

TOPIC: "THE BENEFIT OF CONTINUING TO CONVEY THE FOUNDING PRINCIPLES OF OUR CHURCH BODY" 121

Early in His ministry Jesus our Savior called various individuals to become His disciples. Most of them were fishermen by trade. He promised them: "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." (Matt. 4:19) For three years He carefully instructed and trained them. Then, after His sufferings, death, and resurrection, He announced that "repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." (Luke 24:47) He instructed His disciples "to go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature." (Mark 16:15) He gave them this great commission: "Go ye therefore and teach (make disciples of) all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." (Matt. 28:19-20a) He assured them that He would be with them always. He also promised to send them the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit would 'abide with them forever, teach them all things, help them recall everything that He Himself had said, and guide them into all truth.' Our Lord was very clear about what His disciples.... present and future....were to preach and teach, confess and profess. He emphasized "all things....all truth." These expectations of our Lord and Savior are what led pastors, professors, lay people, and even whole congregations to leave their former fellowship and band together to form a new church body, the Church of the Lutheran Confession.

#### THE FOUNDING PRINCIPLES

The Church of the Lutheran Confession came into existence because of differences in the Synodical Conference on the doctrine of church fellowship and its application. Our Lord graciously enabled the founders of the CLC to recognize the error and remain faithful to His Word. Romans 16:17 was one passage which was studied and discussed a lot in the 50's and early 60's. It has often been the subject of study and discussion ever since. Most of us know its words by heart. "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them." The next verse in Romans is related. "For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple." The formation of our church body, however, was not based on obedience to this one passage alone. There are others also which teach and urge the same thing. "A little leaven leavens the whole lump." (Gal. 5:9) "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." (I Cor. 1:10) ".... what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? .... Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate...." (II Cor. 6:14-18) "Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. Be not ye therefore partakers with them." (Eph. 5:6-7) "If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine (the doctrine of Christ), receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds." (II John 10-11) "A man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition reject." (Titus 3:10)

There was a time when the Synodical Conference was the epitome of orthodoxy in the United States. Its member synods (Missouri Synod, Wisconsin Synod, Slovak Synod, & Evangelical Lutheran Synod) were one in fellowship, completely agreed in both doctrine and practice. The Synodical Conference was founded in 1872. Sad to say, errors in doctrine and practice gradually crept into certain branches of the body over the years. By the 1950's these errors had become widespread and well-defined. Finally both the Wisconsin Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod officially marked the Missouri Synod as a false teacher, a false teaching church body; but then they failed to sever their fellowship with the Missouri Synod,

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as Scripture requires. By failing to obey the dictates of passages like Rom. 16:17, the Wisconsin Synod (WELS) and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS) also slipped into false teaching on the doctrine of fellowship. Although these two church bodies eventually did sever their fellowship with the Missouri Synod (LC-MS) in the early 60's, they didn't do so on the basis of passages like Rom. 16:17. Their decision was more a matter of human judgment than obedience to the Word of God. A time element and room for personal evaluation and decision had been inserted between the "mark...avoid" of Romans 16:17. The failure of the WELS and the ELS to follow through with the "mark & avoid" of Romans contributed directly to the formation of the CLC. By God's grace our church body insists on complete agreement in doctrine and practice for true fellowship to exist.

#### THE BENEFIT OF CONVEYANCE

The founding principles of our church body have been clearly laid out and preserved in various essays and booklets that have been written over the years. The following is a list of some of them:

- "Mark....Avoid," Origin of the CLC (Paul F. Nolting)
- Ten Years of Grace (M.J. Witt, 1970)
- A History of the CLC (C. M. Gullerud, 1978)
- This is Your Church (G. Sydow, 1981)
- Our Anniversary Memorial to the Lord (E. Albrecht, 1984)
- Reflections/Projections

In addition to these there are other articles that have appeared in either the Spokesman or Journal of Theology such as "There Still is a Difference" and "Admonition and Romans 16." In addition to these we have booklets like Statement of Faith and Purpose, Concerning Church Fellowship, and Concerning Church and Ministry. Other excellent essays and articles have been written as well like "A Closer Look for Those Who Are Concerned" (A. Gullerud). Even the CLC Directory has some information along these lines.

