

**THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH AND ITS MINISTRY  
ACCORDING TO  
THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD  
OF THE USA**

by

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## Summary

Nothing has influenced and affected the Lutheran Church in the U.S.A. in the past century more than the doctrine of the Church and its Ministry. When the first Norwegian immigrants entered the U.S. in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there were not enough Lutheran pastors to minister to the spiritual needs of the people. Some of these immigrants resorted to a practice that had been used in Norway, that of using lay-preachers. This created problems because of a lack of proper theological training. The result was the teaching of false doctrine. Some thought more highly of the lay-preachers than they did of the ordained clergy. Consequently clergy were often viewed with a discerning eye and even despised. This was one of the earliest struggles within the Norwegian Synod. Further controversies involved whether the local congregation is the only form in which the church exists. Another facet of the controversy involves whether or not the ministry includes only the pastoral office; whether or not only ordained clergy do the ministry; whether teachers in the Lutheran schools are involved in the ministry; and whether or not any Christian can participate in the public ministry. Is a missionary, who serves on behalf of the entire church body, a pastor? If only the local congregation can call a pastor, then a missionary cannot be a pastor because he serves the entire church body in establishing new congregations. Is a seminary professor, who trains future pastors, a pastor? If only the local congregation can call a pastor, a seminary professor cannot be a pastor because he is called by the seminary board of control and not one particular congregation. In seeking to develop a statement that clearly defines the doctrine of the Church and its Ministry, a controversy exists within the church body known as the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS), the successor synod to the Norwegian Synod. The reason for the controversy is that two different views of how to develop a doctrinal statement exist in the ELS. Some go directly to Scripture and set forth a position. Others follow an example found in C.F.W. Walther's theses on Church and Ministry. They misunderstand and misuse this approach that was developed only for use in a controversy against an erring Lutheran pastor, Johannes Grabau of the Buffalo Synod. Many of those who utilize this approach are former members of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (LCMS), of which Walther was one of the founders. As a result of the two distinct approaches, there has been an inability to unanimously agree on the wording of the statements on the doctrine of the Church and its Ministry. It is the conclusion of the author that it is this reliance on statements made by individuals in previous centuries regarding particular situations that has caused the struggle to develop and serves to prolong it.

### List of Keywords

Church, Holy Christian Church, Communion of Saints, Congregation, Ministry, Pastoral office, Public ministry, Representative ministry, The Keys, Lutheran, Evangelical Lutheran Synod, CFW Walther, Lutheran Orthodoxy, Pietism, Philip Melancthon, Martin Luther, Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, Johannes Grabau, Buffalo Synod, Altenburg Debate, Citation Theology, The Ministry of the Keys, Personal Ministry, Rationalism, Higher Critical Method,

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-Solo Deo Gloria-  
(To God alone the Glory)

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## Chapter

# 1 Whence the Problem?

## 1.1 Introduction

Nothing has influenced and affected the Lutheran Church of Norwegian origin in the United States of America in the past century more than the doctrine of the Church and the doctrine of the Ministry of the Church. The problems experienced around the doctrines of the Church and its Ministry in the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of the USA emerged with the arrival of the first Norwegian immigrants in the USA in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, namely that there were not enough Lutheran pastors to minister to the spiritual needs of the people. Some Norwegian Lutherans resorted to a practice that had been used in Norway and used lay-preachers. This created problems because of a lack of proper theological training. It resulted in the teaching of problematic and, in some instances, false doctrine. Some thought more highly of the lay-preachers than they did of the ordained clergy. This gave rise to one of the earliest phases of the struggle within the Norwegian Synod. Further controversies involved whether the local congregation is the only form in which the church exists. Another facet of the controversy involves whether or not the ministry includes only the pastoral office; whether or not only clergy do the ministry; whether or not ordination of the clergy should be a requisite, and if it is, who should perform the rite of ordination; whether teachers in the Lutheran schools are involved in the ministry; and whether or not any Christian can participate in the public ministry. At stake were the doctrines of the ministry of the keys and the priesthood of all believers.

In seeking to develop a position and a statement that clearly espouses the Biblical teaching on the doctrine of the Church and the doctrine of Its Ministry, especially in regards to some of these issues, controversy continues within the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS), the successor synod to the Norwegian Synod. The focus of our attention in this thesis is not the history of the controversy, but the “content” and the “approaches” through which doctrinal positions have been taken, supported, and defended amongst this particular group of Lutherans in the USA. Our attention on the “content” and “approaches” regarding the doctrinal positions taken is strongly fixed first on the role and authority of the Bible as the Word of God in the formation of the doctrines of the church and its ministry. Secondly, we give extensive attention to an age old complication in Lutheranism as to which practice has and which practice should have the strongest input in the formation of Confessions and doctrines such as that of the church and its ministry: dogmatic and systematic theology, or continuous Biblical exegesis? Which mode of daily operation of engagement and involvement with the Bible is to be preferred in the setting forth of the doctrines of the church and the ministry: the dogmatic and systematic theological mode to the Bible or the exegetical-student-of-the Bible mode towards the Bible?



## 1.2 Preliminary stating of the problem

In this study the ongoing-exegetical-student-of-the-Bible approach through which the doctrines of the Church and Its Ministry are set forth has a strong emphasis on the role and authority of the Bible as the Word of God over the Lutheran Confessions and dogmatic and systematic theological doctrines and constructs that had been handed down by many generations of dogmatic and doctrinal reflection and formulation. The Bible as the living Word of God in our era has precedence even over findings and Biblical exegesis of Lutheran students and scholars of the Bible from the past.

In this study we could have an in-depth examination of the controversies around the doctrines of the Church and the Ministry by comparing what happened within one synod<sup>1</sup> with what transpired in one or more of the other Lutheran synods in the United States. Encapsulating the viewpoints of the other Lutheran church bodies in the USA or in the world would necessitate an overly comprehensive and exhaustive study of the doctrines of the Church and its Ministry. The study concentrates primarily on what has transpired in only one of the more than a dozen branches of the Lutheran Church in the USA. All of the Lutheran church bodies in the USA have at one time dealt with a doctrinal struggle around the definition of the two doctrines.

In a more concretized sense this study circles around the current struggle to develop defining statements for the doctrines of the Church and its Ministry within the particular Lutheran church body known as the Evangelical Lutheran Synod in the United States of America (ELS). Although the approval of the wording which this church body has to use in stating its official position on the two doctrines of the Church and its Ministry is of the utmost importance, the heart and core of the struggle in the ELS concerns the Biblical “content” and the Biblical “approach” that should be used to arrive at a Biblically correct set of defining statements with the appropriate Biblical wording.

### 1.2.1 Are Lutherans primarily dogmaticians or exegetical-students-of-the-Bible?

Some of the Lutheran church bodies in the USA have been swayed by the influences of Modernism and Rationalism - which puts sole trust on the human capacity of reasoning and thinking - to the point where their official positions have changed so drastically that they have become much more liberal than the original positions of the Lutheran Church. This group of Lutherans could accurately be called *liberal* Lutherans. Other Lutherans in the USA have not been swayed in their positions nearly to that extreme and thus could be termed *moderate* concerning matters of doctrine and the application of those doctrines into the practice of every day life. A third group of Lutherans in the USA is *orthodox*, even though the Age of Orthodoxy - which we shall discuss later - has passed, these Lutherans still hold to doctrinal teachings and positions primarily

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<sup>1</sup> A synod is a separate and distinct church body in and of itself. It is a stand-alone church body even though it may bear as part of its name one or more words that it has in common with other independent and stand-alone church bodies; in this case the words “Lutheran” and “Evangelical.”

set forth and embedded in the Bible and in a secondary sense in the Symbolic or Confessional writings of the Lutheran Church as they originally appeared in the *Book of Concord* of 1580.

How these symbolic or Confessional writings are approached vary among Lutherans in the USA. *Liberals* cite these in certain contexts and times in order to support their positions and show that they still are Lutherans. *Moderates*, on the other hand, regard these Confessions as holding great importance to the positions they embrace in their church bodies. Their approach in the frequent and repeated citing of the Confessions is to place the Confessions on a par with the works of dogmatic and systematic theologians. As a third group of Lutherans, *orthodox* conservatives adhere firmly to these Confessional writings not because the Confessions are thought to be equal to or superior to the Word of God as recorded in the Bible, but because these writings are considered to be a faithful rendition of the Word of God. In this instance the *Book of Concord* as a compilation of doctrinal writings composed by human beings is regarded as a secondary source and not a primary source for dealing with matters of doctrine and practice. For orthodox Lutherans, the distinction between primary and secondary sources is under girded by the distinction between the acts and works of God, the Almighty Creator of everything, and the acts and works of created beings, i.e. humanity.

*Liberal* and *moderate* Lutherans may quote the writings of Luther and Lutheran theologians, placing them on the same level as the Bible, or even giving them more credence and importance than the Bible, as the highest authority in the church and the world. Often Luther is cited as the authority for their position as they work to convince others that their position is authoritative and correct. The expectation is that others will listen and adopt their interpretation of the citation. Among *orthodox* Lutherans only the Bible is believed to be the wholly and inspired and infallible Word of God and it is regarded as the primary source. Confessional writings, previously approved by the whole of the Lutheran church, are accepted as secondary sources. Orthodox Lutherans also quote at times from the writings of Martin Luther (d.1546), the later orthodox Martin Chemnitz (d.1586), Johann Quenstedt (d.1688), Johann Gerhard (d.1637) and other Lutheran dogmaticians. Compared to the Bible such quotations are considered to be on a secondary level, therefore having the same weight as the Confessions, or even regarded by most orthodox Lutherans as on a tertiary level, thus having lesser weight than the Confessions. Writings which originated from human beings such as Confessions and dogmatic theologians are never regarded as equal to the Bible. In general one can state that they are informative and are studied for a “second opinion” which may or may not corroborate current findings of a thorough study and investigation of the Word of God.

*Orthodox* Lutherans, amongst whom the ELS is classified, are in agreement that all matters of doctrine and practice should be established and determined on the basis of what *the Bible* says. This statement that *the Bible* says and speaks to us is not made out of poverty or naivety of dogmatic reflection but out of concrete and real listening and hearing of the **viva vox Evangelii**, the living voice of the Gospel which is synonymous to the listening and hearing of the Word of God as it is recorded in the Bible. When orthodox Lutherans are confronted with the task of writing a

statement regarding a doctrine, they directly approach the Bible. Only after a thorough investigation and study of Scripture while being guided in the investigation process by Scripture itself in an all embracing way the wording and phrasing of a doctrinal statement eventuates and is written down.

We might note here before going further that there are shades and degrees within the terminology being used to describe liberals and moderates as well as conservatives. Not everyone who belongs to a liberal or moderate group is 100% liberal or moderate. Our purpose is not to review these gradations of theology, but to speak in generalized terms, describing the views only for the basis of the comparison offered and not judging or condemning anyone for their personal beliefs. Among the *moderates* the Bible is not always apportioned the same respect and authority as orthodox Lutherans give to it. The Bible is often viewed in the *moderate* camp as equal to the writings of human beings, thus to Confessions and dogmatic theology. The latter attitude is the result of two basic views. First, the more conservative side of the moderates view the writings of people such as Luther and other Lutheran dogmaticians as having already been taken from Scripture and thus clearly set forth what the Bible determinedly says. A moderate repristinates and mirrors what Luther and others said about the Bible as if the Bible has to be listened to and heard through the ears and voices of Luther and others. Those who hold to the moderate position establish their doctrinal statements in a derived sense from Scripture. Second, the more liberal side of the moderates view the Bible (or portions of the Bible) as nothing more than something that has been written by human beings and should therefore not be considered to be more authoritative than any other human writing.

The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod (LCMS), as one of the various Lutheran church bodies in the USA, is to be placed amongst the *moderates*. This synod was once regarded as orthodox and conservative but due to outside influences of the past century it underwent changes in doctrine and practice that now cause it to be considered among the so-called *moderate* Lutheran church bodies in the USA.

Among Lutherans in the USA the phrase “citation theologians” is used for those who operate with the approach that one can formulate a doctrine based on what has been derived from Scripture in the writings of Luther, the Confessions, and various Lutheran dogmaticians of the past, or even commentaries, which are regarded, at best, as being tertiary and often as less than tertiary sources. This entails that their theology is established not by ongoing and continuous study of Scripture but by a study of the writings of scholars from yesteryear which they quote heavily and extensively. Their knowledge of Scripture is thus often and for the greatest part derived from their study of the writings of Lutheran theologians. Moderate Lutherans and Lutheran dogmaticians rely heavily on a *dogmatic theological approach* by which they are primarily focused on what *dogmaticians and systematic theologians* have previously written on doctrine and Scripture as well as on doctrines embedded in the *Lutheran Confessions* for the development of doctrine. Orthodox conservatives rely on a *Biblical exegetical approach* in which they are *continuously in a direct*

*sense engaged and primarily focused on Scripture* in the original languages for the development of doctrine.

The ambivalence between the role of dogmatists and systematic theologians on the one hand, and exegetical-students-of-the-Bible on the other in determining doctrine is as old as the early days of the Lutheran Church itself. Where do we as orthodox conservative Lutherans fit into this ambivalence? Let us start with Luther's approach as that of being a student and scholar of the Bible, or to formulate it differently, Luther as a 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformer who operated daily in the exegetical-student-of-the-Bible mode. From Klaus Nürnberger, the South African Lutheran, who we place in the camp of the moderates, we could take a few clues regarding Luther's approach. Nürnberger writes the following in his in depth study of Luther, *Martin Luther's message for us today. A Perspective from the South (2005)* about the age old Lutheran struggle between dogmatics (i.e., systematic theology) on the one hand and exegetical-biblical study and exegesis on the other:

"Luther (d. 1546) was not a systematic theologian but a biblical scholar. The first systematic theology in the Lutheran fold was the *Loci Communis* (1555), written by Melancthon (d. 1560). The greatest and most influential systematic theology of the Reformation was *Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1585). That Luther was not a systematic theologian presents us with some difficulties:

1. Among the multitude of his writings, there is no authoritative source of his theology to which we could refer. The Reformed tradition has a compact work to fall back on, namely Calvin's Institutes. Traditionally the most important reference of the Lutheran churches is the Augsburg Confession (1530), which was written by Melancthon, not by Luther. It is part of the Book of Concord (1580), a collection of Lutheran confessional writings that many Lutherans consider to be binding...
2. There was restlessness in Luther that made him react spontaneously to each and every problem and debate that presented itself. Alertness and vibrancy are the strengths of his theology, but not all these spontaneous reactions are consistent with each other...
3. We have to take account of the fact that, although Luther was the pioneer of a new age, to a considerable extent his thought was still shaped by the Middle Ages."<sup>2</sup>

What clues are to be drawn for our thesis from someone like Nürnberger who is from the moderate camp of Lutherans in the world?

Firstly that Luther's *approach* was that of a Biblical scholar or exegetical-student-of-the-Bible and not of a dogmatist and systematic theologian.

Secondly, it should be noted that while all dogma, i.e., doctrine and teachings of the orthodox, conservative Lutherans is derived solely from the Bible, we are, as was Luther, first and foremost students of the Bible who are engaged in an ongoing sense with the Bible as the Word of God; our

<sup>2</sup> Klaus Nürnberger, *Martin Luther's message for us today. A Perspective from the South*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, pp. 10-11.

approach to systematic theology is not what is commonly held by the rest of humankind. The problem-setting of whether Lutherans are in the first instance dogmaticians or students of the Bible is one of the biggest points of contestation within the Lutheran world. We admit that it is not easily to be solved. One of the complicating factors is as follows: Whether one is in the first instance either a biblically engaged student or a dogmatician one is using sense making Lutheran hermeneutical constructs such as the name of Luther for ones church body as Evangelical Lutheran Synod and we speak about Lutheran Christians. The contestations within the liberal, moderate and orthodox conservative camps as to who is a genuine and real Lutheran are well known. Another example is the well known Lutheran twosome of “Law and Gospel” that while not mentioned specifically in those terms in the Bible is particularly of Lutheran coinage and usage. The way the twosome is approached and applied differs within the liberal, moderate and orthodox Lutheran camps. A proper dogmatician would jump to the fore to say that the twosome ‘Law and Gospel’ is a doctrinal formulation which is dogmatical to the core and therefore makes the dogmatical approach important. The Biblical or exegetical-student-of-the-Bible approach of ongoing engagement with the Biblical text that I advocate in this thesis would say that the twosome is firstly biblical in the first instance. Secondly, admitting that the twosome Law and Gospel has a typical Lutheran ring to it, the importance of ongoing engagement with the Bible as the Word of God, may result and change smaller and larger doctrinal portions and pointers of the twosome that are dogmatically handed over from generation to generation without being scrutinized again and again by the living Word of God. We do however quote the findings of Luther as an exegetical-student-of-the-Bible and Lutheran dogmaticians and exegetes regarding Scripture occasionally but not as determining factors which come to stand in place of our own primary engaged involvement with the Bible as living Word of God, the **viva vox evangelii**.

Thirdly, and perhaps the most important reason of all, is that in following Luther’s approach of being a fully fledged student of the Bible as the Word of God we do not have to conclude with Luther’s findings of the Bible regarding each and every text and verse. Furthermore, to be true followers of Luther’s Biblically engaged and involved approach regarding the original languages of the Hebrew and Greek texts does not mean that we have to parrot Luther’s findings regarding Biblical texts to the letter. We are under the obligation to return day after day to the Bible as the Word of God not only in instances of the doctrine of the Church and Its Ministry, which is our main focus in this study, but also about all things and issues that the Bible speaks of and about which it has something to say.

## **1.2.2 Norwegian Immigration to the USA**

When the Norwegian immigrants came to the USA in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, they brought with them varying ideas regarding the church and its ministry stemming from the situation in the state church, the influence of pietism, and the work of two laymen, Hans Hauge (d.1824) and Elling Eielsen (d.1883) who did not have a high regard for the clergy and went around teaching and preaching without proper training and without a call. Their teachings which were not all based on the Bible created many doctrinal problems among Norwegian immigrants. The work of Eielsen

and other lay preachers induced a lack of respect for the pastoral office which was not uncommon among the Norwegians in the USA. Moreover as these individuals went around without meaningful guidance and direction, and without a biblically based organizational concept their view and concept of what a church is became muddled. This was one of the influences on the ELS that contributed to the current problem regarding the doctrines of the church and its ministry.

### **1.2.3 The Beginning of the Church and Ministry Controversy in the USA**

A century and a half ago, the early Lutheran settlers in the USA found themselves embroiled in a controversy regarding the doctrines of the Church and its Ministry. The cause of the controversy was the two differing views of these doctrines. On the one side Orthodox Lutherans, mainly Saxon immigrants who settled Prairie County in the state of Missouri and eventually led by C.F.W. Walther, held that primarily Scripture had to determine doctrinal positions. They had immigrated because they could not agree with the teachings of the state church in Germany. On the other side Pomeranian immigrants, led by Johannes Grabau, settled in Buffalo in the state of New York. These Pomeranians, although having a Lutheran background, had been strongly influenced by rationalism and the state church. Because of their backgrounds, their views on the doctrines of the Church and Its Ministry as well as other doctrines were far from being in agreement. We shall touch on these differences in chapter 3.

Grabau and the Buffalo Synod held that their position was the only correct position and that any other position was new and not Lutheran. Walther and the Missouri Synod sought to discuss the matter. They attempted to show they had not departed from the original Lutheran position but rather had in fact returned to it. What ensued was almost a decade long debate carried on in by way of published writings: Grabau wrote against Walther and the Missouri synod in his Hirtenbrief (Pastoral letter); Walther from his side upheld the Missouri position in der Lutheraner (the Lutheran). As the decade progressed Grabau's attacks became more vehement and aggressive. For a new church body that was trying to establish its roots while gaining recognition and a following in the community, the insults and attacks of Grabau were major problems. Furthermore, the on-going struggle and fighting between two church bodies, each bearing the name Lutheran, put the name "Lutheran" and the "Lutheran Church" in a bad light. From his the positions he sets forth in his writings, one may conclude that Grabau was increasingly shifting to a more liberal stance in this matter.

