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# Lutheran Synod Quarterly

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# LUTHERAN SYNOD QUARTERLY

Theological Journal of the  
Evangelical Lutheran Synod

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Editor . . . . . Pres. Gaylin Schmeling  
Managing Editor . . . . . Pres. Gaylin Schmeling  
Book Review Editor . . . . . Prof. Mike Smith  
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## Foreword

In this Christmastide we are filled with awe and wonder beholding the mystery of the holy incarnation. Men by nature were walking in darkness and the shadow of death. Yet in the fullness of time the Light of the world, Jesus Christ, was born at Bethlehem to bring life and light to our benighted race. His light brings joy and light to our lives.

In this issue of the *Quarterly* three sermons are presented. The first sermon was presented at the installation of Rev. John Moldstad as president and Rev. Glenn Obenberger as vice-president of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod on September 4, 2002, at Norseland Lutheran Church, St. Peter, MN. The Rev. Donald Moldstad based his sermon on II Corinthians 5:18-21, with this theme, “The challenges and joys of heaven’s ambassadors.”

The second sermon was written by Rev. John Moldstad, (1874-1946), the grandfather of our current president. This sermon entitled, *But Also You Should Witness*, was delivered at the second convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod in 1919. It encourages the members of the synod to be faithful witnesses of the Savior to the world around them. This sermon was translated by Rev. Alf Merseth. Rev. Merseth has faithfully served the Evangelical Lutheran Synod for many years. He was the secretary of the synod from 1972-1996. He was a member of the Board of Trustees and is a member of the Synod Review Committee. He served the Northwood-Lake Mills parish, which included five congregations, from 1966-2001, when he retired at the age of 81 years. Throughout his ministry he was known for his caring pastoral heart.

The third sermon which is based on Psalm 42:2-3 encourages the believer to live a life of true Christian piety imaging the suffering Savior. It was written by Dr. Johann Gerhard (1582-1637) who was one of the greatest seventeenth century dogmaticians. It is said that Gerhard was third (Luther, Chemnitz, and Gerhard) in the series of Lutheran theologians and after him there was no fourth. The introduction and the translation of this sermon are by Timothy Schmeling.

The Rev. Matthew Thompson who served Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, Cold Spring, MN, has prepared an essay, *Walther's Anti-Conventicle Position: Its Roots In Pietism and Contemporary Application*. Here Rev. Thompson aptly summarizes Walther's reaction to pietism. Also he shows that aspects of pietism in trends such as the church growth movement are still a danger to the church today.

The Council of Nicaea (325) and the Council of Constantinople (351) are vitally important in the Trinitarian Controversy of the Early Church. The Rev. Craig Ferkenstad of Norseland Lutheran Church, St. Peter, MN, and Norwegian Grove Lutheran Church, Gaylord, MN, offers a summary of this important history in his essay, *Nicaea to Constantinople Achieving Doctrinal Consensus*.

The Evangelical Lutheran Free Church is our sister synod in Germany. It has recently adopted a set of theses on the doctrine of church and ministry which are included. In addition, this article contains a summary of the history of the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church.

Also included in this issue of the *Quarterly* is the summary of the seminary study tour of Lutherland.

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# **Sermon on 2 Corinthians 5:18-21 at the Installation of Synodical President and Vice President**

*by Donald Moldstad*

## ***The Joys and Challenges of Heaven's Ambassadors***

*Text: All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*  
2 Corinthians 5:18-21

Fellow redeemed: The chief ambassador for the United States is the Secretary of State, the office that also helps in the selection of other foreign ambassadors. During the Carter Administration, Cyrus Vance held this position. Following the inauguration of the new president, Ronald Reagan, Mr. Vance went to the State Department building to pick up a few of his personal items, and found that he no longer had access into secure federal buildings. In just thirty minutes the authority that had been entrusted to him by the citizens of the US had been so quickly taken away. The position of chief ambassador confers authority upon the holder of the office, and entrusts this man with the responsibility of accurately representing those who have selected him. However, the authority does not remain with the man, but with those who confer the authority.

Dear John and Glenn: Today our Evangelical Lutheran Synod entrusts you with authority as president and vice president and installs you as chief ambassadors to faithfully represent us and speak for us, just as President Gurgel, in our midst this evening, represents our

sister synod, the Wisconsin Lutheran Synod, and as President Orvick has done so faithfully through the years. This is to be considered a high honor. Yet this important role of synodical ambassador is overshadowed by, and integrated with, a much higher role – that of being **Heaven’s Ambassadors** - those who publicly preach and teach the Word of Christ – which St. Paul here describes, “*as though God was making His appeal through us.*”

The authority and responsibility of **this** higher office is truly remarkable: that the Almighty God of heaven and earth confers such a position to men! What a task! The Scriptures clearly teach that there is only one door into Heaven, and He has entrusted mortal, sinful people with His authority to administer His Keys through Word and Sacrament and open this door!

Great joy and privilege comes with this position! Earlier in this letter, Paul writes, “*I thank God always concerning you.*” We can sense his gratitude for the opportunity to take part in this “*Ministry of Reconciliation,*” established by God. Whenever I see the word “*reconciliation*” I immediately think of marriage and marriage problems. Many pastors have worked to bring a “warring” couple back together. When the process deteriorates and heads towards divorce there can be a lot of bitterness and animosity. In His Word our Lord uses such imagery to describe our natural status before Him: “*enemies of God*” and “*objects of wrath.*” The dissolution of our relationship with God was not brought about by Him, but rather by the rebellious heart of man. Right now this may not seem like an important matter to many, but on the Day of Judgment — to stand before a righteous, holy God — as His **enemy** — nothing else will matter.

It is no wonder therefore that St. Paul found such joy in the ministry entrusted to him, to declare to all people that “*God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing men’s sins against them.*” Paul’s heart was warmed with the prospect of applying the peace won by Christ on Calvary to the souls of his hearers. And his words hold such comforting news: “*God was in Christ reconciling the **world** to Himself.*” This evening your conscience may cause you to be afraid that this work was somehow not done for you. But, note the word “*world.*” God does not want

a single one of you to leave this evening doubting that the blood of Christ has been shed to atone for all of your own personal sins. The **world** has been reconciled to His side — and you are part of that world. Therefore, **you (singular)** are reconciled. Simply believe it. This is a ministry of joy.

Tonight we are gathered in one of our oldest synodical churches, Norseland Lutheran, where your own mother once served as a Christian Day School teacher, John. This elegant chancel so beautifully depicts the sacrifice of Christ coming to us in Word and Sacrament. Here is God's station of reconciliation, just as are all the altars of our synodical churches. Here we eat His reconciliation food — here we are cleansed in His reconciliation bath — here we regularly hear His glorious reconciliation announcement. This is joyful work! These sanctuaries are joyful stations of grace. As you begin your work as synodical officials I encourage you to go out and visit our churches and missions to see the great work of God. Though it can be difficult labor it is also joyful. God did not design it to be gloomy work.

As a young boy I would often sit in on some of the synod convention meetings. Much of it seemed boring, but one of my favorite things was when the missionaries would stand and tell stories of how the Gospel was touching the lives of new souls.

Today is a very delicate moment in the history of our church body. For the first time the third generation is now rising to leadership. In the pages of church history it is often this handoff which carries with it great potential for trouble. Therefore, with humble hearts, let us also consider the challenges which lie before us as ambassadors of heaven. Let me propose five areas of concern for our generation:

- 1) Apathy – In Norway, ropes have replaced children in the pews. A country that once possessed a burning love for Christ and His kingdom has slowly become a spiritually apathetic culture. The gods of this world have replaced the God of heaven. The same creeping apathy is growing in our land. Last year our synod gave up on the hope of a mission in Washington State. One of our pastors said it well, “When people have life so good it is hard to convince them they are sinners in need of grace and the hope of heaven.” The apathy of our culture also creeps into our hearts and minds. We are



tempted to lose the zeal for spreading the Gospel. Our children face the grave possibility of taking for granted the faith delivered to them. When we think of the sacrifices made by many of our ancestors, let us ask ourselves, “What would **we** be willing to give up for the cause of the truth?”

2) Professionalism – We as pastors are tempted to “professionalize” our work. It becomes so easy for us to no longer take it to heart for ourselves, but to treat our study in a merely academic way. Luther warns us as pastors, “Where the love of Christ does not drive the heart of the shepherd, there the sheep will be poorly watched.” John, your grandfather, Rev. Norman A. Madson, was known for saying to preachers, “People should see you reaching for the Gospel with the same trembling hand.” Let us keep alive our own devotional lives of sincere repentance and faith in the Word of our Lord.

3) Generational Pride – Just as the Jews of Jesus’ day became self-assured because of their birthright, the same challenge exists for us today. Rev. Theodore Aaberg, Sr., who for a time preached from this pulpit, wrote for our instruction: “Truth, as a body of doctrine, cannot be passed on like a family heirloom ...there is in this sense no continuity to synodical heritage, but ...each generation must make it their own” by the work of the Holy Spirit.

We often speak of the oak trees of Koshkonong, where those first services were held by our synodical forefathers. However, there is another tree from which we can learn a lesson, the banyan tree: as the trunk produces branches, each branch sends down a new root to become a support, so that every limb no longer relies merely on the central trunk, but on its own connection to the nutritious soil. May our generation not simply lean back on the doctrinal work done by the earlier members in our family tree, but through study of Scripture and the Confessions develop our own roots into the soil of God’s truth.

4) False Teaching – Many of our laypeople comment to us, when seeing the false doctrine embraced in other church bodies bearing our name, “How can they still consider themselves Lutherans?” Where and how did such heresy develop? It began with a tiny error, which was never checked early on, but was allowed

to grow. St. Paul didn't warn the Ephesian pastors of the danger of atheists or heathens, but rather of those in their own midst who might bend God's truth. How often Paul warns: "*be on your guard*" and "*watch your doctrine.*" May we never be so arrogant as to imagine it couldn't happen to any of us.

5) Losing Sight of History – We live in a time when our culture tempts us to throw aside all that happened before, assuming, "We now know it all." There is often little appreciation for history. In the 1800s many American Lutherans tossed aside their spiritual heritage and adopted Reformed practices for the sake of growth and popularity. The historian Neve described their legacy in one quick sentence, "In seeking to gain others, they lost themselves." In this new era of our synodical history, let us again appreciate and repossess the heritage by which God's truth has arrived in our midst. Let us not lose ourselves. As the author of Hebrews declares, "Remember those who had the rule over you....and imitate their faith."

What a privilege and joy to be called to this position of Heaven's Ambassadors. How wonderful not only to benefit personally from the atoning work of God's Son, but also to be entrusted with the glorious task of reconciling others to God through Christ alone by Word and Sacrament.

Someday when we, by God's grace, enter the doors of heaven, I expect to stand in line to express my gratitude to the grandfathers of our Synod who faithfully kept the faith and so carefully preserved it for our benefit. May our grandchildren feel compelled to do the same for us.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now and shall be forevermore. Amen.

## Sermon of John 15:26-16:4

*by John Moldstad*  
*Translated by Alf Merseth*

The following sermon was delivered at the Second Annual Convention of the Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church (now: Evangelical Lutheran Synod) assembled at Our Savior's Lutheran Church, Albert Lea, Minnesota, May 29 – June 4, 1919.

The preacher, the Rev. John Moldstad, was born in DeForest, Wisconsin, in 1874. He was the pastor at St. Mark's Lutheran Church, Chicago, Illinois, which was the only church he served. He was called to St. Mark's when he graduated from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri, in 1906 and served there until the Lord called him home in 1946.

In 1918, at the synod's reorganization convention at the Lime Creek Lutheran Church, Lake Mills, Iowa, the Rev. Bjug Harstad, in the opening sermon, emphasized the words of Jeremiah: "Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; then you will find rest for your souls." (Jeremiah 6:16) This small remnant had reorganized with the determination to fight for and preserve the truth that God had given in His Word.

It is then interesting to note that in 1919, only one year after reorganization, the Vice President at that time, the Rev. John Moldstad, reminded the people that fighting for and preserving the truth of God's Word was not their only function. There is another:

### ***But Also You Should Witness***

*Text: But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with Me from the beginning. These things I have spoken to you, that you should not be made to stumble. They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think*

*that he offers God service. And these things they will do to you because they have not known the Father nor Me. But these things I have told you, that when the time comes, you may remember that I told you of them. And these things I did not say to you at the beginning, because I was with you.* John 15:26-16:4

It is often said in these days that we live in dangerous times. The tight grip of indifferentism and carelessness has settled itself upon the world, yes, even upon the church; and the epidemic of unionism paves the way for unbelief. It is a dangerous and fearful time; but it isn't the first time. There have often been dangerous times in the history of the church, yes, perhaps all the time; the Devil, the world and our own flesh provide for that. The Devil stands in the way everywhere with his shackles.

And precisely yon Maundy Thursday night, when Jesus spoke these words of our text, was one of the church's most difficult, darkest and most dangerous times. Jesus sits there with His little band of disciples. But how quiet, how sad! The disciples really didn't understand, but apprehensive misgivings filled their souls. A separation was imminent. They were as if paralyzed in sadness. Jesus knew everything. He was aware of the battle, the suffering and the death that had been planned for Him on this night and the next day. He understood the dangers and the fears. He, therefore, is the one that comforts and strengthens. He has entrusted them with the Word and the Sacraments. Now He comforts them, after He has first predicted for them the hatred and the persecution that awaits them. And the comfort is this, that He promises them the Comforter, the Holy Ghost, and commands them to witness about Him.

Today, too, Jesus is with His disciples, His church. He has promised: "And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen." (Matthew 28:20) "For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them." (Matthew 18:20) His Word is yea and Amen. Especially in dangerous times and in dark and fearful days is He close to His own. And the comfort and the help is the same as it always is.

We are gathered here for the synod convention especially because we have experienced and lived through the truths of the

predictions of Jesus in this text. But it is especially for that reason that Jesus comes to us in the same way and with the same comfort and with the same command. Today the same words come to you, dear assembly: **BUT ALSO YOU SHOULD WITNESS.**

**I. For what purpose are you called?** As a disciple of Jesus, a Christian, a child of God, you have this command. It is your Christian calling, **TO WITNESS.** In Norwegian the word *vidne* (witness) comes from the word *vide* (to know). The one who is to witness must know something.

How is this going to come about? What does Jesus say to the disciples? “But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me.” Jesus is going away. He is going to leave the world, but the testimony, His message, shall still be heard in the world. The Holy Ghost will come, He will testify of Jesus. He will enlighten the disciples, and through them and through the whole host of witnesses in the New Testament convey the testimony about Jesus. The Apostles will be filled with the Spirit; He will teach them all things, what and with what words they are to speak and write. Their words are to become the foundation upon which the church will be built and will be immovably anchored so that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Through the Apostles the Holy Ghost witnesses about Christ to you also. Their word is the source of truth.

That is the way it was then, but how is it now? How are we going to learn to witness? You and I have the word of the Apostles, the source of all truth. The whole Bible is inspired by God. Everything that is written for our spiritual learning is written there; because God wanted it there and He Himself made sure that it was written down and preserved. Each word, each letter is from God. Through the Word and the Sacraments the Ascended King, Jesus Christ, sends the Holy Ghost to us. Through the means of grace He witnesses about Christ in us and for us. He teaches us to know and to become acquainted with Christ. He reveals Christ to us.

And when you know Christ, then you will also witness about Him. You will not retain your knowledge for yourself, you will share it with others, you will reveal it to your fellowmen. As a Christian

you are called to preserve and defend the Word and the Sacraments so that they may remain pure and clean. You are to use them diligently for your own edification and in that way constantly witness for yourself. You are to bring these, God's treasures, to others, so that they too may become partakers of them, so that the kingdom of God will come to them. The Word of God speaks to you too: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." (Mark 16:15) "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations." (Matthew 28:19) You are to begin with yourself, your closest relatives, your friends, and you will do what you can to reach out to the whole world. You are to do what you are able to do personally, and after that, like the good Samaritan, you make your effort through others.

Your testimony will be made up of words and deeds. You must confess correctly, but you must also live correctly: confession and life must agree with one another. "Show me your faith by your works." Your works preach to the world. If you confess and teach rightly but live wrongly you profane God's name; the world sees this and blasphemes God. "Because of you God's name is blasphemed among the heathen," says the Apostle Paul. The life of the Christian is to be a constant battle against sin and a constant forward progress in that which is good in the daily sanctification. Against the world the Christian's life is to be an uninterrupted witness.

**II. But about what shall you witness?** What is the content of your testimony? What is the message that your words and your works are to bring to the world? You are to witness about Christ. You are to reveal Him to the world. You have received the great and glorious calling, the great privilege of revealing Christ. Through your testimony the Holy Ghost's testimony about Jesus will go out into the world.

What does this mean? First and foremost you must testify to yourself and to others about the fact that we are, by nature, the children of wrath, dead in trespasses and sins, God's enemies, poor, lost and condemned; that we cannot answer God one to a thousand, that we are helpless, irretrievably lost and if we, in this matter, do not get help from outside of ourselves we will sink down into hell's eternal

fire. We cannot come to God, nor call to God, nor even look up to God. Before God we are spiritually like stinking waste.

But is there then no remedy? Yes, God be praised, that which is impossible with man is possible for God. He has, in eternity, before the foundation of the world was laid, had concern for you and ordained a way of salvation. He could not stand the thought that you should be lost and therefore he prepared a new way to heaven, namely, the way of the Gospel, Jesus Christ. About this Jesus Christ you are to believe and testify exactly that which God Himself says in His Word, and which we confess in the Second Article of our Creed, that He is God's own only begotten Son, true God from eternity, but that He came down to this earth and became a true natural man in this way that He was conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary. This true God-Man is our only Savior from damnation. "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) But "To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins." (Acts 10:43)

Our Savior became the God-Man so that thereby He kept all God's Commandments, satisfied all the demands God makes and thus fulfilled all righteousness. Also in this way that He permitted Himself to be baptized with the sinner's baptism, took upon Himself all our sins and carried them in His own body on the tree; He suffered the punishment of hell in body and soul for all men and atoned for all the world's sin. It was a complete offering by the Son because God raised Him from the dead on the third day "because of our justification." (Romans 4:25) The resurrection of Christ is God's declaration about this, that He is satisfied with the sacrifice, with the payment, that the debt is paid and will not be asked for again, that now there is peace between God and men, and that God finds delight in men. Christ descended into hell and proclaimed His victory over sin, death and the Devil. He ascended into heaven and rules now, also according to His human nature, at God's right hand; and there He in His divine glory rules over all things for the best for His church. Once at the end of the world He will come back again to judge the living and the dead, to gather up all His own and bring them safely into God's everlasting joy and glory. This one, our Substitute, Jesus

Christ, who trod the winepress alone, is our God-given Savior, the One “who gave Himself a ransom for all.” (1 Timothy 2:6) This Jesus Christ is Salvation, this is the Gospel way, this is the heaven way for all; but it is also the only way, outside of which there is no salvation to be found.

This Jesus and His salvation you must know, lay hold of and make your own. When He becomes your own, your personal Savior, and you become His as a branch on the true vine, then there is new life in your soul, then you will serve Him and witness about Him. And that which you shall witness is just the glad Gospel message of which you yourself have become a part. But the message must be the Holy Ghost’s message: you must not shorten, conceal or change it in any way. Whether it agrees with your reason or not, the message of the Holy Ghost is the message you are to believe, the message you are to witness to. You are to be a messenger of Christ, a voice of Jesus. The Master says: **“YOU ALSO SHALL WITNESS.”**

**III. What are you to expect?** Now when you, in obedience to the Lord’s command, as a true witness of Jesus Christ, in love and faithfulness, proclaim God’s whole counsel for salvation, when you witness about sin and grace, when you make known the happy message about the day of salvation, then you will be well received with open arms and with joy in the world, and then you will reap honor and praise and all the good things in the world. Is that not true? What does Jesus answer? “Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also.” (John 15:20) “They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service.” (John 16:2) Not peace or good days, not honor and praise and the world’s favor and good things, but exactly the opposite, cross and persecution, enmity and the ridicule and contempt of the world you will reap. Your own people will despise you and not support you. Your own church, in blind fanaticism, will ridicule and repudiate you and shut you out. That is the world’s thanks for the Christian faithfulness and love. This word of Jesus has been fulfilled and continues to be fulfilled.



And Jesus explains the reason for this. He says: “But all these things they will do to you for My name’s sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me. (John 15:21) “And these things they will do to you because they have not known the Father nor Me.” (John 16:3) It is their ignorance, their lack of acknowledgement and their lack of acquaintance with the Father and the Son that are the reasons, but it is ignorance they have earned by their unbelief and their own hardening of themselves against the Gospel.

But when cross and persecution meet you because of your testimony, then you must not be surprised, because Jesus indeed says: “But these things I have told you, that when the time comes, you may remember that I told you of them.” (John 16:4) Jesus has predicted it all and thus prepared you for the consequences: you know what is awaiting you and you will neither be alarmed nor weakened thereby.

