140)

The Apology of the Augsburg Confession also expounds on a similar vein of thought based on 2 Peter 4:8, which reads, “Love covers a multitude of sins.”:

Obviously Peter is talking here about love to the neighbor, for he connects this statement with the commandment of mutual love... Furthermore, this statement about love is taken from Proverbs (10:12), where the antithesis clearly shows what it means: “Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offenses.” It teaches exactly the same thing as Paul's statement in Colossians 3:13, namely, that if any dissensions arise they should be quieted and settled by calmness and forbearance. Dissensions, it says, grow because of hatred, as we often see the greatest tragedies come from the most trifling offenses. Between Gaius Caesar and Pompey certain minor disagreements arose, which would never have brought on civil war if either had yielded the least bit to the other. When each one gave in to his hatred, a major commotion emerged from an insignificant issue. Many heresies have arisen in the church simply from the hatred of the clergy. This text therefore speaks not of one's own sins but of other people's when it says “Love covers all offenses,” namely, other people's offenses and offenses between people. Even though these offenses occur love covers them up, forgives, yields, and does not go to the limit of the law.

Peter does not mean that love merits the forgiveness of sins in relation to God; that in place of Christ the mediator it is our propitiation; or that it regenerates and justifies. He means that in human relations it is not peevish, harsh, or implacable; that it covers up some of the mistakes of its friends; and that it puts the best construction even on the more offensive actions of others, as the common proverb says, “Know, but do not hate, the manners of a friend.” It is not without reason that the apostles speak so often about this duty of love which the philosophers call “leniency.” This virtue is necessary for the preservation of domestic tranquility, which cannot endure unless pastors and churches over-look and forgive many things. (Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Art. IV,

Justification #238,240-243 in Tappert, 140,141)

It is with good reason that the apostle Paul spoke of Christian love as being the greatest of the gifts of the Spirit. And it is a most needful thing in the exercise of brotherly fellowship. In the portion of 1 Corinthians 13 where the apostle Paul speaks of this greatest of all gifts, he continues on in his discussion of it by setting forth wherein true Christian love consists. The Word of our Lord teaches concerning Christian love that it “*suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails*” (13:4-8).

May God be thanked and praised for the precious Christian fellowship that He has blessed our church body with since its beginning. May He mercifully and graciously forgive each of us for Jesus’ sake wherever we have been guilty of thoughts, words, or deeds that do injury and harm to brethren in the fellowship. And working through His Word of grace and truth, may He enable us to grow in Christian knowledge, faith, and love so that we might continue to enjoy that wonderful fellowship with Him and with one another in Christ Jesus.

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### **BOOK REVIEWS**

***Knowing God***, by Dr. James I. Packer. Downers Grove, IL, 60515: InterVarsity Press, © 1973. Paperback, 279 pages.

*Knowing God* is J. I. Packer’s attempt to introduce both the unbeliever and the believer to their God. Packer believes very strongly (and we would agree) that God remains largely a mystery to mankind. There is much we cannot know about our God, but there is also much we can know. *Knowing God* is the author’s attempt to address this problem. The book, published in the United States by InterVarsity, is popular with the various campus ministries around the country. Recently I agreed to review a video series produced by a Reformed organization for youth groups. *Knowing God* made cameo appearances in the videos - always the book dutifully studied by the fine Christian boys and girls while the others were out getting into trouble. The book, which first appeared as a series of article in the *Evangelical Magazine*, has sold well over a million copies. This ought to tell us that this book is being promoted by the Christian community and that we ought at least to be familiar with its content.