Walther and the LCMS attempted to set the record straight between Buffalo and Missouri. They clarified the matter and showed to everyone that their teaching on the church and its ministry was not new but was the position the Lutheran Church held from its inception. Walther was asked to write a book on the Church and Its Ministry. The main purpose of the book which was entitled Kirche und Amt, or Church and Ministry, was not to set forth the Scriptural position but to show that the position of the Missouri Synod was truly the Lutheran position.

Walther held Scripture in the highest regard as the wholly inspired and inerrant Word of God and also had a high regard for the writings of Martin Luther which he often read and cited. Given that his assignment was to show that the Missouri Synod's was the truly Lutheran position it only made sense that Walther relied heavily on the writings of Martin Luther and the Lutheran dogmaticians of the past. In his presentation of the doctrines of the Church and its ministry in Kirche und Amt he predominantly cited Luther and the dogmaticians of yesteryear. One has to emphasize again that his assignment was not primarily to write on the Biblical position of these doctrines, nor was his assignment to cover and to expound in great detail every possible facet of these doctrines. The latter intention he made quite clear in the preface to the first edition.

Walther's success with Kirche und Amt and his approach of primarily engaging himself with the writings of Luther and early Lutheran dogmaticians spilled over into his other writings. The continuous and constant references to and citations of the writings of these earlier theologians have resulted in Walther being considered a "citation theologian." One needs only to read some of Walther's other books to observe this tendency. In fact, as his career progressed, much of his Biblical knowledge did not come primarily from direct engagement and study of Scripture, but was derived from what he read in the Lutheran fathers.

#### **1.2.4 Walther's Format and Approach Immigrates to the ELS**

Missourians who followed in the wake of Walther and took up the reins of leadership upon his death emulated the format and approach he first used in Kirche und Amt. As a seminary professor, Walther trained more than a generation of Lutheran pastors in the USA. The majority of these pastors used this format and approach in their papers and presentations. And so have Missourians to the present day. This includes the LCMS pastors who, in the last few decades, have been leaving the Missouri Synod for confessional reasons and becoming members of the ELS through the colloquy process. A sizeable number of lay members have also changed synods for similar reasons.

The current situation in the ELS, therefore, is this: this particular Lutheran church body is attempting to clarify and formulate two official statements setting forth the synod's position: one statement dealing with the doctrine of the Church and the other statement dealing with the doctrine of the Ministry. When the voting members of the ELS discussed the wording of these statements a clear-cut division emerged. On the one side of the division those are positioned who want to primarily use the Bible in determining what the statement should say. On the other side the immigrants who have joined the ELS in recent years from the LCMS are positioned who want to base the statements on quotations made by Lutherans in dogmatic treatises and Confessions of past generations and centuries. The ELS is faced with the following problem: Where does the Bible fit into the procedure? What approach is used to obtain what the Bible is directly saying? Are all the citations from Lutheran dogmaticians and even from Luther - who was not a dogmatician proper - a genuine and clear reflection of what the Bible says?

## 1.2.5 Establishing Doctrine in the ELS

The question for an orthodox Lutheran church body thus becomes: Can orthodox, Lutheran doctrine be obtained by using the writings of Lutheran theologians of past centuries? In this sense, a different way of wording the same question would be: can orthodox Lutherans achieve the same doctrinal stance in their wording of a statement by going directly to Scripture as what they would have achieved by going to the writings of human dogmatists and the findings of biblical scholars of the past, even when such a human being's name is Martin Luther?

Can orthodox Lutherans employ and make use of Luther's approach of being mainly a Bible student and biblical scholar on the one hand without necessarily making use of Luther's findings, statements and doctrinal formulations in his engagement with the Bible on the other? A similar question can be asked with regard to Walther as to whether his format and approach in *Kirche und Amt* did not retard and hinder the formulation of the official statement of the ELS on the doctrines of the church and its ministry. The answer to the latter question is one of the major issues of this study and shall be dealt with in chapter 3.

We need to remind the reader that we are not really addressing the issue of how other church bodies have chosen to deal with these doctrines. Certainly the Reformed Churches, other Protestant church bodies, and even liberal Lutheran church bodies use other procedures to establish their official positions on the teachings within their particular church body. This may be difficult for the reader to comprehend. It should be noted that other church bodies often have a different view of Scripture and a different approach to its interpretation than does the ELS. As a result their theologies and the theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod are two different things. Trying to judge one by the standards of the other would be like trying to evaluate a football game by using the rules and regulations of cricket or baseball.

## 1.3 *The basic problem and the basic statement of the study*

The topic captured in the title of the thesis, namely *The Doctrine of the Church and Its Ministry according to the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of the USA* is throughout the thesis document discussed in terms of three sub-problem-settings that express the basic problem of the thesis and in terms of which the basic statement is expressed. The three sub-problem-settings are actually three emphases of the one problem that are very close to each other. All three (sub) problem-settings are worked out in threesomes.

### 1.3.1 **The First Problem-setting: Are doctrines directly extracted from the Bible as the Word of God or indirectly derived through the writings of human beings?**

The first sub-problem-setting with regard to how doctrines are to be captured and extracted from the Bible as the Word of God expresses itself in a threesome:



*Doctrines are directly extracted from the Bible...doctrines are directly and indirectly via dogmatics extracted from the Bible...doctrines are extracted only indirectly from the Bible via the reflection of dogmaticians and writings of biblical scholars.*

The first position which is also called the ongoing exegetical and direct biblically based position, is the position of orthodox Lutherans, the second position is the position attributed to CFW Walther which is discussed in chapter 2 and of which an evaluation of the theses of Walther is presented in chapter 3. "Citation theologians" can also be seen in this middle position. The last position is the liberal position which is utterly humanly based and which is in direct opposition to the orthodox Lutheran position.

The problem of a truthful expression of the doctrines of the Church and Its Ministry from a Bible-believing point of view is not to be treated as a discussion of different doctrinal positions in which one weighs the differing positions for a determinative decision on the value and benefits of citations from various Lutheran dogmatic and exegetical forefathers. First and foremost one has to tackle the different approaches and views of people with varying degrees of acceptance and belief in the Bible. Such differing approaches and uses of the Bible support and carry their views. One has to put the varying human concepts and ideas on the discussion table of the Church and then attempt to demonstrate what the results of each view, approach and use of the Bible are in our community of faith before God (**coram Deo**) and before the world (**coram Mundo**).

The basic question of my hypothesis — Are orthodox, Lutheran doctrines of the Church and Its Ministry to be attained by using the writings of human beings and thus an indirect derived knowledge of the Bible? is continuously to be read in conjunction with my thesis — The influence and impact of the Waltherian format and approach followed in his book Kirche und Amt, in using the methods of citation theology, has hampered the development of doctrinal statements on the Church and its ministry in the Evangelical Lutheran Synod in the USA — one has to go directly to the jugular of the problem, namely one has to engage directly with Scripture to establish doctrines for the church body.

The seemingly slight differences in their views, approaches and uses of Scripture — that is, between establishing doctrine directly on the basis of what Scripture says or establishing doctrine through a derived sense by relying on the quotations of Lutheran theologians and references in the Lutheran Confessions —are creating mega differences in the outcomes and results of the different positions on the doctrines of the Church and Its Ministry. There is no other access route to any problem that arises in the ELS than to search in Scriptures in the sense of re-search, reading it again and again, searching it as individuals, and searching it together even when there are differences because of backgrounds of synods or when one remembers what a Lutheran forefather once said about a particular issue. In doing so, the doctrine is established for the ELS today and future generations can look back at the searching and studying of God's Word for their

doctrinal formation and formulations. This method of establishing doctrine also sets an example for the rest of Christendom.

### **1.3.2 The Second Problem-setting — believing ...half-believing...non-believing approaches to the Bible.**

The second sub-problem-setting concerns different approaches towards the Bible as the Word of God and is also set and expressed in terms of three positions:

The believing view of the Bible as the inerrant and infallible Word of God... half-believing dialectical view of the Bible as the divine Word of God and the words of human beings...non-believing liberal view of the Bible as a religious compendium of human beings about the experience of God, human beings and the world.

In the second problem-setting of this thesis different approaches to the Bible are compared and set in opposition. It is accepted today that some definitions of terms have different meanings in different church bodies. We will look at the inerrant and infallible Word of God with its equating, corresponding and expressive mirroring in doctrine, doctrinal and dogmatic statements and formulations. A doctrinal statement of position does not necessarily need to parrot word for word what the Bible says, but neither should it incorporate anything which is contrary to what the Bible says. In this paper we will see how one's views and approaches to the Bible can affect doctrine. The emphasis in chapter 4 is on the Use of the Bible in determining doctrine. Different views, approaches and uses of the Bible will be discussed, some of which have been and are being used in various evangelical church bodies and especially among some Lutheran church bodies in the USA. The chapter will touch on the view, approach and use of the Bible as the inerrant and infallible Word of God regarding the doctrine of the Church and the doctrine of Its Ministry.

The main question that may be asked pertains to my view, approach and use of the Bible as the Word of God and its equation to doctrine and doctrinal and theological formulations. The question of the first problem-setting is slightly reformulated in the second problem-setting: Is a doctrinal position (or theological position for that matter) which is formulated with direct access and appeal to the Bible as the Word of God closer to the Truth than a doctrinal or theological position which is formulated and expressed via the reflections and written expressions of other dogmaticians and theologians of previous and the present generation, and Lutheran confessions such as the Book of Concord? The question in short is: is the position of access and acquiring of doctrinal truth through direct engagement and mirroring of the Bible as the Word of God a more accurate route of engagement with the Bible than one that goes via and through other persons, writings and confessions of the Church?

A position of either/or is clearly not that easy, because many in the ELS may have acquired doctrines or concepts of belief that are used daily as if these had been directly obtained from the Word of God, when in actuality the knowledge of such doctrines and concepts of belief as

Lutheran doctrine has come about as a result of reading or hearing of statements that were formally set forth by Luther and 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century orthodox Lutherans who, in fact, searched the Scriptures and put these doctrines into words for our use and benefit today. Permit me to use two examples.

The first is the pair Law and Gospel, which Lutherans regard as the two main teachings of the Bible. Both words appear in the Bible and through a thorough study of Scripture a God-pleasing description of either of these doctrines and their relationship to each other can be formulated. Romans 1:16, for example teaches the Gospel, εὐαγγέλιον, and John 1:17 teaches the law, νόμος. Developing them to their fullest would, of course, require a thorough ongoing exegetical study and not just a cursive reading of the English translation. A complete study will require digging into both the Old and the New Testaments. That they are used together as a pair can be credited to the biblical and exegetical studies of God's Word by Martin Luther, who used them in his classroom lectures and in his preaching. Lutherans worldwide will acknowledge the existence of these two doctrines, although they may differ as to how these two doctrines had to be expressed and how they are to be applied in people's lives. It goes without saying that a bible believing, half-believing and a liberal non-believing view and approach to the Bible will read and apply both Law and Gospel differently.

A second example pertains to the use of the theological terms "justification and sanctification". Again, there are differences in the way in which various church bodies in Christendom will view these two doctrines. These were formally described and prominently used by theologians during the Age of Orthodoxy in both the Lutheran and the Reformed churches. One can, however, through a thorough study of the Bible arrive at God-pleasing positions of both. The word δικαίωσις appears in the New Testament, for example Romans 4:25. Through an exegetical study of verses such as this, one can arrive at the doctrine of **justification** just as the theologians in the Age of Orthodoxy did. The same thing can be done with the word ἁγιασμός in passages such as 1 Peter 1:2; it is possible to arrive at the doctrine of **sanctification** just as the theologians in the Age of Orthodoxy did. Once again, a thorough exegetical study is necessary to develop the doctrine to its fullest. A mere cursive reading of a translation is not enough to do so. Also with regard to this example a bible believing, half-believing and a liberal non-believing view and approach to the Bible will read and apply both justification and sanctification differently.

I realize that to claim as I do that this study reflects a position based upon belief in the Bible, it reflects a Bible-based faith. It is based in its entirety on the Bible as the wholly inspired and inerrant Word of God. In this paper, I will be setting forth my personal beliefs and the official doctrinal positions of various church bodies, including conservative, orthodox Lutheran church bodies. Such official doctrinal positions were specifically worded to set forth specific beliefs. These were not intended to be "politically correct" or to be appealing and acceptable to the human capacity of reason or views and opinions based upon it. In this work I have a responsibility and an accountability to spell out my approach with regard to the inerrant, infallible and inspired Word of

God, which is what I personally believe the Bible to be. It is not intended to be sexist, “politically correct”, or offensive to anyone in any way.

The aim of the deliberations in chapter 4 is to spell out which view, approach and use of Scripture gives us the true mirroring and correspondence of a word or a notion, a verse, a pericope or a chapter of the Bible embodied and expressed in one’s doctrinal statements and positions on the doctrines of the Church and its Ministry. I shall present various views, approaches and uses of the Bible held by Bible-believing Lutherans, by partial-Bible-believing, half-believing dialectical, or semi-Bible-believing Lutherans in the USA and in some instances even examples of non-Bible believing Lutherans, non-believing liberals. At the end of chapter 4, I will indicate which view, approach and use I prefer regarding engagement and involvement with the Bible as the inerrant and infallible Word of God.

### **1.3.3 The Third Problem-setting — doctrines embodied in the Bible...doctrines half-embodied in the Bible and half embodied in a human rational construction... doctrines solely an embodiment of human rational reflection (rationalism).**

The third-problem-setting is, again, set as three approaches doctrines and doctrinal positions

Divine doctrinal meaning embedded, embodied and expressed in the words of the Bible...a dialectical mixture of divine faith and human reason in the doctrinal meaning...human reason as the human extractor of divine meaning in the human words of the Bible.

The divine doctrinal meaning of the Church and Its Ministry in the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of the USA has to be extracted directly from the embodied and embedded doctrines in the Hebrew and Greeks words of the Bible. On this road one should not rely on the approach of going via dogmatics in the formulation and definition of doctrines. In a more poignant form this means that Lutherans who are of the moderate middle position operate with a highly problematic approach of extracting doctrines from Scriptures via dogmatic formulations and citations, rationalised doctrines and thus through a variety of constructs of human reason with faith a distant and a remote appendix. The moderate view of approaching Scripture via dogmatics and rationalised doctrines relies more heavily on a dogmatics approach (i.e., a study of what dogmaticians have previously written) in developing doctrine as opposed to the ongoing, engaged and involved exegetical approach (i.e., the direct study of Scripture in the original languages) used by the conservatives in developing doctrine.

The closely connected emphases of the three problem-settings of the thesis carry the discussion, the explication and summary of statements of the Biblical doctrines of the Church and Its Ministry in chapters 5 and 6. Biblical doctrines set within the margins of the view, approach and use of Scripture that makes sense to me as a Bible-believing Lutheran is that of God’s divine intent and meaning embedded, embodied and built into the Hebrew and Greek words of the Bible. My aim is

thus to describe the doctrines inherent and intrinsic to the Bible as God's Word on the Church and Its Ministry. Thus, a doctrinal position that does not mirror the explicit or implicit doctrine which is to be detected in the Bible in a similar way as the accepted doctrinal and practical norm of Biblical equating, correspondence and mirroring is necessarily less true to the Bible and in certain cases false.

First, in the doctrine of the church it is necessary to ask if the term "church" is limited merely to a local group of individuals who meet in a specific place; or can the term "church" be understood in a broader sense thus incorporating several congregations in a specific area or even an entire church body. Secondly in regard to the public ministry, Christ Jesus, according to the Bible, has given select individuals to the church to serve the church. The church, furthermore, has the right to call these individuals to serve in specific locations and in specific ways. With regard to ministry it is necessary to ask who is allowed to serve in the public ministry. Is this restricted to only a parish pastor or can any clergy or layperson serve in that role? It is necessary for us to define what the church is in order to have a proper understanding of which group of believers should call an individual to serve the church in the public ministry.

### **1.3.4 Terminology and the underlying Approach of the Thesis**

Because this thesis presents what the Evangelical Lutheran Synod teaches, it is necessary to use the same terminology that this synod uses when it states what it believes, teaches, and confesses. The work also expresses the views and positions of Bible-believing confessional Lutherans. Because what they believe, teach, and confess is based upon the Word of God, the author will strive to use words, terms, and phrases that the Lord inspired His holy writers to record in the Bible. We believe that God is Triune. God is three persons in one being: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. God "is spirit" (John 4:24), not flesh and blood. To help us begin to understand who God is, various anthropomorphisms are used in the Scriptures to describe the personage, the work, and the attributes of the Lord. These descriptions are in terms that we can understand to help us know more about the Lord God. Because God is unlimited and beyond our comprehension (Romans 11:33-36) these only give us a sampling of what God really is like. The Bible also uses similes to help us better understand the ways of God. These are not to be taken as literal descriptions of the Lord, they are merely comparative illustrations which again use human terms and expressions to help us better understand and know Almighty God. Many times and in many ways within the Bible, God is referred to with masculine pronouns. We shall use the same pronouns within this paper. This is especially true in the quotations that are used from the Bible and other sources. That Jesus was masculine, there can be no doubt. Masculine pronouns will be used when referring to the Second Person of the Trinity.

The views and positions expressed in this thesis, and believed and confessed by the ELS, are not widely accepted throughout the world today. Because of what the Bible teaches regarding the divinely appointed role of women, orthodox Lutherans believe that only men can serve in the office of pastor. For the same reason, they similarly believe that the majority of the positions in the public

ministry can be held only by men. They accept it as the clear teaching of the Bible in the original languages. It is the position and the practice of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod and all of the church bodies with which it is in fellowship. Thus, when reference is made to the work of the pastor throughout this work, and a need to use pronouns arises, it is fitting and proper to use the pronouns “he”, “him”, and “himself”, etc. According to the inspired word of the Apostle Paul, women are not permitted to serve as pastors, (a topic which will be discussed later in this thesis), therefore it would be improper and unscriptural to use the pronouns “she”, “her” or “herself”, etc. when referring to pastors and their activities. This terminology, based on Biblical teachings, has been used by members of the Lutheran Church for centuries.

Each ELS congregation is governed by a church council, which is comprised solely of men, according to Biblical teaching. All of the congregations are engaged in doing the ministry. These congregations unite to form the synod, which enables all of the congregations to work together in doing the ministry that our Lord has given to His Church. The synod is governed by synodical conventions, in which pastors and lay delegates, who are men from the various congregations, vote and guide the church. Therefore, it is correct in this context to use the term “laymen”. Lay preachers are also always male within our church body and in the context of this paper. The expression “Church Fathers” as used in this thesis, applies to those persons (who are undeniably and exclusively male) who have written published statements regarding the formation of the early church. Although the author understands that women have participated in the development of the church throughout the ages, and in no way seeks to deny that role, the fact is that no women are the authors of these specific collective works or teachings. Therefore, in this context, when it is necessary, the author has used the expression “church fathers”. Wherever possible, the author has made an effort to employ “inclusive language.”

What is stated herein is not intended to be sexist or offensive to anyone. What is stated, however, is true to my faith and true to God, who has given us His wholly inspired and inerrant Word. By no means is this an exhaustive study of the doctrine of the Church and Its Ministry. Volumes have already been written on these doctrines. This thesis touches only on the current struggle that exists within the Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

### **1.3.5 How Others May View the Approach**

Very important in establishing an official position in anything is the matter of upon what it will be based. Will it be based on the statements of its founders? Will it be based on a Lutheran mindset that is handed on through the writings and works of Lutheran dogmaticians and biblical scholars? Will it be based on a consensus of the shareholders or the members? Will it be based on decisions made by those who work on behalf of the organization? What is the emphasis? What is the purpose? What is the mission?

In a church body one’s *position* and one’s *approach* towards the Bible must be established.

Firstly, with regard to ones *position*, the Bible is either the wholly inspired and inerrant Word of God or it is not. Whilst as an orthodox Lutheran I believe that the Bible is the wholly inspired and inerrant Word of God the reader may not agree.