“This,” he says, “I have told you, so that you should not be offended.” Here in as in other places in Scripture the word “offended” means to take umbrage at something and to be led astray. When the suffering comes with ridicule and persecution, you will not be confused and believe that it is God’s punishment and thus lose your faith in Christ and quit witnessing. . . . On the contrary, you should view the cross as a natural and necessary result of your relationship to the Triune God and your faithfulness in service to Him.

You ought furthermore to thank God for the cross and the persecution and the ridicule and the contempt on the part of the world, for that is a sign from Him that will show you that you are faithful in your service and are doing your obligation as a witness. Let us not forget what is written in Acts 5:41: “So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.” The Apostles were being jailed, interrogated, whipped and threatened, and yet they were happy. Thus we ought also view it as an honor to suffer for the sake of Christ’s name: no whimpering and complaining, but only joy and thanks and praise to God for the cross when it comes upon us for the sake of the truth.

Think how great an honor it is that God would use us as His messengers to poor sinners, that He who does not need our help yet

does us the great honor that He permits us to be along in building God's Church on earth. O let us, therefore, in thankfulness and love work while it is day: let us with courage and reckless abandon, in faithful allegiance battle for the sake of God's truth, for His glory and people's salvation, always being aware of this that even if we fall in the battle, the victory is sure.

The Lord says, **ALSO YOU SHALL WITNESS.**  
AMEN!

# A Sermon on Psalm 42:2-3

## Faith and Piety

*by Dr. Johann Gerhard*  
*Translated by Timothy R. Schmeling*

### *Introduction*

It is often been asserted with virtually no evidence or a misunderstanding of the facts that the period of Lutheran Orthodoxy was merely the predecessor of rationalism or was an early form of Melancthonian pietism. In fact most of the adjectives used to describe Lutheran Orthodoxy by various 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century schools of thought are so conflicting that they usually make little sense (e.g. Biblicism and dogmatism, formalism and pietism, rationalism and mysticism). In reality most of the charges against Lutheran Orthodoxy say more about its critics and its critics' foes than about Orthodoxy, confirming Lutheran Orthodoxy's balanced approach to theology. So why has Lutheran Orthodoxy become the whipping boy of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries? The reason is that most histories of this period are written by non-Lutherans who are opposed to confessional Lutheran theology. Even worse is the fact that these later non-Lutheran biographies have served as the primary sources for the study of Lutheran Orthodoxy rather than have the actual primary sources. Imagine for a moment that the first biography of Dr. Martin Luther, which was written by Johann Cochlaeus, a Roman Catholic who despised Martin Luther and demonized him in his biography, was the only authority for all biographies of Martin Luther. This is the kind of subjectivity that Lutheran Orthodoxy has had to endure until rather recently. The other great obstacle for modern Lutherans is that our heritage is locked away in rare book rooms that are assessable only to individuals who can read German and, more often, Latin. As a result Lutherans have had to gain their knowledge of Lutheran Orthodoxy from English sources that reflect Reformed or liberal Lutheran biases. Imagine for a moment that your grandfather did not speak English and somebody told you that he was a liar and a cheat.

Would you take his word for it? Remember you are unable to communicate with your grandfather. In the same way Lutheran Orthodoxy is confessional Lutheranism's true spiritual ancestor of whom many want to make us ashamed. For this reason Lutherans need to reclaim Lutheran Orthodoxy as their own not only because it's their great heritage, but also because they have far more to gain from it than could ever be lost. Such a theology may help provide balance to a Lutheranism that has fluctuated between extremes.

The beauty of Lutheran Orthodoxy was that its representatives not only attempted to master all disciplines of the day, using them ministerially for the glory of God, but that they more importantly strived to master all aspects of theology in order to apply it practically as a true *Seelsorger* in the midst of the chaos of the Thirty Year's War. In other words, Lutheran Orthodoxy was a theology permeated with the theology and spirit of the one holy catholic [*Christian* was the customary vernacular rendering of *catholicam* and was in no way intended by Luther to be a denial of Lutheranism's catholicity (Gerhard. *Loci Theologici*. Locus 22. Par. 34)] and apostolic church manifesting this theology in liturgy, devotion, Christian piety, and evangelism (cf. *Symbolum Nicaenum* as found in the *Book of Concord*). In other words, Lutheran Orthodoxy not only coined the axiom, *Theologia est habitus practicus* (theology is a practical aptitude), but it also lived and practiced it.

The greatest representative of this period is Dr. Johann Gerhard. He more than any other clergyman exemplifies a Lutheran who plumbed the depths of Sacred Scripture and applied them pastorally to people of his day. Even in his most scholarly works (e.g. *Loci Theologici*) he ended each *locus* with an *usus practicus* or some remarks on the practical application of each doctrine of Sacred Scripture. In addition to his numerous exegetical, dogmatical, historical, philosophical, and apologetical works, he authored some of the greatest devotional writings ever produced in Lutheranism. Some examples of his devotional works are his *Schola Pietatis*, *Sacred Meditations*, *Exercise of Piety*, and the *Weimar Bible*, the greatest Lutheran Study Bible ever produced and of which he was editor. In addition to these works Johann Gerhard wrote a *Postille* (*post illa verba textus* i.e. *after these words of the text*) or sermon book,

containing some of the most edifying sermons in church history. The sermon translated below is representative of this *Postille* that will dispel all notions of dead orthodoxy.

Johann Gerhard's sermon on Psalm 42 is an excellent example of the biblical and patristic spirituality professed in Lutheran Orthodoxy that takes its origins from David, Solomon, Paul, John, Augustine, the Cappadocians, Bernard, Luther, etc. This spirituality so common in Lutheran Orthodoxy was firmly grounded in its biblical and sacramental piety. In accomplishing this task, Johann Gerhard often employs typology and even allegory. Regarding these uses of Scripture, Gerhard writes in this sermon, "Do not wonder how a passage at the same time can refer to Christ and His believers, since all true believers are one body whose head is Christ." Such a homiletical usage of Scripture was common in the Lutheran fathers and was based on such passages as John 5:39, from which Luther's famous axiom *Die ganze Schrift treibt Christum* is also drawn.

In the beginning of this sermon Gerhard focuses on the natural knowledge of God before and after the fall. Here he acknowledges that one may and should contemplate God in nature. Still one does not meditate on such things as a means of grace or as an alternative means of conversion, but as a spiritual offering of praise or sacrifice to the most Holy Trinity. He writes, "Men should seek God in these creatures, learn to recognize God from them, and explore His eternal wisdom therein."

In this sermon text Johann Gerhard sees our sins as the dogs that hunt the deer who is none other than Jesus Christ. Yet, by enduring great suffering and the cross, Christ vanquishes the devil, thus liberating humanity. Now that we are free, Gerhard places the focus of the new life in Christ not on some manipulation of God to grant a stress-free material bliss as preached by modern theology, but on a longing to become a little Christ veiled in *Anfechtung* or spiritual trial. In so doing the Christian life is defined by the imitation of Christ (*imitatio christi*) thirsting for the complete renewal of the image of God (cf. *Sacred Meditations*, XXX). This imitation of Christ is not an imitation of the glorified Christ. Rather it takes place as the Christian strives to reflect the suffering Christ. Gerhard writes,

For the believers must also be similar to this suffering image of Christ. Romans 8:29; *Those He foreknew, He also had predestined that they should be like the image of His Son.* With the suffering Christ we must suffer. With the crucified Christ we must be crucified, if we should be made different and also glorious with the glorified Christ. (Gerhard, *Postille*, 4:26)

Only on the last day will the believer be allowed to fully partake of the beatific vision and be transfigured in the likeness of the glorified Christ (Regarding the Beatific Vision cf. Gerhard, *Loci Theologici*, Locus 36, Par. 59ff; Gerhard, *Sacred Meditations*, XLVII). Gerhard explains:

In the time of the cross a believing soul should look upon the reward and joy of eternal life as David here says: *My soul thirsts after God, when will I come therein, that I look upon the face of God.* This gazing upon the face of God happens in this world, but *through a mirror darkly.* However in eternal life we will perfectly gaze upon God *face to face* in a bright light (1 Corinthians 13:12). *We will see Him as He is* (1 John 3:2). Until then Christ knows us in the cross, for in Matthew 5:11-12 He speaks these words: *Blessed are you, if man causes you to suffer and persecutes you on account of me, and be joyful and comforted, your reward shall be in heaven.* (Gerhard, *Postille*, 4:30)

This transformation and vision, which is already being experienced on earth, although not in its fullness until heaven, can be brought about only through the means of grace. Concerning the Eucharist, he writes in his *Loci Theologici*:

Natural food is converted into the substance of the body through alteration or transmutation, but this spiritual food is not altered nor transmuted in us, but rather it transmutes or changes us, so that we are partakers of the divine nature, 2 Peter 1:4, and members of the mystical body whose head is Christ. Ephesians 5:30 (Gerhard, *Loci Theologici*, Locus 21, Par. 213).

In a different sermon from his *Postille* the arch-theologian of Lutheranism writes:

There is no natural thing, says Tauler in his sermon on the Lord's Supper, that comes so near and so inwardly to man as eating and drinking. For this reason He established this way to unite Himself with us in the nearest and most inward manner. It is on account of us that He became man so that we through Him would become children of God (John 1:12) and partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). But His love was still not great enough. He also wanted to become our food. Nothing is more closely related to the Lord than His assumed human nature, His flesh and blood, which He personally united to Himself; likewise nothing can be nearer to us than what we eat and drink because this same thing penetrates us in the most inward manner (Gerhard, *Postille*, I:325).

Once again this transfiguration of the believer through the means of grace is hidden in trial and tribulation, or the cross, and not revealed in some kind of earthly glory. It is also not complete on earth, but is a foretaste of heaven since the believer remains *simul iustus et peccator*. The practical implications of this transfiguration occur in the liturgy where heaven descends before our eyes, giving us a foretaste with all the saints of the Apocalypse, and in our daily life where we become little Christs reflecting His image to all around, drawing more and more of the lost into the Savior. May each of us also bear the wounds of Christ as did St. Paul (Galatians 6:17).

The following sermon is based upon a free text that was incorporated into his *Postille* on the historic gospels. This sermon can be found in 4:23-31 of the *Postille*. The translation is based upon the following edition: Gerhard, Johann. *Postille das ist Auslegung und Erklarung der sonntaeglichen und vornehmsten Fest-Evangelien ueber das ganze Jahr auch etlicher schoener Sprueche heiliger Schrift*. Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1877.

### ***Translation***

#### ***A Sermon on Faith and Piety***

Text: *As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?* [Psalm 42:2-3 (1b-2)]

There is a prophecy of Christ the Lord in Psalm 78: *I will open my mouth in sayings* or, rather, as it is said in His language, in *parables*. As richly as these prophesies of Christ are now fulfilled, it is also revealed from the gospel history, particularly in Matthew 13:3, that Christ preached to these hearers in manifold ways through parables.

These parables among other things have occurred because Christ has wanted to teach with them that God the Lord has not only revealed His wisdom in His divine Scriptures, but also that He has partly hidden the parables about His kingdom in the pictures of nature. For this purpose all created nature is simply called a great book, written with living letters, which has three parts: heaven, earth, and water, from which book God the Creator can be recognized in several ways. Regarding this St. Bernard [of Clairvaux] says, “He has taught a great part of His theology from the trees in the forests.”

It is because our first parents (so) noticeably darkened the eyes of their understanding through the fall that we go into this book of nature not as would have been the case before the fall. Nevertheless the book of nature becomes at times brighter to us and the letters become more readable therein, if through the light of the divine Scriptures it is illuminated again for our eyes.

In such a manner we may proceed now to the same end to which God had created nature in the beginning. For as He (has not created) man chiefly for this (earthly life), but has created man for eternal life, so He has also not created other creatures chiefly that they should merely serve man according to his use and desire in this life. Rather men should seek God in these creatures, learn to recognize God from them, and explore His eternal wisdom therein.

Here in the selected little passage that David presents to us, he speaks and points out high divine things in a mystery taken from a deer. He has such a spiritual thirst for God in his trials [*Anfechtungen*] that it is as if he were a little deer drawn to the fresh water when it grows hot and that he waits with great desire that he may come out of his misery to God’s face, that is, to the place of worship. For the Christian Church is certainly the place where man looks on the face of God, for here God the Lord reveals Himself.



Thus Cain separated himself from the true church, as it is written in Genesis 4:16: *Thus Cain went away from the face of God.*

***We want to apply the text:***

***I. First to Christ***

***II. Then to every believing soul.***

***May God here give us His grace.***

**I. As David in many Psalms prays in the person of Christ, so we may refer these words to Christ, that He cries in his suffering to God, as a deer cries beside the fresh water.** Psalm 22 deals entirely with Christ, as He prayed upon the cross: *My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?* Several old teachers are of the opinion that the Lord spoke it entirely on the cross. Now concerning this superscription it says: *A psalm of David sung by a doe* that is hunted early. The Lord Jesus Christ was surrendered early in the morning by the Pharisees, Scribes, High Priests, and Elders, handed over to Governor Pilate and was hunted by them as by mad dogs during which Christ cried in the Psalm: *The dogs have surrounded me.* Here He also compares Himself to a poor animal, which is caused agony on the hunt by the dogs. Song of Songs 2:9 states that the bride, that is, the Christian Church and every believing soul says: *My Friend is like a young deer* since this heavenly bridegroom is also compared to a fast deer. Thus Christ is now hunted and driven by His enemies, by the Jews, as by the dogs. In such distress, He cried out to God, *as a deer for fresh water.* The heat of the anger of God dried up His strength, as a potsherd, so that *His tongue stuck to His gums,* (Psalm 22:16), and He became thirsty. Thus His soul thirsted for God. The weight of the anger of God lay upon Him and pressed so hard upon Him that His bloody sweat went away from Him just as a little grape when it lies under the wine-press produces red juice from itself. He was in extreme agony and it seemed to Him no different then if He was forsaken by God. For this reason He cried out: *My God, why have You forsaken me? The bands of hell surround Me and the snares of death are overpowering me.* He cried out to the living God: *Father, I commend My spirit into Your hands.* He also had the hope that after

such suffering He would go to glory and look upon the face of God. Therefore He spoke to the criminal, *Today you will be with Me in paradise*. Behold, see, how all the parts of this little passage are applied to Christ.

Several old teachers go somewhat further and interpret it not of a deer that is hunted by dogs, but of a deer that swallows the snakes on the rocks in the hot orient through his powerful breath. If He swallows them, then He receives such a thirst that He hastens with a great cry to the fresh water. For in the holy languages a word is used that actually means *to thirst longingly*, to hasten with great desire to a thing. If this is so, thus it applies to Christ, who, as He conquered the hellish snake on the cross, was made so hot and exhausted that He had given up His soul with a cry.

As the poor little deer is hunted and made tired by the dogs, so Christ should come before our heart's eyes as He became exhausted on the cross. Our sins are the dogs that did this, otherwise the Jews would have no power over Him. Therefore we should not weep over Him and take pity on Him, rather we should weep over our sins. If we can do nothing more on account of this, when we remember this [event], we should at the very least lament our sins with believing sighs and thank Christ for His good deeds. He cried out on the cross that He suffered thirst. This cry was a thirst for our salvation, for on account of the same He had allowed Himself to be wounded upon the cross. How much more should we thirst for Him, otherwise our unthankfulness will become harder for Him than His suffering had been at that time, for through such unthankfulness this worthy suffering cannot produce and work in us its fruit.

**II. Secondly we can also extend this little passage to a believing soul.** The believers must also be conformed to this suffering image of Christ as it is written in Romans 8:29; *Those He foreknew, He also had predestined that they should be like the image of His Son*. With the suffering Christ, we must suffer. With the crucified Christ we must be crucified if we should be made different and also glorious with the glorified Christ.

Do not wonder how a passage at the same time can be extended to Christ and His believers, since all true believers are one

body whose head is Christ. Regarding this point, when Saul persecuted the Christians, Christ spoke: *Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?* In the same way also the tongue says: Why do you go to me if someone offends our feet. He states in Hosea 11:1: *When Israel was young, I loved him and out of Egypt I called my son.* Thus the prophet says this really about the Jewish people, but in Matthew 2:15 it is even extended to Christ on the basis that Christ and the Jewish people are spiritually one body together.

The little deer remains in this little passage hunted and tired, which can mean every believing soul. The soul is often times hunted and driven outwardly through the cross and adversity, inwardly through fearful things and trials [*Anfechtungen*]. For thus St. Paul describes the life of a Christian in 2 Corinthians 7:5 as: *Outward strife and inward fear.*

As the whole life of Christ was perpetual suffering, so also the true Christian experiences perpetual suffering, and although at times he enters into peace and delight, still of this peace and delight St Bernard [of Clairvaux] says: "On a rare hour comes a short rest."

If now a believing soul is frightened from the outside and inside, what should it resolve to do?

First it should long for the fresh water as a thirsty little deer hastens to the fountain. Such is now the fountain of Scripture, as David says in Psalm 68:27: *Praise God for the fountain of Israel.*

In Psalm 46:5 it is written: *Nevertheless the desire of the city of God should remain with its little fountain. You will draw water from the fountain of salvation* (Isaiah 12:3), that is, the books of the Holy Scriptures. By such a little fountain such a plagued and thirsty soul can be refreshed. For there is no trial [*Anfechtung*], no persecution, and no cross so great or rare that one may not find comfort in the divine Scriptures that overcomes them in every situation. This is the significance of the history of Exodus 15:27: *And as they, the children of Israel, came to Elim, there were twelve fountains of water and they encamped by the water.* Thus a soul should also go to the twelve fountains, that is, hold on to the Scriptures of the twelve prophets and the twelve apostles. There the soul will find delight when God leads it into the wilderness and deprives it of the food of inner delight. Concerning the garden of paradise it is written in

Genesis 2:10 that it was moistened and watered by four rivers which came out of one stream. The Christian church is the true garden of paradise. Therein the rivers are the divine Scriptures which all come out of one source, namely out of the Holy Spirit. For this reason, from the water of the Scriptures we come to the true living source to the Holy Spirit, concerning whom is written in Psalm 36:10: *Lord by You is the living source*. Christ also compares the Holy Spirit in John 7:37 to a *stream of living water*. He who holds God's Word to himself in persecution and trial [*Anfechtung*] will discover the quickening of the Holy Spirit in it. With it, his weak soul can be inebriated. Therefore David says in Psalm 119:92: *Had Your Word not been my comfort, so would I despair in my misery*. Thus all the saints have done, and that is one thing that a believing soul should do during the cross.

Secondly they should cry out to God. *As a deer cries for the fresh water, so cries my soul to You O God*, speaks David. This happens through prayer which is a cry before God, even if it be only with sighs as we see in Exodus 14:15 when Moses was in great agony. He had a great sea before him. On both sides were high mountains. He was not able to bring them over to the other side. Behind him were the Egyptians. It is not written there that he spoke a long prayer or many words; still without doubt he would have sighed inwardly to God, and likewise the Lord spoke to him: *Why do you cry to Me?* From this it can be clearly seen that a believing prayer is a cry to God even if it is spoken only in the heart. In the Old Testament they went into the tent of the tabernacle. There they could inquire from the mouth of the Lord as Moses reports. In the New Testament we have no such earthly tents wherein God lives, but *Christ lives in our hearts* Ephesians 3:17. If misery or difficult situations come before us, we should go into the little chamber of our heart and stop with a prayer before God. There will also be an answer for us. This happens now not as though we can hear something of a voice, but that we discover in the heart that God hears our prayer and comforts us, as David testifies in Psalm 56:10: *If I cry, so will I know that You are my God*, as it is also written in Psalm 138:8: *If I call to you, so hear me and give my soul strength*. Therefore believing Christians are heard at all times in their prayers. You say: that cannot be, since they often remain under the cross. It is indeed true. However God gives to them inward

power and strength to endure the cross, and that is enough to hear. Thus there is certainty when turning to God through prayer in all crosses. When misery comes to a child in a strange land, there is one single refuge: he can send a message (for help) to his parents. How much more should we, when misery happens to us in the strange land of this world, send a prayer, a true message to God. You need not have concern that your message is not effective, for Sirach 35:21 says: *The prayer of the miserable presses through the skies and will not cease until the Highest One looks into it.* The more your needs increase, the more zealous your prayer should also be, just as it says of Christ: *And it happened that he wrestled with death and prayed more earnestly,* Luke 22:44. If it seems to you that God has hidden Himself from you, seek Him more diligently through prayer. You will certainly find Him. If it seems to you that God has closed the doors of grace before you, knock with prayer more zealously. It will certainly be opened to you, for these are His promises: *Ask, and it will be given to you, seek, and you will find, knock, and it will be opened to you* (Matthew 7:7). These words are the eternal truth. As little as God can lie, so little can He also lie about these words.