I believe that Packer succeeds in doing what he set out to do in *Knowing God*. He sets out to introduce his readers to their God. The problem is that he introduces his readers to God as seen through the eyes of John Calvin. Packer is a Calvinist, and evidence to that fact taints nearly every chapter. In fact, given the wide distribution of this book it might be fairly said that if Calvinism makes some sort of a comeback, then J. I. Packer will probably be lauded in part as its savior. A few examples might be in order. On page 29 he writes, “He (God) knows, and foreknows, all things, and his foreknowledge is foreordination...” John Calvin, the reader will recall, stressed the sovereignty and immutable will of God so strongly that he arrived at double predestination, or election to damnation. So too Packer seems to say on page 79: “Still he (God) shows his freedom and lordship by discriminating between sinners, causing some to hear the gospel while others do not hear it, and moving some of those who hear it to repentance while leaving other in their unbelief.” On page 132 Packer writes, “Only when it is seen that what decides each individual’s destiny is whether or not God resolves to save him from his sins, and that this is a decision which God need not make in any single case, can one begin to grasp the biblical view of grace.”

Yet another product of election to damnation in the mind of John Calvin was the false doctrine of limited atonement (Christ died to pay for sins, but only the sins of those he knew would believe in him). Of interest here is how Packer consistently stops short when quoting 1 John 2:2. Both on page 156 and again on page 181 he stops with “(Jesus Christ) is the propitiation for our sins.” The truncated



passage conveniently omits one of the *sedes* against limited atonement: “and not for ours only but also for the whole world.” There are no variant readings that might warrant this omission. With careful precision Packer limits God’s love to the elect, without acknowledging that God poured out his love in Christ on believer and unbeliever alike in his Son. Page 185: “It is God himself who took the initiative in quenching his own wrath against those whom, despite their ill-desert, he loved and had chosen to save.” Again on page 225: “Those, in other words, whom God eternally resolved to take as sons in his family, alongside his only-begotten – ‘he called...justified...glorified. ’”

In *Knowing God* Dr. Packer also promotes a renumbering of the commandments. His Second Commandment is “You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God.” Dr. Packer believes that all pictures of Christ, as well as all crucifixes and any other church art representing Christ, are a breaking of what he regards as the Second Commandment. (Cf. pp. 43 ff.)

There is much that is good in *Knowing God*. The first half of Chapter Thirteen, for example (which deals with the grace of God) I found to be excellent; as also I thoroughly enjoyed Chapter Sixteen on “Goodness and Severity.” However the material must be sifted so carefully that it excludes this book from my “recommended reading list” for my members. The readers of the *Journal* might also find it interesting that J. I. Packer was the co-author of the Introduction in my copy of Luther’s *Bondage of the Will*. Calvinists, with their emphasis on the sovereignty of God and the immutable will of God, often tout this work of Martin Luther as in complete harmony with their teachings.

***Unlocking The Mysteries of Creation***, by Dennis R. Petersen. Creation Resource Foundation, P.O. Box 570, El Dorado, CA 95623, © 1990. Hardcover, 205 pages, \$22.50.

This book has been around for a while, but it has, regrettably, received little notice. The author himself describes his book on creation as “much different from others you have read. This is intentional.” The book proved true to his word. It is unlike any other book I have seen on creation. Mr. Petersen intended this book to serve “the non-professional ‘layman.’” He did not intend it to “get deep into technical detail.” Having said that, I found very little in the field of Creation vs. Evolution that this fine work did not deal with in a simple and understandable manner. Simply and accurately Mr. Petersen gives insights into such topics as carbon dating, missing links and the fossil record, entropy, biogenesis, and the like. I believe that both pastor and layman would find this to be a valuable resource. The simplicity of the book is its forte. Petersen communicates difficult concepts with simple, easy to understand language. In so doing he *communicates* the truths of creation much more effectively than many other books on the subject. The format is what sets this work apart. There are literally hundreds of diagrams, cartoons, and charts - something on nearly every page. And yet the format is simple, rather than childish.

*Unlocking The Mysteries of Creation* is divided into four sections: The Mysteries Of The Early Earth, The Mysteries Of Evolution, The Mysteries Of Original Man And The Missing Links, And The Mysteries of Ancient Civilization. The book is listed as Volume 1, but I am unaware if there is yet a Volume 2 available.

