

**GOD'S WORD IS STILL OUR GREAT HERITAGE**

**Fortieth Anniversary of the CLC**

**June 19-23, 2000**

**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.**

**GOD'S WORD IS STILL OUR GREAT HERITAGE**

**THE PAST**

**L.W. Schierenbeck**



"God's Word is still our great heritage." This is the theme for this convention, commemorating the fortieth anniversary of the organization of the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC).

I was struck by the aptness of this theme for this occasion. God's Word and its preservation in its truth and purity was the basic cause of the organization of the CLC. Furthermore, the Word of God was the heritage that was received from faithful defenders and confessors of our Lord's Word, who have gone before. Finally, that the Word is still ours reminds us how fragile that heritage is. God's Word was our heritage, is still our heritage, and will remain our heritage only if we are assured and reassured that "of Christ's fulness we have all received and grace for grace" (John 1:16). We love our Savior God only because He first loved us. We continue in that Word only because we are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.

My specific assignment is to speak about the past, the formative years, which will include not only events that led to the organization of the CLC, but also from the founding to the present. I have chosen not to mention any names of members of the CLC.

## **I. THE FORMATIVE YEARS**

What preceded and led to the organization of the CLC? We must begin with the organization of the Synodical Conference in 1872. Up until that time, Lutheranism in America could be described as a wasteland of doctrinal indifference and confusion. There were a few bright spots. For example, in the early 1800's the light of truth shone brightly in the Tennessee Synod but then soon burned itself out. It was not until the organization of the Missouri Synod in 1847 that a staunchly Lutheran body was established under the leadership of C.F.W. Walther.

By the late 1860's the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LC-MS) began to seek out other confessional Lutheran groups. This led to the formation of that magnificent instrument of God's grace, the Synodical Conference, whose sound Lutheran confession we have received and which is still our heritage today.

But human organizations are by their very nature subject to doctrinal corruption. Satan cannot abide the love of and faithfulness to the Word. Satan reacts with all the cleverness and power at his disposal. As history bears out, Satan was hard at work to destroy or limit the effectiveness of the Synodical Conference. After a number of hard skirmishes, he was on his way to the total destruction of this body.

Ironically, it was through the very group, the LC-MS, responsible for the founding of the Synodical Conference that Satan began a well orchestrated campaign, leading to the ultimate destruction of the Synodical Conference in 1961.

Already in the late 1920's, efforts were made between the LC-MS and the American Lutheran Church (ALC) to find the doctrinal agreement necessary for church fellowship. In 1930 the Chicago Thesis was adopted by the representatives of both bodies as a settlement of doctrinal differences. In point of fact, it was plainly a document that sought to hide the continuing differences that still existed.

The LC-MS president, Dr. F. Pfotenhauer, was in Europe at the time this action was taken. He immediately repudiated the document of agreement. To counteract the effect this document

might have, he led the way in drawing up the "Brief Statement of 1932," which was adopted by the LC-MS at its 1932 convention. This document, *The Brief Statement of 1932*, became a part of the doctrinal platform of the CLC in 1960. I believe it deserves the high place it has found among us because of its doctrinal soundness, clarity and brevity.

God's grace had once again stayed the forces of evil. However, it lasted but a short while. There were some in the LC-MS who were determined to override the action of the 1932 convention. The issue was the same, the basis for a God-pleasing fellowship (1 Corinthians 1:10) and the action that must follow if that basis is not present (Romans 16:17-18). The injunction of Romans 16:17-18 to, "avoid those who cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine that we have learned" was under attack again. After 1930 the representative bodies of the LC-MS and the ALC continued to meet. Now, however, the emphasis shifted from looking for agreement in the truth to finding a formula of agreement that would cover up the differences that still existed. The representatives came to the 1938 convention of the LC-MS with the proposition that "it is neither necessary nor possible to agree on all non-fundamental doctrines of Scripture." The convention adopted this unscriptural and dangerous statement.

When this error of doctrine became known throughout the LC-MS, there was a considerable uproar. The many protests received forced the issue to be reconsidered by the 1941 convention. This patently false statement of 1938 was not clearly repudiated as false doctrine. Rather it was withdrawn from consideration. This, in my judgment, marked the end of the orthodoxy of the LC-MS and also later for the Synodical Conference. No doctrinal discipline was initiated. This false doctrine had found a comfortable home in the LC-MS and by extension to the other constituent synods of the Synodical Conference.

This event has a message for everyone concerned about the preservation of the truth. When action is taken against false doctrine, it must be timely and proper. The preservation of the truth cannot include a political type of action in the interest of the preservation of the organization rather than the truth itself.

Upholding the truth of Scripture is never an easy task. Two particular dangers must be avoided. The first is legalism. Legalism is the application of any Scripture without the accompaniment of true love. In Ephesians 4:15, Paul speaks of those who are misled and betrayed into error. When error is exposed, it must be addressed. But it must always be applied in connection with love. The second danger is a wrong kind of love. While it identifies a causer of divisions and offenses and therefore the avoid of Romans 16:17-18 is called for, it postpones that avoiding. Instead the clear Word of Scripture is either set aside or nullified. This too is a failure to speak the truth in love. To walk the fine line between these two errors is not an art to be learned, but a gift of grace given to those who love their Lord and therefore love His Word.

After the LC-MS withdrew the false doctrine of 1938 without repudiating it, doctrine and practice deteriorated rapidly. In just a very few years there was a change of doctrinal position in regard to the governmental chaplaincy, scouting, joint-prayer to mention just a few. In my judgment, the Slovak Synod showed no concern for the dangerous position of the LC-MS. Largely beginning in 1938 both the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS) began a more intense effort of love to help the LC-MS disentangle itself from error. With the passage of time more and more people became concerned about the issue and its ramification for the constituent bodies.

In 1953 the first hint of impending action became evident. The 1953 WELS convention spoke of the "break in relations" with the LC-MS. Aware of the need to involve all of its members in understanding the issues, a series of pamphlets on the main issues was printed and distributed for study by all members of WELS. The effect of these pamphlets is known only to God. Yet, we know, that a study of God's Word is not without effect and blessing.

1955 was a pivotal year. In their June convention the ELS passed a resolution to suspend church relations with the LC-MS. When the rug was pulled out from under them by the August action of the WELS convention, that resolution suffered an attempt to explain away its meaning and force.

At the 1955 convention of the WELS, President Oscar Naumann presided. He had been elected in 1953 to replace President John Brenner, who asked not to be reelected because of advancing age. For President Naumann's opening address, he spoke of the burning issue of deciding the course of future relations with the LC-MS. He took the issue out of the realm of clear Scripture and placed it into the area of human judgment. Some, he said, believe that the "avoid" of Romans 16:17-18 must be applied now, while others held that we owe the LC-MS a debt of love that could be paid only by continuing the doctrinal rescue mission of the LC-MS.

The convention floor committee brought a report that essentially straddled the issue. In the preamble, a record of the issues on which the LC-MS had departed from Scripture was clearly stated. The LC-MS was thereby identified as a causer of divisions and offenses. The preamble was adopted unanimously. But truth was not, as it might seem, triumphant. The resolution that followed was not to avoid, but rather to hold in abeyance the judgment that the LC-MS was a causer of divisions and offenses. This resolution was not adopted unanimously. It carried by a vote of about two to one. A special WELS convention was scheduled for the next year, 1956. The mission of those sent to this convention was to look for signs of change in the LC-MS. This became known as the "ray of hope" convention. This effort brought about no evident results, other than to delay the action of some who were considering separating themselves from WELS.

By the time of the 1957 convention of the WELS, there was much doctrinal confusion. Finally, after a resolution to terminate fellowship with the LC-MS was narrowly defeated, a motion was passed (almost it seemed in desperation) to define its relationship with the LC-MS as one of a "vigorously protesting fellowship." The ultimate result was one of complete doctrinal confusion and spiritual paralysis.

The intervening years between 1957 and 1959 were times of great activity. The number of those who separated themselves from the WELS increased greatly. On the part of the WELS a committee of three, led by its president, went to every district to meet with those whom they considered dissident members. They enjoyed limited success in their mission.

One action of that time period was most important in bringing about the formation of the CLC. A memorial was addressed to the 1959 WELS convention. It was entitled a "Call to Decision," and was signed by a considerable number. It set a clear choice before the convention. When one had been identified (marked) as a "causer of divisions and offenses," may the application of the "avoid" be held in abeyance or defined as a vigorously protesting fellowship, or must it bring about a termination of a formerly God-pleasing fellowship? The answer of the 1959 convention

was "termination of fellowship is called for when you reach the conviction that admonition is of no further avail."

God's grace had now led to a clear revelation of the error of WELS. The deciding factor in termination was to be human judgment. It describes accurately the action of the 1955, 1957 and 1961 conventions.

The organization of the CLC took place in Watertown, SD in August of 1960 and was completed in January of 1961 at Sleepy Eye, MN. What had taken place was the culmination of the leading of a gracious God.

## II. THE ACTIVE YEARS

"The proof of the pudding is the eating thereof." I first heard this phrase from my seminary professor, August Pieper. The excitement of the moment soon faded in the fledgling church body, the CLC. The little flock was soon to face all the problems that lay before it. Would they survive doctrinally, or would they self-destruct? Would they survive financially with a membership that totaled less than that of one of the Lutheran congregations in Austin, MN? How could a body with an overwhelming number of really small congregations support a pastor, and at the same time support the CLC in its programs in education and missions? The answer is ageless. God's grace took over, overriding both the rash and the fearful. He worked His wonders of grace as He always does, and He still works them today through the gifts of His grace.

The first gift is the basic one, the Holy Christian Church. This precious creation of God, still to be revealed in the beauty of the perfection of its holiness, is made up of redeemed and sanctified individuals. These solitary individuals, according to His promise, our God sets in families for the edification of His Church. Among such the Word of God both empowers and rules. Many believe today that the survival of such families of believers, called churches or congregations, requires more than the ascendancy of the Word of God. To them the all important guarantee of survival depends upon control of the operational machinery especially the presidency of a synod. If you need an illustration, study the history of the LC-MS for the last fifty years or so. That review will quickly reveal to you the sad consequences to the confession of the truth. Such activity was not a part of the CLC's organization.

But someone might remind you that there were meetings of like-minded individuals before the organization of the CLC. There was a large group, known as the Interim Conference. This group was mostly made up of individuals who had left the WELS. Its purpose was to study the Word to determine whether doctrinal unity did exist. One of the documents that came out of those meetings was the production of "Concerning Church Fellowship," which became a part of our doctrinal confession in the organizational meetings of the CLC in 1960.

I attended only one pre-organizational meeting, held at Mankato in January of 1960. One of my deep concerns about this incipient church body was legalism. At that meeting someone suggested that there should be agreement on one date, which was the proper moment to sever fellowship with the WELS. To my great pleasure and comfort, there was a swift and decisive response that laid the issue to rest.

A document was also adopted as a part of our doctrinal confession known as "Concerning Church and Ministry," which I consider one of the fine contributions we have made to Lutheran theology. It not only emphasizes the pre-eminence of the priesthood of all believers in all spiritual matters, but provides a constant reminder that the power in groups of believers is not inherent in those elected to lead. Rather, it is restricted to those matters which are entrusted to their leaders by the individual members of the group.

But what about the verbal distinction we make between clergy and laity? This can never be construed as a distinction that relegates the clergy to empowerment over the laity or, likewise, the laity over the clergy. Before God one is neither greater or lesser. There is a difference in gifts to be sure. That is Scriptural. Each one has his own special gift for the edification of the Church. These gifts vary greatly. The greater gift does not bring greater honor among men. It is rather a matter of greater or lesser responsibility. Our Savior says, "For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required" (Luke 12:48). One test is of great importance: faithfulness in the use of one's gifts (1 Corinthians 4:2).

One of my strongest memories is the faith and courage demonstrated particularly by those who lost their pastorates because of their faithfulness to their God. They would not be defined by the hymn, "Onward Christian soldiers marching as to war," but rather by the hymn, "Speak, O Lord, Thy servant heareth. To thy Word I now give heed." They knew above all else that they were subject to the same weaknesses common to man. In their hopelessness there was no despair, but they were strengthened in the confidence that they were totally redeemed in the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ, their Savior-God. They also failed in doctrinal matters from time to time. Yet their distinguishing mark was that they were so gifted of God that they did not build a defense over against their sins as a substitute for godly repentance.