Thirdly in the time of the cross a believing soul should look upon the reward and joy of eternal life as David here says: *My soul thirsts after God, when will I come therein, that I look upon the face of God.* This gazing upon the face of God happens in this world, but *through a mirror darkly.* However in eternal life we will perfectly gaze upon God *face to face* in a bright light (1 Corinthians 13:12). *We will see Him as He is* (1 John 3:2). Until then Christ knows us in the cross, for in Matthew 5:11-12 He speaks these words: *Blessed are you, if man causes you to suffer and persecutes you on account of me, and be joyful and comforted, your reward shall be in heaven.* In addition He has taught us with examples that when He wanted to enter into His suffering He pondered beforehand in prayer on His glorification (John 17:1). When one considers now this joy and glory of eternal life, there should be no cross that one would not gladly suffer. There is no comparison in this life as also II Corinthians 4:17 says: *Our tribulations, which are for a time and are light, are creating an eternal glory and far outweigh everything else.* If a man is tormented his entire life in body and soul inwardly and outwardly

and should look only for a moment upon God, this reward would be greater than the suffering. How much greater is it, since we have the promise that we will look upon the face of God for all eternity? It is written in Revelation 7:17: *And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes* in that life. What makes these tears so blessed, that such a dear hand should wipe them away? In the last judgment it will be revealed before the whole world all that we have suffered on account of Christ. How blessed is now the suffering which before the eyes of God, before the angels, and before all the world shall be praised! Christ says in Matthew 10:32, *Who confesses Me before men* (to be understood: who suffers something on account of this confession), *him I will confess before My heavenly Father*. Why would we then also not suffer something on account of the confession of Christ, so that Christ also confesses us? Concerning this the pious Ignatius, as he lies there in prison, writes to the Ephesians: "I bear now my spiritual pearl on my neck." He also calls his bonds such things because he wanted to be marked with them on the last day, which is much more glorious than when a virgin now is adorned with a pearl. As the martyr Babylas was being killed and still had his bonds before the court, he prayed that they should give him a grave with the bonds because he wanted to bring the bonds with joy before the judgment throne of Christ and await his rich reward. Behold, these things a most tormented soul should do: hold the Word of God to itself, turn itself with prayer to God, and look upon the future joy. Then there will be no cross too great for you. To this end help us, O God, through Christ. Amen.

*Do not despise the writings of the old faithful church fathers, the writings of Luther, Chemnitz, Quenstedt, Gerhard, H Müller, etc.*

*Otherwise you disobey the Holy Spirit, who commands you, "So not despise prophecy." (C.F.W. Walther. Synodical Conference Essay 1884. cf. Essays for the Church. 2:67).*

# Walther's Anti-Conventicle Position: Its Roots in Pietism and Contemporary Application

by Matthew E. Thompson

James Albers, a professor at Valparaiso University, begins our discussion with a description of the conditions under which Walther made his anti-conventicle statements:

One of the major changes for Lutherans who joined the Missouri Synod in the nineteenth century was that they gave up their *Gemeinden* (congregations) and their state churches into which their *Gemeinden* had fit. American religious disestablishment<sup>1</sup>, pluralism and the latter's accompanying voluntarism<sup>2</sup> presented a special challenge to Lutherans in finding the proper ecclesiastical forms for Lutheranism. While the *Gemeinden* were partially reestablished in rural settlements and ethnic neighborhoods in the Midwest, they were fragile and temporary. Walther sought to articulate the "True Form for a Lutheran Congregation (*Ortsgemeinde*) Independent of the State. [1863]"

While Walther propounded the congregation as the primary form of the church, there were still certain necessary churchly activities that had to be conducted outside of the congregation. Such activities, such as training future pastors and teachers, were justifications for the organization of a synod. But other organizations were required to support activities that the synod did not wish to involve itself in. Thus were Bible societies, mission societies, hospital and orphanage associations, educational associations and other organizations in which people banded together to foster Christian ends. These lay- and clergy-supported organizations resemble the structures developed by Pietism when the needs could not be met readily through existing structures.

Having noted these organizational forms, it must be quickly noted that Walther and the Missouri Synod were strictly opposed to the formation of groups [conventicles] or *collegia pietatis* within the congregation. For Walther and others the

congregation was the elementary Christian unit outside of the family. There were to be no churches within the church (*ecclesiae in ecclesia*).<sup>3</sup>

The task of this paper will be briefly to outline Walther's own experience with conventicles, to examine the Pietistic roots of conventicism, and to observe Pietism's influence upon us today and how we react to its influence.

### *Walther and Conventicles*

Walther clearly defines his anti-conventicle position in paragraph 25 of his *The Proper Form of an Evangelical Lutheran Congregation Independent of the State* (1862-63):

In order that the Word of God may have full scope in a congregation, the congregation should lastly tolerate no divisions by way of conventicles, that is of meetings for instruction and prayer aside from the divinely ordained public ministry, 1 Corinthians 11:18; James 3:1; 1 Corinthians 12:29; 14:28; Acts 6:4; Romans 10:15: "How shall they preach except they be sent?"

Augsburg Confession: "No one should publicly teach in the Church or administer the Sacraments unless he be regularly called." (XIV.) Luther: "Every pastor has his definite parish; no one else and no stranger shall presume to teach his parishioners, either publicly or privately, without his knowledge and consent. . . . It is God's will that nothing be done by one's own choice or devotion, but everything by command and call." (5, 721.) "How can all things be done decently and in order if every one interfered with another's business and every layman wanted to get up in the church and preach? . . . St. Paul condemns the wicked and wanton spirit that meddles with the official business of another." (20:1673ff.)<sup>4</sup>

Such a statement by Walther was "a conscious reaction to the divisiveness that he detected in historic Pietism and that he had seen operate within Stephanism."<sup>5 6</sup> In *Ebenezer* we read about frightful



results of conventicles in the life of Walther and many others as young students:

In 1829 Walther attended the University of Leipzig as a student of theology. The University of Leipzig was very rationalistic. Only very few professors claimed to be Christians.

Walther, on the other hand, chose to associate with a small circle of Christian students who, under the leadership of an old candidate by the name of Kuehn, “came together for the purpose of prayerfully studying the Word of God.” . . . By diligent study of the Bible and other books they gradually came to the conviction that the doctrines of the Lutheran Church are the only true ones, but they had not yet come to an understanding of . . . justification. They still held that, in order to come to a full and lasting assurance of his salvation, every sinner must needs pass through the awful terrors of the Law and the qualms of the fear of hell. In other words, they founded their hopes of salvation not so much on the grace of God and the merits of Christ, as on a certain degree of contrition and repentance to which they must have attained. This brought Walther into deep distress; terrible conflicts of soul resulted. . . . He [Walther] says: “Praying, sighing, weeping, fasting, struggling, was of no avail; the peace of God departed from my soul.” He was rescued from this awful torment by a pastoral letter from Rev. Martin Stephan, then pastor at Dresden, Saxony, to whom he had written for advice. Stephan advised him to hasten to the saving arms of Jesus, and he would find healing under His wings.<sup>7</sup>

In his *The Life of C. F. W. Walther* Lewis Spitz writes:

Regarding this “conventicle” Walther writes: “At first there was in this circle (brother Otto Hermann Walther, Johann Friedrich Buenger, Ottomar Fuerbringer, Theodor Julius Brohm, and Ernst Gerhard Wilhelm Keyl) no discussion of the doctrinal differences among the various churches, although the faith which had been kindled in their hearts through the study of the Bible was none other than the Lutheran faith. In the course of time, however, a change came about. . . . Candidate Kuehn, who had come to a full assurance of faith only after long and severe anguish and conflicts, under unspeakable terrors of the Law, now endeavored to lead the little awakened group in the same path along which God had led him. He tried to convince us that

our Christianity could never rest upon a firm foundation until we, too, had experienced the keenest sorrow for sin and the very terrors of hell in bitter struggles of repentance. The result was a general change from a joyful evangelical to a gloomy legalistic Christianity.”

Under such spiritual guidance it is not surprising that the devotional literature which these distressed young Christians used was largely that of Pietism, which belittled the value of correct Biblical doctrine and stressed religious emotions and works of charity. . . . Walther explains: “The less a book invited to faith and the more legalistically it urged contrition of heart and total mortification of the old man preceding conversion the better a book we held it to be. And even those books we read only so far as they described the sorrows and exercises of repentance; when this was followed by a description of faith and comfort for the penitent, we usually closed such a book; for we thought, that did not as yet concern us.”<sup>8</sup>

Steffens adds in his biography, *Dr. C. F. W. Walther*: “The books of devotion most used by these young believers were the writings of Arndt, Francke, Bogatsky, Spener, Werner, Schade, Rambach, Steinmetz, Fresenius, and others of like character.”<sup>9</sup> These were all writers of devotional literature. All but Arndt (1555-1621), who predates the Pietism Movement (beginning in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century), may be classified as Pietists.

This begs the question: What is Pietism? How are conventicles related to Pietism? How did Pietism affect Walther’s theology and practice?

### *Conventicles and Pietism*

According to Valentin Ernst Loescher (1673-1749), who has been considered “the last great representative of Lutheran Orthodoxy in the 18<sup>th</sup> century,”<sup>10</sup> the designation, “Pietism,” first came into use in Hesse-Darmstadt in and around the city of Frankfurt am Main, where a few theologians in the year 1681 took exception to the *collegia pietatis* (private study meetings to promote piety).

Loescher comments in *The Complete Timotheus Verinus* (1718—1721): “The pursuit of piety has sometimes been carried on

in a confused and forced way so that the church runs into danger and the revealed saving truth suffers harm. In the end, the true piety that we love is misused.” He then quotes Zechariah 8:19: “Love truth and peace” and Paul’s words “that the truth that leads to godliness must be taught and learned (Titus 1:1),” and concludes:

The truth must always be our foundation, and godliness and peace should be built on it. Because this order is not always observed, a person sometimes errs in creating a situation in which the pursuit of truth is viewed as antagonistic to the pursuit of piety, and therefore also antagonistic to the pursuit of peace. As a result, there follows a harmful misuse of both peace and piety.<sup>11</sup>

Though the term “Pietism” is relatively new, the deception that carries this label harkens back beyond the seventeenth century. In the ancient Garden the Deceiver convinced our first parents that the “pursuit of truth” obstructed their path to the “pursuit of piety and peace.” Satan successfully slandered their Creator. He enticed the Man and Woman to look beyond God’s clear words to find His true intentions: “Did God really say . . .?” “You will not surely die . . . for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” (Genesis 3:1, 4, 5) It is this very error of seeking God’s counsel and will outside the boundary of His Word that became the hallmark of the Pietism Movement.

Luther recognized this same deception in the enthusiasts, papists and, indeed, in all heresy in every place and time:

All this is the old devil and the old serpent who made enthusiasts of Adam and Eve. He led them from the external Word of God to spiritualizing and their own imaginations, and he did this through other external words. Even so, the enthusiasts of our day condemn the external Word, yet they do not remain silent but fill the world with their chattering and scribbling, as if the Spirit could not come through the Scriptures or the spoken word of the apostles but must come through their own writings and words. Why do they not stop preaching and writing until the Spirit himself comes to the people without and before their

writings since they boast that the Spirit came upon them without the testimony of the Scriptures? (SA III:8:5-6)

. . . In short, enthusiasm clings to Adam and his descendants from the beginning to the end of the world. It is a poison implanted and inoculated in man by the old dragon, and it is the source, strength, and power of all heresy, including that of the papacy and Mohammedanism. Accordingly, we should and must constantly maintain that God will not deal with us except through his external Word and sacrament. Whatever is attributed to the Spirit apart from such Word and sacrament is of the devil. (SA III:8:9-10)

Haegglund highlights the “enthusiasm” inherent in Pietism in his *History of Theology* as he contrasts Orthodoxy with Pietism. He observes that

. . . Orthodoxy had proceeded on the basis of objective reality and grounded the certainty of theological knowledge on the Scriptural principle. . . . Pietism, on the other hand, proceeded on the basis of experience; it looked upon the experience of the individual as being fundamental to religious knowledge or insight.<sup>12</sup>

In part, Pietism grew out of an overreaction to perceived extremes of Orthodoxy. Yet in attempting to escape what some considered dead scholasticism, Pietist scholars abandoned the very tools that could have enabled them to battle the godless scholasticism of rationalism that dominated the Age of Enlightenment. Haegglund continues:

The Pietist movement which penetrated Lutheran territory in the latter part of the 17<sup>th</sup> century . . . was not simply a reaction against certain weaknesses in the church life of the time; it was rather a new theological position, which was based on a new concept of reality and which bore within itself the seeds of the modern point of view.

. . . In spite of the fact that it commonly rejected the new philosophical tendencies of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Pietism itself helped to prepare the ground in many respects for the new ways of thinking.

. . . Thus it was that conservative Pietism inaugurated, in a variety of ways, the modern way of thinking in the field of theology and ecclesiology. In its subjective concept of knowledge and its interest in morality and the empirical facts of religion, Pietism bore within itself tendencies which came into full bloom in the thought world of the Enlightenment, in the secular area as well as in the theological sphere.<sup>13</sup>

An example of the conditions under which Pietism evolved may prove instructive for us today. Since time and space is limited we will not at this time address the topic of Pietism's roots in mysticism. Neither will we discuss Luther's use of Tauler or the *German Theology* and his rejection of Dionysian mysticism except to say that Luther represented a balance between so-called "dead orthodoxy" and "enthusiasm." Instead, I begin with Johann Arndt and his place in Lutheran Orthodoxy.

Johann Arndt (b. 1555) was born in an era of spiritual battle. Once Luther died, the Roman church had not hesitated in condemning the central article of faith at the Council of Trent. Furthermore, political unrest and ecclesiastical confusion confronted our later Lutheran fathers. The Thirty Years' War (1618-1648) left plundered cities, ravaged countryside and populations decimated by war, disease and starvation. Churches and schools had been burned, many of those still standing were without leaders, and the care of the sick and poor practically did not exist. The majority of the German population was not overly concerned about the orthodox theological debates taking place at the universities during this period.

On the year of Arndt's birth the articles of the Peace of Augsburg were signed, terminating the terrors which had followed the introduction of the Augsburg Interim in 1548. Because of the *Interim* four hundred faithful Lutheran pastors and their families from South Germany, who did concern themselves with the orthodox theological debates, had been driven into exile.

As young Arndt grew he witnessed the effects of Schwenkfeldt and Muenzer's mysticism, Servetus' Unitarianism, Agricola's antinomianism, Osiander's confusion of Justification and Sanctification, Major's misrepresentation of the role of good work in salvation, the Synergistic controversy, the Cryptocalvinistic

controversy and others. One author concludes: “Though the storms which such false teachings caused subsided, the waves would long remain in commotion, and it was precisely in these troublous times that Arndt labored in the ministry.”<sup>14</sup>

At the dawning of the Age of Orthodoxy, faithful pastors and teachers found themselves engaged in spiritual combat. Much like our battle against terrorism today, they found themselves under attack from without and within. Identifying the enemy, defending the faith from attack, and striking out with God’s objective truth became the overriding mission of the day. Added into this mix:

At the same time, all these men were fallible creatures, subject to all the errors of judgment, and to all the passions and infirmities incident to fallen man. They often supposed that their intentions were pure, when selfish motives governed them, and their jealous guardianship of God’s truth was combined with a jealous love for their personal opinions. It was under these circumstances, when each party watched with extreme jealousy over the purity of the faith, as adopted by it, and when, besides, many private interests—personal, political, and pecuniary—exercised vast influence, that Arndt entered on his labors.<sup>15</sup>

Johann Arndt, as a pastor and an orthodox theologian, was also sensitive to the effect that polemics can often produce upon the Christian. One can become so engrossed and fatigued in the battle that the use of God’s Word becomes more of an academic exercise than a time of spiritual nurture. Sometimes it can appear that warriors of the faith sacrifice Christian piety in the process of defending Christian truth. Arndt penned his True Christianity (from 1605—1609) in order to encourage a godly and uniquely Lutheran piety that was firmly rooted in God’s truth, His means of grace.

Others who claimed to represent Arndt were not so careful. Lutheran historians outline what happened among Lutherans who “followed a harmful misuse of both peace and piety.”<sup>16</sup> Aland and Stoeffler categorize the Pietism movement into five groups: Spenerian Pietism, Halle Pietism, Wuerttemberg Pietism, Radical Pietism, and Moravian Pietism.

## *Spenerian Pietism*

Among a collection of essays entitled Lutheranism and Pietism (edited by August Suelflow) we find the following assessment of Philip Spener:

Philip Jacob Spener (1635-1705) was a student of the Strassbourg professor and orthodox theologian, Johann Konrad Dannhauer, from whom he gained a thorough knowledge of Luther and his writings. Building on Arndt . . . and in sympathy with Reformed Pietism [Puritan piety and Labadie's French Calvinism], Spener promoted biblical piety in his *Pia desideria* (1657), a volume so popular in eliciting reformist responses that a Lutheran form of Pietism was born. At the time of its composition, Spener was senior of the ministerium in Frankfurt am Main.

. . . For him mystical theology could and should be used by teachers of dogmatics integrating its emphases with orthodox loci. His program of reform called for increased emphasis on the Word of God in worship and in private study meetings (*collegia pietas*); renewed emphasis on the doctrine of the 'priesthood of all believers'; cultivation of the spiritual life among laity and clergy; a clergy composed of 'true Christians' whose piety was formed through the spiritual literature of Tauler (and the *German Theology*), Arndt's *True Christianity*, and Thomas á Kempis' *Imitation of Christ*; and (finally) edifying preaching directed to 'the inward and new man.'<sup>17</sup>

Spener was also the first to encourage formal social programs and mission outreach among Lutherans. He took an active role in building a combination of a poorhouse, orphan asylum, and workhouse at Frankfort in 1679. Later Franke would far overshadow this effort when he would establish an orphan asylum at Halle in 1694. This orphanage was maintained by the voluntary contributions. It also became the point of departure for foreign missions. Though Spener held a special appreciation for this cause it was Franke who would later organize Halle into the center for Danish and Indian missions. He also founded the first German missionary journal and inspired all of Protestant Germany to become mission-minded.

Despite his attempt to remain orthodox, Spener lost sight of the forensic, objective nature of God's justification of the sinner in Christ. Instead, he began laying emphasis upon justification as the fruit of regeneration. He encouraged the avoidance of all pleasure and amusement as evidence of the sanctified life. He surmised that the Christian can attain freedom from all intentional sin. He also subordinated the Old Testament to the New Testament and claimed that Old Testament truth is of a more peripheral nature.

Spener grew careless in the practical application of his theology. He encouraged conventicles in which "inner spiritual phenomena and individual experiences elicited the greatest interest and provided the focus for theological discussion."<sup>18</sup> Loescher bears witness regarding the fruits of Spener's teaching and methods:

The first outbreak of these [public] movements . . . made itself felt about the year 1683 at Frankfurt am Main. It occurred among those whom Dr. Spener held to be the best Christians in his congregation and who had been members of his pietistic gatherings. He himself writes of this:

Some of the best souls, who in other respects had been regarded as enlightened up to that time, were so far captivated by their eagerness concerning the common corruption that they had scruples about joining a congregation. Therefore they avoided the use of the Lord's Supper; some of them even avoided going to church, from which yet more confusion arose. [From Spener's *Theologisch Bedencken und andere Briefliche Antworten*, Part III., forward, p. 3b]

He describes this as a scandal. He confesses that . . . he and they had "endeavored to build up one another," but that there had been "a good beginning." With some of them, "what concerned the purity of the gospel had not been genuine," and he had been "like a captain who had lost the rudder."

It must be said to his credit that Dr. Spener endured very well in this first test. He not only withdrew from these separatists, but he also worked against them, although with too little zeal.

The second outbreak of public movements occurred in 1689 and 1690 at Leipzig when Dr. Spener spent a few years in



Electoral Saxony. Several teachers and students of theology, some of whom had heard his special instruction at Dresden, but all of whom had a high regard for his style of teaching and his writings, began without supervision to hold certain biblical exercises for awakening piety among themselves. By and by, they also admitted unlearned people to these. Teacher August Hermann Francke led a philosophical gathering; but he mostly expounded devotionally and by way of advice in German; finally he also admitted townspeople. Dr. Spener himself confesses that “much unrest arose because of this work.” He cannot deny that “some may have gone beyond him in zeal, and a part did indiscreet things that they should have admitted.”<sup>19</sup>

This admission of Spener brings us to the next form of Pietism:

### *Halle Pietism*

August Hermann Franke, often considered the father of Pietism, expanded upon and popularized the principles of Spener. Franke’s form of Pietism differed from Spener’s teachings in three notable ways: First, he taught that the Christian should be able to point to a distinct conversion experience preceded by an inner crisis (the repentance struggle) evoked by the preaching of the Law. Second, he concluded that in this condition, man is brought to the point where he decides to break with the world and begin a new life. It is only after this point is reached that the gift of faith is bestowed and through this faith he receives the forgiveness of sins. Finally, dancing, playing, and going to the theater was considered sinful.<sup>20</sup>

This ‘new form’ of Halle Pietism, as Aland styles it, was noted for its scriptural emphases and its ethical activism, its charitable and educational work among orphans, its various educational schools and foundations, and its extensive mission endeavors in Asia and America.<sup>21</sup> If anything distinguished Halle Pietism from other forms, it was Francke’s emphasis on the importance of a conversion experience as the chief sign of true repentance, his relative indifference to the sacraments, and his intransigence to Orthodoxy.<sup>22</sup>

Spenerian and Halle Pietism also emphasized the individual care of souls over the general care of souls in the parish. Pastors utilized conventicles<sup>23</sup> and other individualized methods of ministry to meet the needs of a growing population of refugees (Lutheran and Reformed alike) and of the larger congregations. Nicolas Hope writes:

*Cura animarum generalis*, meaning preaching and administering the Lutheran sacraments of baptism and communion in church, became accepted practice in Lutheran sixteenth-century church orders. Private confession and absolution before parish communion was seen as an essential rite for acceptance in the parish, and citizenship. This development brought with it in the seventeenth century a noticeable danger of lip-service Christianity. Heinrich Mueller used the metaphor of the four dumb idols consisting of font, pulpit, confessional, and altar as a system which restricted, especially in populous cities, a citizen's contact with the parish clergyman, and emphasized soulless passive churchmanship.