This book is a find, well worth the \$22.50 price tag. The copy used in this review was purchased at a state home-school convention. It is apparently quite well known among Christian home schoolers. I believe it would serve well as a supplementary science text for grades four and up, as well as a handy Creation reference text for both pastor and layman.

Michael Roehl

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***“Augustus to Constantine” (The Emergence of Christianity in the Roman World)***, by Robert M. Grant. Barnes and Noble, 1996. 325 pages.

The title tells the span of this volume’s contents, which is from AD 14 to 337. Here are some words from the conclusion of the book (311-312): “It may be claimed that the church came to terms

with the world. As it did so, however, the world finally came to terms with the church ... (the church) wanted the right to exist, and it wanted the concomitant rights of freedom of assembly and for propaganda. Toward this goal its apologists asked for justice for Christians, who, they claimed, were like other 'good citizens' of the empire. ... The Christian gospel involved the proclamation of the reality of the one true God and, consequently, absolute rejection of the gods recognized by the Roman state. The Christians regarded worship of these gods, including deified emperors, as idolatry and absolutely refused to participate in it."

And so the record is gone over by Prof. Grant of the battle that went through the hard times of persecution, culminating in Constantine the Christian. Prof Grant certainly understands half of Solomon's proverb, that the horse is made ready for battle, but the victory belongs to the Lord. His book gives very detailed and footnoted reports on the horse's preparation and progress, yet does not acknowledge that God was at work and gave the triumph. Not too far into the book one discovers that Prof. Grant does not take the high view of Scripture. His view of Christianity is of an evolving religion.

Positively speaking, the book does an admirable job of relating the interplay of the church and the empire. The soldiers of the twelfth legion loyal to the pagan emperor and praying to their Jesus for him and victory (90-91), demonstrate the interplay early on. Constantine's efforts in the Donatist and Arian controversies are good to review (235-249), to remind us that the worldly powers, no matter how benign, cannot solve the church's troubles. 'Vicar' and 'diocese' were imperial terms that the church then appropriated. And so the interplay went. He has some good summary sections (253-315), on, for instance: social ethics, property, slavery, sexual matters, war, Christian discipline, creedal formulations, etc. Baptism and the Eucharist are dealt with for about twenty pages. A real asset of this book is the footnote section on each page. It gives citations which would allow one to do a lot of further reading, if one has access to the books cited. One assertion he makes under 'baptism' is (288-289): "Early Christian baptism was always by immersion, at least in New Testament times, and ordinarily this was the later practice." Interesting that he has no citations for this assertion. It is interesting also to see the development from the freedom and latitude allowed by God in establishing offices in apostolic times to the days of Constantine.

One other thing that stands out as one reads is that the proof-reader for Barnes and Noble for this copy slipped up a recognizable number of times.

David Koenig

***The Man Who Created Narnia***, by Michael Coren. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996. Hardcover, 140 pages.

What is the best way to describe C. S. Lewis, who lived from 1898 to 1963? To some he is a student and critic of English literature. To others he is a writer of science fiction. To others he is an apologist for basic Christianity. To others he is an accurate and honest describer of the feelings of love and grief and pain. To Michael Coren he is "the man who created Narnia," that is, the author of seven books of fantasy for children, including *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*.

This reviewer must admit that although he has long been fascinated by the life and writings of C. S. Lewis, he has never read any of the Narnia books. Nevertheless, this well-written biography of Lewis by a Canadian author proved to be interesting reading. It is recommended for those readers who want to know something about Lewis without delving into the complicated mysteries of his personality and relationships with people and the sources of his many writings in so many different areas.

Today Lewis is much more famous than he was in his own time. Many of his writings are still selling very well, and more and more books are being written about him and his writings. In fact, a recent commercial movie, *Shadowlands*, tells the story of his marriage to an American writer, Joy Davidman, in the last decade of his life, her sickness, her recovery, her death, and his grief.