If anyone believes, however, that God laid an easy road before His loved ones, he underestimates the Savior's grace. For the tasks to which they were called strength was supplied. Satan could not let this work go unchallenged. Families suddenly found themselves without financial resources. Doctrinal challenges arose with regularity. Defections from the CLC were not rare events. It is only by God's grace that after forty years we can still say, "God's Word is still our great heritage."

Another evident gift of grace is the CLC's steadfast interest in Christian education.

Nowhere is that interest and commitment more evident than in the founding of Immanuel Lutheran College. If any group of believers is concerned about its calling and mission, a way must be found to prepare pastors and teachers for the public ministry. Before its organization in 1960, God had a gift of grace ready. Several years before 1960, Immanuel Lutheran Church of Mankato, MN had opened a high school, college, and seminary. For boldness of faith, dedication to the truth, and clarity of vision this action ranks high. When the CLC was organized, the Mankato congregation gave this treasure to the CLC. In 1963 another gift of God was, so to speak, laid into our lap. Known as the Ingram Estate, a seventy-five acre beauty spot with a number of useful buildings was purchased for \$85,000. Take a careful look around you today and wonder at the power of our gracious God.

But the CLC's interest in Christian education did not stop with ILC. Most congregations established agencies for the instruction of our children, such as confirmation classes, Vacation Bible School and Sunday Schools. Materials for Sunday Schools and Vacation Bible Schools

have been produced. Continuing efforts to improve these agencies today demands continued efforts to increase their effectiveness, especially in view of the rapid moral and spiritual decline of our nation.

There is no doubt that outside of the family, the best agency for the Christian training for the young is the Christian Day School. There were a few day schools in congregations that were charter members of the CLC. One of the most encouraging factors in our brief history is the growing number of Christian day schools. It bodes well for our being able to say, "God Word is still our great heritage."

Another encouraging gift is the attention given to the spiritual needs of adult members of the flock. In the WELS, where most of us originated, adult instruction in Bible class was not widely promoted. Perhaps the abundance of the study of the Word during the turbulent times of our early years served to increase the use of this precious tool of religious instruction.

God's call to every believer to "go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15) was not neglected in the organization of the CLC. To preach the unconditioned Gospel to a lost world was understood to be at the core of our existence and being. To do this on a total CLC budget for the first year of \$25,000 made this sound like an impossible dream. Yet the hymn writer had it right when he said, "All depends on our possessing God's abundant grace and blessing." A home mission program was established immediately. It was urgent then; it is more urgent now that man has elevated himself to be God, able to determine for himself what truth is, if there really is any truth, and able to establish his own standards of morality, if there is any restriction to be placed on his actions.

At the time of our organization in 1960, God in His grace had ready a foreign mission with pastor and congregation in Japan. God took an indirect route to present us with another foreign field in Nigeria. This He accomplished through one individual in California, who was at that time not a member of the CLC, and did not even know of the CLC. He transmitted the pleas of a number of congregations in Africa for spiritual help and guidance. But God's wonders did not cease! One young CLC member was hospitalized in India. Through him, God's grace brought us a third foreign mission in India with local Indian pastors. All this foreign missionary activity should remind us of Christ's truth that He alone builds His Church. We are reminded of Christ's Word, "For in this the saying is true, One sows and another reaps. I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored: other men have labored, and you have entered into their labor" (John 4:37-38)

One word defines the entire history of the CLC: **Grace**. Everything is the fulfillment of Christ's thrilling and comforting promise, "I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18). That ought not to cause us to relax our efforts. Rather the wonder and power of that grace should move everyone of us to strive strenuously while it is day to use our gifts to the fullest to serve our God. Then may we be assured that we will continue to receive and enjoy His beautiful blessings.

O Lord, let this Your little flock, Your name alone confessing,  
Continue in Your loving care, True unity possessing.  
Your sacraments, O Lord, And Your saving Word To us e'er pure retain.  
Grant that they may remain Our only strength and comfort.



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**THE PRESENT**

**John Schierenbeck**



As members of the Church of the Lutheran Confession, we have been reminded by our first essay of our "great heritage." It is fitting that we have been reminded of the "rock" out of which we were hewn. God has blessed us with parents for whom God's Word was a precious heritage. We have been blessed with faithful pastors and teachers. We have been blessed with Immanuel Lutheran College. Our heritage includes that cloud of witnesses that surrounds us. And yet our true heritage remains the Gospel of the free forgiveness of sins as revealed in the Holy Scriptures. As we celebrate the fortieth anniversary of the Church of the Lutheran Confession, we cannot help but be awestruck at the blessings of the great heritage conveyed to our little church body by a gracious God.

Forty years is not a significant amount of time in the larger scope of God's history. However, when one considers the history of smaller, conservative Lutheran church bodies and the weakness inherent in our own church body, the fact that God's Word is still our heritage after forty years is a miracle of God's grace. Our history also reveals that God chooses the weak things of this world to fulfill His saving purposes.

The assigned title of these presentations assumes as fact that God's Word is "still" our great heritage. This is an assumption that should not be made lightly and should be rigorously examined as the Church of the Lutheran Confession celebrates forty years of God's grace and preserving mercy.

There is a danger that anniversary celebrations in congregations and synods become little more than a trumpeting of "church" accomplishments and a building of external shrines. In spite of the sprinkling of phrases such as "to the glory of God" and "by the grace of God," anniversary celebrations often remain testimonies to what the organization has done. August Pieper warned in connection with the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Missouri Synod and the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Synodical Conference in 1922,

Whoever has more carefully observed the anniversary celebrations held among us and has more closely examined the anniversary literature must have noticed, if he is not entirely lacking the spirit mentioned in 1 Corinthians 2:15f., that much of the praise and thanks expressed had to do with externals and vague generalities. Often it did not even touch on the real content of the great spiritual essentials. In fact – what is just as bad – self-criticism, which must accompany all thanksgiving if it is to be pleasing to God, was restricted to the superficial and general confession of the personal helplessness and unworthiness which is usual on such occasions.<sup>1</sup>

A true anniversary celebration remembers the wondrous saving activities of God with a sense of miraculous joy and true praise to God. However, this will include honest self-criticism and self-examination as well as blunt warnings of the dangers inherent in our own flesh and within our church body. Our remembrance should lead to a sense of corporate and personal repentance. This is not easy for an organization or people to do. Pastor Winfred Schaller, Jr. brought this out in his 1964 convention essay, "A Century of Judgment and Grace." This essay was condensed and serialized into five parts in volumes seven and eight of *The Lutheran Spokesman* under the title, "Remember the Days of Old."

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<sup>1</sup> *The Wauwatosa Theology III*, p. 230-231

As one studies the histories of the synods of the Synodical Conference in their many anniversary books, one finds eulogy after eulogy, and it is needle-in-the-haystack labor to find any self-criticism in these accounts, any mention of the weaknesses of the church bodies, except in the most superficial way. The to-God-alone-the-Glory is a very mechanical thing.<sup>2</sup>

Church bodies do not take kindly to criticism. In 1919, a Pastor William F. Bietz printed a critique of the Wisconsin Synod entitled, "The Just Shall Live By Faith." As a result he was suspended for refusing to modify or withdraw his essay. This led to the eventual suspension of Professor J.P. Koehler from the WELS seminary in 1930 and the beginning of what came to be known as the "Prote'stant" movement. This affair, in the words of the forward to *The Wauwatosa Theology*, led to a muting of self-examination and self-criticism within the WELS.

Now this (self-criticism of Pieper and Koehler) is an aspect of the Wauwatosa theology that wasn't carried to Mequon, namely, Koehler and Pieper's description of the synod as being in a state of decline and deterioration...It is possible that the attacks of the Prote'stants were the cause for this. Under attack, synod professors and administrators would likely "circle the wagons," defend the synod from attack, accentuate the positive.<sup>3</sup>

The (Prote'stant) controversy had long lasting and far reaching effects on Wisconsin. The aftermath brought a great distrust and a fear of being different. Uniformity became an obsession....Professors were chosen who were safe and sober. Creative work and self-criticism all but stopped at Thiensville, and the faculty reproduced what the previous generation had developed.<sup>4</sup>

In Deuteronomy 6:1-2, Moses commanded that what God had given to the nation of Israel should be passed on to their sons and grandsons. "You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up."<sup>5</sup> This would not be an easy task. Luther remarked that the Gospel never stays in one place for more than three or four generations. Pastor Winfred Schaller in his essay describes the second generation as turning the Gospel proclamation into a set of doctrinal statements or a code of principles. Reason then becomes more and more prominent in using the Gospel principles to rule out errors that have arisen. The third generation no longer exhibits the rejoicing of the lost son embraced by his father, but they view the Gospel as partisan material. This generation sees that their church has the true doctrine over against others who have false doctrine. "The concept of the church of the pure doctrine becomes the concept of the pure church of the pure doctrine."<sup>6</sup> The CLC is now entering into

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<sup>2</sup> Winfred Schaller, Jr. *The Lutheran Spokesman* Vol. 7, No. 12, May 1965, p. 4

<sup>3</sup> *The Wauwatosa Theology I*, pp. 95-96

<sup>4</sup> *The Lutheran Spokesman* Vol 8, No. 8, January 1966, p. 9

<sup>5</sup> Deuteronomy 6:7

<sup>6</sup> Winfred Schaller, Jr. *The Lutheran Spokesman* Vol. 7, No. 12, May 1965, p. 4

its third generation of young men and women. Many of the students at ILC are sons and daughters of those who originally attended ILC, and soon grandsons and granddaughters of these original students will be at ILC.

Self-examination and repentance is God's antidote to the dangers that face us from without, and especially, from within a conservative church body such as ours. We need to view the CLC as a church in which spiritual life is in a state of decline and disintegration. August Pieper in 1919 wrote a convention essay, "Does the Church Among Us Need Spiritual Renewal?" Pieper answers:

Woe to our synod if it answers with the congregation in Laodicea: I AM RICH AND HAVE ACQUIRED WEALTH AND DO NOT NEED A THING. Woe to our people and to us, the "angels" of our people, that is, us professors, pastors, and teachers, visitors, presidents, officials, and commissions if, given the present condition of spiritual life, we seek to excuse ourselves from the necessity of a spiritual renewal and say: Spiritual life probably is not as fresh and vital in me as it once was and ought to be, but it's still there, and not exactly more lukewarm than elsewhere.<sup>7</sup>

Pastor Winfred Schaller, Jr. began the May 1965 issue of *The Lutheran Spokesman* with these powerful and challenging words:

We are not a strong church body. We are weak, and we are sick. We are an offshoot of the Synodical Conference, a dying church, a tree cut down under the judgment of God. We are not the cream, the saving of the best. We have been conditioned to think that if a church has the correct presentation of the doctrine that it must be a good church. But this is not so. We are judging by external appearance.<sup>8</sup>

This journey is not intended to be negative or condemnatory of others. It seeks to be an honest journey of self-examination of myself, my ministry, and of the church body of which I am a part. The CLC's history has paralleled my ministry for the last forty years. Please realize that these are my personal evaluations of trends and involve generalizations and personal judgments. I pray that you will in charity consider these evaluations and carefully weigh their validity. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to convict us of sin. As I worked on this paper, I have come to understand the truth of the statement, "History cannot be written by those who are living it." With John the Baptist, may we come to the conclusion that we must decrease so that Christ may increase.

You also should be comforted by the fact that our third essay will follow with an optimistic view of the future of God's Word, which will not return to God void but will accomplish His purposes. We are not concerned about the future of the Church of the Lutheran Confession. Rather we "are not ashamed of the **Gospel of Christ** for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone

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<sup>7</sup> *Wauwatosa Theology I*, p. 59

<sup>8</sup> Winfred Schaller, Jr., *The Lutheran Spokesman* Vol. 7, No. 12, May 1965, p. 2

who believes.”<sup>9</sup> For as the committee that assigned these essays envisioned, our anniversary observance will lead us to the blessed assurance that by the grace of God -

## **God’s Word Is “Still” Our Great Heritage.**

Let us examine some of the symptoms of the decline and spiritual disintegration that are going on within our church body. The history of Old Testament Israel is also our history. “When all that generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation arose after them who did not know the LORD nor the work which He had done for Israel.”<sup>10</sup>

The history is always the same. As with Israel, so it is ever true that any segment of kingdom history reveals the glory of a gracious and patient and 490 times forgiving God, a God who commits His oracles to an undeserving people, a God who delivers His people with mighty acts, a God who makes His people out of those who were not His people, a God who sends great prophets and gifts for the building up of His people. At the same time such a segment of history reveals the stiff-neckedness of the people, the rebellion, the ingratitude, the complaining, the chasing after false gods, the materializing, and above all, the foolish pride which glorifies the *people* of God more than the *God* of His people.<sup>11</sup>

### **I. THE SYMPTOMS OF SPIRITUAL DECLINE**

Let us consider our present condition in light of the warnings given to the seven churches in Asia, which are also applicable to us today as we celebrate forty years of existence as a church body.