. . . The continuance of crisis, the sharp rise of population in some large city parishes augmented by immigration (c. 1670-1700), notably in Berlin, Halle, Hamburg, Dresden, Leipzig, and Frankfurt am Main, forced rural and urban Lutheran parish clergy to rethink the nature of their office. They put less emphasis on an authoritative Lutheran teaching office (*Lehramt*) admonishing from the pulpit the ignorant and wayward, and the use of the confessional before parish communion, and moved towards the pastoral parish of the Reformed church (British and Dutch, also that of Strassburg). This meant spending more time with parishioners, giving individual spiritual advice and comfort, using the catechism and prayer book, and consoling the sick and dying in the home. The Latin phrase *cura animarum specialis, particularis, individualis* became common at much the same time as the German synonym *Erbauung* for British and Dutch *Pietas*.<sup>24</sup>

This can be further illustrated in the example of Johann Winckler (1642-1705). Here we observe some of the historical and logistic factors that hastened the spread of Pietistic methods:

Winckler, brought up in the conservative Saxon environment of Leipzig's Thomasschule and university, had learnt already,

as a court chaplain at Hesse-Darmstadt (1676-8) and briefly as pastor of the new *Concordienkirche* at Mannheim (1678-9), that Lutheran urban parishes had to open doors to Reformed immigrants. Urban parishioners were also ignorant of basic Christian teaching. How to communicate effectively with parishioners in a large urban parish worried Winckler as senior of St. Michael in Hamburg from 1684. His solution was Spenerian. Winckler held from 1687 onwards ‘colleges’ in his vicarage as he had done at Darmstadt. These were simple courses of Bible study for Hamburg ordinands. He also opened his vicarage twice a week to his parishioners for spiritual advice and prayer.

Fräncke, who spent 1688 as a tutor to Winckler’s children, saw this as an excellent model of urban pastoral practice. But the problem of lip-service churchmanship, especially private confession before communion, in this large city parish remained almost insoluble. Winckler’s worries surfaced in an exchange of letters with Leipzig’s theology faculty: whether, in these circumstances, he was a true pastor to a large flock whose spiritual state he could not possibly know? Should he resign? Leipzig theologians praised his conscience, but argued that as an ordained clergyman, Winckler should continue to carry out his duties as best he could. Winckler replied that Jonah had cared for 120,000 parishioners at Nineveh (Jonah 4:11), to which the calm advice of Leipzig experience replied that Jonah surely did not worry too much about each and every one; the same was probably true, they emphasized, of the Apostles when they worked in large towns. This was a prelude to a bitter row (1690-1700) between Winckler and his like-minded Pietist Hamburg clergy (Horb and Hinckelmann) with Mayer and several other influential senior Hamburg clergy over this new homespun pastoral practice.

. . . This tradition was carried on by his brilliant son, the orientalist Johann Friedrich Winckler (1679-1738?), chief pastor of St. Nicholas from 1712. Like his father, or Lassenius at Copenhagen, his simple vernacular preaching became so popular that new pews had to be installed to seat his growing congregation.<sup>25</sup>

Thus Pietism seems to have gained popularity as an alternative to what some considered to be a spiritless form of public worship and a formal distancing between the clergy and laity. Pietism seemed

to offer a “kinder, friendlier” and “user-friendly” way of worship and manner of ministry.

The Halle Pietists also implemented a new method of theological study. Professors encouraged study of the Bible with practical and inspirational goals in mind. Instead of looking for the one intended sense of a passage of Scripture, Johann Rambach encouraged the student to find the literal meaning, the spiritual meaning and the mystical meaning.

In Schaff-Herzog this new method is described:

All academic lectures assumed the character of devotional sessions and revival sermons; every lecture was opened and closed with prayer. In addition to all this, the faculty met twice each week at the dean’s house, where the students had to report on their studies and receive advice. The study of the Bible in the original was the center of the entire course.<sup>26</sup>

In their earnest attempt to encourage not only scholarship, but piety, the Halle Pietists reduced Dogmatic studies to insignificance.<sup>27</sup> They also rejected the use of Aristotelian terminology and the dialectic method in the field of theology. Eventually the Halle faculty abandoned careful scholarship and confessionalism and even lost its influence over the student body. Such Pietistic subjectivism, as it spread, would also help facilitate the incursion of rationalism that dominated the universities in the nineteenth century when C. F. W. Walther matriculated at the University of Leipzig.

### ***Wuerttemberg Pietism***

Spener’s influence in Wuerttemberg stimulated a form of Pietism among Wuerttemberg Lutherans centered on *collegia pietas*, which became an integral part of congregational life in Wuerttemberg and a potent source of Pietistic life and reform for several centuries.<sup>28</sup> Unlike the conventicles in North Germany, which were largely held among the nobility, the conventicles of Wuerttemberg consisted of members of the middle in the towns and the rural districts. “This insured a far more popular character for the movement, so that Pietistic *Stunden*, or prayer-meetings, have survived to the present time.”<sup>29</sup>

Johann Albrecht Bengel (d. 1752) was one of most famous founders of Pietism in Wuerttemberg. Bengel worked in the field of Biblical studies. We know him best from his categorization of manuscripts according to their place of origin for the Greek New Testament, which provided the basis for modern-day textual criticism.

Bengel's theological goal was a concrete, historical interpretation of Scripture free from all philosophical or doctrinal formalism. In other words, Bengel, with most Pietists, sought to reform the educational system by removing the influence of Aristotelian terminology and the dialectical method and replacing it with biblical studies and terminology.

It is of interest that Bengel's exegesis of Revelation was a prophetic interpretation of history. He asserted that the end of the world could be expected in the year 1836.

### *Moravian Pietism*

In Lutheranism and Pietism Robert Scholz describes Hernhuttism or the United Church of the Brethren:

Count Nicholas von Zinzendorf emerged from the Halle matrix of Pietism to rejuvenate the Bohemian Brethren on his Hernhutt estate. The resulting form of Moravian Pietism was known for its strong emotional content and sometimes erotic mysticism, arising out of Zinzendorf's use of the bride-bridegroom imagery and taken from the Song of Songs. Opposed to theological systems, Zinzendorf emphasized the heart and its feelings, especially the experience of Christ in faith. By contrast to Luther's emphasis on following Christ in discipleship, Zinzendorf dwelt on the imitation of Christ, of growing more like Christ.<sup>30</sup>

Haegglund submits that Zinzendorf thought well of the church but did not believe that being Lutheran was necessary for fellowship. The feeling of fellowship with Christ through contemplation of the cross is the only prerequisite for external fellowship. There is no connection between theology and philosophical/general education. There is no natural knowledge of God. Knowledge of God comes only through the crucified One. The repentance struggle induced by

the Law is eliminated. Only the experience of the cross and atonement can bring a person to the proper point in his faith. (Antinomianism)<sup>31</sup>

Zinzendorf also displayed a zeal for missions. He was able to send missionaries at a very rapid pace to Africa and America. His missionaries were also trained to preach in a more lively and winsome manner than many who were trained to preach in a more dogmatic style, even at Halle. Moravian missions grew rapidly as a result of this preaching and Zinzendorf's use of laymen in Bible teaching.<sup>32</sup>

### *Radical Pietism*

Haeggglund writes regarding Radical Pietism:

A Radical Lutheran Pietism also emerged outside congregation and confession that, though Lutheran in origin, was schismatic in result. The mysticism of Jacob Boehme and Matthew Arnold, the influence of French quietism, and the impact of more general theosophical speculations all influenced the radical Pietism that developed along the border between Germany and France.

A fanatic, mystical religiosity combined with a rationalistic critique of church doctrine.<sup>33</sup>

Notable names among radical Pietists are Johann Wilhelm Petersen (d. 1727), a chiliast, who once wrote:

... Extraordinary means can replace the external knowledge of Christ and His reconciliation.

There have been heathen who were really saved even though they had no external knowledge of Christ.

There have been heathen who received Christ for salvation, and thus must belong to the kingdom of Christ, even though in such circumstances they did not know him personally.

One ought not judge any heathen; God can work faith in their hearts just as surely as he works faith in the children of Christians.<sup>34</sup>

Gottfried Arnold (d. 1714) wrote, *Unpartyische Kirchen and Ketzergeschichte* (1699-1700) and set himself above all confessions. He saw Christianity as always preserved and passed on by sects.

Johann Konrad Dippel (d.1734) was critical of the orthodox doctrine of Atonement. He considered “satisfaction” contrary to God’s love, which overlooks sin and creates a new heart. Every facet of religion is imminent or subjective. He was also Chiliastic and believed that the 1,000 year reign would be a release from church and state.<sup>35</sup>

Valentin Loescher outlined thirteen characteristics of Pietism: Pious-appearing indifferentism,<sup>36</sup> contempt for the means of grace,<sup>37</sup> the invalidation of the ministry,<sup>38</sup> the mixing of righteousness by faith with works,<sup>39</sup> millennialism,<sup>40</sup> terminism (that God at times terminates any chance for some to receive His grace before death),<sup>41</sup> precisionism (requiring what God does not require),<sup>42</sup> mysticism,<sup>43</sup> the abolition of the supports of religion,<sup>44</sup> protecting and excusing of enthusiasts and fanatical things, perfectionism, reformatism (where reforming is sought and begun without necessity),<sup>45</sup> and schisms caused by the disorderly seeking of piety.<sup>46</sup>

Wittenberg theologians, Leipzig theologians such as Benedikt Carpzov, and Greifswald theologian Johann Friedrich Mayer all accused Pietism of Platonism, a Schwaermer spirit, Osiandrianism (mixing Sanctification and Justification), demeaning the efficaciousness of the Word, separating the Word and the Spirit, a faulty theology of regeneration, a legalistic concept of sanctification, and chiliasm.

### *Pietism’s Contemporary Influence*

Pietism variously affected Lutheranism in America. Henry Melchior Muehlenberg (1711-1787), for example, represented Hanoverian Pietism, a moderate form of Pietism aimed at joining forces with orthodoxy to battle rationalism.<sup>47</sup> Samuel Simon Schmucker (1799-1873), on the other hand, represented a later Halle Pietism with its strong anti-orthodox stance that conjoined Pietism and rationalism. Scholz notes that:

Pietism and Orthodox dogma together helped keep the Enlightenment at bay as the American Revolution approached. While Muehlenberg's theological education occurred when the conflict between Orthodoxy and Pietism had passed its zenith, it occurred early enough to avoid the effects of rationalism. Halle University, with its staunch anti-Orthodox stance, very early incorporated rationalism into its faculties and its theology, first mixing rationalism and Pietism, and then promoting rationalism itself.

. . . It is this form of education, the marriage of reason and revelation, of rationality and Pietism (instead of Orthodoxy and Pietism) that came to dominate the colonial American Lutheran Church in the era of the American Revolution. This explains why, with Muehlenberg's death, the confessional stance of the Pennsylvania and New York ministeriums collapsed so completely between 1790 and 1815.<sup>48</sup>

Pietism profoundly affected C. F. W. Walther. While seeking out like-minded Lutherans in order to unite them together as a Lutheran church in America, Walther soon encountered the doctrinally indifferent, anti-confessionalism of the Lutherans from the east. Reread his The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel (delivered from 1884-1885) after studying this essay. You will discover that the majority of his theses contradict Pietistic doctrines. From 1862, when he penned *The Proper Form of an Evangelical Lutheran Congregation Independent of the State*, until his famous Law/Gospel lectures ending two years before his death Walther upheld what Loescher had spoken about 150 years earlier: "The truth must always be our foundation, and godliness and peace should be built on it."

Pietism still affects us today in coarse and in subtle ways (to borrow Loescher's terminology). According to Carter Lindberg in The Third Reformation, for example, the Charismatic movement arose out of a sense of dissatisfaction similar to that of 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century society.

There, too [in sixteenth century "charismatic movements" and in Pietism], the concerns focused on both prophetic protest and the goal of renewing a church perceived to have "missed the mark." Contemporary charismatic renewal movements are saying that "the churches need renewal." There is an emptiness



in the life of the churches which is reflected in the lives of its members. An educated ministry lacks the “warmth and conviction of personal dedication” and lives remain unchanged while the hunger for God goes unsatisfied. Where is the presence, the power, and the praise of God? . . . The depersonalization of contemporary life in the midst of materialism and secularism disposes persons to search for a personal experience of reality. In this context charismatic renewal speaks not of having something new but of *becoming* and *being* a new person.<sup>49</sup>

Like Pietism, the Charismatic Movement assures the spiritually dissatisfied church member of God’s presence and power by directing him to his own person or experience. Like Pietism, the Charismatic Movement is anti-clerical by nature and diminishes God’s means of grace. Like Pietism, the Charismatic Movement preaches doctrinal indifference, or, to repeat Loescher, it creates “a situation in which the pursuit of truth is viewed as antagonistic to the pursuit of piety, and therefore also antagonistic to the pursuit of peace. As a result, there follows a harmful misuse of both peace and piety.”

On the other hand we can learn from such overreactions to spiritual dissatisfaction. What more can we do to speak God’s Word meaningfully and to instill a zeal for His Sacraments in the hearts of our people? Walther encourages:

The second requisite for effective preaching is that the preacher not only himself believe the things he preaches to others, but that his heart be full of the truths which he proclaims, so that he enter his pulpit with the ardent desire to pour out his heart to his hearers. He must have an enthusiastic grasp, in the right sense of the word, of his subject. Then his hearers get the impression that the words dropping from his lips are flames from a soul on fire. That does not mean that the Word of God must receive its power and life from the living faith of the preacher; for the Lord says distinctly; “The words that I speak, they are spirit, and they are life.” John 6:63. Moreover, the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews says: “The Word of God is quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” Hebrews 4:12. But when a preacher proclaims what he has ever so often experienced in his own

heart, he easily finds the right words to speak convincingly to his hearers. Coming from the heart his words, in turn, go to the hearts of his hearers, according to the good old saying: *Pectus disertum facit*, that is, it is the *heart* that makes eloquent. This does not mean the artificial eloquence acquired in a school of elocution, but the sane spiritual art of reaching the hearts of hearers. For when the hearers get the impression that the preacher is in full and dread earnest, they feel themselves drawn with an irresistible force to pay the closest attention to what the preacher is teaching in his sermon. That is the reason why many simple, less gifted, and less learned preachers accomplish more than the most highly gifted and profoundly learned men.<sup>50</sup>

Walther indeed encourages the pastor to prepare carefully for every sermon. Yet he discourages rote recitation or, worse yet, a dry and spiritless reading of one's sermon to his hearers. I would add that we should use every opportunity possible to exalt God's means of grace, Word and Sacrament, in our sermons. We ought to relate every part of the Divine Service together as an organic whole. Preach and teach in such a way that you show the congregation how the theme of the Introit is carried through in the Scripture lessons and sermon. Explain the significance and flow of the liturgy and show the biblical basis of each part.

The Church Growth Movement also gives evidence of a Pietistic influence. In fact, as one of its proponents, Dr. David Luecke, author of *Evangelical Style, Lutheran Substance*, studied Lutheran history, Lutheran Pietism in particular, asking, "Is there anything in the history of Lutherans that explains why Lutherans, particularly in America, have tended to educate toward appreciation, whereas Evangelicals have preferred simpler and informal worship structures?" Answer: The German sense of community in the *Gemeinde* (congregation) influenced the German Lutherans in "profound and unacknowledged ways." "Thus it was not by accident that in the new world the parochial school was essential to continue not just the Gospel but the mores, ethos, and aesthetics of the community." On the other hand the American Evangelical "metaphor for church or congregation" was the camp meeting. Here people from

different backgrounds came together, pulled the wagons into a circle, got to know each other quickly, and got to the heart of things in a hurry. Nuanced language and complexity were eliminated for the sake of more direct and unmistakable communication. Were the differences sociological or theological—or both?

Our conclusions were that one can use traditional forms and educate people to appreciate them, or one can develop other forms or ceremonies to attract those outside of the church and facilitate assimilation into the church. After all, ‘it is not necessary that forms and ceremonies be the same in all places’ (CA VII).<sup>51</sup>

This view seems to echo the statement of Heinrich Mueller’s metaphor of the four dumb idols consisting of font, pulpit, confessional, and altar as a system which restricted contact with the parish clergyman and emphasized soulless passive churchmanship.

This contemporary challenge to accommodate a plurality of beliefs and backgrounds is nothing new. Orthodox and Pietistic theologians struggled with this same challenge in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Orthodoxy concluded that the Divine Service served for the edification of believers, not the conversion of unbelievers. Like the Lutheran Pietists, modern evangelicalism and the Church Growth Movement promote the Divine Service as an opportunity “to attract those outside of the church” and to facilitate their “assimilation into the church.” Of course, a pastor should communicate God’s Law and Gospel in such a way that any fourteen-year-old can understand. Yet, who should be the determining force for our form of Divine Service: The non-worshipping non-Christian, or the Christian desiring a consistent and distinctly Lutheran Divine Service? I have catechized many a non-worshipping non-Christian who then became a Christian desiring a consistent and distinctly Lutheran Divine Service.

The next question that naturally follows is “What distinguishes our Divine Service as uniquely Lutheran?” The answer is our unique focus and emphasis in worship. Lutheran worship is focused upon Christ through His Word and sacrament. Lutheran worship seeks God’s grace in what God says and does, not in what the worshipper

says and does. Harold Senkbeil writes in his Sanctification: Christ in Action:

There's more at stake here than meets the eye. Worship is never merely a matter of personal taste. It's a travesty to see churches acting like fast food chains, each trying to get more customers by outdoing the others through advertising and packaging techniques. The gospel is not a product to be sold; it is a message to be proclaimed. It's time to ask whether the church in America today can afford to go on compromising the gospel by its consumer approach to worship.

. . . There is another way of worship. It's the kind of worship which flows out of the gospel itself. Conservative Christians are concerned about orthodox preaching; it's time we take an active interest in orthodox worship as well.

. . . Which response is, in fact, the most faithful to the gospel of Christ – the subjective, entertainment atmosphere encouraged in much of what passes for Christian worship today or objective praise of the God who comes to us in his Word and sacrament?

Senkbeil then quotes F. H. Brabant (1933):

We ought, indeed, to “feel at home” in church, but we come to it as wanderers returned, not like tired city men calling for our slippers and our comfortable chairs. This is why we need all the help we can get from without, the steadiness of discipline, the beauty of holiness, the unswerving faith of the church, upon which to lean our poor half-heartedness. That is why the liturgy not only expresses what we feel; it also teaches what we ought to feel.

Though Senkbeil would concur with Walther's encouragement that the preacher's words come “from the heart . . . to the hearts of his hearers,” he cautions that:

It's time to recognize Christian worship for what it is: Christ at work through his Word and sacrament. Rather than focusing on the mind and heart of the worshiper, worship should point to the God who meets us there. Growth in understanding worship comes along with growth in understanding his Word.<sup>52</sup>

Next, we observe some of the more subtle influences of Pietism. Today we take for granted mission societies, ladies societies, youth groups, Bible studies and group devotions in addition to the Divine Service, Lutheran elementary schools and high schools, and charitable and fraternal organizations associated with the church. These are all borrowed ideas from 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century Pietism. Every-member visitations by the Pastor, evangelism programs, the decline of private confession and absolution, homemade liturgies, “user friendly” congregations, and fund-raising projects were first broadly introduced into Lutheran consciousness by Lutheran Pietists.

### *Some Applications*

Note that most of these changes in the way Lutherans did things are not wrong or evil of themselves, though they can all be abused. Bible Classes in the congregation are very profitable for spiritual growth. Yet if any Bible Class begins to develop into a group of “super-Christians” who consider themselves a “cut above” the rest of the congregation, you are in danger of developing a “conventicle” harmful to the unity of the congregation.

Lay-led Bible studies must also be carefully monitored. I know of a situation in which a pious and devout Lutheran church member began holding Bible studies in his home. It soon turned into a Charismatic, tongue-speaking, Spirit seeking prayer meeting. The pastor, by God’s grace, discovered this activity in its beginnings and was able to put a prompt end to it. I have also witnessed and heard of women and youth Bible studies in which the leaders determined the meaning of a text by majority consensus. If any given meaning sounded good to the majority of the group, that must then be the meaning the Holy Spirit intended! Let us beware of the doctrinal confusion and divisiveness that such conventicle-like meetings can spawn. The same principle applies in regard to our Sunday School teachers and other lay teachers. The pastor must do all within his power to exercise evangelical doctrinal supervision over the public teaching of God’s Word in his congregation. Take time to visit the Sunday School classes on occasion. Hold teacher meetings on a regular basis. Ensure as much as possible that everyone in your

congregation is learning sound biblical, Lutheran theology in your educational programs.