C. S. Lewis was not brought up as a Christian, even though his mother was the daughter of a Protestant clergyman. His childhood was filled with books. After his mother died, he was sent away to a boarding school which he hated. Nevertheless, at this school he became acquainted with the Bible

and the basic teachings of Christianity. He threw all of this away, however, and as a student and soldier and teacher, he professed to be an agnostic.

In 1929, when he was 31 years old, Lewis was converted to Christianity, and he remained faithful in that confession to the end of his life in 1963. He used his literary gifts in the service of Christianity, producing such widely known masterpieces as *The Screwtape Letters* (1942), *Mere Christianity* (1952), *Surprised by Joy* (1955), *Reflections on the Psalms* (1958), *A Grief Observed* (1961), and of course the seven Narnia books (1950-1956). But besides his books for publication, there were hundreds of letters written to many different kinds of people all over the world. In these letters Lewis most often showed himself to be a wise and sympathetic Christian friend.

One of the persons who corresponded with Lewis was an American writer named Joy Davidman, who was having serious marital problems. Eventually her husband left her and ran off with another woman, and the marriage was ended with divorce. Joy made several trips to England with her young sons, met the bachelor Lewis, and they became good friends. In fact, to his surprise, he and Joy became more than friends. They were married, first in a civil ceremony to allow her to remain in England, later in a religious ceremony that took place in a hospital after Joy had been diagnosed as fatally sick with cancer. Amazingly, she recovered to some extent, and she and her husband enjoyed a few months of extreme happiness. "I never thought I would have in my sixties the happiness that passed me by in my twenties" (103), said Lewis. But as great as was their joy, so great was his grief when the cancer returned and she suffered and died.

Coren says: "Lewis wrote about his experiences following the death of his wife in one of the most remarkable books of all time on the subject, a relatively brief work entitled *A Grief Observed*. ... How accurate Lewis is, and how well he describes those feelings many of us have felt" (113-114).

This biography concludes with a brief account of Lewis's last days and death. On the very day of his death another English author died, Aldous Huxley, the agnostic author of *Brave New World*. On that same day President John F. Kennedy was assassinated, and the world paid little attention to the death of C. S. Lewis. "Lewis had written and argued for so long that what was to come was far greater than what we have already known. He did not *think* it was so, he did not *believe* it was so, he *knew* it was so" (123).

Was Lewis a Christian? The evidence indicates that he was. There were inconsistencies in his life, of course, as there are in ours. There were inconsistencies in his teaching as well; we cannot look to him for true doctrine in every detail. In reading this biography, I was most troubled by a statement his biographer made in praise of Lewis. Coren says:

Later in his life, David (one of Joy's two sons - DL) embraced the Judaism that his mother had abandoned for Christianity. It is an interesting insight into Lewis's tolerance toward other religions that he never tried to convert David to Christianity and, in fact, wrote to various Jewish friends of his asking for advice on how to make it easier for David to practice his faith, how to give him a Kosher diet, and so on. It is true to say that at no time in his life did Lewis show any signs of genuine religious bigotry (96-97).

Perhaps this statement tells us more about Coren's faith than about Lewis's faith. Is it religious bigotry to believe that Christianity is the only true religion, that Jesus Christ is our only Savior from sin, and that other religions are leading millions into eternal damnation? Is it religious bigotry or is it love to try to rescue those who are deceived by false religions and pull them out of the fire before it is too late?

I would rather like to believe that Lewis was a true Christian in the sense that Coren himself explains it in this book. He says:

Christians believe that Jesus died for us, his death a sacrifice to God for all the sins that people have committed over the centuries. This belief -- that the son of God should die for all people, including Plain Jack Lewis -- was central to Lewis's life (14).

For those who want to delve more deeply into the life and works of Lewis this biography contains a list of Lewis's main writings as well as a list of some of the many books written about him.

*Civil Government -- God's Other Kingdom*, by Daniel Deutschlander, in the series of *People's*

*Bible Teachings* paperbacks. Milwaukee: Northwestern , 1998. 215 pages.