Secondly, with regard to ones *approach*, one is either in a full, direct and ongoing sense engaged and involved with the Bible as the Word of God or one is engaged and involved with the Bible as a compendium of human religious experience, or one may not even consider the Bible worthy of acknowledgement and goes about their studies as if it were no more important than a Shakespearean play. Orthodox Lutherans believe that one is fully, directly and in an ongoing sense engaged and involved with the Bible as the Word of God in every aspect that touches on doctrines, procedures and approaches of a church body. Again the reader may disagree. If it is God's Word not the result of a person's imagination, Scripture is the basis for formulating doctrine and practice. If it is not, something else must be found. Because of this, those who do not agree with the orthodox Lutheran position will be looking at the orthodox Lutheran doctrines through lenses that reflect their own personal views and opinions of Scripture.

Those who have used human reason or any other capacity of a human being to arrive at a lesser view of the Bible will be looking at the Bible, the nature of the Bible and what others say about it through tinted lenses so as to filter out certain things. It becomes a matter of something that they have decided upon and chosen as part of their personal belief system. It makes sense to them.

If one does not accept the Bible as the wholly inspired and inerrant Word of God, one is not going to accept the authority of Scripture. One will not be able to accept the concept that the Bible in its entirety is God's Word and anything else that has been written as having less status and impact because it is merely the word of a created being, a human being. Consequently one will not fully grasp the importance of the current situation in the ELS. Rather to those who have a lesser view of the Bible, what is happening in the ELS will be nothing more than a debate between two utterly human perspectives which are equally right in their own way in their striving to acquire the dominant position and establish a victory. When it appears as if human beings participate on each side of the issue with the one side winning and the other losing, the human results will be of little or no consequence. In this case, "direct-Bible" versus "derived Bible" engagement and involvement with doctrines will be viewed through various human filters and lenses as if this was a crime scene from which criminologists and detectives have to derive satisfactory and sufficient answers. They will see some sort of "divine truth scale" in which the words of each dogmatician and theologian is weighed and considered. In terms of such a scale some are given a higher degree of consideration than others. Finally, the side with the better academic line-up gains an advantage. And, why should they not have such views and opinions? After all this is what enlightened human reason tells them the outcome should be. It makes sense to them. They have rationalized away what the Bible says and often consider those who believe the Bible to be the wholly and inspired Word of God to be "old-fashioned" and "out-of-date" with ideas that are "high and mighty" and opinionated, operating with the pretension of having received a direct revelation from God. This is the way many outside the ELS very likely view the situation.

With the background laid out, we proceed remembering that this work does not concern itself with all doctrines, nor with all churches; it does not even concern itself with all Lutherans, but only with one particular Lutheran church body in the USA. It is an orthodox Lutheran church body; hence it has orthodox Lutheran doctrines, views, and positions. The reader, then, will have to approach this paper with an open-mind, setting aside his or her own personal philosophical views and opinions, and in some cases even their own personal religious beliefs to better understand the position of orthodox, conservative, Bible-believing Lutherans and the struggle that has developed in formulating doctrinal statements.

Because doctrine is not a matter of philosophical views and opinions originating in the minds of human beings, this paper does not set forth such positions, nor does the author — who has been involved in post-graduate, seminary-level, theological studies for more than thirty years — draw upon them for his conclusions. For the author, and all who hold the Bible to be the wholly inspired and inerrant Word of God, all doctrine originates in and sets forth the clear teaching of Scripture. The question, which I shall now set forth, however, is one that can be adapted and used by all Bible-believing Christians.

The basic problem, once again: Can orthodox, Lutheran doctrine be attained by those who prefer the writings of human beings and thus have a derived knowledge of the Bible?

#### **1.4 Overview of the study**

In **CHAPTER 1**, with the heading **Whence the Problem?**, background information is provided related to the problem. It stems from certain ideas that the Norwegian immigrants brought with them when they came to the USA. It has been complicated by the reception into membership of “moderates” who have a different view of and approach to the Bible.

In **CHAPTER 2**, with the heading **The Historical Background of the Current Struggle and CFW Walther’s Influence**, we look at the development of the Norwegian immigrants into a church body. We take note of the struggles that influenced them. We see what steps they took to overcome their problems. We see the relationship that developed between the Norwegian Synod and the Missouri Synod.

In **CHAPTER 3**, with the heading **An Evaluation of Walther’s Theses on Church and Ministry**, we look at Walther the man, the theologian, and the dogmatics professor. We see how he was viewed by his students and members of another conservative, orthodox Lutheran church body. The controversy over the Church and Its Ministry is discussed from the problems with Grabau and the Buffalo Synod to problems within the Missouri Synod that led to the Altenburg Debate. Finally we look at the theses that Walther wrote and note the format that he used in presenting these, and why he used that format.



In **CHAPTER 4**, with the heading **The Use of the Bible in Determining Doctrine**, we shall look at the importance of using Scripture to determine doctrine. The chapter contains an overview of some of the major theological influences during the history of the Church. We shall also look at different views and approaches toward interpreting Scripture that have been and still are being used today. We also look at three different views and approaches that have been used by members of other Lutheran church bodies. The chapter concludes with some thoughts on these and an indication of the way that I personally believe the doctrine should be determined.

In **CHAPTER 5, The Biblical Doctrine (nature) of the Church** is discussed. In this chapter we deal with the matter of what is the church? Is it merely a local group or can it be any group of believers? We look to Scripture for God's answers as to what His church really is.

In **CHAPTER 6**, under the heading **The Biblical Doctrine (nature) of the Church's Ministry**, we look at what the ministry actually is. We discuss both the private and the public ministry. We also take note of who can serve in the public ministry and how this is realized.

In **CHAPTER 7**, with the heading **Epilogue**, the paper is wrapped up with summary statements.

## Chapter

# 2 The Historical background of the Current struggle and CFW Walther's influence

## 2.1 Introduction

The year 2003 marked the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Norwegian Lutheran Church in America. During that century and a half, Norwegian Lutherans in the United States have been plagued with theological problems and doctrinal controversies. Sadly, rather than uniting around the Word of God and going forth to proclaim the Gospel as our Lord and Savior would have us do, the Norwegian Lutheran Church has split and fragmented several times. Even today, the most Biblically-based remnant of those Norwegian settlers, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, is not united in its definition of the Church and the ministry.

The ELS is currently the fourth largest body of Lutherans in the United States of America. At the end of 2003, it consisted of 140 congregations. There was a baptized membership of 21,047, of whom 16,674 were communicant members. There were 27 Christian Day Schools in the Synod, with an enrollment of 1,025 students and 77 teachers. The Evangelical Lutheran Synod subscribes to the Holy Bible as the inspired and inerrant Word of God. They subscribe to the Lutheran Confessions as contained in the Book of Concord of 1580. The Evangelical Lutheran Synod is a member of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC), which includes member churches in Bulgaria, Nigeria, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Russia, Latvia, Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Australia, Peru, Cameroon, Malawi, Zambia, Sweden and Norway, Japan, Ukraine, and the United States of America (the Evangelical Lutheran Synod and the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod). Each of these is a separate, individual, and distinct church body in and of itself. The Evangelical Lutheran Synod is currently doing mission work in various places, including Chile, the Czech Republic, Peru, the United States, India, and recently began work in South Korea. In the United States, there are two other large Lutheran bodies that are not members of the CELC — The Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA) and the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (LCMS). A number of other smaller Lutheran church bodies can also be found in the USA. There are also other Lutheran bodies located in many countries throughout the world.

Anyone who is a Christian attends worship services conducted by a pastor. No matter to which denomination they belong, the faithful gather for worship services conducted by an individual who is responsible for the spiritual growth and well-being of the local group. If you ask a member of a Christian congregation what a church is, or who the minister is, that person can readily tell you. In most instances, each local congregation is part of a larger church body, which is sometimes called “church”, “synod”, “conference”, or “denomination.” If you speak to the elected officials of the larger church body or denomination, they are able to do the same. They can either give you a short

verbal explanation or direct you to the official written position of the denomination, which delineates this information in detail.

It is not that the individual members of the ELS do not have personal opinions on the matter. It is not that they cannot tell you what the church is, or who their pastor is; that is not the problem. It is not that the synod's officials, past and present, are not able to explain what the church is, or what the ministry is; they can. The problem is that the synod, as a whole, has been unable to clearly define an official position which succinctly states the doctrine of the Church and the Ministry.

## **2.2 CFW Walther: primarily a dogmatician or an exegetical-student-of-the-Bible?**

Why is it that the descendants of the Norwegian Synod, the ELS, have been unable to state clearly their doctrinal position on the doctrine of the Church and the Ministry? As I read the reports, perused the email correspondence of the proponents of various views and listened to the members of the clergy and the laity of the ELS and their discussions regarding the on-going controversy and issues around the doctrines of the church and the ministry, a common theme arises: the radical differences between a dogmatician's and an exegetical-student-of-the-Bible's format and approach to the development and formulation of the doctrines of the church and the ministry. I have become more and more convinced that underlying the inability of the ELS to arrive at a doctrinal position is the influence of Dr. C.F.W. Walther's approach in his writing on the *Theses on the Church and Ministry (Kirche und Amt)* in the mid 1800s. While Walther followed the dogmatician's approach in his *Theses on the Church and Ministry* he followed the exegetical-student-of-the-Bible's approach in the majority of his other writings. In short, the misunderstanding created was thus due to the approach Walther used in his writing on the *Theses* and not what he actually has been saying in his theses on church and ministry.

What is not widely known is that when Dr. Walther wrote these theses, he was writing expressly and pointedly only about a specific problem that had developed between the Lutherans of the Missouri Synod and the Lutherans of the Buffalo Synod, and in particular the leader of the Buffalo Synod, Johannes Grabau. Walther was not writing to someone who was unfamiliar with Scripture. He was not writing to someone who was unchurched and outside the church. This being the case, he did not have to cover every possible facet of background information; he could go immediately to the heart of the matter – the doctrine of the Church and Ministry. He could deal as one concerned Christian out of brotherly love for another Christian.

Grabau's problematic doctrines were much more akin to and constructed in terms of human reason and thinking than they were to the teachings of Scripture.<sup>3</sup> Grabau stressed the dependence of the church upon the office of a pastor. Only if a pastor was present could the group be considered to be a church and only if a pastor was present could the Means of Grace be

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<sup>3</sup> Carl Lawrenz. "An Evaluation of Walther's Theses on the Church and Ministry," (*Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Volume 79, Number 2, Spring 1982), p. 103.

administered and the Office of the Keys exercised. Those who entered the pastoral office did so by means of “Apostolic Succession” in which the ordinar could trace a spiritual lineage through the ordainer and his ordainer all the way back to one of Jesus’ apostles. Were the teachings of Grabau correct? Was the pastor “all-supreme” within Lutheranism and Christendom? In real terms, the positions taken by Grabau were very similar to the papistic and episcopalian system espoused by the Roman Catholic Church and which the Reformers had strongly opposed. At stake in the struggle between Walther and Grabau was the question of who was adhering to the position held by Lutherans since the mid 1500s. Who had been straying? Who was truly upholding and confessing the teachings of the Lutheran Church — Grabau or Walther? It was for this reason that Dr. Walther placed a heavy emphasis on what had previously been written in the Lutheran confessions, the *Book of Concord*, and Lutheran dogmaticians and theologians of the past. A number of pertinent Bible passages were cited to show that each thesis was scripturally based but the bulk of the supporting testimony for each thesis, however, came from the writings of Lutherans of past centuries.

Walther and Grabau were not involved in developing a confessional statement for the purpose of agreement and which was to be publicly set forth as the official position of the respective synods. Rather Walther’s purpose was to let Grabau recognize and acknowledge his errors and return to the Lutheran position as set forth in the official doctrinal writings. At Altenburg (1841) and thereafter, Walther stressed the Lutheran position. Are churches and pastors mentioned in the Bible? Most certainly. Does Scripture teach the proclamation of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments as the Means of Grace? Yes, indeed. The basic concern in the struggle with Grabau was not whether these were Scriptural matters or not, but how they were implemented within Lutheranism. Walther’s intention was with Christian love to let Grabau, and the Buffalo Synod, recognize and acknowledge that their position was no longer Lutheran. Although Walther was still seeking unity — which could only exist if the two positions were in agreement — through his desire that Grabau and his followers would be real Lutherans again, he wanted them primarily to realize that they had strayed from the truth just as Paul wanted the Christians in Galatia to realize this (Galatians 3:1).

The approach and format C F W Walther employed regarding Scripture in the majority of his writings was generally aligned to an exegetical-student-of-the-Bible approach. Had Walther been writing to someone that had shared his Bible-bound approach or to a non-Lutheran not operating on the basis of constructions hauled from human reason and thought experience like Grabau and his followers, he would have started with Scripture to make sure that both he and the other person had a common point of origin in their theological discussions. Walther would have followed the approach he used in his other writings and would have done what he had done frequently as he wrote articles in *der Luteraner*, the official publication of the then Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (LCMS). He would certainly have used many Bible passages to show that the position that he was setting forth was based on God’s Word and in alignment with the practice that Luther, Lutheran theologians and pastors have followed since the days of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformation. This is what

he did most of the time; but not in Kirche und Amt. He would definitely not align himself with an approach based on rationalistic human opinion or emotional experience.

However, when Dr. Walther wrote his Theses on the Church and the Ministry (Kirche und Amt), Walther used many more citations from the Lutheran confessional writings and from 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Century Lutheran theologians than Bible quotations because he wanted to show Grabau that he (Grabau) had strayed from the position to which Lutherans had always adhered. The reason why Walther did this is stated in the Preface to the First Edition (1852) of his Theses (Kirche und Amt). There the eminent doctor states: “We are rather persuaded that present differences among the Lutherans concerning the doctrines of the church and the ministry and whatever is immediately connected with them stems from the fact that the doctrine set forth in the public confessions of our church and in the private writings of its orthodox teachers has been disregarded and abandoned”<sup>4</sup> (emphasis mine). The reason, therefore, for the abundance of citations from the Lutheran confessions and theologians is due to the fact that Grabau and his followers were seemingly unaware of these theological positions and had departed from them.

Walther states that he specifically uses this manner of writing because he and his followers were “compelled to do this especially since Pastor Grabau of Buffalo, New York, particularly in the second synodical report edited by him, has grievously slandered us before the whole church on account of our doctrines of the church and the ministry and several other teachings closely connected with them as well as our practice based thereon. Hence, the synodical convention held in St. Louis in the fall of 1850 asked this writer (Walther) to compose the present book.”<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, Walther points out that his theses (Kirche und Amt) were never intended to be a complete exposition on the doctrines of the church and the ministry. He says: “It was ... not our intention to present the doctrines of the church and the ministry in their completeness. Whoever desires this will find such a presentation in the larger dogmatic works of the teachers of our church, among others, especially in the master works of men like Chemnitz and Gerhard. It was our purpose to stress only those points concerning which there prevails a difference to embody only so much uncontested material as is demanded by the context....”<sup>6</sup>

Did Walther think that Scripture should be completely or even partially ignored? No. Did he think that Scripture was important and should be consulted first? Yes. Did he feel that the confessional writings and what the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Century Lutheran theologians had written were also worth reading and consulting? Yes. He states: “Since today in our church so many raise their voice to resolve the controversy concerning the doctrines of the church and the ministry, but hardly anyone, so far as we know, has thought of letting the church of our fathers also express its opinion, and since the opinion is becoming ever more general that our church has left the

<sup>4</sup> C.F.W. Walther. Church and Ministry: Witness of the Evangelical Lutheran Church on the question of the church and the ministry. Translation by J.T. Mueller of Die Stimme unserer Kirche in der Frage von Kirche und Amt. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, p. 7.

<sup>5</sup> Walther. p. 9.

<sup>6</sup> Walther. p. 9.

doctrines in question unanswered, we therefore do not consider it superfluous if in this present book (Kirche und Amt), according to the humble talent entrusted to us, we seek to make a contribution so that in the present important controverted question concerning the church and the ministry also our official confessions and the private writings of its teachers may be heard and considered”<sup>7</sup> (emphasis mine). He does not say that one should use only the citations of theologians and that one should base and form opinions and doctrinal statements primarily on what these men stated more than a century earlier. Walther says regarding the matter at hand, i.e. the controversy with Grabau regarding the Lutheran position on the church and the ministry that the Lutheran confessional writings and the citations of the Lutheran dogmaticians should also be “heard and considered.” He uses pertinently the word “also” which indicates that Scripture should primarily be used.

Thus, it never was Walther’s intent to base doctrinal positions solely on what Lutheran dogmaticians of the Reformation era had stated. He wanted their statements to be considered, yes, but only in showing how Lutheran theologians have continued to interpret what the Bible says about doctrine through the centuries. Some years later, Walther as synod president, seminary president, and seminary professor translated and edited Johannes Baier’s Compendium Theologiae Positivae from the Latin. This compendium set forth theological statements made by Lutheran theologians from the past. Baier (1647 - 1695) was a 17<sup>th</sup> Century Lutheran professor of dogmatic theology at the University of Jena (also Halle). Baier first studied and later taught with his father-in-law Johann Musäus (1613 - 1681), another Lutheran theologian at the University of Jena. The Walther-Baier Compendium was used as the systematic theology textbook in several Lutheran seminaries in the USA until about 1950. It has since been replaced by the dogmatic volumes of men like Adolf Hoenecke, Franz Pieper, J.T. Mueller, and W.H.T. Dau, among others.

The approach to and interpretation of Scripture as well as the style Walther followed in the composing of Kirche und Amt was correct and appropriate for the time and the particular situation of the struggle and debate he was involved in with Johannes Grabau and his followers. However, it is not the approach that should be followed and made use of time after time in every instance where doctrinal formulation is at stake within in a particular church body. Yet in attempting to deal with the setting forth of the official doctrinal statement of the ELS regarding the church and the ministry, some members of the ELS have chosen to follow the particular format and approach embodied in Kirche und Amt. A heavy emphasis is placed on confessional writings and citations from dogmaticians. In many instances Scriptures are cited only after they have researched and listed quotations from theologians.

A factor often overlooked concerns the difference in circumstances or “culture gap” between 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Century Germany and late 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> century USA. Frequently, in the case of citations, they have been taken out of context to support limited concepts and notions, i.e. only the local congregation can be the church and only the pastor of a local congregation can be a minister.

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<sup>7</sup> Walther. p. 8f.

The “culture gap”<sup>8</sup> between boundaries of space and time has to be contextually respected when a pastor in the United States presently reads a statement of another pastor made in Germany two, three, or four centuries earlier. What previously happened and existed in a country is not always the same and in many instances not even similar to what happens and exists presently on another continent where the political, social, economic, and religious systems are different. Therefore, not even the interpretation of a Biblical verse of a couple of centuries ago is out of necessity to be equated with a present reading within a church body.

Another factor that exacerbates the problem is language and the “language gap”. Firstly, the majority of original theological works of Lutheran origin since the 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformation as well as many works of twenty centuries of Christianity are no longer in print. Hence, they are not readily available to the average person. Some of these works do exist in the reference section of seminary libraries, but cannot be checked out. Others exist only in historical archives and access is very difficult. Secondly, a goodly number of current ELS pastors do not have a working knowledge of German and Latin. Even if they could access the originals, they unfortunately lack the ability to read and understand what past theologians have written. Translations of some of these works do exist, but even these vary in quality and content depending on when, where, and by whom the translation was made. One has only to consider various versions of the writings of Luther, including modern translations, to understand this. All of these are very different in what they say and often offer a completely different interpretation of the same topic. We refer to this as the “language gap.” The quotations that are being cited are not always faithful to what the author wrote. In translation, there are always “some shades of meaning and some nuances of grammar than can never be fully captured” in the new language.<sup>9</sup> Often there are just not equivalent words in a second language to capture in full everything expressed by the word originally used in the first language. Mention should also be made about how language changes from generation to generation. This, too, is part of the “language gap.” Words used by our parents and grandparents are interpreted totally differently by our children. This becomes intensified through the centuries. Many people today no longer understand the English used in the King James Version of the Bible (1611). The words either are completely unknown to the average person or have changed in meaning. Sometimes it is not a question of bad translation but of understanding or comprehending the language used in the translation. Hence Bible societies have continually translated the original Hebrew and Greek texts into a more understandable modern language. Even the (NIV) New International Version (1978, updated 1983) contains language that modern teenagers do not comprehend. Some of the works of the reformers of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and orthodox dogmatists of the 17<sup>th</sup> century are seldom retranslated, hence quoting a translation of these works often means using words from a different context and generation; words which sometimes have changed in meaning.