Also, how do we ensure the proper interpretation and application of Scripture in devotions on our college campuses? Though I never attended Bethany, I remember some very dubious devotional testimonies at my alma mater (Concordia, Ann Arbor). In some instances they were nothing more than the leader's "feelings" about what some Bible passage or other meant to him or her—accompanied on a number of occasions with tambourine "music." Possible solutions: We can recommend to students sound devotional materials such as *Meditations*, *Cling to the Cross*, Laache's *Book of Family Prayer*, or some other appropriate material. We can encourage the singing of Lutheran hymns in the context of dorm devotions. On occasion pastors, professors, or seminary students could be invited to lead a devotion. In addition to helping our students maintain orthodox devotional gatherings we can also encourage their chapel attendance. We can accomplish this in the classroom, by personal invitation, and by offering a variety of liturgical worship settings.

Finally, how can we better foster unity among one another as pastors? First allow me to observe that our Evangelical Lutheran Synod enjoys a doctrinal unity that is rare among Lutheran church bodies or any Christian denomination. I was born and raised in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and served as a pastor in that synod for nine years. I can therefore speak in a more informed manner of its disunity than of any other body. Sadly, the Missouri Synod is not a body that is "walking together," no matter how repetitively its leadership has claimed such unity. Pastors, laymen, and congregations are divided. Everyone divides into the camp-of-choice at conferences and conventions. People huddle together to out-plan and out-manuever one another as "confessional/conservatives" or "moderate/liberals." This is not "walking together."

The most outstanding characteristic I noticed as I entered into the fellowship of our beloved Evangelical Lutheran Synod was and is an evangelical doctrinal unity. We have never achieved perfection. Throughout our history we have always struggled with disagreements (e.g., church, role of women, Lord's Supper, ministry). We too seek out and gather together with those of a like mind on various issues.

As Schaefer wrote in his preface to Arndt's True Christianity, we are "fallible creatures, subject to all the errors of judgment, and to all the passions and infirmities incident to fallen man." We may often suppose that our intentions are pure, when selfish motives governed us, and our jealous guardianship of God's truth can become combined with a jealous love for our personal opinions.<sup>53</sup>

Wilhelm Petersen, former president of our Bethany Seminary (not to be confused with the radical Pietist quoted above) reminded us in 1993:

It is incumbent upon us, as we seek to preserve our heritage, that we do not get caught up in unnecessary controversies that "destroy rather than edify" and, given our old Adam, this is a real danger. And when it comes to necessary controversy where our heritage is at stake, then we are to "speak the truth in love." In the heat of controversy it is so easy to give way to the works of the flesh which include "hate, bickering, jealousy, anger, selfishness, quarreling, divisions." (Gal. 5:20 GWN) Our Confessions also warn that many heresies have arisen in the church simply from the hatred and envy of the clergy." (Tappert, p. 141) How we need to heed those words in our synodical and intersynodical relations!

A small synod, such as ours, is especially vulnerable. Someone has observed that "the bane of a small synod is envy and gossip." As a small synod we have the potential for self-destruction. . . . We cannot afford "a synod within a synod," each with its own agenda. Wouldn't it be a tragedy if we who have been blessed with such a precious doctrinal heritage should self-destruct! Nothing would please Satan more and no one is working harder to achieve that end. God forbid that we should assist him.<sup>54</sup>

As we heed the lessons of piety gone wrong (Pietism) we can avoid the pitfalls of overreacting to perceived dangers in our beloved synod. Conventicism can be very real threat to our unity even today. We must be very careful, for example, as we organize local, unofficial forums and other venues for public doctrinal discussion. Such forums can become localized conventicles in which individuals or small groups draw followers after themselves. Such gatherings will not

serve to unite us, but they may cause a great deal of confusion and division.

From Pietism let us also learn to guard against the extremes of precisionism and doctrinal indifferentism. In other words, we neither want to add to God's Word nor do we want to detract from it. As we attempt to speak and to write confessionally, may our zeal to be confessional never obscure Scriptural wisdom. As we attempt to speak and write Scripturally, may our zeal to be biblical never diminish the derived wisdom of our fathers. And if any matter is a true matter of doctrine, may each of us be willing to die rather than ever depart from it.

### *Conclusion*

We are a part of the Church ever militant here below. Since the time of the Fall we have, in Christ, engaged in battle with the unholy trinity: our sinful flesh, the world, and the devil. Throughout the history of the Church every Christian has stumbled in the heat of this battle. Some have even lost direction and wandered into the field of the enemy. The history of the Pietism movement, its causes and effects, is a prime example of this dynamic.

Thank God that He is the Lord of all history. He orders all things for the sake of His Church. We therefore pray with Luther the words of Hymn 440: 1, 2, 4, 6 (ELH):

O Lord, look down from heav'n, behold, And let Thy pity waken.  
 How few are we within Thy fold, Thy saints by man forsaken;  
 True faith seems quenched on ev'ry hand; Men suffer not Thy Word to stand.  
 Dark times have us o'ertaken.

May God root out all heresy, And of false teachers rid us  
 Who proudly say, "Now where is he That shall our speech forbid us?  
 By right or might we shall prevail; What we determine cannot fail;  
 We own no lord and master.

Therefore saith God, "I must arise, The poor My help are needing.  
 To Me ascend My people's cries, And I have heard their pleading.  
 For them My saving Word shall fight And fearlessly and sharply smite,  
 The poor with might defending.



Defend Thy truth, O God and stay This evil generation;  
And from the error of its way Keep Thine own congregation.  
The wicked everywhere abound And would Thy little flock confound;  
But Thou art our Salvation. [Amen].

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Depriving a state church of official sanction and support by the government.

<sup>2</sup> The doctrine that churches, schools, etc. should be supported by voluntary contributions and not by the state.

<sup>3</sup> Lutheranism and Pietism, The Lutheran Historical Conference Essays and Reports, ed. August Suelflow, 1990, Vol. 14, 1992. James W. Albers, *Pietism at the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, pp. 167-168.

<sup>4</sup> Taken from --Walther and the Church, Wm. Dallmann, W. H. T. Dau, and Th. Engelder, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, Missouri, 1938, p. 101.

<sup>5</sup> Albers, p. 168.

<sup>6</sup> We observe an illustration of Stephan's method in Zion on the Mississippi, Walter O. Forster, CPH, St. Louis, 1953, p. 66: ". . . He . . . conducted gatherings (conventicles) from the very beginning of his pastorate at Dresden (1810-1837). He, as well as others, asserted that the regular spiritual fare on these occasions was prayer, the singing of hymns, and a catechetical review of Stephan's sermons. Besides, he sent out candidates into the homes of his followers to conduct 'Concordia hours,' so called because the Formula of Concord was the chief subject of discussion. Then he developed the custom of holding a kind of 'question-and-answer hour,' in which he dispensed spiritual advice on topics suggested by those attending. . . . The controversy about these meetings was one of long standing, but never led to any definite conclusion, although on the charge of holding conventicles Stephan was legally absolved by the Ministry of Worship as late as 1837." On page 67 we read of other, more controversial meetings sponsored by Stephan. It was through such methods as these that Stephan further strengthened the loyalty of his inner circle: "A meeting place [in Dresden] was rented as a clubroom for the entertainment of his followers. There, it is related, chess and billiards were played, and beer was dispensed. This arrangement was not a congregational project, but a private club of the faithful, with admission restricted to those who were accepted by vote of the

club members and who signed the set of rules which had been drawn by Stephan.”

<sup>7</sup> Ebenezer, Ed. W.H.T. Dau, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, 1922, p. 26.

<sup>8</sup> The Life of C.F.W. Walther, Lewis Spitz, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, Missouri, 1961, p. 16-17.

<sup>9</sup> Dr. Carl F. W. Walther, D. H. Steffens, the Lutheran Publication Society, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1917, p. 41.

<sup>10</sup> The Complete Timotheus Verinus, Valentin Ernst Loescher, trans., James L. Langebartels and Robert J. Koester, Northwestern Publishing House, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 1998, p.v.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid*, Part II, p. 11.

<sup>12</sup> History of Theology, Bengt Haeggglund (Translated by Gene J. Lund) Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis/London, 1968, page 329.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 324, 326, 229-330.

<sup>14</sup> Dr. Charles F. Schaeffer in the Introduction to True Christianity: A Treatise on Sincere Repentance, True Faith, the Holy Walk of the True Christian, Etc., John Arndt, trans. by Rev. A. W. Boehm, the United Lutheran Publication House, Philadelphia, 1898, pp. xviii-xix.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xx.

<sup>16</sup> Loescher comments (Part I, p. 204): “It is likewise an old question whether and how high orthodoxy is to be regarded, which has here and there been brought to the forefront by those who loved the appearance of piety and of peace more than the truth of doctrine. But piety has never been pushed so strongly as in our times, when Herod and Pilate have become friends, by which I mean to say that fanatics and naturalists have united to bring orthodoxy low, and to enthrone indifferentism.

“These and others like them have even publicly advised that orthodoxy be done away with, and that in its place a real theosophy of heart and spirit be introduced. They have taught that orthodoxy and heterodoxy are the same, that one is as good as the other.”

<sup>17</sup> Lutheranism and Pietism, p. 43.

<sup>18</sup> Haeggglund, p. 329.

<sup>19</sup> Loescher, pp. 16, 17.

<sup>20</sup> Haeggglund, p. 330.

<sup>21</sup> In Schaff Herzog (p. 65) the author notes the mission to the Jews at Halle: “Johann Heinrich Callenberg founded, in 1728, the *Institutum Judaicum*, which continued in operation till 1792.”

<sup>22</sup> Lutheranism and Pietism, p. 43.

<sup>23</sup> Carter Lindberg (of the Institute for Ecumenical Research, Strasbourg) observes: “Pietism’s concern for studying and meditating on the Bible found its practical locus in the famous *collegia pietatis*, later known as ‘Stunde.’ The hours devoted to discussion of Scripture and religious experience provided small group support for the strengthening and edification of individuals. This concern for the individual was certainly one of its strengths but it was also one of its weaknesses. The conventicle posed the possibility of creating two classes of Christians: the normal ‘church-goers’ and the ‘better’ Christians of the ‘ecclesiola in ecclesia.’ On the one hand there was the established church (the Volks- and Staatkirche) that distributed the Lord’s Supper to the unworthy and related church discipline to its own concerns. On the other hand there was the conventicle, the gathering together of the holy community not only as a church within the church but even on occasion as separate from the ‘Babel’ of the established church.” The Third Reformation, Carter Lindberg, Mercer University Press, Macon, Georgia, 1983, pp. 170-71.

<sup>24</sup> German and Scandinavian Protestantism: 1700-1918, Nicholas Hope, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1995, p. 120-21.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 137-38.

<sup>26</sup> The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, Vol. IX, Ed. Samuel Macauley Jackson, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1950, p. 58.

<sup>27</sup> Loescher comments (Part I, p. 204): “The word orthodoxy, or pure doctrine, can be taken in two ways, and is usually understood in a twofold way. First, more accurately and simply; then it means the pure doctrine in its substance, heart, and kernel, or the necessary truths of faith in and of themselves. Secondly, in a wider and weakened sense, or with additions; then it means at the same time the most certain and pure doctrinal style . . . or the whole system of doctrine, and how even the not so necessary points of faith are connected with the necessary ones. In the first understanding, orthodoxy belongs to each and every Christian, and is nothing else

than faith which is believed, without which no one is saved. However, in the second understanding, it belongs to theologians, and must be regarded as a matter which is, at all events, highly necessary for the body of the church. Because pure doctrine is our fortress, one can, in the latter understanding, present it as a fortress with its outworks, but in the first understanding, as the chief part of the fortress without outworks.

“Here it is sufficiently well-known how up to this time orthodoxy, or pure doctrine, taken in both understandings, has been despised, struck down, and even slandered.”

<sup>28</sup> Lutheranism and Pietism, p. 43.

<sup>29</sup> Op.Cit., p. 59.

<sup>30</sup> Lutheranism and Pietism, p. 44.

<sup>31</sup> History of Theology, p. 332.

<sup>32</sup> Schaff-Herzog, p. 64.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 331.

<sup>34</sup> Loescher, p. 50.

<sup>35</sup> Haeggglund, pp. 331-32.

<sup>36</sup> Loescher here (Part I, p. 51f) lists both coarse and subtle teachings and practices of the Pietist: They include coarse doctrines—1) Systematic truth and pure doctrine are unimportant; they do not belong to the righteous life. 2) Virtuous heathen were also holy, even if they remained heathen; Christ and the kingdom of grace were hidden in them. 3) Someone who denies the Holy Trinity, the deity, and the atonement of Christ can be truly pious and saved. 4) There is only one religion, namely, piety; the rest are human trifles and sectarian. 5) It is not necessary to have an outward religion. 6) To consider one religion to be the best in matters of faith is sectarian. Coarse practices: 1) When they advise Lutherans to join the Catholic church, and regard this as unimportant. 2) When they praise as truly pious and saved those who died in heathenism, atheism, Socinianism, and other highly fundamental errors. 3) When they abandon pure doctrine and the church’s constitution. 4) When they admit Socinians, Mennonites, and Quakers to church fellowship. 5) When they openly declare that those who hold to no outward religion must be left alone. 6) When they regard the term “Lutheran” as sectarian. 7) When they speak well of the Arians and others who long since have been sufficiently

reproved and condemned as heretics. 8) When they want to unite obvious errors with true doctrine. 9) When they throw around charges of sectarianism, a sectarian life, and intolerance, and mock and scold without limit about this. Subtle doctrines—1) No harm is done unless the basic truths are falsified to the point that they are emptied of all saving meaning. 2) Since it does not matter whether one has a better concept of divine things than another, people ought not at all to fight about this. 3) One must not lose hope about the salvation of those who know nothing of Christ and God’s revealed word. 4) Without piety, all that one learns from Holy Scripture is dead letters, mere natural work, and useless. 5) Someone who errs in very important articles can also be in a state of grace. Subtle practices: 1) When they recognize papists, Calvinistic Reformed, and all kinds of enthusiasts as brothers in Christ and treat them as such. 2) When they regard as pious and saved certain Calvinistic Reformed teachers who have actually taught and spread fundamental errors, who have opposed the evangelical truth, and who have died in such a stand. 3) When they speak and write obscurely of the sectarian intolerance. 4) When they rudely and obscurely cry out against refuting error and disputing for the truth. 5) When they rail against the names orthodox and orthodoxy, and have much to say about pseudo-orthodoxy. 6) When they complain that orthodoxy is far too highly regarded in our churches and pushed too strongly. 7) When theologians refuse to make their confession against false prophets, or even to refute them.

<sup>37</sup> In Part I, p. 86f, Loescher elucidates: 1) . . . “Gottfried Arnold says: Complete Christians need no external means of help, they need no Lord’s Supper; the first Christians regarded the other external signs in the same way and did not dwell on them. 2) Dr. Spener’s words are . . . very dangerous: The means of faith, by which we come to faith, and practice faith, is the examining of one’s self. . . . It is distressing to read Dr. Spener’s words, “The activity of faith is essentially the means of salvation.” . . . 6) They have taught that living knowledge is essentially immediate. As long as the hindrances must still be removed, there is need for means; but when the hindrances are removed, then the soul is united with Christ and his Spirit without means. 7) They have presented the internal and external word as two essentially different things, one of which makes room

for the other, so that the external word only testifies externally, but the internal word works spiritually. . . . 10) They have taught and maintained that an orthodox man who lives in an evil way knows nothing at all true, has no truth in his knowledge, his knowledge of divine things is not true. 11) They have taught that a mere knowledge and doctrine, no matter how good they are, are not the truth itself, and thus are not to be called the truth. There is another, correct truth, which is bursting with power. . . . 22) They have taught that the sacraments are such external things that complete Christians can well be completely excused from them; this is a special economy of God which he undertakes with the soul of a man. . . . 24) They have taught and maintained that true Baptism and Lord's Supper are not external, but internal." Practices: "27) Many have forsaken the use of the external means of grace, especially the Lord's Supper, and yet are defended and praised; at the very least, they are not earnestly rebuked for this. 28) The regular old doctrine of our church has been slandered as organolatry and grammatolatry. . . . 32) They have very coarsely asserted that in our church all too much is made of the means of grace.

<sup>38</sup> Loescher outlines fourteen errors of the Halle theologians: "1) The public doctrines in the congregation are to be bound to no call, but are to be free, the contrary practice is a reprehensible monopoly. Mercker's opinion is that doctrinal freedom should be granted under the bishop's supervision without a special call to those members of the congregation who are skilled and gifted by God; it should still be reasonable to grant other uncalled people the freedom to teach. . . . Lange maintains . . . that all Christians . . . have the power to teach in an orderly way. 2) The teachers and preachers do not kindle faith in the hearts of the hearers, nor do they essentially convert; it is organolatry and a sacrilege when the contrary is taught. . . . Dr. Spener has taught otherwise and better, since he writes even of an evil but orthodox teacher: 'He works faith in the hearts of the hearers. . . .' 5) The servant of the church actually does not forgive sins; he confers nothing, but only declares; thus one must interpret Christ's words in John 20:23; to teach the opposite is idolatry. . . . A minister only declares. To say that he transfers forgiveness produces organolatry. . . . God alone forgives sins; but a man may proclaim

this. . . . When someone offends me, I both forgive him and announce the forgiveness. But no one can forgive a penitent for a sin committed against God and others; he can only proclaim God's forgiveness. Dr. Spener could teach him [Lange] something better. 6) An unholy teacher is not a shepherd or tool of God; he must first become truly pious; until then, he is a wolf or Satan's servant. . . . Dr. Spener has taught the opposite. 9) In no way does an unholy teacher have the ministry of the Spirit, but only a ministry of letters. . . . 12) An unholy preacher has no divine call at all; for by 'unholy and godless,' they understand all those who are not pious according to their style and in the measure they prescribe. [Lange:] 'It is an error to state that if a fleshly man is called by men to the ministry of the Spirit, such a call is truly from God. . . . There is as much basis in the Scriptures for this as for the indulgences and other additions of the papists.'"

<sup>39</sup> In Part I, p. 138f, Loescher explains: "1) They have taught that self-denial, denial of the world, crucifixion, the indwelling of Christ and His mystical conduct in a man, and the internal and external piety are the basis, and certainly the only basis, of Christianity and of our salvation. . . . 3) They have taught that for justification such a mortification of the old man must necessarily be present that the man himself crucifies and mortifies his flesh. . . . 6) They have taught that there is a double grasping of Christ, and that the latter, which occurs through piety and the victory of faith, is the correct one. Indeed, some have made of this a double justification. . . . 7) They have taught and maintained that good works had to be present in the work and article of justification, and thus belonged to it because they were present there. Dr. Spener is so far gone that he says, 'It is asserted that in justification faith is without good works; but this assertion about faith is an apparition and an idol.' . . . 10) They have taught and maintained that a pious man actually fulfills the law through his piety; he conducts himself in such a way that one may not justly say of him that he has not fulfilled the law. . . . For this reason the Waldeck Pietists taught that one man fulfills the law more than another. . . . 15) They have taught that sanctification to a certain extent precedes justification. Dr. Breithaupt, speaking of the production of piety and of sanctification of life, says: 'Sanctification precedes justification to a certain extent.' 17) They have again introduced and pronounced



correct the thesis condemned in the Formula of Concord, ‘Good works are necessary for salvation,’ and want to make free use of it. 18) They have taught that true (justifying) faith is the obedience, commanded by God, of the heart, when one converts himself to Christ, takes him into his heart, gives himself over and entrusts himself to Christ, so that in him he will be cleansed from sins, sanctified, and saved. 19) They have . . . vigorously complained that the doctrine of justification and the forgiveness of sins is presented falsely in our church, so that a dead faith is preached along with an imputed righteousness.”

<sup>40</sup> Loescher quotes Spener (Part I, p. 147): “I regard myself as certainly assured of the glorious kingdom of Christ, and that the thousand-year apocalypse is not yet present.” Loescher continues: “2) They taught that baptism, the Lord’s Supper, and the kingdom of the cross will cease before the last great day of judgment. 3) They taught that there will be a time on earth before the last great day of judgment when sin, need, and death will be no more, and all that was lost in Adam will be restored. . . . 5) They teach that a kingdom will come which will abolish the Roman, German and all modern world kingdoms. . . . 7) They despair of the present condition of the church, calling all the better things that happen in it only useless progression. They give the excuse that a completely new structure must be erected, as Dr. Spener and his friends have many times said.”

<sup>41</sup> Loescher (Part I, p. 149): “We believe that the time of grace, the earnest and powerful offer of the means of grace, the prevenient grace of God which shows itself through those means, and consequently the general gracious will of God, do not cease earlier than the natural life of man. Our opponents believe just the opposite, that the terminus is earlier.”