The founding principles of our church body have been conveyed in the past. But what benefit might there be in continuing to convey them in the future? Last summer our CLC convention was given this theme: "A Call To Recommitment." One essay delivered encouraged us to "Recommit Ourselves to Remembering the Past." In his President's Report, President Fleischer said in this connection: "We ourselves, as well as the generations to follow, need to know what gave us birth, lest the Gospel so wonderfully preserved to us, not without cost or heartache to our fathers, be lost to later generations by reason of a lack of will to stand as they stood. Remembering the past serves a purpose if it increases our resolve to "Recommit Ourselves to Hold Fast to Sound Doctrine ( a second essay that was delivered). Yet, as a church body, our past is meaningless, and our doctrine drawn from Scripture hidden under a basket if we do not declare it. So the third essay at this convention will remind us to "Recommit Ourselves to the Mission of the Church." (page 51 in Proceedings)

Our church body is relatively small. There are several other Lutheran church bodies in the U.S., most of which are considerably larger than our own. The founding principles of our church body remind us of our rich heritage....what great blessings God has bestowed upon our forefathers and us. By comparing the founding principles of our church body with those of others, our people will better understand the origin of our CLC, the reasons why it was established, and how it differs from the rest of Lutheranism. Continuing to convey the founding principles of our church body to our people in the future will be even more important since the WELS now officially teaches that there is no difference between our two bodies and never was. Only if we continue to convey those founding principles of our church body to our people will they be able to know and understand the differences.

Continuing to convey the founding principles of our church body will not only benefit those within the CLC, but those without. There are people outside our

fellowship who are searching for the truth. If our people are well informed to witness to the truth, if the founding principles of our church are available for others to read and hear, it will be easier for them to find the truth.

As children of God, as disciples of Christ, we should desire to profess and confess our faith. Continuing to convey the founding principles of our church body is one such way. Peter writes: "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear." (I Peter 3:15) Unless our people know something about the origin of the CLC and its doctrinal stand, they will be somewhat limited in how much and how well they can witness. Unless our CLC continues to convey its founding principles to future generations, people both within and without the CLC will be at a loss.

#### MATERIALS & METHODS

Time keeps moving forward. The past will soon be forgotten unless we share it with generations to come. All the details of the history leading to the formation of the CLC need not be conveyed, but the founding principles must be conveyed. The very doctrinal integrity of our church body may well depend on it. Many excellent materials have already been written on the subject. Some are still in print and are available from the CLC Bookhouse. Others perhaps should be reprinted and made available. There's much that can be learned from history. We don't want just to rehearse the history of the CLC and the events that led to its birth, but we should also make it live for our people. This information is vital and relevant for us today and future generations.

Our membership today and generations to come need to know the Scriptural reasons why our church body exists and where we stand in the religious community today. If our people are well informed, it will be easier for them to confess, profess, and defend their faith. At the same time, it will be easier for others to learn about the CLC and the precious, saving truths of God's Word with which we have been blessed. Our CLC was formed and exists to serve our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, not itself. Some have said it exists merely to perpetuate selfish ideals or that it is schismatic and contentious. The truth of the matter is that its founding principles are scriptural and correct. They are not "outdated", as some Lutherans would have us believe. Our Lord Jesus has promised: "If you continue in My Word, then are you My disciples indeed; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (John 8:31-32) "Blessed are they who hear the Word of God and keep it." (Luke 11:28) "Be Thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." (Rev. 2:10)

We can continue to convey the founding principles of our church body in the years to come much as we have in the past...through booklets, pamphlets, essays, and articles. From time to time these materials should be reviewed in our Bible classes, ladies groups, young people's groups, confirmation classes, and any other forum which seems feasible. We have been so richly blessed in the CLC. The Lord has preserved to us His holy Word in its truth and purity. He has made our church body a beacon that shines brightly in a world that's becoming increasingly dark. The CLC is a haven to which concerned Lutherans and others may turn in the future. May the Lord richly bless our efforts as we continue to convey the founding principles of our church body to future generations.

God's Word is our great heritage and shall be ours forever;  
To spread its light from age to age shall be our chief endeavor.  
Through life it guides our way; in death it is our stay.  
Lord, grant, while worlds endure, we keep its teachings pure  
Throughout all generations. Amen. TLH 283

Minnesota Delegate Conference  
Nicollet, MN  
June 11, 1995  
Wayne Mielke, Pastor