It is hard for American Christians not to be confused in matters of church-state relationships. For we are living in a society that is becoming more openly immoral and anti-Christian, on the one hand, while at the same time many who profess to be Christians are seeking to overcome this immorality and anti-Christianity by involving the church more actively in politics. The temptation for us, therefore, is either to become more godless and immoral together with society, or to oppose the direction of society by joining the so-called "Christian Right." We need guidance from God's Word to help us avoid both of these temptations.

But you ask: What is wrong with the "Christian Right"? Are they not taking a stand against abortion and homosexuality and divorce and the breakup of the family? Is this not where the church ought to stand in these matters?

Before trying to answer such questions as these, it is good for us to take a careful look at what our God says to us in Scripture. Daniel Deutschlander's book, *Civil Government*, is a helpful review not only of what God's Word says, but also of historical developments in the relationship between church and state since the time our Lord first uttered the words: "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Matt. 22:21).

The first chapter of the book refers to the unique theocracy established by God for His Old Testament people. Deutschlander reminds us: "The government God gave to Israel mixed religious and civil functions to a very high degree" (19) "to meet the needs of that nation at that time" (22). Perhaps at this point Deutschlander could have warned us against the "reconstructionists" of our day who maintain that Christians should work at establishing the Old Testament law of Moses as the law of our nation. What a blunder that would be!

In the second chapter David and Daniel are presented as examples for us to follow. Even though God had anointed David as king of Israel, David did not revolt against Saul's authority as king. Neither did Daniel lead a revolution against the Babylonian or Persian kings; yet he disobeyed their orders when they commanded him to disobey his God.

The next six chapters summarize the New Testament's teaching concerning government and our duties to the government, in contrast with what our Lord teaches us concerning His church. The apostle Paul teaches us in Romans 13: 1-7 what the proper work of government is: to commend the law-abiding and to punish evildoers. It has the right to collect taxes to carry on this work. The instructions Christ gives to His church are entirely different.

Deutschlander asks: "Could government in our day go beyond the judging of criminal behavior to the business of judging souls or the Word of God?" (66). He answers: "Perhaps teachers face this threat more obviously than anyone else" (66). How so? What if the government insists that the Genesis creation account be ridiculed? What if the government insists on the promotion of abortion and homosexual behavior as proper options for its citizens?

On the one hand, Christians need to have their own moral questions answered on the basis of God's Word. So it becomes clear that abortion is murder and that homosexual behavior is sinful. Nevertheless, individual Christians involved in politics need to learn how to convince non-Christians of the rightness or wrongness of actions by means of reason and natural law. Above all, Christians need to realize that the real, genuine inner changes in people's attitudes and motivations can be worked only by the Holy Spirit through the gospel. This is the work of the church, not the government. More than once Deutschlander repeats the sentence: "The state runs on the gasoline of human reason and natural law, not on the water of life in God's Word" (88).

Five chapters are used to present the historical developments from Christ's time to ours. In the East the state dominated the church; in the West the church dominated the state. In both cases the functions of church and state were dangerously entwined.

The proper relationship between church and state reemerged in the time of the Reformation and is stated admirably in the *Augsburg Confession*. Lutherans had great difficulty in maintaining the proper relationship in practice. "Most of them (the Lutheran princes) tried to keep church and state separate. ... They did not always succeed. ... But the goal remained the same. ... The church should preach the gospel and not interfere with the civil government; the government should not use the

sword to force matters of faith and conscience” (142). Calvinists and Catholics, however, used the power of the state to enforce their doctrinal teachings.

Later developments are outlined briefly: the American Revolution, the French Revolution, the role of Napoleon in setting up the state-church systems in Europe, the Prussian Union, the conflicts between communism and capitalism.