Some members of the ELS attempting to be more like Walther by copying the style he used for a particular situation in the past may actually become unlike Walther if they apply this style to all of

<sup>8</sup> David Kuske. Biblical Interpretation: The Only Right Way. Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1995, p.15.

<sup>9</sup> Kuske. Biblical Interpretation: The Only Right Way. p.14.

their doctrinal studies including the current matters involving the doctrine of the Church and the Ministry in the ELS. It is my opinion that attempting to formulate a doctrinal position using presuppositions based on what someone else said many years ago, and sometimes taken out of context, has resulted in misunderstandings and contributed to the current lack of ability to reach a common consensus on the doctrine of the Church and Ministry within the Evangelical Lutheran Synod in the USA.

For decades now, the pastors and lay delegates of the ELS have been wrestling with how to state the doctrine as the official position of the synod. Through the years, pastors and laymen have studied the issues individually and in groups. There have been forums, conferences, and conventions at which the matter has been discussed, debated, and further studied. On various occasions in recent decades, the Doctrinal Committee of the ELS has established criteria for these studies and published statements for discussion to help the pastors and the laymen with the goal that they would be able to gather and reach a position that would be acceptable to the entire synod. Many of those who began the study now have gone to their eternal home. Others continue to study and debate. One side continues to base its position on Bible passages, thus is more inclined to be in the exegetical-student-of-the-Bible mode, while the other side continues to base its position on quotations of dogmatic theologians from past centuries, thus being inclined to work primarily with the dogmatician's conceptual tools. The result: the positions continue to be reiterated echoing the thoughts of past generations and the two sides remain divided.

It is my hypothesis that if everyone in the Evangelical Lutheran Synod based their study of the doctrine of the Church and the Ministry on an exegetical-student-of-the-Bible approach to God's Word, and only in the second place use the Lutheran confessions and in the third place use the writings of Lutheran theologians from previous generations for elaboration, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod would not have had problems clearly setting forth its position on these doctrines.

In clearly defining the doctrines of the Church and the Ministry in a manner that is both faithful to the Scriptures and in accordance with the Lutheran confessional writings one must mine the key Scriptural passages dealing with the Church and the Ministry; then one must examine the Hebrew and Greek words used in the original text to describe the Church and the Ministry; and only after this should one look to sources that are not the Word of God but that faithfully expound what the Bible says, for example the Lutheran Confessions, Dr. Walther's theses on the Church and the Ministry, the writings of Luther, etc. In preparing this thesis, I have followed this route. In this thesis, I will set forth the doctrine of the Church and Ministry that I believe the ELS should adopt.

### ***2.3 The historical background of the problem***

Norwegian emigration to the United States of any sizeable degree began in 1825. A second wave of immigration occurred in 1836-1837. A third large group arrived in 1840. Most of these people



came from Stavanger and Bergen in Norway. They arrived in New York and made their way west to what is now northern Illinois and southern Wisconsin.<sup>10</sup>

When the Norwegian immigrants left Norway, they left behind their properties, their friends, and their families. Some men even left behind their fiancées, promising to send for their brides-to-be once they had arrived and established themselves in the new world. What they did not leave behind was a concept of church and ministry that had been affected by the false teaching of the Grundtvig error and the influence of Hans Nielsen Hauge (1771-1824).

Nikolaj Frederik Severin Grundtvig (1783-1872) was a Danish theologian who had been influenced by Rationalism and especially by Friedrich Ernst Daniel Schleiermacher (1768-1834).

Schleiermacher taught that to understand what the Scriptures say, one must distinguish between the process of grammatical understanding or the exactness of understanding (*subtilitas intelligendi*) and the “psychological” or “technical interpretation.” The second part was the same as the exactness of explication (*subtilitas explicandi*) that Johann Ernesti had developed.

Schleiermacher held that the grammatical interpretation only focused on the objective side of interpretation and that the technical interpretation dealt with the subjective side. Schleiermacher included an additional step, that of personally assimilating the subject by seeking to reconstruct the mental process of the author. In opposition to Ernesti, Schleiermacher held “that every word has a general sphere of meaning which is not to be found in itself but is to be worked out from the total given value of language brought to the text and the heritage common to the author and his reader.”<sup>11</sup> Personal experience was the most important thing in religion for Schleiermacher. It became the foundation of one’s faith. By placing the emphasis on one’s personal experience, it became more important than Scripture. By basing what a person believes on what a person has experienced rather than on the Word of God, he actually elevated humankind to a higher position than God. He made humans the ultimate authority in religion. Grundtvig took this and applied it to his teaching.

Rationalism was a theological approach that stemmed from the age of Enlightenment. It is a “concept which held that the religion of revelation includes and by degrees develops into a religion based entirely on human reason.”<sup>12</sup> The type of rationalism that was common in Germany in the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, about 1800–33, reduced religion to a system of morals based at the most on two or three religious principles. Two types of rationalism can be found throughout history. One is the philosophical. The other is the religious. We find a type of rationalism already in the philosophical systems of the ancient Greeks. Such rationalism is usually traced to the school of Elea, the Pythagoreans, a school named after Pythagoras from which the well known Pythagorean Theorem sprung, and Plato. Philosophical “systems that are called rationalistic include those

<sup>10</sup> George M. Orvick. Our Great Heritage. (Mankato, Minnesota: The Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1968), p. 1.

<sup>11</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. Toward an Exegetical Theology. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1981), pp. 28-29.

<sup>12</sup> B. Hagglund. History of Theology. Translation of *Teologins Historia*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1968, electronic edition 1999.

which are deductive; which hold that reason, apart from sense, is the highest criterion; those which apply mathematical methods; and those which make coherence a criterion of truth. Contrasted with empiricism, rationalism has been described as being abstract, supernatural, absolute, certain, peaceful, authoritative, eternal, religious.”<sup>13</sup> Philosophy and theology have not always conceptualized the term “rationalism” in exactly the same way. When the term “rationalistic” is applied to scholasticism it implies the application of dialectics to theology. When it is applied to the theology of Ulrich Zwingli and John Calvin, it often means to say that “they interpreted revelation in such a way as to render it harmonious with deductive reasoning, logic, and/or phenomena.”<sup>14</sup>

Like Schleiermacher, Gruntvig set aside the Scriptures. Gruntvig was also influenced by Scandinavian folklore and what he learned from his study of old Norse. In 1825, he set forth his position in a work entitled *Kirkens Genmæle* (The Church's Reply). “In his earlier years, he had been of the opinion that the Church’s whole foundation was the Bible, but later in life he arrived at the view that it was the Church itself, and its tradition, especially as expressed in the apostolic confession at baptism, that was the basis of Christian faith. Christ was not to be sought in the past or in a book, but in the living community, where people become Christians by baptism, and where their life as Christians is nourished and sustained by the Communion. It is in the congregation, at baptism and communion, that Christ speaks his living word to the community, the word that creates what it names. The congregation had always existed even before the Bible was written.”<sup>15</sup> Gruntvig taught what he considered to be the “living word” which he found in the Apostles’ Creed and the baptismal formula. Nothing more was necessary as far as Grundtvig was concerned.

Leading the opposition to Gruntvig was H. N. Clausen, a professor of theology and the author of a book on the doctrines of Catholicism and Protestantism. Clausen (1793–1877) was a product of Rationalism. “For him, the Bible was the undoubted foundation of Christianity, and the truth was to be deduced from it with the aid of intellectual reason, whereby, as time passed, one would eventually be able to arrive at an increasingly deeper understanding. It was a view that ran completely counter to Gruntvig’s idea of the Christian faith as something transmitted in the historical congregation.”<sup>16</sup> It had been Gruntvig’s intention to debate Clausen, but instead he made a violent attack against the person of Clausen, asserting that the professor was the one at the top of the list when it came to those who were the enemies of the Christian Church and the despisers of God’s Word. Clausen sued for libel. Gruntvig was fined and censured. But history has remembered Gruntvig’s writings and not Clausen’s.<sup>17</sup>

Hauge was a layperson, not a pastor. His theology was influenced by his reading of the works of “Luther, J. Arnd, E. Pontoppidan, H. Müller, H. A. Brorson,” and others. As such, he considered himself to be among the orthodox Lutherans, but his orthodoxy was challenged by those in the orthodox camp. He confused the teachings of the law and the gospel, he commingled the

<sup>13</sup> E. L. Lueker, Ed. *Christian Encyclopedia*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, electronic edition, 2000.

<sup>14</sup> Lueker, Ed. *Christian Encyclopedia*.

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.ambwashington.um.dk/en/menu/InformationaboutDenmark/Culture/Literature/N.F.S.Grundtvig.htm>.

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.ambwashington.um.dk/en/menu/InformationaboutDenmark/Culture/Literature/N.F.S.Grundtvig.htm>.

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.ambwashington.um.dk/en/menu/InformationaboutDenmark/Culture/Literature/N.F.S.Grundtvig.htm>.

doctrines of justification and sanctification, and he stressed personal piety as opposed to the all-atoning merits of Jesus Christ.<sup>18</sup> He was also a synergist. A synergist, in the theological sense, is a person that believes two or more forces work together to accomplish something. In the case of Hauge, the forces worked together to accomplish our salvation. He believed that people contributed to their own salvation – that is, God contributed a portion, but it was up to the individual person to contribute the remainder. Hauge interpreted a 1796 religious experience as a call to evangelize his fellow countrymen. In doing so, he emphasized conversion and sanctification. His activities were regarded as illegal and he often was arrested and imprisoned for itinerant lay preaching.<sup>19</sup> At the time, religious assembly outside the auspices of the state church was illegal. Consequently he was imprisoned for much of the period between 1804 and 1814. One has to admire his evangelistic zeal which impelled him to walk throughout most of Norway, from Tromsø in the north to Denmark in the south.<sup>20</sup>

Hauge, whose theology arises from Lutheran doctrine, reflects an influence from pietism. He departed from his theological roots in seeking to establish the notion of a universal religion in Norway. Today, the state church in Norway (which classifies itself as Lutheran) credits Hauge for making religion a personal obligation. Hauge had a profound influence on both the secular and the religious history in Norway. His defiance toward the religious and secular establishment gave voice to ordinary people, paving much of the way for the social democratic tradition in Norway and indeed the entire Nordic region. He can be considered to be a social activist who tried to raise the standard of living of his countrymen.<sup>21</sup>

Pietism was an influential religious reform movement that began within German Lutheranism during the 17th century. One of its leading proponents was Philip Jacob Spener (1635–1705). It considered Orthodoxy to be “spiritually unproductive.” Among other influential German Pietists were A. H. Francke, G. Arnold, J. J. Rambach, J. J. Schütz, E. G. Woltersdorf, and L. v. Zinzendorf. German Pietism came into Norway from Halle. Pietism began in Norway as a fanatical and separatistic sectarianism hostile to the church and the ministry. It was “spiteful toward the sacraments, and extremely legalistic.”<sup>22</sup> Pietism emphasized the faith and emotion of the individual over and against what was being taught in the organized church. It “stressed the primacy of feeling and experience and considered the study of the Scriptures more important than the theological formulations and speculations of Lutheran orthodoxy. As a result, the Pietists turned to biblical exegesis as a more edifying discipline.”<sup>23</sup>

Hauge taught and preached in many forms of religious gatherings, even taking it upon himself to conduct worship services. As a result, some began to think of the clergy as redundant. When this

<sup>18</sup> S.C. Ylvisaker, Grace for Grace, Mankato, Minnesota: The Lutheran Synod Book Company, pp. 6-7.

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.lcms.org/ca/www/cyclopedia/02/display.asp?t1=H&t2=a>.

<sup>20</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hans\\_Nielsen\\_Hauge](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hans_Nielsen_Hauge).

<sup>21</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hans\\_Nielsen\\_Hauge](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hans_Nielsen_Hauge).

<sup>22</sup> Lueker, Christian Cyclopedia.

<sup>23</sup> W. A. Elwell & B. J. Beitzel. Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1988), p. 340.

idea of itinerant lay preaching came to the USA, a young Norwegian Synod found it necessary to deal with the matter. In 1862 the Norwegian Synod adopted seven theses on lay preaching. The theses addressed a specific situation in the history of the synod where individuals were despising the regular call (*rite vocatus*) into the public ministry as set forth and agreed upon in Article XIV of the Augsburg Confession. Such lay preaching circumvents Article XIV of the Augsburg Confession and categorically is to be rejected. Yet the seven theses on lay preaching do not forbid occasional lay-led services arising from necessity and conducted under the supervision of an ordained pastor. The type of lay preaching promoted by men like Hauge and Eielsen is not an issue for the ELS today; yet it did influence the way members of the synod think about the ministry.

After their arrival in the United States, the Norwegian immigrants as Christians wanted to worship the LORD. There was a problem, however, in that there were not enough pastors living in America who could speak Norwegian fluently and thereby meet the spiritual needs of these new immigrants. In Norway, it was the custom to have lay preachers conduct services. In and of itself, of course, there is nothing wrong with this practice. However, the manner in which it proceeded created problems. I will mention those shortly (Section 2.4).

Meanwhile, in 1839, a group of Germans in Saxony, which included Carl F.W. Walther and his brother Otto, set sail for the United States. Martin Stephan, an influential pastor from Dresden, led this group. Upon arriving in America, this group of Saxon immigrants moved west to Prairie County, Missouri. They would form the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (also known as the LCMS and the Missouri Synod). This group eventually would be led by C.F.W. Walther.

About the same time that the Saxons emigrated, a group of Prussians and Silesians also emigrated to America. These were led by Johannes A.A. Grabau, Heinrich von Rohr, and L.F.E. Krause. These immigrants settled in the states of New York and Wisconsin and formed the Buffalo Synod.

## **2.4 The development of the problem**

Among the Norwegian immigrants in the USA, there were no organized Lutheran congregations prior to 1843.<sup>24</sup> The only opportunity for Norwegian Lutherans to worship was by means of family devotions held within the individual homes and at occasional scattered services that were conducted by various lay preachers.

Among the lay preachers who conducted services and preached sermons to the spiritually hungry souls was Elling Eielsen. "He was an uncompromising opponent of the pastors of the State Church of Norway and vigorously denounced the educated clergy."<sup>25</sup> Like Hauge, Eielsen traveled about from community to community conducting services and preaching to whomever would welcome him into their midst. Other lay preachers did the same. These lay preachers,

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<sup>24</sup> Orvick, [Our Great Heritage](#). p. 3.

<sup>25</sup> Orvick, [Our Great Heritage](#). p. 3.

because of a lack of preparation, had not acquired a clear concept of the truth of the Gospel. They could not rightly divide the law and the gospel. They became confused about doctrines as they were exposed to the members of other church bodies in their new country. They did not know how to search the Scriptures in order to compare what they were hearing with what the Word of God actually says (Acts 17:11). Professor Thomas Nass reports that Ulrik Koren, one of the fathers of the Norwegian synod, firmly believed that God could work through lay preachers. However, when Koren analyzed the preaching of Hauge and Eielsen, he became aware of major problems especially concerning the proper distinction of the law and the gospel, and the doctrine of justification.<sup>26</sup>

The law was given by God to instruct the people as to what they must do, how they must live, what they should not do. People are to obey the law completely, not deviating from it in the slightest for any reason. "Be holy, because I am holy," (Leviticus 19:2, NIV) God told the people in the Old Testament. He reiterated this message through the Apostle Peter in the New Testament (1 Peter 1:16). Anytime someone breaks the law, he sins (1 John 3:4). The law shows people that they have sinned against God. It shows people that they are sinners. They have failed to fulfill the requirements of God. They are guilty before God and as such deserve to be punished by God. As a result of their guilt, they will die and receive the eternal condemnation which they rightfully deserve. All people have sinned, without exception, and consequently have fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). As a consequence of sin, all people, without exception, die (Romans 6:23). The law leaves every person condemned and doomed to an eternity in hell. God is just and holy. His law must be fulfilled perfectly.

By nature, the plight of humankind is horrible. No person can do anything to change the circumstances. No one can do anything to save themselves. The only way for anyone to be saved is through a Substitute. Someone else would have to perfectly obey the law of God in the stead of humankind. Someone else would have to endure the condemnation, bear the consequences, and suffer the death and eternal damnation in their place. Mankind would need a Savior.

That is the Good News that God graciously gives people in the gospel. In the gospel, we are told about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The gospel declares what God, in His unlimited love and mercy, has done for us and all humankind. The gospel tells people what Christ did for everyone when He died as our Substitute on the cross of Calvary. The gospel message assures people that all their sins, no matter how horrendous, no matter how many, have been forgiven and washed away with the blood of Christ.

The purpose of the law is to molest and disturb us, to trouble our consciences. The law shows people their sin and shows them that they must change and amend their sinful lives. The purpose of the law is not to comfort and console, that is the purpose of the gospel. The law convicts a person of their sin. As a result, the person confesses and repents of their sin. The law, however,

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<sup>26</sup> Thomas P. Nass. "The Pastoral Ministry As a Distinct form of Public Ministry". (Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly. Vol. 91: Num. 4. Fall 1994), p. 260.

does not motivate nor does it empower people to do this. Only the gospel can and does do this. The gospel shows people that God has forgiven them. If the two — the law and the gospel — are not properly used, blatant sinners can be assured that there is nothing wrong with their sinful ways. They can conclude that it is all right, even God-pleasing, for them to continue doing the wrong, the sin, that they have been doing. Imagine a murderer, a child molester, a drunk, a prostitute getting the impression that God is pleased with their lifestyles; when, in actuality, He opposes it. A person that confounds the law and the Gospel creates a false impression that has damnable and eternal consequences. The doctrine of justification deals with how a person is brought to faith, is redeemed, is restored and is forgiven through God's grace and mercy because of Christ's death. A person is justified, that is, declared "not guilty" solely by the grace of God as a result of faith in the atoning work of Christ Jesus. After a person has been brought to faith in Jesus Christ, that person can begin living a life of faith, or a sanctified life. The doctrine of sanctification deals with how a Christian lives a life of faith in joyful response for everything that God has done. It is the life of faith that every Christian lives.

When these improperly trained lay preachers could not properly present these basic concepts, they were actually doing more harm than good. They were not feeding the Lord's flock as He would have us feed them (John 21:15,16,17; Acts 20:28-30). What they were doing to the body of believers became a matter of concern among members of the Norwegian Synod clergy. Many of the laymembers, on the other hand, knew even less than the lay preachers and thus could not distinguish truth from error. They were truly sheep without a shepherd (Matthew 9:36). Some of the laity even preferred to be served by lay preachers instead of by a member of the clergy, even to the point of despising those who were pastors. One of the early theologians of the Norwegian Synod, S. Ylvisaker said, "The preaching by lay members came to be regarded more and more as a sign of true spirituality, while the means of grace [the gospel in Word and the Sacrament of Baptism and the Sacrament of the Altar] and the divine office of the ministry were neglected and even despised."<sup>27</sup>

In part, this was due to a gross misunderstanding of the doctrine of the universal priesthood of all believers. In a paper delivered to the Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church (which would later adopt the name: the Evangelical Lutheran Synod) assembled in convention in 1949, the late Reverend S.A. Dorr stated:

When, by the grace of God, Luther and others had reemphasized the fact of the royal priesthood of all believers, there were those who misapplied this truth. They drew the false conclusion that, since each believer is his own priest over toward God, there, therefore, was no longer any need for public teachers of the Word. They, therefore, despised the work of the duly called public teachers of the Word. Now, we said, this was a false deduction. For, on the one hand, it was based on a false conception of the nature of the public ministry. For the work of the public teacher of the Word of God is not at all the work of a priest in the Roman Catholic sense of the word. E.g., the pastor of a congregation is

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<sup>27</sup> Ylvisaker, p. 8.

not the go-between between God and his congregation. He is there, rather, to show them that Jesus is the go-between, that through faith in Him (Jesus) they have an open pathway to God. And, on the other hand, the fact is that the Lord Himself has established the public ministry of the Word.... Pastors and other teachers of the Word are God's own gift to the Christians. To despise the work of such teachers is to despise the Lord Who gave them.<sup>28</sup>

After the arrival of ordained pastors, these lay preachers did not want to yield their role in the congregations where they were preaching. These lay preachers assumed a hostile attitude toward the ordained pastors when these attempted to bring about order within the church. The lay preachers wished to continue their activity throughout the settlements even after regularly organized congregations had been established. As a result, bitter conflicts arose in many localities. When these groups from the various localities began to unite as Christians who spoke Norwegian, they did not have a clear understanding of what is the ministry and what is the church.