<sup>42</sup> Loescher gives the following examples: “In our times, this characteristic has here and there appeared so coarsely, that some in public writings have proclaimed it a sin for the servants of the church to lie with their wives, or to eat cheese. In other matters, they want to extort an uncommon strictness. They proclaim all who won’t submit to them to be belly servers and godless. . . . They regard all who play games, dance, watch comedies, and joke as for that reason unborn and godless.” P. 150.

<sup>43</sup> Loescher (Part I, pp. 161-180): “Dr. Breithaupt says: ‘We naturally recognize something divine in our souls.’ They sometimes call this the good spark, sometimes the image of God. Dr. Breithaupt writes that it is the light of grace, the spiritual life, Christ in us, and the Spirit of God. Dr. Anton says: ‘The spark of the divine image is more widely suppressed in the unregenerate.’ They want rebirth to originate from this spark. But this doctrine leads to deism and to offensively confusing nature and grace. . . . A corrupted mystic mixes everything together—the internal emotions, anything that serves piety, especially the inner awakening, which is even found among some heathen—and bakes out this cake by which the means of grace and the order of grace suffer much. Grace does not aim at divine gifts and goods surpassing our understanding; grace provides an incomprehensible contact and communication with God. But the impure mystic credits all of this to his conscience and his own natural light, to whatever is still naturally good in him. . . . 7) They persist in the way of speaking that creatures are emanations of God and that they flow out of God [Neo-Platonism]. . . . 11) They demand the sensation, and the experience of spiritual things arising out of it, as an essential part of faith, theology and the analogy of faith in every point of faith. . . . 13) They teach and maintain that the inner man, whom the Scriptures praise so highly, is in all men, even in every godless person. They teach that the inner man is nothing other than the soul according to its chief powers, from which its essence arises.” Regarding church orders Loescher quotes Pietist Joachim Lange (p. 204): “Certainly just as an infant deservedly throws away step stools or gives up knee-splints, so an adult gives up the use of formular prayers. That is why these have been so much abandoned by certain persons and on certain occasions.”

<sup>45</sup> Loescher gives the following examples of reformatism: 1) A church which doesn’t have only completely pious members, and in which there is still much to be improved, is for that reason not the true church of Christ, even though it correctly has God’s word and sacraments. 2) Our Evangelical Lutheran Church is basically corrupt and is of no value. 3) A reformation of our church must be undertaken, as at the time of Luther. 4) The only attitude one can, with a good conscience, take toward our present church is condescension. . . .

Similar outbreaks can be found in these practices: 7) When they, without necessity, abandon the old church uses. 8) When they, without necessity, introduce new usages in the place of these, and regard them as indispensable. 9) When they proclaim that this is a great reformation.” P. 239.

<sup>46</sup> Under this “characteristic” Loescher includes “Spener’s advice that faithful teachers ought to make churches within the church, and ought to join the pious with their congregations into a visible little heap.” (Part I, p. 247)

<sup>47</sup> Scholz (p. 47, 49) gives the following example of Muhlenberg’s practice:

“Counseling a prospective pastor, Muhlenberg identified for him an appropriate course of study: he was to read the Holy Bible diligently, ‘become acquainted with all our symbolical books,’ and study the writings of ‘such highly enlightened fathers of our church as our blessed Luther, Arndt, Spener and others, so that he might lay upon his soul the fundamental biblical and theological truths, and experience them, and thus be able to transmit them to others.’ “Where parishioners asked about ‘exercises of piety,’ Muhlenberg urged on them the daily reading in the Bible, the Small Catechism, and Arndt’s *True Christianity*. On one occasion he urged a deacon to “take hold of the Holy Bible and *True Christianity* every day, read from them to himself and to his family, and pray God in all simplicity that He might bless this to their souls. This would be the most necessary and useful exercise of piety.” Aware of pitfalls common in such practices, he urged the deacon’s wife in dealing with her religious experience to hold fast to Gospel promises without ‘putting her trust in feelings,’ making sure of her ‘state of grace’ by ‘daily putting off of the old man and putting on of the new.’”

<sup>48</sup> *Lutheranism and Pietism*, pp. 50, 51.

<sup>49</sup> *The Third Reformation?*, Carter Lindberg, Mercer University Press, Macon, Georgia, 1983, p. 180.

<sup>50</sup> *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*, C. F. W. Walther, trans. W. H. T. Dau, CPH, St. Louis, Mo., p. 112.

<sup>51</sup> *Lutheranism and Pietism, A Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod Perspective* by James W. Albers, p. 164.

<sup>52</sup>Sanctification: Christ In Action, Harold L. Senkbeil, NPH, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 1989, pp. 177-80.

<sup>53</sup> See footnote 15.

<sup>54</sup> ELS SR, *Our Great Heritage*, an essay for the 75<sup>th</sup> annual convention of the ELS, 1993, p. 107.

# Nicaea to Constantinople Achieving Doctrinal Consensus

*by Craig A. Ferkenstad*

On an appointed day, Christians meet before daybreak and sing “a hymn to Christ, as to a god;” so wrote Pliny the Younger to the Roman Emperor Trajan at the conclusion of the first century A.D. Such was the confession of the early Christian Church as they confessed that “Jesus Christ is Lord” (Philippians 2:11).

By the year 325 A.D. the voices of the songs have become muted. During the intervening two centuries of time, the Christian Church had undergone debate and heresy such as Gnosticism and Sabellianism. The very divinity of Christ had been challenged; and at the Council of Nicaea a voice was raised which sang:

There was when the Son was not.  
Before being born the Son was not.  
The Son came into existence out of nothing.  
The Son is of a different hypostasis or substance to the Father.  
The Son is created.  
The Son is subjected to alternation or change.<sup>1</sup>

From where was this heretical song? How did the New Testament church again achieve doctrinal consensus and unity?

## *I. Need for Doctrinal Consensus*

The doctrinal controversy began in Egypt. Alexander, the bishop of the Christian Church in Alexandria, had been discussing the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In about the year 318 Arius, a pastor in a suburb of Alexandria, accused his bishop of Sabellianism.<sup>2</sup> Arius did not set-out to be a heretic. He had good intentions. He sought to defend monotheism. Arius explained his own theology in the year 320 when he wrote to Alexander:

We acknowledge One God, alone unbegotten, alone everlasting, alone unbegun, alone true, alone having immortality, alone wise, alone good, alone sovereign: judge, governor and administrator of all, unalterable and unchangeable, just and good, God of Law and Prophets and New Testament; who begat an Only-begotten Son before eternal times, through whom he has made both the ages and the universe; and begat him not in semblance, but in truth: and that he made him subsist at his own will, unalterable and unchangeable; perfect creature of God, but not as one of the creatures; offspring, but not as one of things that have come into existence...”<sup>3</sup>

Arius believed that the Son had to be a part of God’s creation: preexistent but not eternal. For Arius, to speak of the “generation” of the Son was tantamount to attributing a change to God.

It is said that “Alexander seems to have behaved with patience; there were long private interviews with Arius; special prayers were offered against the emerging heresy. The clergy of Alexandria were assembled to discuss the matter, and most of them signed an urgent letter to Arius, begging him to acknowledge his heresy. Arius refused.”<sup>4</sup> At this point in 321 Bishop Alexander called a council of one-hundred bishops from Egypt and Libya. Arius’ teaching was condemned and Alexander wrote a circular letter warning against the Arian heresy.

Arius, however, did not recant. Instead he sought to defend himself. He wrote to his friend, Eusebius of Nicomedia and said:

We are persecuted because we say, “the Son had a beginning, but God is without beginning.” This is really the cause of our persecutions; and, likewise, because we say that he is from nothing. And this we say because he is neither part of God, nor of a lower essence.<sup>5</sup>

Thereafter, Arius fled to Caesarea where he was befriended by another friend, Eusebius bishop of Caesarea who was considered the greatest scholar of the day. From here Arius and Eusebius began to write letters seeking the support of friendly bishops. Arius also writes the *Thalia* [Banquet] which was a collection of theological sayings in poetic form which were intended “to be sung at table and by sailors, millers, and travelers” who carried them throughout the East.<sup>6</sup>

In the *Thalia*, Arius wrote:

We praise him [the Father] as without beginning, because of him [the Son] who has a beginning.<sup>7</sup>

Thus the popular motto became “There was a time when the Son was not.”

## *II. Striving for Doctrinal Consensus*

This disunity did not please Constantine, who in 323 had become the sole ruler of the Roman Empire. He wanted to unite the empire and could not tolerate any division. He also needed to pacify sentiments in Egypt, where this religious division was centered, because it was a major source of grain for the empire. To mediate the dispute, the emperor sent Hosius the bishop of Cordova, Spain; but he could only report failure. “There had been bloodshed in the streets; Alexandria and Nicomedia were exchanging defiant taunts.”<sup>8</sup>

Emperor Constantine decided to call a council of the entire Christian Church to settle the dispute. By the third century, the right to vote at such councils was limited to the bishops.<sup>9</sup> All expenses were to be paid by the empire. The council convened, with lavish arrangements, on May 20, 325 in the city of Nicaea (present day city of Iznik, Turkey) which was located 60 miles from the city of Constantinople.<sup>10</sup>

318 bishops assembled here.<sup>11</sup> Among those present were men who bore the physical marks of the recent persecutions of the Christian faith. Bishop Alexander brought with him a young priest by the name of Athanasius who served as his secretary. Bishop Hosius served as the emperor’s personal counselor. As the council began, the emperor himself made a speech and at its conclusion he took the parchment rolls and letters on which many of the bishops privately had written to him and tossed them into the flames of a brazier which had been set-up for such a purpose. It has been said that while they were burning “he explained that all these petitions would appear again on the day of judgment, and then the great Judge of all things would pass judgment on them; for himself he was content to listen to the

public deliberations of the bishops and had not even read these bitter messages sent to him.”<sup>12</sup>

When Arius was asked to explain his teaching he began to sing and even was accompanied by an Egyptian dance band. The heretical words of Arius’ song caused the orthodox bishops to cover their ears in protest. He sang:

The uncreated God has made the Son  
 A beginning of things created,  
 And by adoption has God made the Son  
 Into an advancement of himself.  
 Yet the Son’s substance is  
 Removed from the substance of the Father:  
 The Son is not equal to the Father,  
 Nor does he share the same substance.  
 God is the all-wise Father,  
 And the Son is the teacher of his mysteries.  
 The members of the Holy Trinity  
 Share unequal glories.<sup>13</sup>

The church now adopted a form of debate common to the Roman senate. Matters were first deliberated upon by the most prominent bishops in private meetings; then their recommendations were debated by the assembly. Work began on formulating a creedal statement with the orthodox majority wanting a creed to which no follower of Arius could assent. They insisted on the inclusion of the word ὁμοούσιος (*homoousios* - same substance). Thus the Nicene creed states of the Christ: “*being of one substance* with the Father.” The creed, adopted at Nicaea, also concluded with an anathema. As the creed was read, Arius himself covered his ears at the sound.<sup>14</sup>

There were seventeen adherents to Arius; all but two refused to sign the creed. Along with Arius they were banished. The emperor declared the creed of Nicaea as law. Constantine issued an order that all of Arius’ books should be burned “so that his depraved doctrine shall be entirely suppressed and so that there shall be no memorial of him left in the world.”<sup>15</sup>

The council adjourned on June 19, 325 when the other considerations of the council were complete. A grand banquet was held at the conclusion of the council at which Emperor Constantine



complimented Athanasius, who had exerted great influence on the deliberations, and gave presents to a number of the bishops.

*Doctrinal consensus* had been decreed. The words of Arius were no longer to be heard:

At God's will, the Son is what and whatsoever he is.  
And when and since he was, from then he has subsisted from  
God.<sup>16</sup>

### *III. Lack of Doctrinal Consensus*

It is one thing to decree *doctrinal consensus*, it is another thing to achieve it. The consensus of Nicaea was fleeting. The fifty-six years between the councils at Nicaea and Constantinople have a great complexity which hardly allows for simplification. Shortly after the Council of Nicaea, the bishops in the neighboring Sees of Nicaea, Nicomedia, and Chalcedon revoked their signatures to the condemnation of Arius. They were banished by the emperor. In the year 328 Bishop Alexander died and Athanasius was chosen to replace him; in that same year the emperor recalled the exiled bishops and reinstated them. When the emperor founded his new capital city of Constantinople, Eusebius of Nicomedia, who also had become the leader of the Arian cause, became its bishop. The stage was set for renewed controversy.

The supporters of the Arian teaching knew that they could not openly attack the Creed of Nicaea. Instead they sought to discredit the leading bishops who supported the decisions of Nicaea. They insisted that those who supported *homoousios* were supporting the heretical teaching of modalism. The first victim was Eustathius, Bishop of Antioch, who possibly had been the presiding officer at Nicaea. In a short time, nine other bishops also were removed and the Arian supporters whispered into the emperor's ear that Athanasius was involved in murder, illegal taxation, sorcery, and treason.<sup>17</sup> In the course of thirty years Bishop Athanasius was exiled and reinstated five times. Arius himself was recalled from banishment in 335 and would have been reinstated to the church if he had not died the following year on the evening before a formal ceremony which was

to restore him to his office.

The Arians sought their approval with the pleasure of the emperor and within the imperial government. The followers of Nicaea sought to identify their teaching with that of the apostles. The Arians strove for intercommunion while the Nicenes refused to recognize the Arian sacrament as valid “and went to great lengths to demonstrate this, even throwing the bread consecrated by Arians to the dogs.”<sup>18</sup>

It is obvious that imperial involvement in the controversy determined at any given moment whether the Council of Nicaea or the teaching of Arianism was dominant. The dispute also was complicated by political questions. The cities of Alexandria and Constantinople were rivals; which led Constantinople to be Arian just because her rival city was orthodox. To further complicate the matter, when Emperor Constantine died (337) the empire was divided among his three sons. After the death of Constantine II (340), Constans became the lone-ruler of the west; he supported the Nicene teaching and Athanasius. In the east, Constantius II opposed the Nicene theology. As many as fourteen councils were held between the years 341 and 360. When Constans died (350), Constantius became the sole-ruler of the empire (350-360). He sought a compromise stance by demanding that all the bishops agree that Christ was *ὁμοιούσιος* (*homoiousios* - like substance) with the Father. Nevertheless, this still differed from the Nicene Creed’s statement that Christ and the Father are of the *same substance*. This is what led St. Jerome later to say “The whole world groaned and marveled to find itself Arian.” Constantius was succeeded by Julian (360-363), who became known as Julian the Apostate, because he sought to eradicate Christianity and restore paganism. He recalled all the banished bishops with the hope of destroying the Christian faith.

The Arian hymns were still chanted:

For the Son is not equal, no, nor one in essence [homoousios]  
with the Father.<sup>19</sup>

#### ***IV. Achieving Doctrinal Consensus***

But now in relatively short time 150 bishops would gather at Constantinople to reaffirm the teaching of Nicaea for all time. A

*doctrinal consensus* had been reached and was proclaimed for all the world. From a human viewpoint this *doctrinal consensus* which emerged in the year 381 was a result of several factors.

### Use of Non-Scriptural words

It is necessary that any Christian confession be in harmony with the Scriptures. It is a standard principle that Scripture-interprets-Scripture. When the bishops gathered at Nicaea in 325 they were very aware of this. They first sought to describe the person of Christ using only Scriptural terminology. They hearkened back to the Gospel of John and called Christ the *Son of God* (John 1:34) and *the only-begotten* (John 1:14). They confessed that through Christ *all things were made* (Colossians 1:16). They spoke of how He *was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary* (Luke 1:35). One portion of the assembly at Nicaea did not feel that any terminology should be used which was not already to be found in the Scripture.

Various attempts were made to formulate a creed using only Scriptural terminology; but this was not sufficient. Arius and his friends continued to use the words “begotten” and “Son.” In the debates at Nicaea they also had a new way of interpreting verses of Scripture. For example in John 10:30 Jesus says “I and the Father are one.” Whereas we correctly view this passage as referring to a oneness of the substance of the Father and the Son, others may falsely interpret the same passage to be a reference to the harmony which exists between the will of the Father and the Son. It is said that “Arian-sympathizing bishops could be seen ... winking and nodding, confident that they could twist a scripturally worded creed to their advantage.”<sup>20</sup> The Scriptures were not written for the purpose of refuting philosophical arguments. In St. John’s Gospel we are told about the purpose of the Scriptures: “These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:31). It was necessary for any suitable confession to be worded so as to exclude the approval of the false teachers; and so the word *homoousios* was included.

This word *homoousios* had been used in earlier times, but the citation of earlier usages was of little assistance in the debate. The word had been used in the correct sense, of *one substance*, by Clement

of Alexandria (150-215) and Origin (185-254). Meanwhile, the Arians made a point that the word had been used in a different sense by the Sabellians and Paul of Samosata, the bishop of Antioch who taught that the Father and the Son are one person (*homoousios*). In 268 this use of the word had already been condemned by “sound and orthodox” bishops. This condemnation gave the word *homoousios* an aura of heresy! Yet it was used in the Nicene Creed. As Martin Luther was later to say “Councils can err;” and so can and do the “fathers.”

It was this multi-faceted word which was used in the Nicene Creed. It was clarified with the words *Very God of Very God* and *Begotten of His Father before all worlds*, It was this word, *homoousios*, which was unacceptable to the followers of Arius. Only by moving outside of Biblical wording was sufficient clarity achieved in defining doctrine.

### **Analogy of Faith**

The orthodox clergy rightly understood that Arianism was an undermining of the certainty of salvation and a denial of the basic tenet of Christianity. In Arianism they saw a form of polytheism. In regarding the Son as a special creation “the Arians were worshipping three deities related to one another in a hierarchy—a form of tritheism. Certainly one (God the Father) was absolutely supreme, but the other two (the Son and the Spirit) were certainly not either angels or men and so were inferior deities.”<sup>21</sup>

Arianism threatened the doctrine of salvation. If the Christ was only a part of God’s creation, then He could only be an example for us to follow. He could teach and perform miracles; but He could never save people from eternal death. Only a Christ who is *homoousios* with the Father can be the Savior of the world. Bishop Athanasius especially was aware of this and wrote:

Human beings could not have done it, for they are only made after the image; nor could angels have done it, for they are not the images of God. The Word of God came in his own person, because it was he alone, the image of the Father, who could recreate human beings made after the image.<sup>22</sup>

The framers of the Nicene Creed did not work in isolation from historic Christianity. They drew upon the earlier church for the guidance. Earlier creeds are similar to that which was adopted at Nicaea. Some scholars say the creed drew upon a creed from the church in Caesarea; others feel it was the creed of the church in Jerusalem. In any event, the council drew upon earlier confessions and added the words which settled the matter. Thus Athanasius was able to write: “But concerning matters of faith they [the bishops assembled at Nicaea] did not write: ‘It has been decided,’ but ‘Thus the Catholic Church believes.’ And thereupon confessed how they believed. This they did to show that their judgment was not of more recent origin, but was in fact of Apostolic times...”<sup>23</sup>

The Lord, who will not desert His little flock, also has promised to rule over all things for the well-being of His Church on earth (Ephesians 1:22-23). When Julian the Apostate recalled the banished bishops with the hope of destroying the Christian faith, the presence of such a common enemy caused them to move beyond their bickering and concentrate on the central teaching of salvation through Christ.

The Arians, however, failed to see the fallacy of their own teaching and since they did not possess a firm verifiable truth, they split into several sects which naturally weakened their position. They started producing their own creeds, either eliminating the word *homoousios* or substituting another word for it. This led to the breaking up of the Arians into diverse groups according to which term they supported; *homoiousios* (like in substance), *homoios* (similar in substance), or *anomoios* (dissimilar in substance). Eventually they shrank to a minor community.

### **Clarification of terminology**

In spite of the above, it took fifty-six years of bitter debate before the teaching of Nicaea was accepted. Unclearity in terminology had left the door open for the discussions to continue. There were three words which required clarification: *homoousios*, *ousia*, and *hypostasis*.

In 325 the framers of the Nicene Creed sought to be careful in their use of *homoousios* to describe the substance of the Son of God. However, not all the bishops understood this same use of the term. Eusebius writes that Emperor Constantine “was the first to testify that it was entirely orthodox, and that he himself held exactly the same opinions. He instructed the others to sign it and to assent to its teachings.”<sup>24</sup> Some subscribed to the creed willingly; but some subscribed reluctantly or under pressure from the emperor who sought the unity of the empire; and some were forced to subscribe to the creed under threat of exile.

Athanasius, who had been prominent at the Council of Nicaea, now became the earnest defender of the word *homoousios*. He became known as the Champion of Orthodoxy as he publicly kept insisting that the emperor enforce the decisions of Nicaea. It almost seemed as if the whole world stood against Athanasius and Athanasius against the world. When Julian the Apostate recalled all of the bishops, also Athanasius was recalled. His position as bishop was so important that he immediately was again exiled because he was viewed as too great a voice in the defense of Christianity. Through the persistent defining work of Athanasius the term *homoousios* became understood.

The other two terms which needed further clarification had been included in the anathema of 325 which stated:

“But as for those who say, There was when he was not, and before being born He was not, and that he came into existence out of nothing, or who assert that the Son of God is of a different hypostasis [ὑποστάσεως] or substance [οὐσίας], or is created, or is subject to alternation or change—these the Catholic Church anathematizes.”