#### **THE CLC IS IN DANGER OF LOSING ITS FIRST LOVE.**

**(Revelation 2:4) “Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love.”**

Woe to the CLC, if like the church at Ephesus, we have lost our first love. Those of you who were a part of the formation of the CLC forty years ago realize the difference in spirit and attitude that exists today. It is impossible to maintain the white-hot intensity of that “first love” which marked the beginning of the CLC and founding of ILC. The second and third generation have taken for granted the struggle and blessings of those early years. Instead of pastors delivering milk and working second jobs, we have a synod which adopted as its highest priority “the raising of the salaries of our code workers.” Instead of the people who took students of ILC into their homes in Mankato and volunteers who made this campus ready to use during the course of one summer, we have trouble getting a few people to do volunteer work at ILC and within our congregations. Sometimes, we ask in the words of Jesus, “Where there not ten

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<sup>9</sup> Romans 1:16

<sup>10</sup> Judges 2:10

<sup>11</sup> Winfred Schaller, *The Lutheran Spokesman* Vol 7, No. 12, May 1965, p. 2

cleansed? Where are the other nine?" The excitement and self-sacrifice of the early years has given place to a dull contentment with things.

August Pieper speaks of the zeal and enthusiasm with which young pastors and teachers enter the public ministry and what happens to this first love.

That was the time of the first love. But very gradually and unconsciously we have given up that first love and became ever more cool. Our praying and studying grew less frequent....In time we became more and more a spiritual and physical machine....We are workers with a spiritual trade. We turn out our products like a pattern cutter....We have preached ourselves empty....THIS, THIS, THE DEAD WORKER'S ROUTINE, THE MACHINE-LIKE WORK IN THE GOSPEL MINISTRY IN THE CHURCH, IN THE SCHOOL, AND THE CLASSROOM, THAT IS THE SURE DEATH OF THE GOSPEL AND OF THE CHURCH.<sup>12</sup>

### THE CLC IS IN DANGER OF COMPROMISING GOD'S TRUTH.

**(Revelation 2:14-15) "But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality. Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate."**

Woe to the CLC, if like the church at Pergamos, we tolerate the doctrine of Balaam. As a church body grows older and larger, it becomes more vulnerable to the "doctrine of Balaam." King Balak of Moab wanted the prophet Balaam to curse the people of God who were preparing to enter into the promised land. God prevented Balaam from cursing Israel. Because of the money, Balaam suggested to Balak an indirect way to destroy the people of God. Balaam suggested that Balak introduce immorality and idolatry to the nation of Israel. Old Testament Israel did not fall because of direct, outward attack. Old Testament Israel was destroyed because of its toleration of the idols of the surrounding nations and the effect this compromising spirit of Balaam had on their history.

There is the constant danger that the CLC will lose its confessional nature. This will not come because of the frontal attacks of the world and false churches. The CLC will lose its right to the Gospel because of a slow compromise with error and false teaching. There is unbelievable pressure on the church by this present generation to compromise its proclamation of the truth. Main-line denominations have sold out their inheritance for a bowl of warmed-over approval of the world. Just as great nations collapse from the inside, so church bodies crumble because of a gradual acceptance of the ways of the two beasts of Revelation, i.e., the anti-Christian forces of government and the harlot of Babylon (the false church). Old Testament Israel, the chosen people of God, was finally destroyed because of Balaam's error.

For every action, there is an equal reaction. There is always a tendency to be so concerned about the formulations and applications of the doctrine of fellowship as a protection of the Gospel that we lose sight of the importance of the doctrine of justification by grace alone

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<sup>12</sup> August Pieper, *Wauwatosa Theology, I*, pp. 60-61

through faith. As a church formed out controversy forty years ago, it would be easy for us to become a one-issue church. The "doctrine of Balaam" produced the Pharisees, the separated ones, who were so concerned with categorizing the demands of the law that they completely missed the coming of the Messiah. The CLC, because of its history, has tended to see fellowship as the most important issue of its heritage. Satan would love to have this issue obscure the Gospel itself. I remember having been asked as a test of my orthodoxy whether it was a sin to buy Girl Scout cookies. This was followed by the question of whether it was a sin to eat a Girl Scout cookie that someone else had bought. A reformation and renewal will only come by concentrating on the central Gospel teaching of justification by faith alone without works. The doctrine of justification was the key to Luther's and Walther's power and influence.

The secret of Walther's power lay in his clear, popular, joyful, and convincing presentation of objective justification....Luther is right in his statement that the article of justification, when it is correctly understood, keeps all other articles pure, and that no article will remain pure if this one is blurred.<sup>13</sup>

### **THE CLC IS IN DANGER OF BECOMING MORALLY CORRUPT AND INDIFFERENT.**

**(Revelation 2:20) "Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols."**

Woe to the CLC, if like the church at Thyatira, we become seduced by Jezebel. It does not seem possible that this condemnation would apply to the CLC. However, there has not been a great deal of emphasis on morality and life-style in our church body. Our heritage has been formed by an emphasis of doctrine over life. The teaching of salvation by grace alone without works produces the human reaction, "Should I then sin the more so that God can forgive me more." Our emphasis on God's forgiveness in Christ can have the effect of not taking seriously the affect of sin in our Christian lives. Because of its heritage, the CLC has not emphasized the need for walking in a way that is worthy of our high calling.

The mores of today, including the influence of TV and the common culture, have resulted in a church which is struggling with the sins of the flesh. The seducing voice of Jezebel tempts the church to participate in the wickedness of this age and, by silence, put its stamp of approval on the life-style of this generation. This present generation in the CLC has lost a degree of sensitivity to the wickedness and immorality of this age. The choices that parents and young people make in what programs they watch on TV, what movies that they see, and what music they listen to reveal a lack of Christian judgment and a lack of appreciation for the dangers of the lusts of the flesh. An average congregation in the CLC reveals the same divorces, the same out-of-wedlock pregnancies, the same casual attitude toward sexual relations outside of marriage as the rest of the world. This casual attitude of young people toward divorce and sexual purity is alarming because it is within the church. Can outsiders tell that we are followers of Jesus by our walk?

The opposite danger is that we will fall into the opposite trap of Pietism. This over-reaction to the deadness of orthodoxy after Luther's death led to legalism and a subtle journey into work

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<sup>13</sup> August Pieper, "Anniversary Reflections," *Wauwatosa Theology III*, p. 252 and 254



righteousness. We tend to look at the faith-life in terms of regulations and rules, which "have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh." The CLC can also make the cure worse than the disease by making the outward life more important than the inward faith.

### **THE CLC IS IN DANGER OF BEING DEAD.**

**(Revelation 3:1) "And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, 'These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: "I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead."**

Woe to the CLC, if it like the church at Sardis, it rests on its reputation for orthodoxy and spiritual life. The nation of Israel and its religious leaders were condemned by Jesus for their hypocrisy. "Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: 'These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'"<sup>14</sup> The Gospel spirit of the Lutheran Reformation quickly deteriorated into the age of dead orthodoxy. The spirit of the Gospel was replaced with the dead shell of correct teaching and religious traditions.

This natural calcification process is at work within the CLC. We can look at these buildings at ILC including this new commons building, which still has not been paid for, and think that everything is all right. We can look at our mission program and our budgets and think that we are doing something right. The orthodox form of doctrine is still in our seminaries and our pulpits, and yet a generation has arisen which has no knowledge of the spiritual struggle for the Gospel and the Word of the living God that brought the CLC into existence. There is a tendency to make the forms and doctrinal correctness more important than the spirit of the Gospel.

This preoccupation with outward forms is revealed in the idea that our faithfulness to the Gospel and God's Word depends upon holding on to the vessels in which these truths came to us. There is a human tendency to equate orthodoxy with external forms. This is seen in the desire of some to hold on to the King James translation of the Bible as test of orthodoxy. Some would stake our existence on keeping the 1941 "The Lutheran Hymnal" or the "blue" Missouri catechism that some of us cut our teeth on. If maintaining the form of "old" Missouri or "old" Wisconsin is our claim to fame, we will cease to exist as a viable church body. This is reflected in the graying of the CLC and a failure to communicate the Gospel to this generation as evidenced in the demographics of our congregations. The composition of our congregations reflects the sad fact that we are a dying church body. Most of the support and interest comes from people who are over fifty. As we are called upon to give a reason for the hope that is within us, we are looking backward instead of forward.

### **THE CLC IS IN DANGER OF FAILING TO WALK THROUGH THE DOORS JESUS HAS OPENED FOR US.**

**(Revelation 3:8) "I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no**

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<sup>14</sup> Matthew 15:7-9

**one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name."**

Woe to the CLC, if like the church at Philadelphia, we fail to go through the door Jesus has opened for us in our generation. We have, in our practice, defined mission work as the gathering in of "disgruntled" or even "gruntled" synodical conference Lutherans. Most of our growth in membership has come from appealing to people who have left the Synodical Conference and who are looking for the old ways. Very few of our congregations have reached out in any meaningful way to the unchurched. Perhaps, unconsciously our mission outreach effort has been hindered by our fellowship concerns and our realization of Jesus' hard sayings. While condemning the church growth movement, the CLC has become part of what might be called "the no-growth church movement." The membership in the CLC has remained fairly constant over the last several years. Sometimes this lack of growth is proudly viewed as a proof of our orthodoxy. There has been a lack of zeal and a sense of excitement when it comes to reaching out to others in new and different ways. People outside of our Synodical Conference background, especially in the South, find our order of service a daunting challenge to the Bach-impaired.

We have failed to involve our members in individual outreach. Our background tends to lead to the conclusion that mission work is the purview of the pastor and the church. The most effective method of making disciples of all nations is the one-on-one interaction of individuals. August Pieper observed this in his comment:

Why do we Lutherans not learn something in this matter of spiritual freedom from the Reformed churches around us? They know how to draw the laity into the service of the church, also in the individual congregations and make them co-workers of the pastor. It's remarkable! No church has set forth more clearly the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers than the Lutheran church, and especially the Lutheran church in America. And no church puts this doctrine less into practice. Among us the laity is largely consigned to listening and doing nothing in the congregation, and the pastor wants to do everything by himself.<sup>15</sup>

There has been excitement created by our work in Nigeria and especially in India. Again we are struggling against a heritage that was reluctant to do foreign mission work. This dates back to the early days of the Wisconsin Synod when Hoenecke opposed the Apache Indian mission because it might dilute the focus of the church's work.

For Wisconsin's greatest weakness was lack of interest in mission work. Its one foreign effort among the Apaches was poorly supported and even attacked by some. Home mission activity was in the main confined to rural areas; large cities were avoided in this period. In addition, Wisconsin was hindered by a lack of organizational ability. Though God made this lack serve good purposes at times, yet Wisconsin was wrong in making a virtue of not being well organized, and even of not being mission-active.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Quoted in *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*; Vol 94 Number 4 Fall 1997 p. 262

<sup>16</sup> Winfred Schaller, Jr., *The Lutheran Spokesman* Vol 8, No. 8, January 1966, p. 8

On the other hand, J.P. Koehler warned against the "bravado" of foreign mission work. People are easily excited by the appeal of saving one soul who has not heard the Gospel while ignoring the needs of one's own next-door neighbor. It is amazing that an appeal for orphans or an appeal for typhoon damage can produce offerings that the regular work of the church can't match. The response to the appeal for typhoon relief in India produced such an outpouring of offerings that we had to wait for a second natural disaster in order to use up the extra funds. There is also the danger of equating the work of the Gospel with the work of providing for the poor and especially for the widows and orphans. In India our work has centered around orphans and providing for their physical and spiritual needs. Some have gone so far as to suggest that our work at ILC is not really mission work. The implication is that the monies spent on ILC could be better spent on "real" mission work.