Most of the work of gathering the various clusters of Norwegian Lutherans into an established group was done by J.W.C. Dietrichson.<sup>29</sup> Pastor Dietrichson together with Pastors C.L. Clausen, H.A. Stub, and A.C. Preus held periodic organizational meetings between 1848 and 1850. These meetings led to conventions attended by the pastors and lay representatives of the various congregations. Finally, in October of 1853, all of the pastors and all of the lay representatives were able to reach an agreement to form a synod. The Norwegian Lutheran Church of America was formally organized on October 5, 1853.<sup>30</sup>

After they had been formally united and organized, the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America began looking at the other Lutheran church bodies in the United States to determine if they had anything more in common than merely the name "Lutheran." At one point, there were more than 40 separate and distinct Lutheran church bodies within the USA. It became obvious that some of the church bodies that bore the name "Lutheran" were very lax in doctrine and practice. Some of these church bodies were not even truly Lutheran. The Norwegians received invitations to visit and speak with the faculties of the seminaries of some of the other Lutheran synods. At its convention in 1855, the Norwegians agreed to send Pastors J.A. Ottesen and N. Brandt as its representatives to visit the theological seminaries in St. Louis, Missouri, in Columbus, Ohio, and in Buffalo, New York. The purpose of these meetings was to inform the Norwegians of the positions taken on the Lutheran Confessions by these church bodies. A second purpose was to investigate the possibility of establishing a relationship with one of these seminaries to formally train men to be pastors who would serve the Norwegians in their congregations.<sup>31</sup> It was at these meetings that the representatives of the Norwegian Synod met M. Loy of the Ohio Synod, J. Grabau of the Buffalo Synod, and C.F.W. Walther of the Missouri Synod. After these meetings, the Norwegians formed

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<sup>28</sup> S.A. Dorr, "The Royal Priesthood of Believers". (Paper delivered to the Thirty-Second Annual Convention of the Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church held at Bethany College, Mankato, Minnesota, August 12-17, 1949), pages 24-25.

<sup>29</sup> Orvick, *Our Great Heritage*. p. 6.

<sup>30</sup> Orvick, *Our Great Heritage*. pp. 5-11.

<sup>31</sup> Orvick, *Our Great Heritage*. p. 21.

close ties with the Missouri Synod. The relationship between these two synods — the Norwegians and the Missouri Synod — was of particular benefit almost immediately during the Election Controversy.

## **2.5 The Missouri Approach Continues to Influence the ELS**

After the death of Dr. Walther (1877), there were those who desired to carry on in his footsteps. In doing so, learned men looked especially at the way in which Walther had written his *Kirche und Amt*. That pattern of citing a few Scripture passages, and then the placing of a heavy emphasis on the Lutheran confessions and the writings of the Lutheran dogmatists of previous centuries is one that has been followed by the Missouri Synod dogmatists ever since. Among these was Francis Pieper, who wrote a four-volume dogmatics that is still widely used today. Others include J.T. Mueller and W.H.T. Dau.

The ELS continued its close relationship with the LCMS until 1955, and even though it has distanced itself from the LCMS since that time, the influence of the LCMS on some within the ELS continues. A group known as the Teigenites gives priority to and carefully searches the writings of their Lutheran forefathers. The Teigenites comprise one side in the current struggle within the ELS to develop an official public statement on the doctrine of the church and the ministry — they are inclined to turn first to the writings of Luther and the Lutheran theologians of the past. In the current debates, they place a heavy emphasis on the quotations of these theologians.

On the other side, there are those that have not been influenced by this approach that is so common among Missouri Synod pastors. This other group begins with Scripture. They carefully examine what the Word of God has to say. Only after this, do they cite the *Book of Concord*,<sup>32</sup> which contains the confessional writings of the Lutheran Church, or the writings of Luther, or of one of the Lutheran dogmatists. Such citations are used to show that the Lutheran Church has continued to hold the same belief for centuries. The citations are not used by this second group to develop doctrinal statements.

## **2.6 The Cincinnati Case**

Early in the Twentieth Century, the Lutheran Church in the USA began to focus its attention on the relationship between the congregation and the synod. The matter was intensified by a situation that arose within a Missouri Synod congregation in Cincinnati, Ohio. It led to discussions within the Missouri Synod from 1904 through 1911, and had an effect on all of the member bodies of the Synodical Conference,<sup>33</sup> including the ELS, which was one of the members (of the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of the USA).

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<sup>32</sup> The *Book of Concord* exists as a separate volume in English. It also exists in the two original languages German and Latin, as well as an English translation in the *Concordia Triglotta*.

<sup>33</sup> The Synodical Conference was a fellowship of some of the large Lutheran Synods in the United States including the Missouri Synod, the Wisconsin Synod, the ELS, and the Slovak Synod. Other synods also participated from time to



The Cincinnati Case involved interaction between pastors, congregations, and synods. What occurred is the following: Two Missouri Synod pastors excommunicated a member of a Missouri Synod congregation in a case of church discipline. The excommunicated person felt that he had been treated unjustly and appealed his excommunication to the proper synodical district. The synodical district examined the case and determined that the excommunication was unjustified. It instructed the local congregation to reinstate the member. The congregation, however, refused to withdraw its resolution to excommunicate the person. This congregation, consequently, was suspended from membership in the Missouri Synod. The Wisconsin Synod was affected by this case inasmuch as the suspended congregation applied for membership in the Wisconsin Synod. The Wisconsin Synod rejected this congregation's application for membership, because the Missouri Synod had not yet finished dealing with the matter. But as the case became known in Wisconsin, a storm arose. Advocates and opponents of the synod's action in the case developed opposing views. As a result, the question of the relationship between congregation and synod was fully discussed. In doing that, the question came up whether only the local congregation can claim to be "church" (ecclesia) or if this is true also of a synod.<sup>34</sup>

The good that resulted from this situation is that it gave rise to a study of the doctrine of the Church within the Lutheran synodical bodies in the USA. The prime question in the study was "Can church discipline be carried out on a level other than the local congregation?" This was expanded to the following: "What is the relationship of the congregation to the synod?" No one within Lutheranism in the USA ever contended the fact that the local congregation is autonomous and that a group of congregations, be it a district, synod, or any other grouping, could not countermand a decision made within the local congregation, as Dr. Walther had emphasized.<sup>35</sup> Closely tied to this was the issue of whether or not synodical officials could, in fact, exercise church discipline among the member congregations of the synod. Therein enters the connection with the doctrine of the church and the doctrine of the ministry. Are synodical officials when acting in their official capacity actually participating in the ministry? There are those who claim that only parish pastors are in the ministry. Secondly, do these officials together with the group of believers that they represent constitute the church and thus have the power and the authority not only to suspend from fellowship, but also to excommunicate? There are those who claim that only the local congregation is the church, and therefore only the local congregation is able to do this.

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time. The Synodical Conference functioned from 1872 until 1967, although not all of the member synods participated during this entire time span.

<sup>34</sup> Gottfried Herrmann, "The Theological Development of the WELS with Particular Reference to Its Doctrine of Church and Ministry", Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly. Volume 96, Number 2, Spring 1999, p. 110.

<sup>35</sup> A. Pieper. "Luther's Doctrine of the Church and Ministry" Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly. Volume 60. Number 2. April 1963. p. 82.

## **2.7 Male Teachers and the Public Ministry**

As the number of male teachers increased in the schools operated by the Lutheran congregations, questions arose regarding the call and the status of these teachers as early as the 1870's.<sup>36</sup> What was the relationship of the teachers serving in the congregation's school to the pastor of the congregation? Were these teachers actually ministers of the Gospel? Was there a hierarchy in which the pastor was on one level and a male teacher on a different level? How one answers these and related questions influences the position taken on the doctrine of the church and ministry.

## **2.8 Struggles within the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference**

The Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference (the Synodical Conference) was organized in Milwaukee, Wisconsin in July of 1872, after two preliminary meetings. Its membership was comprised of the Missouri, Ohio, Wisconsin, Illinois, Minnesota, and Norwegian synods. (The Illinois synod later became part of the Missouri synod and the Minnesota synod later became part of the Wisconsin synod). Today the Missouri Synod is more commonly known as the LCMS and the Wisconsin Synod as the WELS. The purpose of the Synodical Conference was not to interfere in the internal affairs of the constituent synods, but "to give an outward expression of their unity in spirit, to strengthen one another mutually in faith and confession, to promote unity of doctrine and practice, and to take up common activities in fields not already covered by individual synods." In order to exercise brotherly admonition, in case any error should arise, the printed proceedings of each synod are always reviewed by committees consisting of members of the sister synods. These committees regularly report their findings to the general body, so that disciplinary measures may be taken, if it should become necessary.<sup>37</sup>

During the 1880's there was a controversy over the doctrine of election. The controversy involved Professor F.A. Schmidt of the Norwegian Synod and Professor C.F.W. Walther of the Missouri Synod. The controversy affected the entire Synodical Conference. In 1882, the Wisconsin Synod examined the position set forth by Dr. Walther and the Missouri Synod and determined that it was biblically correct. The doctrine of *intuitu fidei* (election in view of future faith) and its ensuing synergism, which had been presented by Professor Schmidt, was thoroughly and completely rejected by both the Missouri and Wisconsin synods.<sup>38</sup> Members of the Ohio Synod could not agree and consequently it withdrew its membership from the Synodical Conference. The Norwegian Synod withdrew from the Synodical Conference in 1883, recognizing that it had a problem within its midst. The Norwegian Synod wanted to deal with this doctrinal problem before resuming membership in the organization.

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<sup>36</sup> Herrmann, p. 109.

<sup>37</sup> Orvick, Our Great Heritage, p. 22.

<sup>38</sup> Herrmann, p. 106.

Professor Schmidt, as a seminary professor, was able to influence and confuse many of the men who were studying to become pastors within the Norwegian Synod. A group known as the “Anti-Missourian Brotherhood” visited congregations and pastors within the Norwegian Synod, thereby creating confusion and divisions. “During 1887 and 1888 about one-third of the pastors and congregations of our [Norwegian] Synod left to form a new body.”<sup>39</sup>

The election controversy continued to influence members of the Norwegian synod for the next decades. There were divisions between those who held to the scriptural position, as set forth by Dr. Walther, and those who continued to adhere to the doctrinal errors of Professor Schmidt. Those who sided with Professor Schmidt agreed to a settlement in 1912. In 1917, they agreed to merge with the Hauge Synod. This action led to another division within the Norwegian Synod. The larger group formed a new body known as the American Lutheran Church, which continues to this day as a part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). The smaller remnant of the Norwegian Synod reorganized in 1918 as the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS), which currently is the fourth largest Lutheran synod in the USA. The ELS joined the Synodical Conference in 1918. The Synodical Conference was affected by the role of teachers in the ministry in the 1930’s. As the millennia concluded and the Twenty-First Century began, the ELS was still dealing with the doctrine of the Church and the Ministry. Heated debates were still occurring over questions such as: Is the local congregation the only divinely recognized church? What is the ministry? Who can serve in the ministry? Is ministry limited solely to the work of the pastor of a local congregation? Is the public ministry limited only to the pastoral office, with all other offices — including that of missionary, seminary professor, etc. — being merely assistants to the pastor of a local congregation?

## **2.9 The Break-up of the Synodical Conference over Doctrinal Issues**

Members of the Synodical Conference became concerned about the influence that the Ohio Synod was having on the LCMS as it continued to become more and more liberal and less and less scripturally based. Following World War II, the Synodical Conference embarked on a series of doctrinal discussions involving, among others, the matter of the military chaplaincy and church fellowship. The matter over the chaplaincy had a direct bearing on the doctrine of the ministry. The doctrine of church fellowship had a direct bearing on what constitutes the church. After the discussions on church fellowship began, the ELS suspended fellowship with the LCMS. It was 1955. For almost a decade, the ELS continued working within the Synodical Conference trying to resolve the doctrinal differences and restore unity. These efforts, however, proved fruitless and the ELS withdrew from the Synodical Conference in 1963. The WELS also suspended fellowship with the LCMS and withdrew from the Synodical Conference in 1963. Currently the ELS and the WELS are in doctrinal fellowship and members of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC). The CELC consists of twenty Lutheran church bodies worldwide, all of which are in doctrinal fellowship and co-exist as sister synods.

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<sup>39</sup> Orvick, Our Great Heritage, p. 26.

## **2.10 The 1963 Conclave in Mankato**

In 1963, as the ELS and the WELS were withdrawing from the Synodical Conference, a conclave was held in Mankato, Minnesota, the home of the ELS. Present were representatives from the Lutheran churches in Australia, Finland, France, the UK, The Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany (SELK), as well as the ELS and the WELS. An observer from the LCMS was also present. Absent were representatives of Lutheran church bodies in Brazil, Germany, and the Republic of South Africa. The meetings took place between August 19 and 23 and dealt with the doctrine of the Church and the Ministry as well as the doctrine of church fellowship. Those attending presented the positions of their respective church bodies on these matters. The various positions were discussed. However, no agreement was reached.

## **2.11 Continued Debates within the ELS**

The pastors and lay delegates of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod continued to wrestle with the doctrines of the Church and its Ministry for the remaining decades of the twentieth century. A compromise was reached on the doctrine of the church in 1980, following many years of debate and negotiation. To this day, there are still some within the ELS who do not adhere to the compromised position. We shall talk more about the adopted statement on the doctrine of the Church in chapter 5.

As it moved into the Twenty-First Century and prepared to celebrate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the formation of the Norwegian Synod in the USA, the ELS at its annual convention in 2002 was not to reach agreement on its statement on the doctrine of the Ministry. The delegates at the convention did not unanimously accept a series of Bible based statements that had been developed by the synod's doctrinal committee to publicly set forth a positional statement on the doctrine. Following days of heated floor discussions, the debate was terminated, and the newly elected president, John Molstad, Jr., appointed a committee of six men to review the matter and reach a compromise that could be presented to the synod at some future date.

At the 2003 convention, the committee could report that they had met and discussed the issues, but nothing more. Throughout 2004, the committee continued to meet.

After more than two years of meetings to hammer out the wording, the committee formulated a compromise statement. The voting members of the synod spent a considerable amount of time in discussions regarding this compromise statement. At the synod's annual convention in June 2005, this compromise statement on the doctrine of the Ministry was thoroughly discussed and narrowly approved. Although a formal position was approved, it was not universally accepted by the entire synod. One side it felt that it could have said more, but was willing to accept the compromise statement. The other side regarded the compromise as too broad; insisted that it should be much narrower; and turned the convention into a shouting match. The approval of the compromise statement on the Ministry, like the compromise statement on the Church twenty-five years earlier,

really did not resolve the issue. Those who follow the Waltherian format continue to hold firm to their view. The debates continue via emails and around the coffee pot at conferences. We shall talk more about the adopted statement on the doctrine of the Ministry in chapter 6.

Later in this paper we will be looking at how a doctrinal position can be developed without following the Waltherian format. In the next chapter we take a look at Dr. C.F.W. Walther and the format that he used in Kirche und Amt. It is the same format used by LCMS trained clergy to this day.

## Chapter

### 3 An evaluation of Walther's Theses on Church and Ministry

In this chapter, we shall look at the theses that C.F.W. Walther wrote about the Church and the Ministry. There is not really an issue in what he says. Orthodox Lutheran pastors around the world continue to agree with what Dr. Walther wrote more than 150 years ago. The problem is with the manner in which the theses are explained in the book Kirche und Amt, and therein lies the source of the two positions on these two doctrines within the ELS today.

The thesis of this paper is that the current struggle within the ELS to define the doctrines of the church and its ministry is due to a large number of ELS members following the format used by Dr. Walther in Kirche und Amt, namely basing doctrine on the writings of Luther, the Confessions, and the Lutheran dogmaticians rather than the Bible.

I believe that a contributing factor in the inability of the ELS to define the doctrine of the Church and Ministry is a misunderstanding of why Dr. Walther wrote his theses (Kirche und Amt) in the manner in which he did. In this chapter, I shall examine these theses of Dr. Walther.

In this chapter, we will seek to answer the question whether the Waltherian approach to developing doctrine produces the same doctrinal understanding and position as does the approach that attains doctrine directly from Scripture. In doing this, we shall look at Walther as a man, as a theologian, and as a dogmatics professor. We will see how his theology developed. We will briefly look at the influences and struggles that led him to use the specific format and approach to developing doctrine. The doctrine of the church and its ministry dominated the writings and theological presentations of Walther throughout much of his life and career. We will look first at the origin of his position and then at his well-known theses on the church and the ministry. The tone for the chapter is set in section 3.1. In this section we comment on the position taken by Johannes Grabau and the Buffalo Synod and Walther's reaction. We become acquainted with the influence of Pastor Martin Stephan in section 3.2. The thoughts of Walther as a dogmatics professor drawn heavily from the writings of one of his students, August Pieper, are presented in section 3.3. The necessity for Walther to write his theses on the church and its ministry arose from two situations: the teaching of Grabau and the Buffalo Synod on the one hand and the situation that led to and was resolved in the Altenburg debate on the other. We shall present information on the Altenburg Debate in section 3.4. In section 3.5 we shall present Walther's theses on the church and ministry with comments on the theses and Grabau's position. Finally in 3.6 we shall see that the use of Walther's format continues to foment debate within the ELS.

### 3.1 Introduction

The purpose of these theses, and this is very important, was not to present the doctrine of the church and its ministry to the general public – i.e., those outside of the Lutheran Church – but to combat the erroneous teachings of another Lutheran pastor, Johannes Grabau. It was strictly an internal matter within the Lutheran Church in the USA or its day. In the August 1852 issue of *der Lutheraner*, Walther wrote about the intense struggle that was taking place between Walther and Grabau, between the Missouri Synod and the Buffalo synod.

Walther commented that they were engaged in a fierce and difficult theological battle. To expose his opponent's doctrinal errors was not a difficult task. Walther stated that this could be done with the clear teachings of the Bible, and statements from the Lutheran Confessions written by Luther and orthodox Lutheran teachers. Even though he regarded the solution as being an easy one, Walther felt that the battle was difficult. He listed four noteworthy reasons for feeling this way. They existed in the controversy between Walther and Grabau. These reasons have also existed in other doctrinal controversies, and made them difficult to deal with and attempt to resolve. Let's briefly review Walther's four reasons. I have included some comments and observations on each of them.

1) The opponent was not fair and honest in the manner in which he carried out his polemics. Instead of directly refuting Missouri's actual doctrinal positions, the opponent discredited the person and character of Walther. The teachings of Missouri were misrepresented. Thus Grabau set up "straw men" that could easily be attacked and knocked down.

2) To deal with the doctrinal points of the issue required a spiritual understanding and an earnestness that the majority of Lutherans in the USA at that time did not possess. They were unable to make a proper judgment on the doctrinal points. Many regarded the controversy as nothing more than petty squabbling, bickering over insignificant matters. A goodly number did not have a sufficient comprehension regarding the points in controversy to have the faintest idea or realization that this was a serious matter that would have an impact on the welfare of their souls.