The last two chapters discuss current problems in church-state relations in our own country. The First Amendment to the United States Constitution is examined. The difference between the eighteenth century and our own is that now “government dominates in the fields of education on every level, in health and welfare concerns, in life-and-death decisions for the unborn and the old. When government activity so dominates a culture, there is the danger that a secular government can equal a godless society” (173). So, while we ought to rejoice in the religious freedom we still enjoy as Americans, we need to be on guard against increasing governmental involvement in matters having to do with religion. We cannot agree with the “Christian Right” in their efforts to get prayer into the public schools. “It is not the business of the state to teach doctrine. It is not the business of the state to write prayers or organize their recitation. ... We do not want to worship together when there is no unity in the confession of faith and doctrine” (177).

What about state aid to church schools or to parents sending their children to church schools? If government regulation of our schools follows, we are certainly better off without state aid. “Those who imagine such aid comes without a price tag may well be in for a rude surprise. ... We do not want the government to tell our schools what to teach or how to discipline for false doctrine” (185).

The Christian position on church-state matters is rarely heard today. We recommend this book by Deutschlander as a sound presentation of Scriptural principles as well as a helpful guide in dealing with current questions related to church-state matters.

What then is wrong with the “Christian Right” and the “Christian Left”? “Both these groups want, in one way or another, to improve society under the careful direction of the spokesmen for the church” (201). But the church’s main interest and assignment must be “the salvation of souls, not the reformation of society” (193). “The church as church has no direct role to play in the political arena. That is the business of individual Christians carrying out their role as Christian citizens” (195).

We find that Deutschlander’s basic position in these matters is in agreement with the *Brief Statement* of 1932 in its paragraph **Of Church and State**. It is also in agreement with the *Statement of Faith and Purpose* of the Church of the Lutheran Confession, which states in its first article: “We disavow the position that the church as a body is to promote social and political causes and opinions of men. The individual Christian will indeed show the fruits of faith by his concern for social and political causes wherever they present themselves. Our right of existence as a church, however, is limited by our readiness to say with St. Paul that we are ‘determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified’ (1 Cor. 2:2).”

*An Introduction to Mennonite History*, by Cornelius J. Dyck. Third Edition, Scottsdale, Pennsylvania:Herald Press,1993. Paperback, 452 pages.

“It is not right, and I truly grieve, that these miserable folk should be so lamentably murdered, burned, and tormented to death. We should allow everyone to believe as he wills. If his faith be false, he will be sufficiently punished in eternal hell-fire. Why then should we martyr these people also in this world, if their error be in faith alone and they are not guilty of rebellion or opposition to the government?” So wrote Martin Luther (*Luther’s Works*, 40:230) in 1528 in a letter to two pastors with reference to the persons known as Anabaptists or rebaptizers.

What happened to the Anabaptists of Luther’s time? Many, of course, were martyred, both as false teachers and as rebels. Nevertheless, the Anabaptists continued to exist in various European countries, often being forced to migrate to other places because of severe persecution. Today the direct descendants of the Anabaptists are the Mennonites. Their history up to the present time is the subject matter of *An Introduction to Mennonite History* by Cornelius Dyck, a long-time Mennonite leader from Elkhart, Indiana.

The Anabaptists in Luther's day had many leaders with different emphases. Some of the leaders discussed in this book are Andreas Karlstadt, Luther's colleague at the University of Wittenberg, called the father of Anabaptism; Hans Denck, who was a universalist; Menno Simons, from whom the term Mennonite is derived, who denied that Jesus' human nature came from Mary; Jacob Hutter, from whom the Hutterites or Hutterian Brethren derive their name; Jacob Ammann, from whom the Amish derive their name. Many of these leaders and others as well were persecuted and even put to death for their beliefs. The grisly details can be found in this book.

Sad to say, the Anabaptist opposition to infant baptism, which at that time marked them as enemies of church and state, is today an acceptable view to many Christians and in fact a very prevalent view in our church world. Witness the tremendous growth of the Baptist and Pentecostal churches.

But the Anabaptists were also known for their opposition to force and violence. Most refused to participate in any government activities, such as police work or war or capital punishment. They wanted their congregations to be made up of only true believers, and therefore they promoted the use of the ban or excommunication on the disobedient. They saw the teaching of salvation by grace as being too permissive; they emphasized the deeds of faith. They tended to become legalistic in their demands, enforcing obedience to their own man-made rules as necessary evidence of true faith.