### **THE CLC IS IN DANGER OF BECOMING LUKEWARM.**

**(Revelation 3:15-16) "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth."**

Woe to the CLC, if like the church of Laodicea, we are lukewarm. After forty years of existence, there are many signs of complacency and dullness. This is the nature of church bodies and individuals. We have the form of godliness while denying the power thereof. It is difficult for each generation to make the truth and power (dynamite) of the Gospel the personal possession of the present generation. It would be beneficial if each generation had to rediscover the truth of the Gospel and then rewrite the confessions of the church for itself from scratch. There is a tendency to accept what we have without understanding it or critically examining it. There is a real benefit that results from the pain of controversies and doctrinal battles which are so wearing. These controversies drive us back to the Scriptures, the source of our life.

God forces us to dig into the Scriptures for our personal answers and confessions. Fifty years ago, at the height of Wisconsin's struggle with what to do in regard to its relationship with the Missouri Synod, John P. Meyer warned about traditionalism which is the strange bedfellow of unionism.

If we, their children, now content ourselves with simply repeating the terms our father's coined, we may appear to be in complete agreement with them, while in reality, because we fail to mine those doctrines ourselves from the Scriptures themselves, we are virtually in basic disagreement. We accept them on the authority of our fathers, not because we have ourselves become sure of them out of the Scriptures. Traditionalism has taken the place of unreserved submission to the Word of God. There may seem to be a world of difference between traditionalism and unionism, but under the skin they are twin brothers.<sup>17</sup>

This lukewarmness is seen in the lack of original material produced within the Church of the Lutheran Confession especially in the area of music and hymns, which are the signs of life in a church. At times, the Journal of Theology seemed to consist mainly of reprints and translations of old articles by the fathers. As valuable as these are, they can never replace the individual

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<sup>17</sup> John P. Meyer, "Unionism" in Jahn "Essays on Church Fellowship" p. 65

mining of the Scriptures. Sometimes it seems that there is a lack of exegetical work in our midst and in our conventions. I remember when the CLC was forced to deal with the question of the grounds on which a congregation may terminate the call of its pastor. The discussion centered around citations from the fathers. Luther was quoted on both sides because of the nature of the state church in Germany. Most quoted were Walther and Fritz. It almost became a matter of "I'll see your Luther, and raise you two Walter quotes." It did lead us to the realization that the Bible in the New Testament has very little to say about the form of the public ministry.

It is interesting to note that there has been an upsurge in materials produced within the CLC. The following have been produced in recent years: original hymns, a catechism, several adult instruction classes, new liturgies, Ministry-by-Mail, web-sites, VBS materials, devotional materials, etc. Currently, the CLC is working on publishing a Sunday School series. There are many individuals especially among the younger pastors with the advent of the computer, who are sharing materials they have prepared. It is instructive that almost all the original work in our church body has been done by individuals not by committees or the synod.

This lukewarmness is revealed in pastors and people alike. A sure sign of decay is when sermons and classroom presentations become mechanical and lifeless. Pastors and professors see their calling as a job and settle into a dull routine of rehashed leftovers. The spontaneous and joyful faith-life of the earlier years is replaced by organizational and synodical concerns with budgets and power struggles. Our people also fail to appreciate their pastors and teachers and support them. People no longer are hungry for the "bread of life" and no longer desire the "water of life." Personality conflicts and petty problems occupy the pastor's and school teacher's time. The blessings of a Christian education in the Christian Day School and the tremendous blessing of ILC are weighed against the material advantages the world seems to offer. The lack of interest in the public ministry among our young people is not a result of the low salary structure. It is a direct result of the lukewarm attitude of parents and pastors and teachers toward this high calling and a lukewarm attitude toward the Gospel itself.

God would rather encounter the coldness of the atheist than the stultifying lukewarmness of a nominal CLC Christian. The devil has succeeded in dulling the consciences of many by giving them a pale imitation of faith and the Christian life within organized churches. Only the Gospel can produce a living faith within the CLC.

## **II. THE CAUSES FOR THIS SPIRITUAL DECLINE ARE INHERENT WITHIN OUR HERITAGE**

Professor J.P. Koehler considered himself first and foremost a historian. He wrote two major books: *Kirchengeschichte* and *History of the Wisconsin Synod*. Koehler's premise was that human organizations such as congregations and synods go through growth stages just as individual human beings do during their lifetimes. He saw in the Wisconsin Synod a "verstockung" or hardening process at work. Koehler referred to this "verstockung" as the calcification or stiffening process that takes place in our physical bodies and also affects whole societies and nations as well as, in particular, churches and church organizations. After forty years of existence, we today will seek to examine how this calcification process has affected the Church of the Lutheran Confession.

If you accept the premise of the church historian, Professor Koehler, our church body, like every other human organism, is in a state of decline and calcification. The reason for this decline is that the Gospel and faith are contrary to human reason and expectations. God's ways are not our ways. In fact, God's ways are often diametrically opposed to our ways. The grace of God is always seen against the backdrop of the weakness of man. That is why the Apostle Paul refers to the "foolishness of preaching" in 1 Corinthians 1. There is always the tendency to externalize the Gospel and emphasize the forms and rituals rather than the power of the cross. In fact the more blessed by God an individual or organization is, the greater the spiritual dangers. It is also true that the CLC, after forty years, is in a process of calcification. 1 Corinthians 1 stresses the paradox of how God works so that His grace is always central.

For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, **that no flesh should glory in His presence** (emphasis mine).<sup>18</sup>

This is also illustrated in Deuteronomy 6, where Moses warned God's people against allowing the blessings of God in that land flowing with milk and honey to inflate their sense of accomplishment and to, in the end, cause them to forget about God. The nation of Israel was blessed by God like no other people. To the chosen descendants of Abraham were given "the oracles of God" (Romans 3:2), the law, the promise of the Messiah. The Old Testament history of the Children of Israel revealed how they kept the outward forms (the ordinances, the ceremonies, the rituals) of God's revelation. At the same time, they emptied these forms of their Gospel content and turned them into the worst kind of self-righteous religion. Jesus' conflicts with the religious leaders of His day were not due to their embracing of the false religions of the day like early Israel had done in the days of the judges. Instead they paid more attention to the letter of the law than to its Gospel spirit. In their orthodoxy and separatism, they ended up trusting in themselves and despising others. Every church body and church organization has tended to replace the power of the Gospel with empty ritual and tradition. As the CLC enters into its third generation, it also faces the danger of losing the spirit and the power of the Gospel.

So it shall be, when the LORD your God brings you into the land of which He swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give you large and beautiful cities which you did not build, "houses full of all good things, which you did not fill, hewn-out wells which you did not dig, vineyards and olive trees which you did not plant; when you have eaten and are full; **"then beware, lest you forget the LORD** (emphasis mine) who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:26-29

<sup>19</sup> Deuteronomy 6:10-12

## TRADITIONALISM AND FORMALISM (VATER THEOLOGIE)

The strengths of an organization are often its downfall. Traditionalism is the tendency to confess and believe something because that it is the way it always has been. The life of the church is derived from the Scriptures not from the writings and confessions of the fathers or the church. There developed a tendency in the Synodical Conference to study the writings of the church fathers and Luther instead of digging into the Scriptures. This became apparent especially within the Missouri Synod. Conference papers and sermons from the early twentieth century are filled with quotes from Luther and Walter. As faithful as these men were and as important as their writings are, it became standard operating procedure to use them to settle doctrinal questions and for their writings to become the material out of which sermons were produced.

The subject of study for new essays became not so much Scripture as the essays in the old synodical reports, and quotations from them were frequently used instead of proof from Scripture.<sup>20</sup>

After Luther, orthodoxy had become a dead form devoid of spiritual life. The confessional Lutheran church became the dead body out of which came the overreaction of Pietism with its emphasis on feeling and emotion. The longer a church body exists and the larger it becomes, the more it becomes vulnerable to the dangers of traditionalism and formalism. If the CLC exists as a haven for people who want to use the King James version and The Lutheran Hymnal of 1941 and pp. 5ff., its days are numbered. If our defense of the Gospel consists of repeating what the fathers have written, we have already been outflanked by Satan. We need to pray that the CLC does not become a dead shell of orthodoxy having the form of godliness but denying the power of it.

It is easier and quicker to rely on the traditions of the fathers than to personally mine the Scriptures anew. It is very impressive to line up citation after citation from the fathers in doctrinal discussions. History reveals that this is the kiss of death. It is this process of calcification or hardening that also affects the Church of the Lutheran Confession. To deny this fact is to ignore the history of God's Old Testament people and to fail to learn from their example (1 Cor. 10).

Our doctrinal battles were fought to a large extent with the 17<sup>th</sup> century fathers as our authorities....We grew up with citations from the fathers; with the same citations that our teachers gave us, and we copied out of their writings. We in turn operated when we had to give an essay at conference, at synods, in controversies, obviously without having come to know the fathers thoroughly ourselves by our study. We were familiar with the Scriptures, but didn't master them. Indeed to establish the correctness of Scriptural proofs we again quoted the fathers: "This is how Luther, or Lucas Osiander, or Johann Gerhard interpreted this passage." That usually settled the matter.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> August Piper, "Anniversary Reflections", p. 263

<sup>21</sup> August Pieper, *Wauwatosa Theology I*, pp. 87-88

## DOGMATICISM AHEAD OF EXEGESIS

The Lutheran Church sought to present the truths of Scripture in propositional forms. This was due to a desire to be faithful confessors of the truth. It is important to carefully define the question that faces the church at any point in history and to confess the truths of God's Word clearly and succinctly. However, this was also due to the medieval scholasticism of Luther's day. I have always been struck by how few Bible passages and Scriptural references are used in the Lutheran Confessions. Luther's *Small Catechism* (six chief parts and their meaning) was more filled with truths drawn directly from the Bible. However, the Age of Rationalism which followed the Reformation tended to make doctrinal debates more like lawyers debating the fine points of the law. This was an age of intellectualism and rationalism. I would maintain that anyone with a logical, lawyer-like mind could become a good dogmatician, but only a forgiven sinner could become a true exegete.

Our stream of Lutheran history in the Synodical Conference faced a continental divide in the different seminary training methods in the LC-MS and the WELS. The Missouri Synod seminary under Walther made dogmatics the queen of theology. One of the Pieper brothers (Franz) wrote the three volume set of dogmatics that I studied at Immanuel seminary. This emphasis was revealed in the time spent studying dogmatics at St. Louis. This method involved setting forth dogmatical propositions and then finding passages and citations from the fathers that proved the proposition. This form of dealing with Scripture made it possible for Missouri to send forth a well-trained army of dogmaticians. This dogmatical approach is also revealed in the part of the catechism we have added to Luther's *Small Catechism*. Here again in our traditional method of instruction, we set forth a doctrinal proposition and then buttress it with proof passages. A better but more difficult method would be to teach Bible stories and sections of Scripture and then draw the truths out of them (the inductive method of teaching).

Walther naturally was the teacher of dogmatics, which was regarded as the queen of the theological disciplines...It was dogmatics, with five to seven periods a week, that in the second and third years of study claimed all the energy of even the diligent student. The pedantry of using a Latin textbook and Latin as the language of instruction together with Latin dictation from the church fathers made dogmatics so difficult for most students that they had to spend four, five, or even six hours on it every day in order to be able to answer in Latin Walther's Latin questions....The drill in dogmatics in the seminary was so thorough that only a few left the institution without knowing the smallest details of pure Lutheran doctrine.<sup>22</sup>

In the Wisconsin Synod Lutheran Seminary at Wauwatosa, another Pieper brother (August) took a different tack. The three men at Wauwatosa (J.P. Koehler, John Schaller and August Pieper) emphasized that exegesis was the queen of theology. They were even reluctant to write a dogmatics textbook. The seminary at Wauwatosa emphasized the study of the entire Bible, the content of entire books, and the immediate context of passages. Greek and Hebrew were taught as they were at St. Louis. However, the emphasis was always on the direct study of Scripture and the individual's exegetical work. The work of these three men reflected a freshness and life that was sometimes missing from confessional Lutheranism.