3) Grabau's erroneous positions had already been slowly creeping into the Lutheran church in Germany. Luther and the Lutheran Reformation had clearly established that Scripture had set forth the truth of the priesthood of all believers with great clarity. The Bible says that all authority in the church has been given by Christ to all believers. This authority comes from the Word of God. Regarding the practical administration of matters of the church, neither the truths about the priesthood of all believers nor the authority that rests with these believers was ever really put into practice in the Lutheran church in Germany. Philip of Hesse had at one point tried to implement these teachings and give the laymen a greater role in church administration, but Luther felt that the German laity was not yet ready for this and hence advised against it.

Instead, Luther called upon the Lutheran princes and the Lutheran councils of the imperial cities to administer the churches in their particular duchies. He carefully made a distinction between their secular duties and authority, and what they were now being asked to do as the most prominent members of the church. Luther based his decision to choose them on their qualifications and expertise. Some of them had a very deep spiritual knowledge. As long as this distinction is known and understood there was no problem in permitting the more qualified and more spiritually enlightened Christians to perform the duties while those with lesser qualifications waited and tacitly agreed to this.

When Grabau and his associates organized the Buffalo Synod, their goal was to establish a ministerium that closely resembled the old 16th century *Kirchenordnungen* of the Pomeranians and the Saxons. Because the *Kirchenordnungen* had been established at a time when the Lutheran church was scripturally orthodox, Grabau and his fellow pastors of the Buffalo Synod concluded that the regulations established in the *Kirchenordnungen* for governing the church had to have been truly Lutheran and scriptural.

It is very important to remember this; especially as we consider how most of Walther's contemporaries thought that the truths regarding the church and the implementation of church polity set forth in Walther's theses were new and different ideas. On the other hand, the positions on the church and the ministry expounded by Grabau seemed to be the long-standing traditional positions of the Lutheran church.<sup>40</sup>

4) The erroneous doctrines of Grabau regarding the church and its ministry are much more appealing and in tune with human reason than is the true scriptural doctrine. It seems very plausible to an ordinary person that the holy Christian church is a visible association of people who have gathered together around the Word and the Sacrament; and that in this gathering some of the people are in positions of authority while other people are subject to their authority. That is much easier for people to accept than the fact that the church is really an invisible spiritual kingdom; that Christ alone rules this kingdom, in which all believers are brethren in the faith, and in which the pastor has only the power of the Word. Accordingly, the pastor may not force anyone to accept and follow his human ordinances, no matter how good they may appear to him. This position also appeals to the sinful nature, or the Old Adam, within pastors who think that a congregation must respect and obey them in everything that is not against God's Word especially when it comes to the things he requests of them concerning the administration of the church.<sup>41</sup>

It is errors such as these that motivated Walther to write his theses on the church and ministry in the manner in which he did.

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<sup>40</sup> In the 1870s Dr. Adolf Hoenecke also spoke out against the erroneous positions of Grabau and the Romanizing tendencies that were being set forth by Lutheran theologians in Germany. We find this also in Hoenecke's *Dogmatik* (volume 4) in the section where he treats the church and its ministry — "the Teaching Office".

<sup>41</sup> Lawrenz. "An Evaluation of Walther's Theses on the Church and Ministry". pp. 100-103.



Let's look at how Walther developed the concepts that he sets forth in his theses. We begin by looking at how he was influenced while growing up in Germany, and then look at the influence of Pastor Stephan on him both in Germany and when he immigrated to the USA.

### ***3.2 The influence of Martin Stephan on Walther and the group in Missouri***

C.F.W. Walther grew up in the midst of strong pietistic influences. He was educated at the University of Leipzig, where he was thoroughly exposed to Rationalism. His Christian faith was not firmly rooted, and as a result, he was easily swayed. Theologically speaking he was thoroughly confused at this point in his life. Walther was now deeply convinced of his spiritual depravity and sinfulness. But doubts and uncertainties resulting from the pietism and the rationalism caused him to undergo a great spiritual struggle.

It was during this spiritual struggle that he met Martin Stephan, an influential pastor in Dresden who urged him to cling to the promises of the Gospel. Walther came to regard Stephan as the person who saved him. This established a bond between Walther and Stephan. It influenced his ministry in Germany. Because of this bond, he later agreed to travel with Stephan to the "new world." This attitude of Stephan had an effect on Walther the pastor, the professor, and the theologian after the LCMS was formed.

Many people, like Walther, were attracted to Pastor Stephan. He had a way of surrounding himself with many influential people. Stephan was very charismatic and easily attracted followers. Tormented by the rationalistic tyranny of the state church authorities and seeking peace for his Christian and Lutheran conscience, Walther resigned from his pastorate and immigrated to the USA with others from Saxony. As the group of Saxons organized and then made their way to America, Stephan was elected to the position of bishop. As his following grew, Stephan became almost deified. He developed an elevated view of his person, his ministry, and his role as a minister within the church. It was as if he had adopted a philosophy similar to that of the Roman Catholics, in which Stephan viewed himself as a pope, to whom people looked for leadership and guidance, and who spoke with divine authority. Stephan was found guilty of moral turpitude and exiled.

When Stephan had to be removed from his position because of his open sinfulness, questions began to arise among the Saxons regarding what Stephan had taught them, especially in regard to the church and the ministry. They began to ask: Are we really a church? Can we use the sacraments? Who can administer the sacraments? Are our pastors really pastors?

Walther suffered even greater inner distress after Stephan was unmasked and the doctrinal confusion ensued. It was not until after he fought his way through an indescribable spiritual struggle that he found solid ground. Through a study of Luther, Walther became clear in his faith and certain of his salvation. Having previously held all kinds of false doctrinal views, he recognized

the biblical purity of Luther's doctrine. In studying Luther, Walther came to know the doctrinal position of the orthodox Lutherans. Thus the writings and teachings of Martin Luther held a place of very high esteem for Walther. In the midst of a group filled with doubts and uncertainties, Walther became the leader of the Saxon immigrants in the state of Missouri.

As early as 1840, Grabau and his associate leaders of the Buffalo Synod — Heinrich von Rohr and L.F.E. Krause — through the means of a publication known as the *Hirtenbrief* were setting forth ideas regarding the pastor and the church which were similar to those that Stephan had promoted. It was primarily through the *Hirtenbrief* that Grabau and the members of the Buffalo Synod made their attacks on Walther and the Missouri Synod. In 1859, Grabau excommunicated the entire Missouri Synod declaring that anyone who was not a member of the Buffalo Synod could not be saved.

### **3.3 Walther the Dogmatics Professor**

Walther was both a professor and the president of Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri from 1849 until his death in 1887. During this time, immigrants from other Lutheran synods had a need to train men to become their pastors. The other synods would, at times, call men to serve as professors at the St. Louis Seminary. Both the Norwegian Synod and the Wisconsin Synod sent men to St. Louis to teach, but especially to study for the public ministry. Among the men that the Wisconsin Synod sent to study in St. Louis, three eventually became professors at the Wisconsin Synod Seminary in Thiensville, Wisconsin. These men were: J. P. Koehler, August Pieper, and John Schaller. All three studied dogmatics under Walther.<sup>42</sup>

“Although Wisconsin's shift from its confessionally weak beginnings to a more solid Lutheranism was initiated internally by men like Bading and Hoenecke, the confessional trumpet that Walther was sounding on the pages of *Der Lutheraner* and *Lehre und Wehre* did not fall on deaf ears. It was mutually recognized as a triumph of God's Word and grace when, in spite of numerous frictions in other areas, agreement in doctrine and practice was reached between representatives of Wisconsin and the Missouri”... This led to the formation of the Synodical Conference four years later.<sup>43</sup>

The Bible-based writings of Walther were warmly received not only in the LCMS, but also in the Wisconsin Synod. To this day, many of Walther's writings are read and studied. His essay on the doctrine of election in 1877 was so controversial that it resulted in a bitter split of the Synodical Conference. The Wisconsin Synod, behind the leadership of Hoenecke, thoroughly independent in his study of the Bible and a quarter century younger than Walther, agreed with the position set forth by the older doctor. Both agreed that the solidly biblical teaching of God's election is *sola gratia* and not *intuitu fidei* (i.e., God selects an individual for salvation solely because of God's own

<sup>42</sup> Wilbert R Gawrisch. “Foreword 1987 The WELS' Walther Heritage.” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*. Volume 84. Number 1. Winter 1987. pp. 3-4.

<sup>43</sup> Gawrisch. “Foreword 1987 The WELS' Walther Heritage.” Pp. 3-4.

grace and mercy and not because He with foreknowledge knows that an individual will have faith). *Sola gratia* is still the position of orthodox Lutherans, the ELS, and the Wisconsin Synod to this day.

Walther has often been referred to as a mere *Zitatentheolog* (one who bases his theology on citations) and his writings have often been considered “restitution theology” because of his continual practice of citing Luther and the orthodox dogmaticians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In a way, Walther was correct in citing these early Lutherans because what they wrote was thoroughly based on God’s Word, which is the source of comfort in every human need. Walther constantly opposed every error and continually resisted every attempt to compromise the truth of doctrine. Although Walther has been referred to by many as a dogmatician, he was a dogmatician only in the sense that he was involved with the study of dogma, of Lutheran doctrine. He knew the writings of Luther and he knew the writings of the orthodox Lutheran dogmaticians. These writings he knew very well. It is from these that he deduced his theology and his doctrinal positions. He did not approach theology from a scientific point of view. In all his years at the helm of the LCMS and its seminary, Walther never developed his own system of dogmatics. He did nothing to advance theological knowledge. He merely took the theology of Luther and of some of Luther’s faithful students up to the time of Chemnitz, combined it with the Formula of Concord, added citations from the orthodox Lutheran dogmaticians, adapted it and presented it.<sup>44</sup>

One of his students, August Pieper, said, “Walther had not come to a knowledge of the truth, to a clear and firm position, through a direct and independent study of Scripture, but above all through a study of Luther; but he was, of course, no worshiper of Luther. The sin and evil consequences of idolizing men, of which he, too, had been guilty in respect to Stephan, almost brought him at that time to despair. He felt and knew that Luther’s doctrine was God’s Word.”<sup>45</sup> Walther’s knowledge of Scripture was not the result of personal study of God’s Word; it was derived through his study of the writings of Martin Luther. The Bible passages that Walther used to support his doctrinal positions were not the result of mining the Scripture to see what God says and on the basis of that establishing or verifying a doctrine. Rather Walther would note the passages that Luther and orthodox Lutherans of the past had used to support a doctrine, and these in turn would be used by Walther as well. Even though it was through a study of Luther that he had come to know Scripture, Walther had an unconditional trust in every word of the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures. For him the Bible was not a dead book of divinely attested events and of divine truths that had been revealed at some time in the past, but it was God’s living, personal and direct word to him. In the Bible, God spoke about the salvation in Jesus Christ for the eternal life for Walther and all other believers.

Walther’s reliance on Luther and the Lutheran dogmaticians of the past was reflected not only in his approach to theology, but also in his teaching. Walther taught dogmatics at the St. Louis

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<sup>44</sup> Gawrisch. “Foreword 1987 The WELS’ Walther Heritage.” pp. 3-4.

<sup>45</sup> August Pieper. “Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther 1811–1887 Anniversary Reflections.” Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly. Volume 84. Number 1. Winter 1987. pp. 17-19.

seminary. In his teaching, he relied heavily on what Luther and other Lutherans had written, especially Johannes Baier. Walther was so impressed with the *Compendium*, which contained quite a quantity of statements by Lutheran dogmaticians, that he produced a revised copy of it for his students at the seminary. The Walther-Baier *Compendium* was used for almost a century in the Missouri Synod and is still used in the WELS. This *Compendium* became his textbook. From it, he would read to his class and then elucidate on the statements with comments of his own.

One might think that the class would be interesting, especially in view of the fact that it was the future Lutheran pastors of the LCMS, and at times of other synods, that were his students. The “Baier Hour”, as his students referred to it, has been described as being intellectually interesting but spiritually dry. The reason for the dryness was that his dogmatics class largely dealt with making distinctions between concepts which had to be logically grasped with an intellectual operation that did not touch the heart. Even worse, in Walther’s case, was the fact that the textbook was written in Latin and Walther proceeded to teach the class solely in Latin. At times Walther was not as precise in the Latin language as he could have been, consequently “most of his students did not fully understand him.” Hence, his class which dragged on for three to five hours became known as the “Baier grind” and spoiled his students’ joy in God’s precious Word. He was much better when he lectured on pastoral theology and his forte, the writings of Luther.<sup>46</sup> He was very knowledgeable, very intelligent, and spoke eloquently.

Clearly in all his classes he wanted his students to know that in matters pertaining to the church, everything is ultimately determined by one single point: What does the clear Scripture say? For Walther, as for all orthodox Lutherans, the Bible is the Word of God which has the final say in all matters of doctrine and practice.

Walther was a tremendous leader, a dynamic preacher, a powerful lecturer, and a remarkable writer. However, lest we wind up worshipping the man, as many had done with Martin Stephan, and perhaps some do with Luther, we need to be mindful of some of Walther’s deficiencies. Walther was legalistic when it came to the matters of usury, dancing and going to the theater, life insurance, running a tavern, in-law marriage (e.g., a man marrying the sister of his deceased wife), geographical parish boundaries, the local congregation and the pastoral office. He often made his position as if it were Scripturally based and therefore God-given doctrine, when, in fact, he was going beyond what the Bible says and turning matters of casuistry into untenable doctrines.

Regarding the doctrine of the church and its ministry, the content of what Walther wrote in Kirche und Amt and The Proper Form of a Lutheran Congregation has become basic and normative for the view held by all orthodox Lutherans, even today. Walther’s definition of a Lutheran local congregation, however, has not been universally accepted by orthodox Lutherans. This is true even though Walther clearly tied the ministry of the Keys only to the communion of saints. However, misunderstandings have arisen among modern Lutherans in the USA because Walther

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<sup>46</sup> Pieper. “Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther 1811–1887 Anniversary Reflections.” p. 19.

uses terms that had commonly been used in Germany in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He synonymously uses *public ministry* [*Predigtamt*, literally, preaching office] and *pastoral ministry* [*Pfarramt*, literally, parish office]. By doing this he infers that only the pastoral ministry was divinely instituted. Hence, there are those today who say that this is so — consequently, only those serving as pastors are involved in the work of the ministry. Although he unconsciously implied this, it really was not Walther's intention to do so. He did not want to deny the divine institution of all other forms of the public ministry. He regarded a professorship at a Christian college to also be a species of the public ministry. He attested to this in a sermon that he preached for the installation of a professor at Fort Wayne, Indiana. However, the way in which he presents the matter in *Church and Ministry* and elsewhere gives people the impression that God has only instituted the local congregational or the parish ministry form. Luther had a very broad understanding of the public ministry. He regarded not only the pastoral office form but all possible forms of the public ministry as divinely instituted. Thus for Luther it did not matter if one was serving as a pastor, or as a teacher, a preacher, a reader, a priest (i.e., a chaplain, as they were called), a sexton, a schoolmaster and whatever else belongs to such offices and persons, the entire spiritual estate has the ministry and the service of the word and sacraments. In other words, every one who is involved with sharing the Gospel in word and sacrament was doing the work of ministry. Luther expressed this view in a sermon that he preached in 1530 on the education of children. Walther was well aware that this was Luther's position. He cites this sermon as one of the proofs for his second thesis on the public ministry or pastoral ministry (*Predigtamt oder Pfarramt*).<sup>47</sup>

Not only did Walther use terms that were readily misunderstood by others, but another cause for his *naevi* [faults], according to his student August Pieper, was that Walther depended too heavily on the secondary sources of theology, i.e., Luther and the lesser fathers. In spite of all his emphasis on Scripture, there can be no denying this. Although Walther was a great, and a very talented leader, he was a poor, even an inferior exegete. He had only an average knowledge of the original biblical languages. Frequently he would cite dozens of Bible passages merely because Luther and the dogmatists had done so. Yet these passages did not prove what they were supposed to prove. Although very eager to express himself on matters, he failed to recognize that his position was based on translations and not on the original text. Thus, he could say something as if it were doctrinally true, but without a firm scriptural basis. Over all, the knowledge of Scripture that Walther had was more an intimate acquaintance with Luther's Bible and knowledge of certain passages rather than knowledge of the whole line of thought of a biblical book and of the original text.<sup>48</sup>

Walther built his theology more heavily on the writings of Luther and his faithful followers than even Walther would admit. This is evident from his entire way of doing theology. This characteristic appears in all his doctrinal books, papers, and essays. "His dogmatics textbook consists entirely of material taken over from others." The method that Walther used was understandable at a time in which there was searching for true Lutheranism, and it also fully corresponded with Walther's

<sup>47</sup> Pieper. "Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther 1811–1887 Anniversary Reflections." p. 108.

<sup>48</sup> Pieper. "Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther 1811–1887 Anniversary Reflections." p. 109.

spiritual development. Another reason that is frequently cited for his use of this format is that he realized how inadequate his knowledge of Scripture and doctrine really was in comparison with Luther and Chemnitz, Gerhard and Calov, thus in all modesty he was afraid of going astray in even the smallest point of doctrine.<sup>49</sup>

Walther was a great leader and the Lutheran Church benefited much from his leadership, still no matter how justified Walther's method of citing Luther and the Lutheran dogmaticians might have been in the beginning, it was wrong both in principle and in practice. The problem was that unlike Luther, who stressed the Bible and the study of the Bible, Walther's positions neither rested *directly* on Scripture nor did they lead one directly into it. Instead he strongly stressed, to the extreme, the importance of Luther and the Lutheran Confessions and the Lutheran fathers, and certainly much more than he cited God's Word. Utilizing this format Walther led people to think that the matter under discussion or being presented had been established sufficiently by the quotations from Luther and the fathers; therefore it was unnecessary to study Scripture. This format actually hampered people in their use and study of the Bible. And eventually, it has come to the point where the citation theologians not only quote Luther and the old fathers but now they have also included Walther and others as proof of the doctrinal stand. As pastors, theologians, and theological students took up the study of doctrinal matters in subsequent years the subject of study was not as much a study of the Bible as it was a study of old synodical reports and conference and convention essays. And now quotations from these, not the Bible, are frequently used to support doctrinal positions.<sup>50</sup>

It is this higher regard for the writings of Luther and other Lutherans than for the Bible that has resulted in differences in the doctrinal positions on the church and its ministry. Today, the LCMS still uses this format. It still prefers to use Luther, the Confessions, and other Lutherans rather than the Bible. And those in the ELS that have come from the LCMS do the same.

Given what the early Missouri Synod members had gone through as they began in the USA, it would seem perfectly natural to them that the Bible be read in view of how the great dogmaticians of the Age of Orthodoxy had viewed it. An entire generation of pastors had sat at Walther's feet listening to him read from Baier's *Compendium*, and lecturing in Latin. At the St. Louis seminary, dogmatics was regarded as the "queen of theological sciences." However, it was unsettling to have Walther take a firm stance on a matter citing the Lutheran fathers as his proof, yet not realizing that at the same time his position was in contradiction to what they had written. His authoritative citing of the Lutheran theologians of the past was often confusing to his students. What did it mean to be an orthodox Lutheran? For that matter, what did it mean to be Lutheran? Obviously questions such as these could not be answered by citing Lutheran dogmaticians against one another, or Luther and the Confessions against Quenstedt and Gerhard. All of them were orthodox. All of them were theologians who based their theology on what the Bible says. For Walther, the problem was in maintaining a proper relationship between the doctrine that we

<sup>49</sup> Pieper. "Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther 1811–1887 Anniversary Reflections." p. 110.