The words hypostasis and ousia had been used as synonyms in 325. Athanasius was even able to say “Hypostasis is ousia and means nothing else than being.”<sup>25</sup> But in the years following these terms were used in differing ways:

There were those who correctly interpreted the anathema to say the Father and Son were of the same deity and substance. This, in large part, is because following the Alexandrian school of thought the Trinity is approached from heaven to earth — emphasizing the

oneness or unity of God: looking first at the Unity and then at the Persons.

There were others who, following the Antiochian school of thought, approached the Trinity from earth to heaven — looking first at the Persons and then at the Unity. This thinking finds the source of the Godhead in the Father.

Socrates describes the situation when he writes:

The situation was like a battle by night, for both parties seemed to be in the dark about the grounds on which they were hurling abuse at each other. Those who objected to the term *homoousios* imagined that its adherents were bringing in the doctrine of Sabellius and Montanists. So they called them blasphemers on the ground that they were undermining the personal subsistence of the Son of God. On the other hand, the protagonists of *homoousios* concluded that their opponents were introducing polytheism, and steered clear of them as importers of paganism.... [sic] Thus while both affirmed the personality and subsistence of the Son of God, and confessed that there was one God in three hypostases, they were somehow incapable of reaching agreement, and for this reason could not bear to lay down arms.<sup>26</sup>

The teachings can be summarized as follows:

<b>Modalism</b>	<b>Nicene Doctrine</b>
<i>Stressed unity of Father and Son</i>	<i>Attempted to balance unity and difference between Father and Son</i>
<i>Son is the Father</i>	<i>Son is "of the same substance" as the Father</i>

It took a clarification of terminology during the time between Nicaea and Constantinople to achieve *doctrinal consensus*. Athanasius clarified the teaching of *homoousios*; the teaching was made clear for the Eastern church, in large part, by three men who have become known as the “Cappadocian Fathers” or the “Young Nicenes”: Basil of Caesarea (300-379), Gregory of Nazianzus (329-389) and Gregory of Nyssa (330-395). By this time, the discussion also included the divinity of the Holy Spirit.

Basil the Great became the leader of the orthodox following the death of Athanasius. He has been called “an ecclesiastical statesman of first rank.”<sup>28</sup> He is credited as bringing the thinking of the Eastern church into harmony with the teaching of Nicaea and Athanasius. He clarified that there are three Persons (*hypostases*) in one Substance (*ousia* - *homoousios*). He also argued that the Holy Spirit is to be given the same glory, honor, and worship as are the Father and the Son and published *De Spiritu sanctu* in 375.<sup>29</sup>

Gregory of Nyssa was the younger brother of Basil. Although he was not an able administrator, he was a gifted writer and defended the doctrine of Nicaea.

Gregory of Nazianzus was sent by the Nicenes to Constantinople to rally support for the faith of Nicaea. It has been said that Gregory spoke the final word on the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity, for the Eastern Church, in five long sermons.<sup>30</sup> The Arians rioted against him, and once almost killed him at the altar; when Gregory wanted to flee from the city the people pleaded with him to stay and “not to take the Trinity from them.”<sup>31</sup>

The three Cappadocian Fathers cleared up the theological misconceptions which had prevented the Eastern church from a proper understanding of the Nicene teachings by defining the *ousia* of the Godhead as consisting of three *hypostases*. Therefore, at Constantinople in 381, the Nicene anathema was eliminated as the terms were no longer synonymous. A separate canon was added condemning the teachings of Arius.



## *Conclusion*

When 150 bishops now gathered at Constantinople in the year 381, it was not to debate the matter of the Trinity but rather to affirm the *doctrinal consensus* which already had been achieved.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, “due to the convergence of aim and doctrine,” it was possible for the bishops both to confirm the faith of Nicaea with its *homoousios* and to distribute a further Creed, which confirmed the faith of Nicaea and also stated the full divinity of the Holy Spirit.<sup>33</sup>

*Doctrinal Consensus* already had been reached through the use of non-Scriptural words, the analogy of faith, and especially the clarification of terminology. The bishops now understood that Jesus Christ is *homoousios* with the Father, and the Holy Trinity is three Persons (*hypostases*) in one substance (*ousia*). God, from the point of view of internal analysis, is one object; but from the point of view of external presentation is three objects.

The Council of Constantinople met from May 381 — July 9, 381. Clarifications of the Nicene Creed were made and an enlarged statement was added concerning the Third Person of the Trinity; thus the creed which we recite today properly is called the “Niceo-Constantinopolitan Creed.” As the Council of Constantinople was closed, the emperor now denied the heretics the right to worship in public.<sup>34</sup> The bishops had declared the following:

The profession of the faith of the holy Fathers who gathered at Nicaea in Bithynia is not to be abrogated, but is to remain in force. Every heresy is to be anathematized and in particular that of ... the Arians ...”<sup>35</sup>

It was a long journey from Nicaea to Constantinople as *doctrinal consensus* was achieved. This journey served God’s purpose of clarifying the truth.

Truth will eventually win (this is the promise of the gospel), though setbacks accompany victories and many victories remain uncompleted during our lifetimes. It is not a sprint we are in, but a marathon. Every mile marker we pass is a victory, but not one we should stop to celebrate—the race is still on.

And at mile 20, when we “hit the wall” and exhaustion wracks our bodies, we should remember the glory of the finish, at which we will indeed arrive.<sup>36</sup>

Today, the Christian Church continues to sing that which she has sung since the time of Constantinople:

Of the Father’s love begotten  
E’re the world began to be,  
He is Alpha and Omega,  
He the Source, the Ending He,  
Of the things that are, that have been,  
And that future years shall see,  
Evermore and evermore.

Christ, to Thee with God the Father,  
And, O Holy Ghost, to Thee  
Hymn and chant and high thanksgiving  
And unending praises be,  
Honor, glory, and dominion,  
And eternal victory  
Evermore and evermore.

A.C.Prudentius (328-413)

## Appendix

### *Creed of Caesarea*

*We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of all things visible and invisible*

*And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Logos of God, light from light, life from life, Son only begotten, first-begotten of all creation, begotten before all ages from the Father, through Whom all things came into being, Who because of our salvation was incarnate, and dwelt among men, and suffered and rose again on the third day, and ascended to the Father, and will come again in glory to judge living and dead;*

### *Creed of Jerusalem*

*We believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible;*

*[And] in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, Who was begotten from the Father as true God before all ages, through Whom all things came into being, Who [was incarnate and] became man, [Who] was crucified [and buried and] rose again [from the dead] on the third day, and ascended to the heavens, and sat down at the right hand of the Father, and will come in glory to judge living and dead, of Whose kingdom there will be no end;*

*[And] in one Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, Who spoke in the prophets, and in one baptism of repentance to the remission of sins, and in one holy Catholic church, and in the resurrection of the flesh, and in life everlasting.*

## ***Creed of Nicea***

*We believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of all things visible and invisible;*

*And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten from the Father, only-begotten, that is, from the substance [οὐσίας] of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, of one substance [ὁμοούσιον] with the Father, through whom all things came into being, things in heaven and things on earth, Who because of us men and because of our salvation came down and became incarnate, becoming man, suffered and rose again on the third day, ascended to the heavens, and will come to judge the living and the dead;*

*And in the Holy Spirit.*

*But as for those who say, There was when he was not, and Before being born He was not, and that he came into existence out of nothing, or who assert that the Son of God is of a different hypostasis [ὑποστάσεως] or substance [οὐσίας], or is created, or is subject to alternation or change—these the Catholic Church anathematizes.*

## ***Niceo-Constantinopolitan Creed***

*We believe in one God the Father almighty, maker of all things visible and invisible;*

*And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten from the Father before all ages, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, of one substance [ὁμοούσιον] with the Father, through Whom all things came into existence, Who because of us men and because of our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became man, and was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered and was buried, and rose again on the third day according to the Scriptures*

*and ascended to heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father, and will come again with glory to judge living and dead, of Whose kingdom there will be no end;*

*And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and life-giver, Who proceeds from the Father, Who with the Father and the Son is together worshipped and together glorified, Who spoke through the prophets; and in one holy Catholic and apostolic Church. We confess one baptism to the remission of sins; we look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.*

Source: J.N.D. Kelly *Early Christian Creeds*, pages 182, 182-83, 215, 297.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Arius quoted by Peter Toon, page 87.

<sup>2</sup> Sabellianism is a form of Monarchianism which taught that God revealed Himself, not in three persons, but in three modes or forms of activity.

<sup>3</sup> Arius from *A New Eusebius* as quoted by Peter Toon, page 72.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Payne, page 75.

<sup>5</sup> Arius from *A New Eusebius* as quoted by Peter Toon, page 345.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Payne, page 76.

<sup>7</sup> Peter Toon, page 74.

<sup>8</sup> Robert Payne, page 11.

<sup>9</sup> Korthals, page 15.

<sup>10</sup> J.N.D.Kelly contends the actual date was 3 June 325 – page 211.

<sup>11</sup> The actual number of bishops in attendance has been disputed. Some consider this number to have been chosen because of the 318 servants of Abraham in Genesis 14:14. Others report that 250 bishops were in attendance; but each was allowed to bring two presbyters and three servants and so the actual number of attendees could have approached 2,000.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Payne, page 82.

<sup>13</sup> Arius in *Thalia* quoted by Robert Payne, pages 82-83.

<sup>14</sup> *Good News*, page 26.

<sup>15</sup> As recorded by Socrates, quoted by Robert Payne, page 86.

<sup>16</sup> Arius in *Thalia* quoted by Robert Payne, page 87.

<sup>17</sup> Mark Galli.

<sup>18</sup> “The Nicenes emphasized the Eucharistic community in which members of the Body were sustained and united, while Arians viewed the Eucharist as the unbloody, reasonable sacrifice, the substitute for the pagan sacrifices.... Nor would the Nicenes admit the sacrilegious Arians to their own Eucharist, confident they were participating together in the body of Christ and drawing therefrom energy to oppose the foes of Christ’s full divinity. On the other hand [for] the Arians ... the union of believers within the body of the empire was for them more important than union in the Body of Christ.” Leo Donald Davis, page 73.

<sup>19</sup> Arius in *Thalia* quoted by Robert Payne, page 74.

<sup>20</sup> Leo Donald Davis, page 59.

<sup>21</sup> Peter Toon , page 91.

<sup>22</sup> Athanasius *On the Incarnation* quoted by Bruce Shelly.

<sup>23</sup> Columbia Encyclopedia (quoting from Volume 1, *Faith of the Early Fathers*, page 338).

<sup>24</sup> J.N.D.Kelly, page 214.

<sup>25</sup> Leo Donald Davis, page 63.

<sup>26</sup> Leo Donald Davis, page 82.

<sup>27</sup> Ted A. Campbell, page 24.

<sup>28</sup> Leo Donald Davis, page 112.

<sup>29</sup> Peter Toon, page 93. “He also discussed the various possible renderings of the doxology (“glory to the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit,” and “glory be to the Father with the Son and with the Holy Spirit”) claiming that both were orthodox. However, as a result of the desire to avoid possible Arian teaching, what we now know as the *Gloria* (the second of those cited) won out in the liturgy of the Church.”

<sup>30</sup> Robert Payne, page 186.

<sup>31</sup> Leo Donald Davis, page 118.

<sup>32</sup> The bishops represented only the Eastern church, as the Arian heresy had not been an issue in the Western church; and the bishops who favored the Arian view left before the council began.

<sup>33</sup> Peter Toon, page 80.

<sup>34</sup> Isolated cases of Arianism continued for another two centuries among those outside of the Roman Empire who had been converted to Christianity by Arian missionaries, especially among the Goths, Vandals, and Langobards. The remnants of these tribes became Catholic in the sixth and seventh centuries.

<sup>35</sup> Peter Toon, page 80.

<sup>36</sup> *Hit the Wall and Keep Going*, page 31.



# **A Brief History of the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church of Germany Including Its Recent Ministry Discussion**

*by Gaylin R. Schmeling*

## ***The History of the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church***

Our ELS has a sister church body in Germany known as the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church (*Evangelisch-Lutherische Freikirche* [ELFK]). We have been in fellowship with this church for over 100 years beginning with our membership in the former Synodical Conference. This church has endured very difficult circumstances; first it spent many years under communism, then it faced a break in fellowship with the SELK (*Selbständige Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche*), the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod partner church in Germany, and recently it has had serious questions concerning the doctrine of church and ministry in its midst. Yet the Lord has been with our sister church and these questions have been resolved with a scriptural and confessional statement on the doctrine of church and ministry.

The ELFK has a membership of about 2,000 souls in some 30 congregations and preaching stations. Most of these congregations are in the former East Germany, but mission work is being carried out in places such as Augsburg and in Ludesch in the Vorarlberg region of Austria. Our sister synod is proclaiming the Gospel in its truth and purity in Lutherland, where today that Gospel is seldom heard. Many of the great and beautiful churches of Germany are virtually empty on Sunday mornings. But in the modest churches of the ELFK the Gospel resounds to the glory of our gracious Savior. These buildings and gatherings may be modest but they are rich in spiritual beauty.

Pastor Gerhard Wilde faithfully served as president of the ELFK from 1978 to 2002 when he retired from the presidency. Throughout his presidency he stood firm on the doctrine of inerrant Scripture and of the Lutheran Confessions. Most of the present pastors of the ELFK had President Wilde as their vicarage supervisor and were ordained by him. President Wilde and his wife Ingeborg have made a number of visits to the States and are well known in our circles. He is a dear friend of the ELS.

At its convention this past May in Hartenstein the ELFK elected Pastor Rolf Borszik from Lengenfeld in the Vogtland as the president. Pastor Borszik, who is 52 years of age, was born in Chemnitz. He was originally a member of the state church and in secular employment. However, he left the state church in 1982 for confessional reasons and studied at the Leipzig seminary. In 1989 he was called to serve the congregations in Lengenfeld and Plauen, where he continues to serve today. Pastor Borszik and his wife Rosemarie have been blessed with a family of six children.

Since its founding in the 1870s the ELFK has protested against the liberalism and unionism in the Lutheran state churches. In the early years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century rationalism and unionism were rampant in the German state churches. This is the main reason why the Saxons, Prussians, and other “old” Lutherans went to America and Australia. In 1846 Friedrich Brunn, a pastor in Steeden a town northwest of Frankfurt, left the state church. He established contact with the LCMS and from 1861-78 he prepared students in a pre-seminary who would study at the seminaries of the LCMS. He became one of the early pastors of the ELFK.

The Evangelical Lutheran Free Church was organized in 1876 as a bastion of confessional Lutheranism in Germany. The church body was centered in Saxony but it also extended to other states in Germany. As soon as it was founded, the ELFK had a close relationship with the Synodical Conference. This was to be expected considering the connections between these Saxon Lutherans and the Saxons who came to America and founded the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. Among the early pastors of the ELFK are Friedrich Ruhland, Otto Willkomm, and George Stoeckhardt.

There is an interesting connection between Ruhland and the ELS. Before he was called to the *Johanneskirche* in Zwickau-Planitz, Saxony, he served in the LCMS in America. While he was a pastor at Oshkosh, Wisconsin, he helped organize St. Martin Lutheran Church of Shawano in 1859, which today is a member of the ELS. (St. Martin Lutheran Church Centennial Booklet, p. 6) Pastor Otto Willkomm who was also president of the ELFK later served the *Johanneskirche* in Zwickau-Planitz, Saxony.

George Stoeckhardt (1842-1913) was educated at Erlangen, Leipzig, and Berlin. In 1876 he left the German state church for confessional reasons and joined the ELFK. After serving for a short time as the associate pastor in the Saxon congregation in Zwickau-Planitz he immigrated to America. There he served as pastor of a congregation in St. Louis and as a professor at Concordia Seminary. He was probably the most important exegete of the early Missourians.

Another connection between the ELS and the ELFK is found in the life of S. C. Ylvisaker. In 1907 he enrolled at the University of Leipzig in Germany. While at the university he became closely associated with the pastors of the Saxon church.

In the *vita* prepared later for his ordination into the office of the public ministry Sigurd pays special tribute to these dear friends in his litany of thanks (written in the traditional third person): "From his stay in Germany he remembers with sincere thankfulness President Kunstmann and other pastors of the Saxon Free Church for their friendly accommodation and their willing counsel and guidance in a time and during a course of study in which his Christian faith was not infrequently put to severe test. He likewise thanks the congregation of the Saxon Free Church in Leipzig for the great comfort he experienced in their midst. God reward them all in His grace!" (*Sigurd Christian Ylvisaker 1884-1959*, p. 10)

The pastors of the ELFK were trained in the seminaries of the LCMS for many years. But that changed after World War I. It was decided to found their own theological seminary. In 1921 a seminary was established in Leipzig, but it was soon moved to Kleinmachnow near Berlin.

In 1924 the WELS began a mission in Poland working mainly among the many German people in the new Poland. One of the important areas of work was in the city of Lodz. As World War II drew to a close most of the members of this mission church body fled before the advancing Red army across the Oder River into Germany. In 1953 the refugee members of this mission living in East Germany became a part of the ELFK. They entered the church as the Diaspora District or *Bezirk*.

In 1948 the ELFK declared fellowship with the Evangelical Lutheran (Old Lutheran) Church (Breslau Synod) and with the free churches in Hesse. The Breslau Synod had been organized in 1841 in reaction to the Prussian Union, a union between Lutherans and the Reformed in Prussian lands. This fellowship was declared on the basis of *Einigungssätze*, statements of agreement. After this their pastors were trained at the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Oberursel near Frankfurt am Main.

Because of the separation between East and West Germany it was difficult for students in East Germany to travel to Oberursel in the West. In 1953 the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church established its own theological seminary in Leipzig. The name of the seminary is *Lutherisches Theologisches Seminar Leipzig*. In 2003 it will celebrate its fiftieth anniversary. The rector of the seminary is Dr. Gottfried Herrmann. The other professors at the seminary are: Pastor Martin Hoffmann, Pastor Günter Meinhold, and Pastor Hans-Wolf Baumann. With the exception of Dr. Herrmann, all these pastors serve congregations in addition to their work at the seminary.

The Lutheran free churches in West Germany merged in 1972 and became the *Selbständige Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche* (SELK). It was assumed that this merger would also occur in East Germany. However, in the discussions it became evident that the Evangelical Lutheran (Old Lutheran) Church had different theological views. They tolerated higher criticism in biblical interpretation and they had unionistic tendencies. Rather than resulting in a merger, in 1984 fellowship came to an end between the ELFK and the Evangelical Lutheran (Old Lutheran) Church. The SELK defended the tendencies found in the Evangelical Lutheran (Old Lutheran) Church and therefore the ELFK suspended relationships with it in

1989. These suspensions of relationships were very difficult for the ELFK. No longer was there fellowship with those who had been numbered as brethren for many years. They experienced the same loneliness that the ELS did when it broke fellowship with the LCMS in 1955. Some members and congregations were lost, but the Lord of the church supported the ELFK and it made a firm confession on the basis of the inerrant Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions.

The ELFK was still in fellowship with the LCMS and a number of its European partner churches. It urged these churches to take a stand against the doctrinal position of the SELK, but its request was unheeded. After three years of patient pleading the ELFK demonstrated its seriousness in maintaining a sound scriptural position by adopting resolutions suspending fellowship with its five erring sister churches: The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS), the Evangelical Lutheran Church of England (ELCE), the Evangelical Lutheran Church—Synod of France and Belgium (ELC—SFB), the Confessional Lutheran Church of Finland (CLCF), and the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church of Denmark (ELFCD). This action in 1992 at its Hartenstein convention brought to an end the difficulty of a triangular fellowship that involved both the ELS and WELS even after the ELFK suspended fellowship with the SELK.

A very important event occurred for confessional Lutherans in 1993. On April 27-29, at Oberwesel, Germany, the ELFK, together with the ELS, WELS, and other confessional Lutheran churches formed the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC). This conference is the spiritual heir of the Synodical Conference. It provides for the mutual support and strengthening of confessional Lutherans throughout the world. The ELFK had the opportunity to become one of the charter members of this conference.

Since its beginning the ELFK has been very active in the publication of books and other theological material. Even under communism it was possible to print some Lutheran material. This publishing was mainly done through the *Concordia-Verlag* (Concordia Publishing House) in Zwickau. This publishing house was established in 1881. Among other things the publishing house produces the *Evangelish-Lutherischer Volkskalender*, the *Lutherische Gemeindebriefe*, which is comparable to the *Lutheran Sentinel*, and

the *Theologische Handreichung und Information*, which is a journal for pastors similar to the *Lutheran Synod Quarterly*. The *Concordia-Verlag* also prints a quarterly devotional book with the title *Gott ist für uns*. This is much like the *Meditations* used in our midst. The last German devotional booklet produced in America was phased out a few years ago with the result that there was no German devotional book printed on this continent. Now, however, the Tree of Life Publications has the rights to reproduce in America *Gott ist für uns*, prepared by *Concordia-Verlag*. This devotional may be obtained from Tree of Life Publications, 47 Pensville Road SE, Calgary, Alberta, T2A4K3 Canada, email: tree-of-life@telusplanet.net

Dr. Gottfried Herrmann has served as the manager of the publishing house since 1983. In that year he also received the Doctor of Theology degree from Karl-Marx University in Leipzig. In 1990 he was called to the faculty of the seminary at Leipzig where he serves as rector. He lives in Zwickau where the publishing house and bookstore are located.