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<sup>22</sup> August Pieper, *Wauwatosa Theology I*, pp. 86-87

They introduced what has come to be known as the grammatical-historical approach to exegesis and the study of Scripture. Our seminary at ILC shares this rich heritage in the study of Scripture in its original languages. What made the Wauwatosa theology different from Missouri's approach was its emphasis on the historical setting of the text. J.P. Koehler taught not only Bible History but also world history like no one else. In our seminary, schools, and pulpits, we need to teach the history (His Story) of God's saving acts. I believe that this has been missing in Wisconsin and in the CLC's approach to theology and the study of the Bible. Koehler, Pieper, and Schaller believed that it was necessary to understand the historical context of the entire Bible. Then it was important to understand the larger context of an entire book within the framework of this history. Finally, a passage was to be studied in its immediate context. This is not as fast as quoting a proof passage, but it prepared people with the help of the Holy Spirit to understand the meaning of God's Word.

I believe that the men who were instrumental in the forming of the CLC were more in the cut of J.P. Koehler, August Pieper, and John Schaller than in the mold of Walther and Franz Pieper. However, I still remember reading line by line Pieper's Dogmatics and the emphasis on being able to refute Hodge et alii. The problem was that while Franz Pieper was refuting the traditional Reformed predestination of Calvin and Zwingli and Hodge, the church was stormed by Arminian theology with its emphasis on the free will of man and man's decision to accept Christ into his heart. In my ministry, I have met fewer than five genuine Calvinists who believed in an absolute double predestination. I also feel that in my seminary education, we did not spend enough time on the study of the books of the Bible in their entirety. I was not required to read all the books of the Bible even in isagogics. Also our exegesis courses were minimal as far as the amount of material covered. We spent all year in Hebrew exegesis in the study of the first three chapters of Genesis. What is needed is an immersion in Bible History and an in-depth study of the historical books of the Old and New Testaments.

Two men in the CLC are examples of the power of the Gospel proclaimed in its historical context and how the **historical**-grammatical method worked. The first was Roland A. Gurgel. His sermons, Bible Classes, and classroom presentations were powerful because of his grasp and presentation of the historical context of God's dealings with man. The second was L.W. Schierenbeck. He taught the Lutheran Confessions from the rich background of Bente's historical introduction. As you understood the story of the men involved in the various doctrinal controversies, the Lutheran Confessions became alive. This was in contrast to the usual, dead and dread reading of the Apology during Christmas vacation in my seminary days.<sup>23</sup> I have come to the conclusion that adult instruction courses as well as school and Sunday school classes and confirmation classes need to emphasize the total history of God's plan of salvation as revealed from Genesis to Revelation.

### **AN EMPHASIS ON THE FELLOWSHIP DOCTRINE AS THE APEX OF THEOLOGY**

A church born out of controversy always faces the danger of defining its existence in terms of that one doctrine under attack. I still remember that fine ALC woman in Washington who told me that in the ALC she had not even heard of Romans 16:17, but since coming to Gethsemane

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<sup>23</sup> *The Wauwatosa Theology I*, p. 86

August Pieper noted, "The extremely lifeless reading of the Symbolical books was auxiliary to the instruction in dogmatics."



she had heard nothing but it. This was in the early days of my ministry. We who are in the CLC from birth often do not realize the emphasis we put on the fellowship principle in our ministries. Very few small Lutheran church bodies which came out of the turbulent days of the Synodical Conference have survived or made much of an impact. The Orthodox Lutheran Conference and other smaller conservative Lutheran Churches have disappeared and are disappearing from the religious scene. Many of these church bodies that came out of Missouri like the "real CLC" the Concordia Lutheran Conference, Illinois Lutheran Conference, and Churches of the Lutheran Reformation came out of Missouri because of the "old" Missouri doctrine on church and ministry and the fight against unionism. These churches exist fifty years later for the purpose of still fighting this same battle on church and ministry. It has become, in practical terms, their mission and reason for existence.

It is very easy for the Church of the Lutheran Confession to make the doctrine of church fellowship and Romans 16:17-18 its main doctrine and its justification for existence. This would make a caricature of the Gospel and the reason for our existence. There is a real temptation to apply the fellowship principle to an ever narrower and narrower range of activity. In our recent history, several pastors came into the CLC from the WELS. It soon became apparent that their agenda was to expose the errors of the Wisconsin Synod. There was increased rhetoric against WELS, sometimes the making of accusations which were a wrongful judging of motives and actions of pastors and professors in the WELS. If our reason for existence is simply to point out the errors of other Lutheran church bodies, we have no godly purpose in our mission and focus as a church body. Looking back, it was a remarkable gift of God that the CLC did not react with more bombastic rhetoric against WELS and the Missouri Synod. Again, if we exist only as an alternative to liberal Lutheranism, our days are numbered. The illustration of what happens when someone's mission and goal is to reform a synod is found in Herman Otten's "Christian News" with its tone and spirit. Nothing dare trump the proclamation of justification by grace alone through faith.

On the one hand, there is the fact that the *consciousness of one's own rectitude*, of one's own orthodoxy, finds expression. You hear this, for example, in sermons at anniversaries or other occasions, when preachers refer mainly to what our synods or individual men among us or the particular jubilarian has accomplished. It is taken for granted among us that we then add that God alone deserves the glory for these achievements. However, the presentation runs otherwise; instead, the man receives the praise, some men and their accomplishments are compared with other men, but it is not pointed out that it is not at all their doing, and the words, 'to God alone the glory' only limp along at the end.<sup>24</sup>

### **A LACK OF APPRECIATION FOR THE UNA SANCTA**

We believe in the Holy Christian Church. The Bible defines the Church as the invisible body of Christ, which is made up of all who believe by the power of the Holy Spirit that Jesus is their Savior from sin. These believers are known only to God. The human tendency is to externalize everything, that is to emphasize the outward and what can be perceived. The pagans externalized "God" by making idols that could be seen and touched. Old Testament Israel

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<sup>24</sup> J.P. Koehler, "Legalism Among Us," *Wauwatosa Theology*, II, p. 251

externalized the law by making the "shadow" rituals like the Sabbath more important than the substance which was Christ. Man has always tried to externalize the Gospel and turn it into the law. The Catholic and medieval church externalized Christ's body of believers, the Church, by saying that outside of the church (the outward organization) there could be no salvation. The modern ecumenical and the church growth movements also are guilty of externalizing the Holy Christian Church today by making it one organizational entity.

However, our synodical conference background has tended to externalize the Church by emphasizing fellowship in terms of the church instead of in terms of the word. The emphasis on fellowship in terms of a **pure church** rather than on **pure teaching** tends to make salvation dependent upon a "right" confession. In the early years of the CLC, this was clarified by the emphasis on pure or correct teaching and preaching separate from the idea of a pure outward church.

Intellect tied the matter of fellowship with the church. Unionism rules were drawn to answer the question, with whom you may fellowship. Missouri wished to witness to the unity that exists among Christians. The question always turned on whom one may recognize as a Christian brother? The question is better placed when one thinks of dogma (doctrine) as that which must be preached, and not think of it in terms of that which is believed by this person or that. This ties, the problem of fellowship to the Means of Grace rather than to the doctrine of the Church....It has to do with the means of grace which saves people, not with church relations and rules for church relations. The institutionalized church thinks in horizontal relationships and neglects the vertical relationship between each child of God and His Father in heaven.<sup>25</sup>

There developed a trend within the Synodical Conference to define a Christian in terms of correct doctrine and teaching. It has been expressed that while we gratefully acknowledge that there are believers who are not members of our church, our fellowship principles prevent us from thinking of or recognizing others outside our fellowship as brothers. "Whom may I recognize as a brother?" In the CLC, we struggled with the proposition that we can only recognize as brothers (Christians) those who are in doctrinal agreement with us. This caused a lot of confusion until the CLC carefully spoke in terms of recognizing and acknowledging others as "confessional brothers." The question then becomes, "Whom may I recognize as a confessional brother?"

I believe that the unspoken idea that doctrinal purity is necessary for membership in the *Una Sancta* is a part of our confessional baggage from the Wisconsin Synod and is reflected in their fellowship principles. I would maintain that one reason WELS found it difficult to follow through on its "marking" of the Missouri Synod was the idea that WELS could no longer think of or recognize these former brethren as Christians. This was revealed in the rationalization of WELS, which defended continuing in fellowship with LC-MS in order to extricate the true believers from Missouri. A recent article in the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* revealed the tortured logic condoning private fellowship with someone of a different church if it was

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<sup>25</sup> Winfred Schaller, *The Lutheran Spokesman* Vol 8, No. 8, January 1996, p. 10

discovered that he was in agreement with the entire word.<sup>26</sup> This article also equated avoiding false teachers with excommunication (regarding the person to no longer be a believer).

A non-Christian confession, on the other hand, reflects a conscious, stubborn rejection of portions of Scripture, a less than full allegiance to all that God says. This is far different than imperfect knowledge and weakness of faith. Such an attitude calls for repentance and, if persisted in, forces us to regard the confessor as an unbeliever.<sup>27</sup>

The CLC in its early years, particularly at a Spokane pastoral conference, carefully distinguished between marking and avoiding a false teacher and the act of excommunication.

However, as CLC pastors, what is the first thing you think of when you meet someone in an hospital bed who wants you to pray with him – possible fellowship conflicts or his eternal end? What predominates in our church body and in our ministry?

There is a curious paradox in our conservative Lutheran heritage in regard to the church. The Synodical Conference rejoiced in the universal priesthood of all believers as proclaimed by Luther. However, the Missouri Synod which taught that the local congregation was the only God-ordained form of church became very synod-oriented. Because of the force of Walther's personality and style, doctrine was decided by the "Gutachtens" of the seminary. WELS has also evolved into a top-down form of organization over the years. There is the real danger in the CLC that the synod organization becomes the center of our attention. I hope that the CLC will resist the temptation to make the synod or even the congregation the arbitrator of matters of conscience and application for the believer, who has been made a priest and a king by Jesus.

There is a pride which accompanies this trend. I remember the stewardship drive in the Missouri Synod in the late sixties or early seventies. It was called SOS, which meant "Save Our

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<sup>26</sup> Forrest Bivens, "Current Issues Concerning Church Fellowship" Part I and Part II, *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol 94, # 4 Fall 1997 and Vol. 95, # 1 Winter 98

"The Doctrinal Statements of the WELS, 1970, Church Fellowship" p. 52 "A Christian confession of faith is in principle always a confession to the entire Word of God. The denial, adulteration, or suppression of any word of God does not stem from faith but from unbelief...We recognize and acknowledge as Christian brethren, those who profess faith in Christ as their Savior and with this profession embrace and accept his entire Word." Bivens's conclusion is that "If from private, personal contact with any professing Christian we learn that he trusts Jesus as his Savior and expresses a commitment to the whole of Scriptures without reservation, we have reason to consider him a weak brother rather than a persistent errorist despite his flawed public confession. In seeking clarification about the inconsistencies, we may well learn he is weak in faith or largely, if not fully, unaware of the seriousness of the errors involved. he may be genuinely open to counsel and instruction. 'Accept him whose faith is weak,' and do so on the basis of the private confession you received through personal contact." WLQ Vol 95/Number 1, p. 27

<sup>27</sup> Forrest Bivens, "Current Issues Concerning Church Fellowship", Part II, Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly, Vol. 95, #1 Winter 98, pp. 31-32

Synod." Synodical Conference Lutherans tended to confess what their church believed. The founding fathers of the CLC tried to implement a synodical structure which would keep in check the power of the synod, a strategy which sometimes led to inefficiency and vigorous, unfettered public debate.

The dichotomy regarding the nature of the Church is revealed in Walther's premise that the Missouri Synod was the true visible church. "The Missouri Synod has become great, not only inwardly, but also outwardly, through this characteristic of Walther's. Though he clearly recognized that the true church is something purely inward and invisible, he – more than Luther – emphasized the 'true visible church on earth' and staked his life on making it a reality in the most perfect form possible in his synod."<sup>28</sup>

On the other hand, when legalism gains ground among Lutherans in doctrinal discussion, then the direct reverse appears, the *absence of an ecumenical spirit*. The distorted term, *the true visible church*, which to be sure can be correctly understood has much to do with this unecumenical attitude. The ecumenical spirit follows directly from the Gospel.<sup>29</sup>

We need to emphasize the truth of the *Una Sancta* (the one holy body of Christ) even as we maintain confessional integrity. If we do not, we are in danger of subtly making salvation dependent on correct doctrine and purity of fellowship. There is also a danger that correct teaching and a pure church become more important in effect than justification by faith through the blood of Christ. Our heritage seems to make salvation dependent upon faith in Jesus **and** the acceptance of God's entire Word. The miracle of the Reformation was that Luther made justification by grace through faith the apex of his theology. Everything flowed out of the Gospel. This truth will enable us to function as a truly mission-minded outreach group of believers who are not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ. It also will restore unto us, after forty years, the joy of God's salvation. I believe it will also result in a fresh appreciation for an organization which seeks to clearly confess and find agreement on the teachings of God's holy Word and yet is able to rejoice in the power of the Gospel wherever it is proclaimed.