For example, some insisted that every true Christian must turn over his money and property to the community. One of their leaders wrote: "Where the love of Christ does not enable me to keep brotherhood, there the blood of Christ does not cleanse from sin" (144). Keeping brotherhood in this context meant turning over your personal property to the brotherhood or community as evidence of your faith in Christ. Jacob Hutter and the Hutterian Brethren were especially strong in emphasizing community of goods. "Eventually they were to move to where the community owned everything and gave each person their tasks to perform as well as their food, clothing and housing" (74). "The Hutterian Brethren considered their expression of Christian love to be the only true one" (74). Jacob Hutter himself was "publicly burned at the stake on February 25, 1536" (75), but some of his ideas and rules continue to exert an influence in those groups named after him.

As we might expect, disagreements among these people in connection with their rules for living have occurred through the years. For example, Jacob Ammann insisted that the ban meant "that even family members must avoid excommunicated persons, making them eat, sleep, and live completely alone" (153). He also insisted "that all congregations should practice foot washing, that members wear simple clothing including beards for men" (153). "Communion service was to be observed twice annually, not once" (237). When other Mennonites objected to his demands, he banned them. Even today many of the Amish are separated from the other groups simply because of their insistence on such man-made rules.

The middle section of Dyck's book gives the historical background for the different Mennonite groups that are in existence today, and also when and how they came to the United States and Canada. The largest group is known simply as the Mennonite Church, which has about 100,000 baptized members in the United States. Surveys of their beliefs indicate a greater devotion to fundamental Christian doctrine than most Protestant denominations. Examples: "Belief in the divinity of Jesus - 86%; miracles - 90%; the resurrection - 90%; a personal devil - 89%; biblical inerrancy - 75%; creation of the earth in six 24-hour days - 47%" (232).

Other groups that are discussed at some length include the Old Order Amish (56,200 members in the United States), the Beachy Amish Mennonite Fellowship (an Amish group that has condoned the use of automobiles), the Hutterian Brethren (made up of 350 colonies scattered across North America, especially in Alberta, Manitoba, and South Dakota), the General Conference Mennonite Church (including many Mennonites who came from Russia), and the Mennonite Brethren Church (stressing that baptism must be by immersion). Smaller groups described in less detail include the Reformed Mennonite Church; the Church of God in Christ, Mennonite; and the Evangelical Mennonite Church.

The last chapters of the book show how Mennonites have spread into Latin America, Asia, and Africa. Maps and pictures help tell the story. Attempts have been made to attain closer communication and greater cooperation between the various branches of the Mennonites. "In July of 1990 some 25,000 Mennonites gathered together in Winnipeg, Manitoba, for the twelfth Mennonite

World Conference” (442). “They came from over sixty countries, speaking seventy-eight languages, but were one family in Christ” (443).

We are happy to say that members of the invisible Christian Church may be found among the Mennonites because of their use, in part, of God’s means of grace. But we also need to remember that the Mennonites are united in defense of at least one false doctrine, believers’ baptism, and that by adherence to that false doctrine they are causing divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine of Scripture (Rom. 16:17-18). Therefore Martin Luther’s counsel concerning the Anabaptists of his day must still be our counsel today with respect to the Mennonites. “Every devout Christian, convinced that they are misleading, uncertain, and perverted spirits, should avoid them at the peril of his soul’s salvation” (*Luther’s Works*, 40:261).

Nevertheless, at the same time Luther said: “Still we must admit that the enthusiasts have the Scripture and the Word of God in other doctrines. Whoever hears it from them and believes will be saved” (*Luther’s Works*, 40:251). It is part of God’s gracious provision for His people that He allows the true gospel to be taught at times in the midst of much human error. Through that gospel, regardless of who is proclaiming it, our God is gathering His flock. To Him be all praise and glory!

*David Lau*