<sup>50</sup> Pieper. "Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther 1811–1887 Anniversary Reflections." p. 111.

believe, teach, and confess, and the very source of that doctrine — between the *norma normata* and the *norma normans*. Orthodox Lutheran doctrine comes first from a careful exegesis of the Biblical text, a thorough study of the Word of God, and not from reading what the Lutherans from generations in the past had to say. What they say is secondary to Scripture. “It is not dogmatics, but exegesis that is the queen of theological studies.”<sup>51</sup>

Unlike Walther, the WELS dogmatician Hoenecke did not dictate, rather he spoke German and he sought to lead his dogmatic students in their mother tongue to understand the content and method of the old orthodox Lutheran dogmatics. By doing this Hoenecke was in principle and practice a far more scriptural theologian than was Walther. The old orthodox Lutheran dogmaticians were not authorities for Hoenecke to the same extent as they were for Walther. The latter relied on the word of the dogmaticians without question, the former tested them critically. For Hoenecke, like Luther, the most important thing was the Word of God. Thus in his class, Hoenecke sought to lead his students directly into Scripture and then to base everything on Scripture.<sup>52</sup>

### 3.4 Altenburg

Following the demise of Stephan, the Saxons floundered for nearly two years of doubts and uncertainties. Powerful laymen such as Carl Eduard Vehse (d. 1870) and Franz Adolf Marbach (d. 1860) became highly critical of the concept of clergy rule and hierarchical governance. Vehse challenged the episcopal ideas regarding the clergy and as a result wrote a series of theses that reduced the status of the pastor to nothing more than an employee-at-will of the congregation. Vehse returned to Germany and the controversy regarding the relation of the pastor to the congregation was continued by his brother-in-law, Marbach, a lawyer from Dresden. Walther spent weeks studying the writings of Luther and other Lutheran dogmaticians. In April of 1841, Marbach and Walther squared off in what has become known as the Altenburg Debate.

This debate is considered to be the real birth date of the Missouri Synod. At Altenburg, Walther clearly showed *what* the church is and that the Saxon immigrants were still a church. Under his leadership, the rudder was straightened and the fledgling church body put back on the correct doctrinal course. The points that Walther made at Altenburg developed into a topic that he would expound upon for many years. It was the basic topic of many of his writings — *Church and Ministry*, which was followed by *The Proper Form of an Evangelical Lutheran Congregation*, and then set forth in a practical way in his *Pastoral Theology*. In what transpired at Altenburg, the broad and solid foundation was laid for the future Missouri Synod, as well as what was to happen in other synods. It was at Altenburg where Walther stood firmly footed on Scripture as the infallible

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<sup>51</sup> Paul O. Wendland. *Forward in Christ...At the Dawn of a New Millennium Changing Contexts—Eternal Word*. Paper presented to the Reformation Symposium, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin, October 31, 2000.

<sup>52</sup> Pieper. “Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther 1811–1887 Anniversary Reflections.” p. 196.

Word of God written by the Holy Spirit. Thus Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions continued to be their solid ground upon which stood this band of Saxon immigrants.<sup>53</sup>

The result of the debate was eight theses on the church that Walther produced. These were a forerunner of the theses on the church and the ministry that he would write eleven years later. The theses read as follows:

I. The true Church, in the most real and most perfect sense, is the totality (Gesamtheit) of all true believers, who from the beginning to the end of the world from among all peoples and tongues have been called and sanctified by the Holy Spirit through the Word. And since God alone knows these true believers (2 *Tim.* 2:19), the Church is also called invisible. No one belongs to this true Church who is not spiritually united with Christ, for it is the spiritual body of Jesus Christ.

II. The name of the true Church belongs also to all those visible companies of men among whom God's Word is purely taught and the holy Sacraments are administered according to the institution of Christ. True, in this Church there are godless men, hypocrites, and heretics, but they are not true members of it, nor do they constitute the Church.

III. The name Church, and, in a certain sense, the name true Church, belongs also to those visible companies of men who have united under the confession of a falsified faith and therefore have incurred the guilt of a partial departure from the truth; provided they possess so much of God's Word and the holy Sacraments in purity that children of God may thereby be born. When such companies are called true churches, it is not the intention to state that they are faithful, but only that they are real churches as opposed to all worldly organizations (Gemeinschaften).

IV. The name Church is not improperly applied to heterodox companies, but according to the manner of speech of the Word of God itself. It is also not immaterial that this high name is allowed to such communions, for out of this follows:

1. That members also of such companies may be saved; for without the Church there is no salvation.

V. 2. *sic* The outward separation of a heterodox company from an Orthodox Church is not necessarily a separation from the universal Christian Church or a relapse into heathenism and does not yet deprive that company of the name Church.

VI. 3. *sic* Even heterodox companies have church power; even among them the goods of the Church may be validly administered, the ministry established, the Sacraments validly administered, and the keys of the kingdom of heaven exercised.

VII. 4. *sic* Even heterodox companies are not to be dissolved, but reformed.

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<sup>53</sup> Pieper. "Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther 1811–1887 Anniversary Reflections." p. 16.

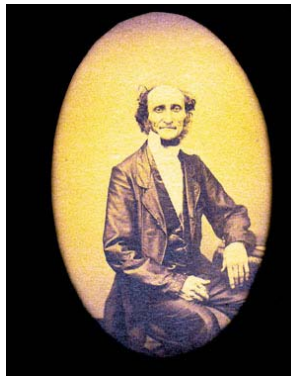


VIII. The Orthodox Church is chiefly to be judged by the common, orthodox, public confession to which its members acknowledge and confess themselves to be pledged.<sup>54</sup>

Walther honed and polished these theses from Altenburg. They formed the basic ideas that he would use through out his tenure as he dealt with the doctrines of the church and its ministry.

### **3.5 The theses of Dr CFW Walther on the Church and the Ministry**

Dr. Walther's Theses on the Church and the Ministry (Kirche und Amt) were originally written in 1852. This work was released in a Second Edition in 1865. A Third Edition was printed in 1875. Walther died May 7, 1887. He was working on a Fourth Edition at the time of his death. It was published posthumously in 1894.



*C.F.W. Walther*

It is interesting to note what he himself wrote in the "Preface to the First Edition" of Kirche und Amt. Walther writes: "It was not our intention to present the doctrines of the church and the ministry in their completeness. Whoever desires this will find such a presentation in the larger dogmatic works of the teachers of our church.... It was our purpose to stress only those points concerning which there prevails a difference and to embody only so much uncontested material as is demanded by the context. We hope, therefore, that on account of this intentional incompleteness we shall not be charged with one-sidedness in our interpretation and presentation. In order to avoid misunderstanding, we declare expressly that in this monograph we are not so much concerned about how the church is to be constituted as rather about its essence and the principles according to which its manifestations [*Erscheinungen*] are to be judged and on which its polity [*Verfassung*] is to rest."<sup>55</sup>

In Kirche und Amt, Dr. Walther sets forth a thesis to state succinctly a position. Then he supports each thesis with three major sources. He quotes Scripture first. He uses only a few Bible passages. He does not exhaust all of the passages that could apply to each of the theses. The

<sup>54</sup> <http://www.lcms.org/ca/www/cyclopedia/02/display.asp?t1=a&word=ALTENBURGTHESES>

<sup>55</sup> Walther. Church and Ministry, p. 9.

second section is much larger. It cites quotations from the official confessional writings of the Lutheran Church, The Book of Concord. The third section of proof for each thesis is the largest. This section consists of quotations made by various dogmaticians and church fathers from the past. It is in the midst of these quotations that Dr. Walther elaborates his position on the Church and the Ministry.

What is often overlooked, however, is why Walther used this approach. It was not because he thought more of the statements by the dogmaticians than he did of the Scripture. No, Walther stressed what the Lutheran dogmaticians had previously said because Grabau had accused Walther and the Missouri Synod of not being Lutheran. In order to prove that he and his synod were Lutheran, Walther cites the Book of Concord, Luther, and the dogmaticians more heavily than he cites the Bible.

There was no problem with the doctrinal stance of Walther. The problem developed after Walther's death. At that point, those who wanted to be eminent and respected, as had been Dr. Walther, decided to follow the approach evident in his writings. They copied the style that Walther used in these theses to prove to Grabau and the Buffalo Synod that the doctrinal positions of Walther and of the Missouri Synod were indeed the Lutheran doctrinal positions.

The approach in which attention is given first and foremost to the writings of the dogmaticians and the Book of Concord has been used to develop doctrinal positions within the LCMS and by some within the ELS. Unfortunately, this style, which Walther used to prove to other Lutherans that he and the Missouri Synod of his day were truly Lutheran, has been adopted by many and used as the means and a model for developing all doctrines. However, this is not the correct approach to use in developing doctrinal positions to set forth clearly the teachings of Scripture against the theological problems of the last few decades. This approach puts the cart in front of the horse. It gives more credence to what man has said, and his interpretation of what the Bible says concerning a particular situation at a particular time, than it does to what God has said.

The following are the theses that Dr. Walther developed on the Church and Ministry. There are nine theses on the church and ten theses on the ministry. We shall examine each of these separately.

### **3.5.1 Theses on the Church**

Walther wrote nine theses concerning the Church. The first three theses formed Walther's initial thesis at the Altenburg debate in 1841. As such, they can be taken as an initial unit for what Walther stated about the Church.

### 3.5.1.1 Thesis I

The church in the proper sense of the term is the congregation [Gemeinde] of saints, that is, the aggregate of all those who, called out of the lost and condemned human race by the Holy Spirit through the Word, truly believe in Christ and by faith are sanctified and incorporated in Christ.<sup>56</sup>

Walther uses one page to support his thesis from the Word of God. He cites 6 Bible passages: Ephesians 1:22-23; 5:23-27; 1 Corinthians 3:16-17; Hebrews 12:23; Matthew 16:18; and John 11:51-52.<sup>57</sup> However, by no means do these exhaust the clear testimony of God's Word that supports this thesis. Among other passages that he could have cited are the following: Ephesians 2:19-22, John 10:16, 1 Corinthians 1:2, 2 Corinthians 1:1, 1 Thessalonians 1:1, and Acts 2:47. These have been used by the Wisconsin Synod as it defines the Church.<sup>58</sup>

In comparison, he uses two pages to cite the Lutheran confessions, one page to quote Luther, and three pages to summarize what the Lutheran dogmaticians had previously said.

Against the false concept that the church is nothing more than a group of people that have gathered around the Word and sacrament, with some of these people being in authority and others being subjected to them, Walther correctly states what is clearly set forth in the Bible. The Church is the Communion of Saints. This becomes the important foundation thesis for what follows. The church is not merely a visible gathering together of people who have something in common. Such a definition could define a business, a university, fans at an athletic event, even a group of tourists on a trip. The church is much more!

### 3.5.1.2 Thesis II

To the church in the proper sense of the term belongs no wicked person, no hypocrite, no unregenerate, no heretic.<sup>59</sup>

The church consists only of believers in Christ Jesus, those called to faith and gathered together by the working of the Holy Spirit. Because there are only believers within the church, there are no godless persons within the church. There are no heathens within the church. There are no pretenders, and no false teachers who deny the fundamental Christian doctrine within the church. This second thesis is the antithesis of his first thesis. He cites only three Scripture passages — Romans 8:9, 1 John 2:19, and John 15:6<sup>60</sup> — on a half a page as proof. The Confessions also receive a half a page. Luther and the dogmaticians take up two and a half pages.

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<sup>56</sup> Walther. Church and Ministry. p. 27.

<sup>57</sup> Walther. Church and Ministry. p. 27.

<sup>58</sup> Doctrinal Statements of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1970, p. 4.

<sup>59</sup> Walther. Church and Ministry. p. 34.

<sup>60</sup> Walther. Church and Ministry. p. 34.

### 3.5.1.3 Thesis III

The church in the proper sense of the word is invisible.<sup>61</sup>

The concept of a united visible Christendom is appealing to natural man and those who would foster ecumenism, even within the Lutheran Church. The Roman Catholic concept of the *Unam Sanctum* is very popular, especially in Latin America. Consider the throngs that gather any time that there is a papal visit. Consider the news coverage in the fourth quarter of 2003, when John Paul II named new cardinals within the Church of Rome. The media certainly made it appear that the church is visible. However, it is not visible; it is invisible.

It is true, the church, the communion of saints, is manifest in visible gatherings of believers. These believers are present in every Christian congregation every time God's Word is read and proclaimed. However, their unity is not due to some outward allegiance. They are bound together by a common faith in Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. The Holy Spirit creates and maintains that faith within the hearts of individuals. Because no human being can see into the heart of another and detect the presence or the absence of faith, we say that it is invisible. We cannot see it. However, God can, and does.

The term "invisible" did not originate with Walther. It has been used since the time of Martin Luther. The term expresses three important truths about the church drawn from the Scriptures. First, there is a bond of faith. This bond of faith unites the individual believer with Christ. This bond of faith unites one believer with another believer to form a body of believers, the holy Christian Church. This bond of faith is a spiritual bond. Second, only God who searches the hearts and minds of every individual is able to detect the existence of faith and know who all the individual members of the church are. Third, during our earthly lifetimes, we enjoy a time of grace. This is a time that God graciously gives us to recognize our sin, our need for a Savior, and to learn that God has graciously met that need in Christ Jesus. Only because of faith in Him can we be saved. Only because of the working of the Third Person of the Holy Trinity, the Holy Spirit, can we be led to faith and become a part of God's Holy Church.

Walther uses a half a page to refer to three Bible passages — Luke 17:20-21, 1 Peter 2:5, and 2 Timothy 2:19.<sup>62</sup> He uses just over two pages to cite the Confessions and almost eight pages to quote Luther and the Lutheran dogmaticians in support of his position.

### 3.5.1.4 Thesis IV

It is to this true church of believers and saints that Christ gave the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and it is the proper and only possessor and bearer of the spiritual, divine, and heavenly gifts, rights, powers, offices, and the like that Christ has procured and are found in His church.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Walther. *Church and Ministry*. p. 38.

<sup>62</sup> Walther. *Church and Ministry*. p. 38.

<sup>63</sup> Walther. *Church and Ministry*. p. 49.

In his fourth thesis, Walther speaks of the keys. The “keys of the kingdom of heaven” is that power that Christ gives to the believers to forgive or to retain sins. This power our Redeemer gives not just to a few, but to all true believers individually and collectively. Everyone who believes in Jesus Christ as his Savior has this power. It is important to note that Dr. Walther mentions the keys before he speaks of the congregation. The forgiveness of sins is clearly more important than the creation of a visible gathering of believers. A gathering of believers also possesses the keys, true. However, this is because of the individual believers within its midst. In support of his position, Walther uses a page and a half to cite Matthew 16:15-19, Matthew 18:18, John 20:22-23, Matthew 18:20, and 1 Peter 2:9<sup>64</sup> as the key Bible passages. At the same time he uses two pages to cite the Confessions, one page to cite a hymn and two other writings, four pages to cite Luther and an additional eight and a half pages to cite the Lutheran dogmaticians.

### 3.5.1.5 Thesis V

Though the true church in the proper sense of the term is essentially [according to its true nature] invisible, its existence can nevertheless be definitely recognized, namely, by the marks of the pure preaching of God’s Word and the administration of the sacraments according to Christ’s institution.<sup>65</sup>

If the church is invisible, how can a believer know where other believers are located with whom he may worship and enjoy Christian fellowship? Dr. Walther correctly states that wherever the Word of God is preached in its truth and purity and wherever the sacraments are properly administered, that is where the believers are present. These two qualifications — the preaching of God’s Word in its truth and purity and the proper administration of the sacraments (baptism and the Lord’s Supper) — indicate the presence of the holy Christian Church. These are the marks of the Church. Wherever these are present, the holy Christian Church is present. The contrary is also true. Wherever these are not present, the holy Christian Church is not present.

Walther uses almost two pages to refer to seven Scripture passages — Mark 4:26-27, Matthew 13:38, Isaiah 55:10-11, Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 16:15-16, 1 Corinthians 10:17, and 1 Corinthians 12:13<sup>66</sup>— to support his position. Quotations from the Confessions occupy almost two pages, Luther almost five pages, and the church fathers nearly two pages.

### 3.5.1.6 Thesis VI

In an improper sense Scripture also calls the visible aggregate of all the called, that is, of all who confess and adhere to the proclaimed Word and use the holy sacraments, which consists of good and evil [persons] “church” (the universal [catholic] church); so also it calls its several divisions, that is, the congregations that are found here and there, in which the Word of God is preached and the holy sacraments are administered, “churches” (Partikularkirchen [particular or individual

<sup>64</sup> Walther. Church and Ministry. pp. 49-50.

<sup>65</sup> Walther. Church and Ministry. p. 67.

<sup>66</sup> Walther. Church and Ministry. pp. 67-68.

churches]). This it does especially because in this visible assembly the invisible, true, and properly so-called church of believers, saints, and children of God is hidden; outside this assembly of the called, no elect are to be looked for [anywhere].<sup>67</sup>

In the first five theses, Walther has been speaking only of the Holy Christian Church. Beginning with this sixth thesis, he speaks of the church as it is most commonly thought about in the world around us.

In reality, as has been stated already, the church is comprised only of believers. However, in this world believers congregate in groups that consist of both believers and hypocrites, that is, those that pretend to be believers. Therefore, in an improper sense, we can speak about a visible church. Such congregations, or visible gatherings, are referred to as the church only because of the believers who are present worshipping and serving our Lord. Perhaps one could understand it best by comparing it to a literary device that the ancient Greeks used known as “*synecdoche*”, in which the whole unit gets its name because of a portion of it.

Although this sixth thesis is rather elaborate, it is correctly deduced from Scripture. We note that in the parables that he cites, Walther does not equate “the kingdom of heaven” with the Church. This is correct. The Church consists only of believers, as has been previously stated. Within the visible gatherings, when hypocrites and true believers are present, we can find a mixture of good and bad, wise and foolish, etc.

Walther uses almost a page and four Bible verses — Matthew 13:47-48; Matthew 25:1-2; Matthew 22:2, 11, and Matthew 18:17<sup>68</sup> — to provide the Scriptural support for this thesis. The Confessions merit just over a page, Luther just over two pages, and the dogmaticians and church fathers almost four pages.

### 3.5.1.7 Thesis VII

As visible congregations that still have the Word and the sacraments essentially according to God’s Word bear the name “church” because of the true invisible church of sincere believers that is found in them, so also they possess the power [authority] that Christ has given to His whole church, on account of the true invisible church hidden in them, even if there were only two or three [believers].<sup>69</sup>

The power, the authority, which Christ has given to each individual believer, is found also within each gathering of believers, it does not matter if it is a large congregation or merely two or three individuals. Neither the church as an entire body nor the church as a congregation is a special divine institution that has been given a right and a power that would make it superior to its members. Rather, it has the power and authority of Christ only because of the individual believers who comprise it.

<sup>67</sup> Walther. Church and Ministry. p. 77.

<sup>68</sup> Walther. Church and Ministry. pp. 77-78.

<sup>69</sup> Walther. Church and Ministry. p. 87.

In Thesis VII, Walther is speaking of the local congregation rather than an association of congregations that we know as a synod or a church body. The reason for this, again, was to emphasize his goal in writing these articles in the first place. It was to combat the false teachings of Grabau and some of the Lutheran leaders in Germany. These people, and especially Grabau, held that the pastor, by virtue of the ordination, possessed the keys. When a congregation had a duly ordained pastor serving them, the congregation had the keys, but only because of their pastor. To combat this error, Walther uses Scripture and the Lutheran dogmaticians to show correctly that the power of the keys rests not with the pastor because of the office, but with the congregation because of the individual believers in the midst of the congregation. The pastor possesses the keys individually as a believer. The pastor acts on the congregation's behalf and in their stead by virtue of the call that they have issued. It is the power of the keys, which the congregation possesses because of its individual members, which the pastor exercises because the congregation has delegated the power and authority to do so in their name.

That Walther held that synods and church bodies as a whole also possessed this power because of the believers that comprised them is evident elsewhere in his statements and writings. It is indicated also in this thesis: "As visible congregations ... because of the true invisible church of sincere believers that is found in them, ... possess the power [authority] that Christ has given to His whole church, on account of the true invisible church hidden in them, even if there were only two or three [believers]." The entire church has this power, whether it is two or three believers gathered together in a small room, a large congregation with many members, representatives of different congregations that have assembled to function on behalf of others, or an association of congregations of believers.

The Scriptural support for this thesis is just over a half a page and incorporates only two Bible passages — Matthew 18:17-18 and Matthew 16:19-20.<sup>70</sup> The Confessions merit a page and a half; Luther quotations occupy six and a half pages and the dogmaticians and church fathers are cited on four and a half pages.