### **LEGALISM AMONG US (Gesetzliches Wesen)**

The founders of the CLC recognized the dangers of legalism inherent in our heritage and our human nature. The *CLC Directory* states, "We recognize that many temptations and snares confront the way of orthodoxy - legalism, arrogance, formalism, exclusiveness - to name a few." This legalistic spirit consists of the tendency of a Christian to again be motivated by the law's demands, threats, and condemnation rather than by the Gospel's proclamation, promise, and gifts. The distinction between law and gospel must be clearly recognized in order for us to determine what legalism really is. The CLC also struggled with the dangers of unevangelical practice in connection with its warning against fraternal life insurance companies like Aid Association for Lutherans. It emphasized the need for proper evangelical pastoral practice.

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<sup>28</sup> August Pieper, "Anniversary Reflections," *Wauwatosa Theology*, III, p. 269

<sup>29</sup> J.P. Koehler, Legalism Among Us, *The Wauwatosa Theology* II, p. 247

Legalism gains ground especially during doctrinal controversies. The spirit of producing conformity at all costs obscures the purpose of gaining the brother. The law is imposed on others to coerce their obedience. This is revealed in how we try to increase giving or church attendance among our members. Legalism produces a factious spirit which stops listening to others and makes the holding of a doctrinal position predominant. There is a very real and present danger that a conservative church body end up adhering to orthodoxy and yet out of real concerns for preserving the truth end up deserting the Gospel. A legalistic spirit tends to develop a handbook of rules and regulations as it seeks to apply a Scriptural principle to specific situations (cf. Fritz's *Pastoral Theology* approach).

The essay (J.P. Koehler's "Legalism Among Us") shouldn't of course, be misunderstood to suggest that we do not possess the gospel and have no reason to extol God's grace - also not as if every age didn't have its defects. Yet it is necessary to pay attention to the fact that our era lacks the vigor the work of our fathers exemplified, and that the defects sketched out above are prominent enough to have become noticeable and habitual. We often lack the consciousness, the sense for detecting legalism. That is why people can't abide the accusation.<sup>30</sup>

### III. THE ANSWER REMAINS: OUR GREAT HERITAGE - STILL THE WORD OF GOD

This brings us full circle. Our anniversary celebration seeks to turn our attention to the life-giving Word of our Savior God which is our great heritage. The Word and the sacraments are the means of grace. They bring us the Gospel, by which the power of the Holy Spirit creates and sustains faith and spiritual life in the believer. The Lord, in His unsearchable wisdom, has blessed us with this Word. Our heritage is not what we have done, the doctrinal stands we have taken, the buildings we have erected, but the everlasting mercy of God in preserving His saving Word and Gospel in our midst.

Are we going to faithfully pass this word to the next generation? The answer is found in God alone. I do know that if we do not treasure the Word of God and our Savior Jesus, both will be taken from us, and we will forfeit our right to exist as a confessional church body. We will become like so many other church bodies, simply an empty noise.

In closing, I would suggest that we look at our present use of God's Word, not in our confessional statements, but in our daily use of that Word. How seriously do we as pastors and individuals study the life-giving Word? How concerned are we that we will pass it on to our children? Is the study of the Bible a dull or non-existent routine, or do we hunger and thirst after its soul-satisfying words? We need to examine our sermons, our instruction classes, our confirmation classes, our schools, our seminary to make sure that God's Word is still our heritage. Most of all we need to emphasize the importance of daily family devotions.

We have a rich heritage in the so-called historical-grammatical study of the Scriptures as encouraged not only by Koehler, Pieper and Schaller, but also as emphasized by those who founded the CLC. I would suggest that the Bible needs to be studied in its totality rather than

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<sup>30</sup> J. P. Koehler, Legalism Among Us, *The Wauwatosa Theology II*, p. 281-282

by an isolated proof-passage method. The great themes of the Old and New Testament should, first of all, be mastered and understood. Then the individual books should be digested in the context of God's overall plan of salvation. Finally, the individual sections of Scripture should be examined in the context of each individual book. In this way, the Bible becomes a living book that makes Christ and His forgiveness a real part of our lives. I have found in my instruction classes the joy of people who, as they go through the historical parts of the Bible from Genesis to Acts, discover for themselves what God has to say to them in Christ. These then are people who come to Bible Class as well as the worship services. In the congregations I have served, I have taken the people through the Old Testament history over two years and then through Luke's Gospel account of Jesus' life and the book of Acts. The key is to lead people into God's Word for themselves and let the Holy Spirit work. Sunday school lessons and Christian Day School religion courses should stress the chronological order of God's plan of salvation by not skipping around from Joseph in Genesis to Joseph in the birth of Jesus. Confirmation classes should follow the old LC-MS sixth grade confirmation text, *Growing in Christ* as it teaches doctrine directly from Bible stories.

The Bible consists of many individual books. They were carefully placed together by God through men to form a well-ordered whole, to reveal completely to us God's plan for our salvation. No one book contains everything. Only all together contain the whole. Therefore the public teacher of the Word who wishes to work with success, may not leave one book of Scripture unstudied..... Yes, if our professors, pastors, and teachers actually wish to attain to a ripe, manly or mature knowledge of the Scriptures, then we dare not be satisfied with the mere knowledge of individual verses and passages, be they ever so many, but must learn and know the Scriptures BOOK BY BOOK.<sup>31</sup>

The remedy he (Koehler) offered again and again was *Zusammenhangendes Schriftstudium*, study of the Scriptures on the basis of the original languages with constant attention to the larger context.<sup>32</sup>

For the last thirty-three years I have been privileged to be in the ministry within a church body where prayerfully **God's Word Is Still Our Great Heritage**. I pray for the future of my children and grandchildren. Like the Children of Israel at the Red Sea, God tells us to be still and acknowledge the He is God. The future of God's Word is secure.

A person who looked at the first draft of this paper reacted with, "I didn't think things were that bad." I would rather hope that a honest look at our weaknesses will lead us to marvel at the grace of God that has preserved the Gospel in our midst in spite of our flaws and shortcomings. Only when we realize that we are weak, will we be strong. I am amazed by the grace of God which has preserved the great heritage of the Word. "Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me."<sup>33</sup> Those of us who have been raised in the cocoon of conservative Lutheranism, do not fully appreciate the grace and mercy

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<sup>31</sup> August Pieper, *Wauwatosa Theology I*, p. 62

<sup>32</sup> *The Wauwatosa Theology I*, p. 47

<sup>33</sup> 2 Corinthians 12:9

God has shown to us in the our Church of the Lutheran Confession and what we have been given. The object of our faith is Jesus Christ alone. To God alone be the glory.

Pastor Winfred Schaller's essay closed with the following cry "out of depths."

Such honest humility drives us to Scripture, and we have much Scripture to learn. And in this alone is our strength.

Our synod is grass which withers. Our flesh will die and the CLC will wither. We cannot stand it if the breath of the Lord blows upon us. The judgment of God rests on a world ripe for judgment, on a nation which has despised its blessings, and on churches which in pride have failed their Lord. And judgment begins at the house of God.

**But the word of our God will stand forever.<sup>34</sup>**

Lord Jesus Christ, with us abide,  
For round us follows the eventide;  
Nor let Thy Word, that heav'nly light;  
For us be ever veiled in night.

Lord Jesus, help, Thy Church uphold,  
For we are sluggish, thoughtless, cold,  
Oh, prosper well Thy Word of grace  
And spread its truth in every place.

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<sup>34</sup> Winfred Schaller, Jr., *The Lutheran Spokesman* Vol 8, No. 8, January 1966, p. 12-13





**GOD'S WORD IS STILL OUR GREAT HERITAGE**

**Fortieth Anniversary of the CLC**

**June 19-23, 2000**

**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.**

**GOD'S WORD IS STILL OUR GREAT HERITAGE**

**THE FUTURE**

**Michael Schierenbeck**



As the young man glides by on in-line skates you notice the jeans which appear to be at least a size too big, judging by the fact that they hang down six inches from the normal height. You also notice rings and studs protruding from places which you thought could never be pierced, and you wonder: Is this the future of our country? No doubt previous generations had similar thoughts as they observed young people wearing pants far too tight and hair unconventionally long. Thankfully, the future is flexible. While some hasty generalizations may turn out to be correct, what you may guess as the future of a young person may be far off the mark as most grow up and out of the teenage years and make the transition to adulthood, leaving the destructive habits of youth behind. Often there is the reliance on the foundation built and the values instilled by parents, which may be remembered and returned to. It is not only difficult, it is impossible to predict the future of an individual.

The same is true when we talk about the future of the Church of the Lutheran Confession and of Christians. Our Lord has not permitted us to see much of this. In the Scriptures He has given us glimpses in generalities, such as the eventual triumph of Christ and His Church as pictured in Revelation. This is most important, and all that we need to know, and yet we crave specifics. When we talk about the future of a church body and the heritage of God's Word for future generations, generalities again will have to suffice. There are no prophecies that deal with our synod in particular. It is a good thing that we are not shown all the details, for surely we would allow it to cloud our judgment and actions in the present. Gazing toward the future there are two paths which are available - either with or without God's Word as the lamp to our feet and the light to our path. Which path will be ours as a synod? It is impossible to say. The intent of this essay is merely to show the two paths. We will examine the blessings involved when the Word is delivered from generation to generation, and the difficulties and dilemmas that occur when it is not.

## **I. OUR FUTURE IS DEPENDENT ON THE PAST: THE HERITAGE OF GOD'S WORD FOR US TO PASS ON WAS HANDED DOWN TO US BY OUR FOREFATHERS**

God could have chosen many ways to convey the forgiveness of sins, which was won for the world, to an individual. In His divine wisdom God has chosen to use the Gospel of Jesus Christ as the means, the method, through which faith is created. The Holy Spirit does not create faith without the Gospel. He does not strike into people's hearts randomly like lightning striking the earth. There is not some Christian gene that is automatically passed on to children like eye color or hair color. *"So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God,"* Romans 10:17.<sup>1</sup> God's plan of salvation involves His Word being spread from person to person.

Although we do not receive faith through genetics, each and every one of us has automatically inherited a corrupt, sinful nature. To become a child of God and an heir of eternal life in heaven, a spiritual rebirth is necessary. *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, {4} to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,"* 1 Peter 1:3-4. This rebirth and adoption into God's family occurs only when the Holy Spirit works through the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. Subsequent strengthening of that faith is worked through that same Gospel.

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<sup>1</sup>Scripture quotations are taken from the New King James Version

In this connection I have heard it said that out of the Ten Commandments it is perhaps most harmful to disobey the Third Commandment ("Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy") because in the despising of God's Word you are cutting yourself off from the way in which God can work repentance and restoration. In the same way, when we fail to pass God's Word down to the next generation, we are in essence cutting them off from the source of salvation and failing to pass on to them a heritage of life. Our present status as an orthodox (correct teaching) synod is due in large measure to the heritage that we have received from our spiritual forefathers. The future of the CLC is dependent upon the transmission of God's Word to the generations to follow. God's Word is not an inheritance meant to end before time itself does. There is the Biblical precedent and injunction to pass the Word down to the next generation. This directive was there very early on in Bible history.

The Old Testament ceremonial Law had several functions (to reveal sin, to keep the Israelites separate from the heathen), but not to be forgotten was the critical purpose of pointing ahead to the Messiah. In Colossians chapter 2 we find this description of the Sabbath and other ceremonial laws, *"which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ."* God laid before His people picture after picture of how payment for sin must be made, and that payment would come in the form of the atoning blood of the Lamb of God. Here are just a few examples:

The Passover — lives were saved because the blood of the Passover lamb covered their doorposts; we are saved by the blood of Jesus, the Lamb of God (1 Peter 1:18-19).  
The Day of Atonement — blood sprinkled on the mercy seat atoned for the sin of the people; the shedding of Jesus' blood paid for the sin of the world (Hebrews 9:11-12).  
The Scapegoat — the high priest would lay the sins of the people on a goat who would be sent off into the wilderness, thus portraying the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29).