The ELFK continues to be a valiant voice for confessional Lutheranism in the land where Luther walked. This church body has endured atheistic communism, doctrinal liberalism in its former German sister churches, and the religious indifference of our modern materialistic society. Yet the Lord has continued to be with them and to strengthen them through His means of grace Word and Sacrament. For more information concerning the ELFK, go to their website: [www.elfk.de](http://www.elfk.de)

### ***The Church and Ministry Theses of Evangelical Lutheran Free Church***

Recently there have been intense discussions concerning the doctrine of church and ministry within the ELFK. In regard to the doctrine of the church the question was raised: Is the local congregation the only mandated form of external gathering or are other gatherings around the means of grace, such as synod, also church. In regard to the doctrine of the ministry the question was raised: Is the pastoral office the only divinely instituted form of the

public ministry or has God instituted the public ministry which may take various forms.

The ELFK came to a resolution of these questions at a special convention in September of 2001, where they produced theses on church and ministry. In their theses they show that Scripture does not make the external forms of the public ministry a matter of divine mandate, just as the external form of the church is not a divine mandate. The theses are found below:

***Thesen zur Lehre von Kirche und Amt***  
***(Theses concerning the Doctrine***  
***of Church and Ministry)***

The synod accepted the following series of theses as a scriptural and confessional presentation of the doctrine of our Evangelical Lutheran Free Church.

***A. Die Lehre von der Kirche***  
***(The Doctrine of the Church)***

(A1) Our Lord Jesus Christ has created one church. To Peter He said, “You are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it.” (Matthew 16:18) All who truly believe in Christ belong to this one church. (Ephesians 2:19f) This we confess in the Apostles’ Creed when we say: “I believe...one holy Christian church, the communion of saints.” Cf. AC 5+8

(A2) This church is found wherever the pure Word of God is proclaimed and the Sacraments are administered according to their institution. The Holy Spirit builds the church through this means. We may be certain that the Word of God will not return empty but will accomplish what pleases God. (Isaiah 55:11) Cf. AC 7

(A3) God has given His church the commission [*Auftrag*] to preach His Word and to administer the Sacraments. This is called the office of the keys. The believers are commissioned to use the

keys privately [individually] and collectively. (John 20:21-23; 1 Peter 2:9) Cf. Tractatus § 24

(A4) God wills that Christians come together in assemblies to use the means of grace pure and unaltered as well for their own edification as to let the unity among them be recognized, and to bring the Good News of salvation in Christ to others. (Jeremiah 23:28; John 8:31f; Acts 2:42; Psalm 133:1; Matthew 28:19f) — This assembly occurs, for example, in the outward [external] forms of congregation, synod, and church. Although God wills that Christians come together for public worship, He has not prescribed a fixed form of the gathering. “The kingdom of God does not come with observation.” (Luke 17:20) The local congregation [*Gemeinde am Ort*] holds the highest rank among these gatherings of Christians because it is the place where Christians normally live and can best carry out God’s command practically.

(A5) The single authority in the church is the Word of God. Where this Word is spoken — whether it is in the private or in the public sphere (in the congregation or the church) — it is as valid as if the Lord Himself had spoken from heaven. (Luke 10:16) Cf. SA B 2,15; Tractatus § 42; Apol. 7,28

(A6) If we love God and would be faithful to His Word we must see to it that we remain members of the true church: in that we preserve our faith in the Savior; in that we belong to a congregation, synod, or church, which teaches God’s Word without error; in that we do all in our power to further the spread of the kingdom of God through prayer, personal service (2 Corinthians 12:15) and financial support; and in that we avoid all false teaching churches. (2 Corinthians 13:5; Matthew 7:15; 1 John 4:1; Romans 16:17; 2 Corinthians 6:4)

(A7) The relationship between the various Christian forms of gathering should be orderly and honorable. (Ephesians 4:3-6; 1 Corinthians 14:33, 40) Christians let themselves be led by the law of Christian love. This applies also to the powers of the synod in relation to the congregation as they are delineated in the synodical constitution. (ELFK-Verfassung, Art. III)



## ***B. Das öffentliche Predigtamt (The Public Ministry)***

(B1) The *öffentliche Predigtamt* denotes the public ministry of proclamation [*öffentlichen Verkündigungsdienst*] to which God has commissioned His church. (Divine institution; cf. Matthew 28:19f with 1 Corinthians 12:28; Ephesians 4:11f; Apg 20:28; Titus 1:5-9) Through this ministry the Gospel in Word and Sacrament (office of the keys) is to be publicly administered. This ministry occurs in the name of Christ and is conferred through His church.

(B2) There is only one public ministry of proclamation, [*öffentlichen Verkündigungsdienst*] but this ministry can take various forms as is required in the life of the church. (1 Corinthians 12:4-11, 27-31) The purpose of this ministry is to nourish and build up the church of God through the means of grace. (Acts 20:28; 1 Corinthians 4:1; Ephesians 4:11f) The public ministry of proclamation is conferred on individuals. It is to be distinguished from the private proclamation ministry of all Christians. (Universal priesthood)

(B3) The office of the keys (loosing and binding key) has been conferred on the one holy Christian church and therewith on every Christian. (Universal priesthood of believers) 1 Peter 2:9; Matthew 16:19; Matthew 18:17-20; Matthew 28:18-20; John 20:22f, Cf. AC 28,5f; SA C 7,1; Tractatus §§ 22-24. 65-70

(B4) It is God's will and command that the office of the keys be administered publicly. Therefore He has instituted the public ministry of proclamation. This ministry is conferred on those whom God calls into it through His church. Those who are called exercise the functions of the office of the keys by the commission of the church as well as in the name of Christ and in His stead. Wherever we hear Christ's servant we hear Christ Himself speak. (Luke 10:16; Titus 1:5-9; Acts 20:28, 14:23; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; 1 Thessalonians 5:12f; 2 Corinthians 3:4-6; 4:5; 5:18f; Ephesians 4:11f) Thus the public ministry of proclamation is a divine institution and not merely the product of historical development nor merely a beneficial institution of the church. Cf. AC 5; AC 28,5f+21f; Apol 12,39f; Apol 14,1

(B5) The public ministry of proclamation should be exercised only by those who are regularly called, whether immediately through

the Lord Christ (as in the case of the apostles) or mediately through the church. If someone publicly proclaims the Word of God or administers the Sacraments without a regular call, this contradicts not only good order, but also the will of God. The duties and responsibilities of each called servant must be determined by his call. (Romans 10:14-17; Acts 6:1-6) Cf. AC 14; Apol. 14,1

(B6) Ordination is not a divine institution but a fine churchly order from early times. (1 Timothy 4:14; 1 Timothy 5:22; 2 Timothy 1:6) It demonstrates the public confirmation of call by the Word of God and prayer. We speak of ordination when pastors are installed in their office for the first time and are bound to the Confession. But also with other calls into the public ministry of proclamation the commissioning should be publicly recognized. Cf. Apol. 13,11; Tractatus § 70

(B7) The public ministry of proclamation is instituted by God but it is not limited to a fixed form. The New Testament names various offices. Therefore the form of the public ministry of proclamation can vary according to the need of the church but there is only one public ministry of proclamation in the church. (1 Corinthians 12:4-11; 27-31; Romans 12:6-8; Ephesians 4:11f; 1 Timothy 3:1,8; 5:17) Cf. SA B 3,1; Tractatus §§ 63-66. 72.26

(B8) The term *Predigtamt* is customarily used in our church to describe the office of pastor. This use should continue. The pastor's office is the most comprehensive and fundamental form of the public ministry of proclamation. Full spiritual oversight over the flock of Christ is conferred on pastors in their local congregations. [*Ort*] (Proclamation of the Word, administration of the Sacraments, church discipline, care of souls, 1 Peter 5:2f) — Where there are, in addition to the pastoral office, other offices of the public ministry of proclamation in the congregation, the pastor bears the final responsibility [*Gesamtverantwortung*]. Because Christ wills to have responsible shepherds for His flock, such an office is indispensable. (Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 20:28-31; Titus 1:6-9; 1 Peter 5:1-3; Hebrews 13:17) In the ministry of the pastoral office only suitable males may be called. (1 Timothy 3:1-7; 1 Corinthians 14:34f; 1 Timothy 2:12) Cf. Apol. 14,1

(B9) The purpose of the public ministry of proclamation is to nourish and build up the church of God through the means of grace. This occurs through the Word of God and the Sacraments of Baptism and Lord's Supper. (1 Corinthians 4:1; Ephesians 4:11f) Ministers [servants, *Diener*] in the public ministry of proclamation possess no worldly authority but only the Word of God in Law and Gospel, through which they should lead their entrusted flocks. (1 Corinthians 3:5-9; 1 Peter 5:3) Where they properly carry out this ministry the highest respect is due them (those in the public ministry of proclamation). (Romans 10:15; 1 Timothy 3:1; Hebrews 13:7; 1 Timothy 5:17) Cf. AC 5; AC 28, 5.8-17; Tractatus § 11

(This is a composite translation of the original by Juul Madson, Tim Schmeling, and Gaylin Schmeling.)

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# Lutherland: A Spiritual Pilgrimage

*by Timothy R. Schmeling*

Forty-two persons both seminary students and friends of the seminary participated in the Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary study tour. We arrived early Friday morning April 12, 2002 in Frankfurt am Main about to brave a whole day of travel after a long night aboard an airplane. Our first destination was the Wartburg *Schloss* or Castle where Dr. Martin Luther disguised as *Junker Jörg* (Knight George) translated the New Testament into German following the Diet of Worms. This famous medieval castle lies on the border between the former East German province of Thüringen and the former West German province of Hessen overlooking the great divide between freedom and oppression. The castle itself is a national monument due to all the events that occurred within its mighty walls. From the Wartburg, our bus descended into the town of Eisenach where Luther stayed with Frau Cotta as a student. Two other famous citizens of Eisenach are the Gnesio-Lutheran Nickolaus von Amsdorf who is buried in St. George's Church where he served as pastor, and the Lutheran composer Johann Sebastian Bach who was born in Eisenach. After viewing the sites, we departed for Erfurt where we would spend the night.

As anyone who has traveled through Europe knows, the breakfasts are excellent and are the key to surviving a full day of sightseeing. The breakfast with which we were greeted on Saturday morning had to be one of the best ever eaten by seminary students. After eating more than our fill we were ready to walk the streets of Erfurt where Luther spent his days as a university student and an Augustinian Friar. At the famous University of Erfurt, Martin Luther studied law until he took an oath to become a friar. In 1505, he entered the Augustinian Monastery. In the chapel of this monastery Martin Luther celebrated his first Mass and was terrified by the whole event. We toured this monastery led by a Lutheran nun. From here we walked to the Erfurt *Dom* or Cathedral where Martin Luther was ordained as a priest. This Roman Catholic Cathedral boasts one of the largest

bells in all of Europe. Two other notable sights in this city are the church where Meister Eckhardt, a medieval mystic, served and the church where J.S. Bach's parents were married. We then boarded our bus and began the longest ride of the trip that ended in Plzen, Czech Republic. Along the way we passed the city of Jena which along with Magdeburg served as one of the centers of Gnesio-Lutheranism in opposition to Philippism. In addition Johann Gerhard, the famous preacher and systematician, served as professor at the University of Jena. Leaving Thüringen, we passed through the province of Bayern or Bavaria on our way to the Czech border. Crossing the border into Czech Republic today is fairly easy, yet one can still get a taste of what life was like in Soviet times. Soon we arrived in Plzen, where we were graciously greeted by the Thoughts of Faith missionaries and were treated to a Czech feast.

After a good night's sleep we all awoke on Sunday morning refreshed and anxious to see the mission in Plzen. The mission building is a beautiful prewar structure which houses the missionaries, St. Paul's Church, and the Martin Luther School. Following the tour of the mission, we worshiped with our Czech brethren and received Holy Communion with them. Pastor Luttmann served as liturgist, Vicar Martin Vrsecky (former student of Bethany Lutheran College) translated, and Pastor Kincaid Smith preached. During the service there were musical selections from the choirs of Martin Luther School and Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary. Not wanting to leave Plzen, we boarded our bus again with Praha or Prague as our destination. Prague is the beautiful capital of the Czech Republic and has a strong German, Jewish, and Czech flavor due to its multicultural roots. Prague was particularly intriguing to our group since it was a Habsburg capital and was the center of the Hussite movement. Jan Hus, the Bohemian reformer, lived a hundred years before Martin Luther and was martyred at the Council of Constance even though he was given safe passage. Before being burned at the stake, Hus predicted a greater reformer would come after him who could not be silenced. Martin Luther wrote concerning this prophesy, "Holy Johannes Hus prophesied about a goose (for Hus means goose), but in a hundred years they will hear a swan sing, which they will not be able to silence" (Luther. WA. 30/3. 387, 6-10). Ever after many



Lutheran churches in Germany proudly bore a swan upon them signifying the swan was Martin Luther. The fate of Hus explains why Luther and others were not convinced of the safe passage given him to Worms since Luther was already being called the Saxon Hus. In Prague our tour began on the Royal Mile with the Prague Castle (where the famous defenestration of Prague occurred that sparked the Thirty Year's War) and the gothic St. Vitus Cathedral. From there we went down to Charles Bridge that is named after Charles IV. Charles IV was a Habsburg king who made Prague the beautiful city that it is today. After seeing Charles Bridge, St. Nicolas Church, Our Lady of Tyn Cathedral, the Jewish Quarter, and the astronomical clock, our group did a little shopping before retuning to the hotel.

Monday morning we crossed the Czech and German border in order to arrive at Dresden the capital of Sachsen or Saxony, a province of Germany. Dresden was a beautiful city situated along the Elbe River. Dresden also has a significant Lutheran past. The 1580 German edition of the *Book of Concord* was printed here. The famous Saxon court preacher and opponent of Calvinism, Matthias Hoe von Hoenegg, ministered in this great city. Heinrich Schütz served as cantor at the *Kreuzkirche* or Church of the Cross. Valentine Ernst Löscher, one of the last leaders of the Lutheran Orthodoxy, fought Pietism from his post as superintendent of the Dresden. Martin Stephan who brought the Missouri fathers including C.F.W. Walther over to America served as a pastor in this city. While Stephan could properly apply law and gospel to Walther's depressed heart freeing him from the Pietists who tormented him, Stephan's other side was evident in Dresden where he heard the "private confessions" of young ladies near the vineyards. Although this city was once one of the most beautiful in Germany, it suffered greatly in the Second World War being virtually annihilated. Nevertheless the old city of Dresden along the Elbe is being rebuilt. Our first stop was at the *Frauenkirche* or Church of Our Lady. This magnificent Lutheran church was the largest Lutheran church in Europe until it was destroyed in the firebombing of Dresden. For years it lay in rubble as a memorial to the war but is now close to being completely rebuilt. The Saxon *Hofkirche* or Court Church was also visited. This church is Roman Catholic because the rulers of this part of Saxony turned Roman

Catholic in order to rule Poland. This church was a sobering reminder of how easily the treasure of the Gospel can be lost.

On Tuesday morning we spent a little more time in Dresden and then left for Leipzig. Leipzig is a city with a long and distinguished Lutheran heritage. In 1519 Martin Luther took part in a debate here with Johann Eck known as the Leipzig Debate. In 1539 Martin Luther would return to Leipzig in order to preach in the *Thomaskirche*. One of the authors of the *Formula of Concord*, Nikolaus Selnecker, was superintendent of Leipzig and is buried in the St. Thomas Church. In the period of Lutheran Orthodoxy, Leipzig would become a stronghold of confessional Lutheranism. At this time the Lutheran king of Sweden, Gustavus Adolphus, defeated the Roman Catholics ending the Swedish phase of the Thirty Year's War, driving them south but died at Lützen outside of Leipzig where he is buried. In 1631 the Leipzig Colloquy took place here between the Lutherans and the Reformed as a result of the Edict of Restitution. Musically Leipzig was served by the great Johann Sebastian Bach. During Pietism, Halle, which is only about 30 minutes away from Leipzig, became the center of this movement. At the beginning of the *Erweckungsbewegung* or Lutheran Awakening C.F.W. Walther studied at Leipzig but was entangled in a pietistic *collegium pietatis* that drove him into a depression. There is also an ELS connection in Leipzig, Caspari and Ylvisaker both studied here. Finally the *Evangelisch Lutherische Freikirche* or the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church, the sister synod of the ELS in Germany, operates its seminary in Leipzig. After touring the St. Thomas Church, the St. Nicholas Church, and the Bach Museum we ate supper at the famous Auerbach's Keller where Goethe wrote his *Faust*. This elegant dinner was made even more enjoyable due to the company of the ELFK faculty and students.

The next morning we met at the Leipzig seminary for a devotion led by President Wilde of the ELFK. President Wilde also told us about the struggles and blessings of our fellow confessional Lutheran brothers and sisters in Germany. Afterwards Dr. Gottfried Herrmann gave us information concerning the history of the ELFK while President Schmeling explained the history of the ELS. The lectures were concluded with a lunch prepared by Mrs. Hoffmann, the wife of Prof. Hoffmann from the ELFK. This opportunity for the

seminarians of the ELFK and ELS to meet was indeed a unique and joyful experience.

Reluctant to leave, the tour pushed forward to Wittenberg where we spent the rest of Wednesday and Thursday. This gave our group plenty of time to sightsee, shop, and relax. In Wittenberg we saw the *Schlosskirche* or Castle Church where Luther nailed the 95 theses. In this church, Martin Luther, Philipp Melancthon, Fredrick the Wise, and Fredrick the Steadfast are buried. Next our group toured St. Mary's Church or the *Stadtkirche* where Johann Bugenhagen served as pastor and is buried. The altarpiece of the *Stadtkirche* painted by Lucas Cranach is a permanent reminder of the importance of the means of grace. Philipp Melancthon's house was toured along with the Black Cloister or Luther's House and Cranach House. During our stay, Mr. Mark Schwan took us out to the Luther Keller for dinner. It was hard to believe that we had just been walking in the footsteps not only of Luther, Melancthon, Bugenhagen but also such orthodox divines as Leonhard Hutter, Aegidius Hunnius, Nikolaus Hunnius, and Balthasar Meissner. In addition we learned about the next greatest Lutheran after Johann Gerhard, Abraham Calov who with the aid of Johann Quenstedt battled every foe of Christendom and preserved Lutheran theology against the Syncretism of the University of Helmstedt.

On Friday we left for Berlin the capital of reunited Germany. Along the way we stopped in Treuenbrietzen the birthplace of Martin Chemnitz, the second Martin, and took our pictures next to the small monument in front of St. Mary's Church. In Berlin we started with a bus tour of West Berlin seeing the partially destroyed Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church, the Victory Column, Checkpoint Charlie, and the *Tiergarten*. Following this we were dropped off near the Reichstag and the Brandenburg Gate. After visiting both we walked into former East Berlin and visited a number of sites. Some of the most significant were: 1. Pergamom Museum which houses the Pergamon altar, a city mentioned in the book of Revelation, along with the Gates of Babylon through which the Prophet Daniel no doubt passed. 2. Berlin Cathedral which is the cathedral of the Prussian Union. Prussian Union is a half Lutheran half Reformed church body established in 1817. As a result of this forced union, many confessional Lutherans

fled to America and joined church bodies like the LCMS and WELS. 3. St. Nicholas Church which was served by Johann Crüger the author of the tune for *Now Thank We All Our God*, Paul Gerhardt the famous hymnist, and Johann Philipp Spener the father of Pietism. 4. St. Mary's Church which was served by Johann Agricola who later swayed from confessional Lutheranism. In addition to these sites, members of our tour visited many of the museums and other historical sites of Berlin.

On Saturday morning the majority of our group rode the bus to Tegel Airport in Berlin boarding a flight to Amsterdam and then Minneapolis while the others eventually traveled to Sweden for the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference held in Göteborg, Sweden on April 23-25, 2002. At this meeting all the church bodies around the world in fellowship with the ELS were in attendance for their fourth triennial meeting.

Although the weather did not cooperate initially, the tour was a complete success. The opportunity to travel with confessional Lutherans to all these important sites and have fellowship with orthodox German and Czech Lutherans was a truly wonderful experience. Our trip was especially unique because every day a different pastor had a devotion for us connected with something that we were going to see. The most memorable was Pres. John Moldstad's devotion in the Castle Church in Wittenberg. In conclusion this trip was something that I will not soon forget because it was a chance to share experiences with my American classmates that I had enjoyed as a seminary student in Leipzig. Reading and hearing about the Reformation is one thing. Walking in the footsteps of the Reformers is another. But walking in the footsteps of the Reformers with fellow Lutherans from around the world and partaking of the means of grace together is something significantly better than any normal tour has to offer.

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