This Law was not meant for only one generation of Israelites. It was to be taught and carried out until the coming of Christ who would fulfill it.

- ▶ (speaking of the Passover) *"So this day shall be to you a memorial; and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD throughout your generations. You shall keep it as a feast by an everlasting ordinance."* Exodus 12:14
- ▶ *"And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. {7} You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up."* Deuteronomy 6:6-7
- ▶ *And Moses commanded them, saying: "At the end of every seven years, at the appointed time in the year of release, at the Feast of Tabernacles, {11} "when all Israel comes to appear before the LORD your God in the place which He chooses, you shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing. {12} "Gather the people together, men and women and little ones, and the stranger who is within your gates, that they may hear and that they may learn to fear the LORD your God and carefully observe all the words of this law, {13} "and that their children, who have not known it, may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God as long as you live in the land which you cross the Jordan to possess." Deuteronomy 31:10-13*

The Lord used such memory devices to keep the plan of salvation in front of the eyes of His people and emphasized the repetition of it for generations to follow.

Permit one more example to illustrate the point. When the children of Israel crossed over the Jordan into the promised land, the Lord allowed them to cross over on dry land in a similar fashion as when they had crossed the Red Sea in the exodus from Egypt. A man from each of the twelve tribes was commanded to take up a stone and make a pile. Why? *"That this may be a sign among you when your children ask in time to come, saying, 'What do these stones mean to you?' {7} Then you shall answer them that the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD; when it crossed over the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. And these stones shall be for a memorial to the children of Israel forever"* Joshua 4:6-7. Even when the printed word was not readily available, God saw to it that opportunities existed for His message to be spread from person to person and from generation to generation.

Several passages from the New Testament reiterate that will of God.

- ▶ *"And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord," Ephesians 6:4*
- ▶ *"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you ..." Matthew 28:19-20*
- ▶ *"Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching," 2 Timothy 4:2*
- ▶ *"So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God," Romans 10:17*

In the history of the Christian Church several turning points may be observed in which the Word of God was utilized and gave direction to Christians, giving them a future far different from one without the Word. There have been plenty of occasions in church history when the Word was abandoned. These occasions are far too numerous to mention. While one can easily look and learn in these cases of what not to do, here are some positive examples and turning points in the history of God's people.

Hezekiah (2 Chronicles 29-31) - After years of spiritual decay there was a revival during the reign of King Hezekiah. There was 'rubbish' and 'debris' in the temple which was removed. Heathen altars were destroyed, and worship of the true God was restored.

Josiah (2 Chronicles 34:3-7) - Soon after the death of Hezekiah, the nation of Judah again fell away from God. Josiah began to reign at age eight, and by age sixteen he was tearing down idols. In restoring the temple, the Book of the Law of the Lord was found (34:14). Can you imagine things being bad enough that it was lost? Using the Book of the Law, Josiah restored worship of the true God, including the Passover (Chapter 35) to the people.

The Early Christian Church - Acts 15 - Shortly after the ascension of Christ, there was a debate among Christian Jews and Gentiles. The question centered on whether or not the Gentiles should be required to be circumcised and to keep the Law of Moses (Acts

15:5). The seeds of legalism were being sown, and these Christians had come to a fork in the road — one path led ultimately to the belief that one was saved by works, and one path led to Christ as the Savior of both Jews and Gentiles. By the grace of God, the debate was settled with the Word of God found in Amos 8:11-12. It was found then that both Jew and Gentile were saved by grace not by the deeds of the Law.

The Reformation - The Reformation era was a tremendous turning point for the Church. In an age of spiritual darkness the Lord raised up Martin Luther and others to bring forth the seemingly radical idea of using Scripture as the final authority. In this wondrous spiritual 'fresh air' people were revitalized, and fear and terror of the Lord were swept away for thousands. The three pillars of the Reformation - grace alone, faith alone, and Scripture alone - brought hope and salvation to those who were caught in the despair of self-righteousness and held under the thumb of tyrannical church leaders. The availability of the Bible to the common man in his own language changed the world, and even more impressively changed people's hearts.

C.F.W. Walther and the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod - In the mid-nineteenth century Saxon Lutherans emigrated to the United States under the leadership of a pastor named Martin Stephan. He was deposed after being charged with adultery. In dealing with Stephan, and in the time following his departure, a dispute arose concerning the priesthood of all believers. These were some of the questions the people were asking themselves: "Had the pastors the right to serve congregations? Had they been justified in leaving their congregations in Germany? ... Had they the right, if they were congregations, to call pastors and teachers? Had they the right to depose those now in office? ... What was a church? What was the office of the ministry? What were the rights and obligations of both clergy and laity?"<sup>2</sup> Three laymen were led to Matthew 18:20 ("*Where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them*") as proof of the priesthood of all believers and autonomy of the Christian congregation. The Lord also provided a new leader in C.F.W. Walther who was grounded in Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions. In this way orthodox Lutheranism gained a foothold in the young United States.

The Wauwatosa Theology - After a time, there was a tendency toward *väter theologie* in the LC-MS and Wisconsin Synod. That is to say that there was a heavy reliance upon the sixteenth and seventeenth century Lutheran fathers for explanation of Scripture passages instead of doing one's own exegesis (drawing out the meaning of a passage using the original language and context). Three Wisconsin Synod seminary professors helped to bring an emphasis back to Scripture. For the first twenty-five years or so of the twentieth century Professors J.P. Koehler, August Pieper, and John Schaller trained men using what is referred to as the "Wauwatosa Theology." "They sought to realize the principle of *sola scriptura* more fully, in a practiced way in seminary training and theological work in general by dropping the undue use of and reliance on the works of

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<sup>2</sup>Forster, Walter O., *Zion on the Mississippi*, p. 517, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, 1953.

the dogmaticians of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and stressing the importance of direct, systematic study of the Scriptures as much as possible in the original languages."<sup>3</sup>

The Formation of the CLC - While the formation of the CLC may not be as significant in the history of the Christian Church as the other examples, it has certainly impacted the lives of us here today. In this age of ecumenism, it is difficult for many to fathom a doctrinal debate over one verse or one word of Scripture, yet such was the case. With the previous essay on the formation of the CLC, no further details need to be given here, but the point is that at another crossroads the Word was used as the guide. How the Lord will continue to use this synod remains to be seen.

I grant you that this is a lot of history for an essay concerned about the future, but to know where we're going, we need to see where we've been. We learn not only from mistakes, but also from the positive examples and turning points in church history when the Word of God was applied. A future as a synod focused on our Lord and the truth of salvation through Christ alone would be improbable if we had not received this wonderful inheritance of the pure Word from our forefathers. Despite all the workings against Him, God has continued to provide His children with the knowledge of the Way to heaven. Personally this has given individuals the comfort, hope, and certainty of sins forgiven, of a bodily resurrection, and an eternity with their Lord. In our congregations we have found the blessing of unified hearts and minds and are able to comfort and encourage one another with the hope that we share. In our synod we have used and continue to use this heritage to pursue jointly the spread of the Gospel with our combined resources. When doctrinal debates arise, we have that blessing of sharing the same foundation and belief in the inerrancy and infallibility of the Scriptures. Could you imagine a discussion on a doctrinal point with a group that does not believe that the Bible is God's Word? Where would you even begin?

Thanks be to God that the Biblical precedent of passing on the Word has been followed in the past because it has allowed us to stand where we are today. The lesson to be learned is that the more things change, the more they stay the same. The Lord's will remains that His Word is not just for one group of people, but is to continue on for generations to come. His plan of salvation still involves His Word being communicated from person to person across the land and across time.

## **II. OUR FUTURE DEPENDS ON THE HERITAGE OF THE WORD CONTINUING ON THROUGH CHRISTIAN EDUCATION**

We frequently refer to this communication of the Word as Christian Education. Christian education is for life, and this can be understood in two ways. It is for life because the topic centers on Christ through whom alone eternal life may be found (*"Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."* - Acts 4:12). It is also for life because it is a life-long process. There will never be a point in this life in which we will reach a pinnacle of understanding about God. Quite often adults give that impression to children when on the one hand they make sure that the kids go to Sunday School and confirmation classes, but on the other hand there is not an effort on their own part to go to

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<sup>3</sup>Jahn, Curtis, Editor, *The Wauwatosa Theology Vol. 1*, p. 97, Northwestern Publishing House, Milwaukee, 1997.

Bible Class or to attend church regularly, or to have home devotions and prayers. Is it any surprise that there is an exodus of young people from the ranks of active members?

Let us revisit the passage of Deuteronomy 6:6-7 in a bit more detail: *"And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. {7} 'You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.'"*

It is not to be taken for granted that children will just "pick up" on Christianity without some sort of instruction. The command from God to the Israelites was to teach children diligently. Such diligent instruction of the Israelites was necessary because in spite of all the wonderful things that God had done for the Children of Israel - rescuing them from the Egyptians, miraculously sustaining them in the wilderness, and what He would do - routing their enemies and giving them a land flowing with milk and honey, they still ended up playing the harlot and chasing after false gods. More often than not this would happen after faithful leaders such as Joshua or any of the judges would die, and the next generation would not pick up where they left off. Because of the strong, natural inclination to reject God, the education of the young is vital. This is life-saving information that is being given out. It is truly education for the real world because nothing is more real than life and death.

To teach our children not only diligently but also effectively, adults need to know what they are talking about. *"You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. {9} 'You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates,' Deut. 6:8-9.* God wants His Word to be a constant influence, and to be constantly applied to daily living. An hour a week to think about God is nowhere near sufficient. The Pharisees misinterpreted this verse and made for themselves phylacteries (boxes with passages written on the inside which they then strapped to their hands and foreheads). By literally having God's Word on their hands and between their eyes, they felt that they had fulfilled God's command. However, nothing was further from the truth. Jesus points out their hypocrisy in Matthew 23. The Word was in front of them, but was not penetrating their hearts of stone.

We make the same mistake when we merely go through the motions of worship, or teach the young by example that Christian education takes place only within the walls of a church building or Christian Day School. The children that you see in Sunday School and Vacation Bible School are the future leaders of congregations and this synod. Certainly the church body as a whole benefits from their training. Even more important we instruct them in God's Word for the benefit of their own souls.

The impact of Christian education will be seen in many different areas of life. For example, it will provide the tools for mission work, giving the proper motivation for testifying of one's faith and also giving the proper message.

When it comes to mission work, it is altogether too easy to get caught up in numbers, gauging success with gains on the membership roster. In our day and age there is also the prevalence of the social gospel, namely the idea that Christianity is about feeding the body rather than the soul. Our mission is to proclaim Jesus Christ and Him crucified, to seek out lost sinners and bring to them a knowledge of their sin and helpless condition, and to enlighten them with a



knowledge of their Savior, Jesus, and the healing balm of absolution found in Him. To keep a proper perspective of what mission work is, again the Word of God is absolutely necessary.

The very desire to tell others about Jesus comes through the Bible. Without knowing that Jesus died for all, without the reinforcement of the Savior's love and the change of heart that He effects through the Gospel, there will not be the proper incentive to spread the Word:

- ▶ *"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
- ▶ *"Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, {19} that is, that God was in Christ **reconciling the world** to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation."* Corinthians 5:18-19
- ▶ *"How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? {15} And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!' {16} But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed our report?' {17} So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Romans 10:14-17*

We also see a proper view of stewardship linked to the Christ-centered raising of children. Our society is geared toward material things, and the influence of this world is unavoidable. This needs to be countered with the reality of God's Word. The Lord has given us our bodies and our possessions on loan. We are to take care of them, but it is not a permanent situation. *"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; {20} but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal,"* (Matthew 6:19-20). This is a mind-set that you will not find anywhere else but God's holy Word.

Time and talent, which God has also given us, are to be used for the glorification of Christ, not for selfish interests. All Christians (ministers and laymen alike) have been given talents and gifts to work in God's kingdom. Whether among friends or in front of the TV or eventually on the job, our youth will hear the exact opposite from the unbelieving world. The view there is to look out for number one, and success is equated with wealth. How easy it is too fall into that trap! The overabundance of goods in our country has not brought satisfaction. Instead greed has increased, and the more we have, the more we want. The idea that time, talent, and money should be dedicated to the Lord is a foreign thought. Again, it takes the news of what God has done in giving up His Son, and the promise of heaven that can change a person's attitude, and inculcate the Biblical idea of stewardship.

From the inception of our synod there has been an emphasis on Christian education in the formation and continuance of Immanuel Lutheran College. ILC was established at the very beginning of the CLC with the knowledge that without a training ground for workers in the church this newly formed synod would very well fold up after a generation. In a cursory glance through our directory, I number ILC graduates in the teaching and preaching ministry at right around 75% of the total pastors and teachers. This is not to say, of course, that ILC is the only

avenue for called workers to enter the active ministry in the CLC. The Lord has led several pastors and teachers to us from other synods, but if history holds true, the vast majority of called workers for the future will come through ILC.

Besides being a training ground for pastors and teachers, ILC is also a valuable asset for providing a strong foundation for lay members. ILC is no substitute for parents, but regardless of where our teenagers go to school, they will be with educators from six to eight hours a day. It is invaluable to have these teachers be of the same mind and judgment, centering their teaching (whether in religion, science, history, health etc.) on Christ. The chapel talks and Christian friends (future spouses?) all add to a Christian atmosphere making ILC vital to the future of the CLC.

The debate which pits ILC against Missions when it comes to the distribution of funds is really quite senseless. They are dependent upon one another. As part of the great commission we are on the lookout for places to send workers into the harvest, but at the same time we need workers to send. It is a symbiotic relationship.

### **III. THE FUTURE IS BLEAK WITHOUT THE UNADULTERATED WORD**

While it is impossible to predict the direction of the CLC, it is safe to say that it will be either with or without the leaven of false doctrine. The path of truth which is to be walked upon has ditches on either side which present alternatives to the truth, better known as lies. The unwary Christian may easily meander into a ditch without knowing it, or even back into the ditch on the other side as an over-correction. Without the unadulterated Word of God as our guide we will end up in either the ditch of legalism or the ditch of liberalism. Legalism promotes salvation by works, and uses the Law of God in a way that He never intended, namely to coerce behavior by using demands, threats, and guilt. On the other hand, liberalism tends toward ignoring God's Law and dismisses guilt by dismissing sin without proper payment. While appearing to be the opposite in nature, legalism and liberalism are really two sides of the same coin. In both cases man's word and opinion are put above God's Word.

It is very easy to slip into legalism because our flesh is already pulling in that direction. By nature we would like to think that we have a hand in our salvation by believing that we add to or replace Christ's work with our own righteousness, as though Jesus had left something undone in the work of redemption. Decision theology also stems from the notion that man plays a role in being saved by coming to Christ on his own accord.

More tempting for the future of our synod, I believe, would be the subtle introduction of legalism by using the Law of God to motivate behavior. Only through the Good News of sins forgiven in Christ does God change hearts. Fruits of faith come as a reflection of love for God. Truly God-pleasing behavior comes from the inside out, from a heart that has been changed from stone to flesh (Ezekiel 36:26). In legalism a change is sought from the outside in, that is, the attempt is made to change the heart by first changing behavior. It is very tempting to go this route because guilt and fear are very effective tools for altering conduct, but the change brought about is only superficial.

One of the concerns in the discussion of the American Legion and organizations in general is that we could lean, whether intentionally or not, toward motivating actions with the club of the Law. We certainly want to encourage Christians to make God-pleasing decisions, but not

merely because the convention says, "Do this." The right thing may be done for the wrong reason which does not facilitate true understanding of the issue. I am not stating that this has happened in our group, but we do stand at a crossroads. A God-pleasing life is not forced by coercion or threats or pressure, but flows from the love of Christ.

- ▶ *Who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works. Titus 2:14*
- ▶ *We love Him because He first loved us. 1 John 4:19*

In the December 1999 *Journal of Theology*, there is an article by Pastor Steve Kurtzahn entitled "Temptations that Especially Confront the Orthodox Revisited." There is the recognition that in reacting toward liberalism there is the possibility of swerving in the other ditch of legalism. The temptations for the orthodox mentioned are: legalism, arrogance, and lovelessness.

"So how do we fight against these temptations that especially confront the orthodox? How do we prevent ourselves from falling into either one of the ditches on both sides of the road? Paul's inspired words in Ephesians chapter 6 apply to us as never before: '*Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil*' (v.11). We also dare never forget the central message of Paul's proclamation, which should also be the focus of our ministry and proclamation: '*And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified*' (1 Cor. 2:1,2)<sup>4</sup>

Liberalism is also part of our nature. The tendency is there in each one of us to ignore sections of Scripture that we either don't like to hear or don't understand. Liberalism has penetrated nearly every denomination. Many who are swayed by liberalism invoke love as the reason, claiming it loveless to practice close communion, church discipline, and church fellowship. Liberal theologians claim to have a monopoly on love. However, it is loveless to allow souls bound for hell to continue merrily on as if nothing were wrong. It is loveless to put no attempt forward to warn people who are on the path to destruction of the dangers of sin and impenitence. It is loveless to ignore God's commands which are given for the protection of blood-bought souls.

The appeal is also to the intellect because the historical-critical method<sup>5</sup> of interpretation allows for man to critique the Bible and decide whether or not a passage is truly from God, and whether it is fact or fiction. Faith is thrown out of the window and trampled under by human reason.

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<sup>4</sup>Kurtzahn, Stephen C. F., "Temptations that Especially Confront the Orthodox Revisited," *Journal of Theology*, Vol. 39, No. 4, Dec. 1999, p. 25

<sup>5</sup>There are several aspects to the Historical-Critical method, but the bottom line is that in this method of interpretation, so-called scholars judge whether or not words and passages in the Bible are indeed God's Word, raising doubt as to what in the Bible is legitimate and can be trusted.

Either legalism or liberalism is the future when man's opinion is put above the Scriptures. It is a tantalizing lie of Satan which encourages us to believe that we have a better way than God. It is tantalizing because not only is the Gospel foolishness to natural man, but such a lie inflates pride and is very delightful to swallow. Satan is merely pushing the sinful flesh in a direction that it already wants to go. Christians throughout history have come to the conclusion that they had a better way than God: Abraham and Sarah thought that the child of promise should come about through an adulterous relationship with Hagar, rather than waiting on God; Isaac and Rebekah each wanted the blessing to come to a favorite son with their help rather than submitting to the will of God; more than once Samson thought that he had a better way of doing things than God.

Every false teaching stems from that same lie: I know better than God. Work righteousness, the belief that the sacraments are merely symbolic, and decision theology all stem from not taking God at His Word. The church growth movement, the social gospel, and secular fund raising promotions in the church and other such ideas have their root in human wisdom.

Without reliance on Scripture as the final answer, the future of the CLC is bleak. The days of orthodoxy would soon be over. I have heard it said that the average length of time that a synod remains orthodox is three generations. Some would assert that this occurs when former leaders are no longer around, and the torch has not been passed as was so often the case with the Israelites. Perhaps defenses only hold up so long against the assaults of the kingdom of the world. Whatever the case, I find such a statement alarming because I am part of the third generation of this synod.

#### **IV. OUR FUTURE IS BRIGHT WITH THE WORD**

That bleak future is not necessarily ours. As far as leaders go, God does provide. After the death of Moses, God provided Joshua. After Luther, God gave the next generation Martin Chemnitz. By His grace, and despite our own alleged greatness, God can keep us focused on the truth. There is a bright future when we remain in God's Word.

While we can by no means make the choice to become a Christian, after all without God we are dead in trespasses and sin, after conversion we do have choices since the Holy Spirit has created a new man within us. There are choices between right and wrong that we make every single day. The wrong choices, encouraged by the old man, lead away from God and His promises. Satan would love to have us believe that as Christians we can wallow in the pleasures of this earth, and there will be no negative impact on our souls. He would love to have us believe that we will grow in the knowledge of our Lord simply by thinking about Him or praying to Him to the exclusion of hearing what God has to say to us in His Word. He would also be more than delighted to see the CLC rest on its laurels and not be concerned about the future to the extent that slowly but surely God's Word is laid aside. This method worked well with the nation of Israel as many were gradually drawn away into idolatry. The northern kingdom was eventually taken off into captivity never to return to the land of promise. The southern kingdom of Judah also experienced a period of captivity in Babylon until God sent them back home. He preserved a remnant of Judah because of His promise of the Messiah which was yet to be fulfilled. By His promise and by His grace they were preserved.

We do not have a particular promise that the CLC in particular will remain steadfast. There are no guarantees of remaining orthodox until Judgment Day. So when we talk about the future,

the realization is there that it rests with God and His grace and mercy. He does make promises to those who abide in His Word, and in it we do find comfort as His people. These promises of God are received through faith, and this faith comes through the hearing of God's Word. When you backtrack, you can see that a disconnection from the Word leads to the weakness and destruction of faith, and a disconnection from the promises of God. While we can do nothing to merit God's favor, we have that awful power to throw it away.

The fact remains, though, that God does not leave His children without His help. The promises of protection that God has made for individuals may also apply to a group. The same spiritual weapons and armor (Ephesians 6) are available to a congregation and a synod as well as to the individual. Consider these promises of comfort that God has revealed:

- ▶ *"But now, thus says the LORD, who created you, O Jacob, And He who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; You are Mine. {2} When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, Nor shall the flame scorch you. {3} For I am the LORD your God, The Holy One of Israel, your Savior." Isaiah 43:1-3*
- ▶ *"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go." Joshua 1:9*
- ▶ *"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. {28} "And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. {29} "My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand." John 10:27-29*

It is a tremendous challenge for a group to remain true to God's Word. Christian congregations and synods are constantly under assault, and the orthodox even more so, as Satan strives to plant the leaven of false doctrine and watch it go to work. In this heathen world of immorality and debauchery where sins once taboo are now promoted, in a world where there is a strong push in religious circles toward sinful unionism which surely seems to be leading back to Rome, the odds are stacked against us. This has never been a problem for God before. What sort of odds did Gideon and his band of three hundred have against the thousands of Midianites? What chance did the Israelites have against the fortress city of Jericho? Yet in both instances the Lord prevailed.

God's protection is for the long term because He is protecting the eternal soul. Our brethren overseas are facing persecution and attacks that are not present here in America, and yet the Gospel there is thriving. Our future safety as Christians in this country is not guaranteed by any means as our nation takes incremental steps toward socialism. But we are told, *"And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do,"* (Luke 12:4). With God on his side the Christian has nothing to fear. *"If God is for us, who can be against us?"* (Romans 8:31)

Looking toward the future it pays to keep your eye on the prize. The heritage of the Word brings with it the heritage of heaven. As children of God, adopted into His family through Holy Baptism, we have awaiting us the inheritance of everlasting life. That goal of heaven is what we look forward to as we sit through the sweatbox of convention, and that goal is kept in mind

as the various board and committees debate over the best way to do the work of God's Kingdom. That goal keeps one going through the agonies of cancer, the grief of losing a loved one in death, and through the frustration in battling sin and its effects. The prize of heaven won for us by our Savior overshadows everything else on this earth. We're concerned about the heritage of the Word and passing it down to the next generation intact because we do not want to come between anyone and heaven.

God knows what the future of the CLC is. Only He knows how He will use our group as His instrument. Only He knows whether or not we will tumble over the edge into a pit of apostasy. Your personal future and the future of our synod is dependent upon God and His mercy. If He would withdraw from us for a moment, we would have nothing at all. Without Him we would not have become Christians, nor would we be able to remain Christians.

On this fortieth anniversary of our synod let us neither reflect on what we have accomplished, nor project what we will accomplish. All glory belongs to our ever gracious God who has helped us to this point, and who faithfully stands by His children. May He use the CLC for His glory and keep us steadfast in His Word through which we have come to know Him as our Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. His Word is indeed our great heritage. Of all that we may hand down, it is the one possession in which our children and grandchildren and any other generation to come may find everlasting satisfaction.

*Oh, keep us in Thy Word we pray;  
The guile and rage of Satan stay!  
Oh, may Thy mercy never cease!  
Give concord, patience, courage, peace.*

*And since the cause and glory, Lord,  
Are Thine, not ours, to us afford  
Thy help and strength and constancy.  
With all our heart we trust in Thee. (TLH 292:4,7)*