### 3.5.1.8 Thesis VIII

Although God gathers for Himself a holy church of elect also there where His Word is not taught in its perfect purity and the sacraments are not administered altogether according to the institution of Jesus Christ, if only God's Word and the sacraments are not denied entirely but both remain in their essential parts, nevertheless, every believer must, at the peril of losing his salvation, flee all false teachers, avoid all heterodox congregations or sects, and acknowledge and adhere to orthodox congregations and their orthodox pastors wherever such may be found.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Walther. Church and Ministry. p. 87.

<sup>71</sup> Walther. Church and Ministry. p. 101.

Walther divides his eighth thesis into three parts. He rephrases the parts and presents them separately.

- A. Also in heterodox and heretical churches there are children of God, and also there the true church is made manifest by the pure Word and the sacraments that still remain.<sup>72</sup>

God, at times, graciously provides a faithful remnant. In the Old Testament, during the life of the prophet Elijah, wickedness dominated the world. The prophet thought that he was the sole believer in Israel. However, because of his faithful proclamation of the Word, God preserved seven thousand faithful persons. As the Apostle Paul wrote to the churches in Galatia, where they had been beset with false doctrine (the doctrine of justification, in particular, having been compromised and perverted) he continued to refer to them as churches. Even to this day, God preserves a faithful remnant within erring church bodies because His Word is proclaimed. Knowing that the last day is rapidly approaching and that God wants all to be saved and none to be lost, we are compelled to continue to preach the message of salvation in Christ Jesus in the hope that the believers in heterodox churches will hear and overcome the errors with which they have been surrounded.

The Scriptural support of four verses — Galatians 1:2, 1 Kings 19:14-18, Revelation 2:24, and 2 Samuel 15:11<sup>73</sup> — occupy less than half a page. Citations from the Confessions take up more than a page; Luther gets almost two pages and nine pages are dedicated to quotations from the dogmaticians and church fathers.

- B. Every believer for the sake of his salvation must flee all false teachers and avoid all heterodox congregations or sects.<sup>74</sup>

Every Christian is obligated to forsake false prophets and those who promote erroneous doctrines. Why? Very clearly, it is for the sake of their eternal salvation. Those who associate with errorists can be just as tempted to deny their Savior and their faith in a moment of weakness as Peter was on the night in which Jesus was betrayed (Luke 22:54-61). We pray in the Lord's Prayer "Lead us not into temptation" (The Sixth Petition). We need to be careful that we do not place ourselves in spiritual danger because of our own actions.

For this thesis, Walther uses twelve Scripture passages<sup>75</sup> that fill two pages. The Confessions only occupy a page and a half. Meanwhile, Luther gets twelve pages and nine pages are dedicated to the citations of the dogmaticians and the church fathers.

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<sup>72</sup> Walther. Church and Ministry. p. 101.

<sup>73</sup> Walther. Church and Ministry. p. 101.

<sup>74</sup> Walther. Church and Ministry. p. 113.

<sup>75</sup> Deuteronomy 13:1-3, Matthew 7:15, Matthew 24:23-24, Acts 20:30-31, Romans 16:17-18. 1 Corinthians 10:18-21, 1 Corinthians 11:9, 2 Corinthians 6:14-18, Galatians 5:9, Titus 3:10-11, 2 John 10-11, and Revelation 18:4.



- C. Every Christian for the sake of his salvation is in duty bound to acknowledge and adhere to orthodox congregations and orthodox pastors, wherever he can find such.<sup>76</sup>

That we believe and confess Jesus as our Lord is not of our own doing or choosing. We were spiritually dead in our trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1). It is only because of the working of the Holy Spirit that we can believe in Jesus Christ and call Him Lord (1 Corinthians 12:3, 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14). The Holy Spirit, who brought us to faith, incites us to worship, praise, and confess Jesus as Lord. He leads us to gather together with our fellow believers to manifest our faith openly and jointly with them. Anyone who is unwilling to join with their fellow Christians in confessing Christ would be denying the faith and displaying unbelief.

Walther incorporates fifteen Bible passages<sup>77</sup> on just under two pages; the citations from the Confessions occupy a little over a page; Luther gets just over two pages while the dogmaticians and church fathers get just over six pages to support this thesis.

### 3.5.1.9 Thesis IX

To obtain salvation, only fellowship in the invisible church, to which alone all the glorious promises regarding the church were originally given, is absolutely necessary.<sup>78</sup>

Grabau and the Buffalo Synod had taught that there is no salvation outside of the visible church. There are church bodies today that still teach this erroneous concept. It is not the visible gathering of people that is holy. No, that gathering, as we have stated, consists of hypocrites mixed together with believers. The Church is invisible. This Church is comprised only of believers. Outside the Church, there can be no salvation. Thus to counter the errors of Grabau, Walther points out that it is membership in the invisible church that is important, not our outward association with a particular group.

Three Scripture passages — Romans 3:28, Acts 4:12, Romans 10:13-14, Romans 10:17,<sup>79</sup> all of which speak of faith in Jesus Christ and His redemptive work as the basis of our salvation, occupy about one page. The Confessions fill almost a page and a half, Luther gets three pages, and four pages contain the quotations of the dogmaticians and the church fathers.

### 3.5.2 Theses on the Ministry

Walther wrote ten theses that define the Ministry.

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<sup>76</sup> Walther. Church and Ministry. p. 136.

<sup>77</sup> Matthew 10:32-33, Luke 9:26, Romans 10:9-10, Luke 10:16, Matthew 10:14-15, Matthew 10:40-41, 2 Timothy 1:8, 1 Corinthians 1:10-13, Ephesians 4:3-6, 1 John 2:19, Hebrews 10:25, Matthew 18:17, Acts 2:42, Acts 2:44, Acts 2:46-47.

<sup>78</sup> Walther. Church and Ministry. p. 149.

<sup>79</sup> Walther. Church and Ministry. pp. 149-150.

### 3.5.2.1 Thesis I

The holy ministry or pastoral office is an office distinct from the priesthood of all believers.<sup>80</sup>

In this thesis, Walther makes a distinction between the priesthood of all believers, the ministry or service in which every Christian is involved, from the holy ministry or the pastoral office, that is, the ministry or service in which only certain individuals are involved. The holy ministry and the pastoral office are not one and the same; they are not identical. Some, however, would like to equate them.

Most of our Lutheran theologians through the years have referred to the holy ministry as *das heilige Predigtamt*, the holy, divine, office in which Word of God is proclaimed. They have referred to the pastoral office as *das Pfarramt*, the office in which spiritual care is given to the souls entrusted to the care of an individual. At times, the two terms have been used interchangeably due to the diverse work that a pastor does. The confusing and confounding of these two terms has resulted in many, long, often pointless, theological debates since the late 1800's, especially in the United States.

Properly and plainly defined, *Predigtamt* indicates the function of proclaiming the Word of God. It is the public ministry. A similar word, *ministerium*, has also been misunderstood. It is not a group of clergymen. It is the Latin equivalent to the German *Predigtamt*. Both refer to the function or the task of proclaiming the Word of God.<sup>81</sup>

Throughout history, a pastor has not always done the same work. A pastor has not always had the same responsibility. Ask pastors who have been in the ministry for more than twenty-five years if they have always done the same thing, and most likely, they will say "no." The pastoral ministry has evolved to meet the growing spiritual needs of people in an ever-changing world. A pastor in the first century is markedly different from a pastor in the twenty-first century. Yes, both preach and teach the Word. And, yes, both care for souls. But the manner in which they do so is totally different.

There is only ministry — to proclaim the Word of God. The distinction between these facets of the ministry, or these two types of ministries — proclaiming the Word and caring for souls — is not based on any sort of hierarchy. The holy ministry, the pastoral office, and the priesthood of all believers, all three are the same ministry. The only difference lies in the way in which a particular ministry is accomplished. The holy ministry and the pastoral office are administered in the name of and with the consent of all of the spiritual priests. This Walther indicates in his seventh thesis.

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<sup>80</sup> Walther. *Church and Ministry*. p. 161.

<sup>81</sup> David G. Peters. "Authority in the Church: Biblical Principles of Church & Ministry Which Apply to Ecclesiastical Polity". (Paper delivered to the Southern Pastoral Conference of the Southeastern Wisconsin District at Hope Evangelical Lutheran Church, Twin Lakes, Wisconsin, November 14, 1995), p. 12.

Walther shows that this always has been the Lutheran position by extensively citing Luther. There are, in fact, twelve pages of what Luther said that Walther quotes here. This is in addition to three more pages of quotations from the Lutheran dogmaticians and the church fathers. He is not nearly as generous with his citations from the Bible. He lists only six Bible passages on a half a page to support his thesis.<sup>82</sup>

### 3.5.2.2 Thesis II

The ministry of the Word or the pastoral office is not a human institution but an office that God Himself has established.<sup>83</sup>

In his second thesis on the ministry, Walther indicates that the ministry of the word or the pastoral office is not something that people devised and developed. Nor is it something contrived by the church. Rather, God established it. How do we know that? Walther shows us: First, through the prophets, God indicated that He would give pastors and teachers to the New Testament church. Second, that Jesus called the apostles and the Seventy into the ministry shows the divine institution. Third, the passages in the New Testament that speak about those who were called into the ministry indicate the divine character of the ministry of the Gospel. Fourth, that the apostles equated themselves with the servants who were called mediately indicates the divine institution of the ministry.<sup>84</sup>

Walther taught that the ministry was not something that people developed. It was divinely established. There is but one public ministry. The public ministry can manifest itself in various forms as circumstances arise. During his lifetime, Walther served as a theological professor, the seminary president, and a parish pastor simultaneously. That he did not elaborate on all the various forms in which the ministry could manifest itself was because he was writing about the church in North America. The needs and circumstances were much different in North America than they were in Europe. The needs were also different in St. Louis than they were in a rural area just outside of town or even one hundred miles away.

As was mentioned earlier, Walther cites a sermon by Luther regarding the education of children (“A Sermon on Keeping Children in School”) to demonstrate that the ministry can manifest itself in various forms.<sup>85</sup>

To indicate that this is God’s will, Walther offers twenty verses from Scripture over a page and a half as proof.<sup>86</sup> The Confessions get almost a page and a half; Luther occupies three pages; the dogmaticians and the church fathers take up almost seven pages.

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<sup>82</sup> 1 Peter 2:9, Revelation 1:6, Revelation 5:10, 1 Corinthians 12:29, Romans 10:15, and James 3:1.

<sup>83</sup> Walther. *Church and Ministry*. p. 177.

<sup>84</sup> Walther. *Church and Ministry*. pp. 177-178.

<sup>85</sup> M. Luther. *Luther's Works, Volume 46: The Christian in Society III* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967, 1999. Page 207

### 3.5.2.3 Thesis III

The ministry is not an arbitrary office but one whose establishment has been commanded to the church and to which the church is ordinarily bound till the end of time.<sup>87</sup>

The ministry was instituted by God and it is to continue until the end of time. The church is obligated by God to carry out the work of proclaiming the Gospel until our Redeemer returns on the Last Day. The thrust of this thesis is against the false teaching of Johann Wilhelm Friedrich Hoefling who was a professor at the University of Erlangen. He died in 1853. Hoefling erroneously held that the ministry was something that the church contrived to meet a particular need that had arisen. According to Hoefling, the ministry was created by man only because of a need that existed at a particular time, much as a university might create a new professorship to teach a class on a special subject, for example, “Global Warming and its Effects on Intergalactic Travel in the 22<sup>nd</sup> Century.” Obviously, such a course did not exist two decades ago. It was created because of a current situation. Hoefling thought that the ministry was something similar. Where Hoefling differed from Scripture, Walther, Luther, and evangelical Lutherans since, is that he held incorrectly that the ministry was of human origin, developed by the church, to serve its members. On the contrary, the ministry is of divine origin, instituted by God, to provide the proclamation of His Word until our Savior’s return.

Hoefling was a contemporary of Walther. There were no citations contrary to Hoefling’s error from previous centuries because the specific problem did not yet exist. However, these Lutheran dogmaticians did deal with the fact that the ministry is divinely instituted, the church is to continue proclaiming the Word of God, and through that Word, God leads people to saving faith.

Walther offers less than half a page and only one Bible passage — Matthew 28:19-20<sup>88</sup> — to discuss the Scriptural proof for his thesis. There are other passages mentioned within the quotations provided by the dogmaticians. The Confessions occupy a page. Luther, the Lutheran dogmaticians, and the church fathers are quoted over five pages.

### 3.5.2.4 Thesis IV

The ministry is not a special or, in opposition to that of ordinary Christians, a more holy state, as was the Levitical priesthood, but it is a ministry of service.<sup>89</sup>

Grabau, and some since him, have adopted a position on the pastoral office that is very similar to the position held by the Roman Catholic Church. They hold that those in this office have been given special rights and privileges through “apostolic succession”. In doing this, they wish to

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<sup>86</sup> Psalm 68:11, Jeremiah 3:15, Joel 2:23, Matthew 10, Matthew 28:18-20, Luke 9:1-10, Mark 16:15, John 20:21-23, John 21:15-17, Luke 10:122, Acts 20:28, 1 Corinthians 12:28-29, Ephesians 4:11, 1 Peter 5:1, 2 John 1, 3 John 1, Colossians 4:7, Philippians 2:25, 1 Corinthians 4:1, and 1 Corinthians 1:1.

<sup>87</sup> Walther. *Church and Ministry*. p. 191.

<sup>88</sup> Walther. *Church and Ministry*. p. 191.

<sup>89</sup> Walther. *Church and Ministry*. p. 198.

establish a special caste within the church. They are restoring the Levitical priesthood of the Old Testament. Contrary to this, Scripture teaches that those who serve in the ministry in the New Testament are those from within the priesthood of all believers who have been selected to publicly perform the ministry of the group on their behalf.

Seven Bible passages<sup>90</sup> on a half a page are used as proof for this thesis. The confessions also occupy half a page. Luther is quoted on just over seven pages. The dogmaticians and church fathers are cited on three and a half pages.

### 3.5.2.5 Thesis V

The public ministry [*Predigtamt*] has the power to preach the Gospel and administer the holy sacraments as well as the power of spiritual judgment.<sup>91</sup>

Christ has given His Church the public ministry. In this, He has also given them the power of preaching the Gospel, the administration of the sacraments, and the keys.

A half a page is set aside for Scriptural proof. Walther cites four Bible passages.<sup>92</sup> The Confessions get almost a page and a half; Luther gets a half a page; the Lutheran dogmaticians and the church fathers are quoted over two and a half pages.

### 3.5.2.6 Thesis VI

The ministry of the Word [*Predigtamt*] is conferred by God through the congregation as the possessor of all ecclesiastical power, or the power of the keys, by means of its call, which God Himself has prescribed. The ordination of the called [persons] with the laying on of hands is not a divine institution but merely an ecclesiastical rite [*Ordnung*] established by the apostles; it is no more than a solemn public confirmation of the call.

- A. The ministry of preaching is conferred by God through the congregation, as the possessor of all ecclesiastical power, or the power of the keys, by means of its call, which God Himself has prescribed.<sup>93</sup>

Those who publicly proclaim the Word of God in the name of and on behalf of the congregation have the office to do so because of the call that the calling body of believers has given. The call comes from God to the gathering of believers who issue it to the person they call to serve them.

As Scriptural proof, Walther cites four Bible passages — Matthew 18:15-20, 1 Peter 2:5-10, Acts 1:15-26, Acts 6:1-6<sup>94</sup> — on one page. The Confessions take up two pages. Quotations from Luther fill more than six pages. The dogmaticians and the church fathers are cited on nineteen pages.

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<sup>90</sup> 1 Peter 2:9, Revelations 1:6, Galatians 3:26, Matthew 23:8-12, 1 Corinthians 3:5, 2 Corinthians 4:5, and Colossians 1:24-25.

<sup>91</sup> Walther. *Church and Ministry*. p. 213.

<sup>92</sup> Matthew 28:19-20, John 20:21-23, John 21:15-16, and 1 Corinthians 4:1.

<sup>93</sup> Walther. *Church and Ministry*. p. 219.

- B. The ordination of the called [persons] with the laying on of hands is not a divine institution but merely an ecclesiastical rite [*Ordnung*] established by the apostles; it is no more than a solemn public confirmation of the call.<sup>95</sup>

Walther correctly points out that Scripture never mentions a divine institution of ordination. It is a valid and meaningful rite within the Church in which there is a public acknowledgement of candidates for the office(s) into which they have been called. Hands are laid upon the head of the candidate, prayers are offered, and divine blessings are received. However, ordination is not a divine institution. It is a rite developed by the church.<sup>96</sup>

Ordination is neither commanded nor forbidden by Scripture. It is an adiaphora — neither commanded nor forbidden by Scripture. Therefore there are no Scripture passages quoted. The Scriptural position is stated on about a third of a page. A page of quotations have been taken from the Confessions. Citations from Luther appear on eleven pages. The dogmatists and the church fathers are quoted over seven pages.

### 3.5.2.7 Thesis VII

The holy ministry [*Predigtamt*] is the power, conferred by God through the congregation as the possessor of the priesthood and all church power, to exercise the rights of the spiritual priesthood in public office in the name of the congregation.<sup>97</sup>

Many in the church today promote what is known as “Apostolic Succession.” According to them, the ministry of the Word comes to us “from Christ through the Apostles.” They claim that there is a rite of succession that is passed on from one generation to the next, and that without this special rite, a person cannot be a pastor. Those who hold to this position would say that the office of the pastor is an elevated position within the church. These are the people who contend that the public ministry is equal to, and only found in, the office of the pastor of the local congregation. That Walther did not adhere to this mistaken belief is obvious from this thesis. The correct understanding is that the public ministry comes “from Christ through the church.”<sup>98</sup>

In the previous theses, Walther has stated that the universal priesthood of all believers and the public ministry are not the same entity because of what God’s Word clearly teaches. A member of the priesthood of all believers is not necessarily a pastor because there is no specific divine call. Those that have been called into the public ministry are not in a special holy state that would make them different from and superior to other Christians. They receive their office from the gathering of believers, the congregation of the faithful, upon whom God has conferred the responsibility of

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<sup>94</sup> Walther. *Church and Ministry*. pp. 219-220.

<sup>95</sup> Walther. *Church and Ministry*. p. 247.

<sup>96</sup> Walther. *Church and Ministry*. p. 248.

<sup>97</sup> Walther. *Church and Ministry*. p. 268.

<sup>98</sup> John F. Brug. “The Ministry of the Apostles and Our Ministry”. *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*. Volume 92. Number 3. Summer 1995, p. 168.

proclaiming the Gospel to the entire world. Those in the public ministry are not only ministers and stewards of the mysteries of God, but they are also ministers and stewards of the church. They represent not only their own rights and powers as individual Christian believers, part of the universal priesthood of all believers, but also the rights and powers of the church. They, therefore, not only act in behalf of and in the name of Christ, but also in the name of and on behalf of the church of believers.

Walther uses two pages but cites just one Bible verse —Romans 15:16 — for this thesis. He does state that other passages have already been cited in the presentations of the other theses.<sup>99</sup> Citations from the Lutheran Confessions are on three pages. Luther quotations occupy seven pages; the dogmaticians and the church fathers occupy almost nine pages.

### 3.5.2.8 Thesis VIII

The pastoral ministry [*Predigtamt*] is the highest office in the church, and from it stems all other offices in the church.<sup>100</sup>

Here is where the correct understanding of the German word *Predigtamt* is so very important. The translation above by the late Pastor J. T. Mueller of the LCMS indicates the narrow and restrictive interpretation that it can only mean the “pastoral office.” If on the other hand, we take the broader interpretation, the word can and does mean “the public ministry.”

Although the pastoral office is the most comprehensive form of the public ministry, it is not the office but what the person holding the office does that is important. It is the proclamation of the Word of God that is the most important thing the Church does. This is so because it is the teaching all things that Christ has commanded (Matthew 28:20). Truly, those who proclaim the Word publicly are engaged in an important work. Those placed in authority over a flock of believers as pastors (overseers, bishops, deacons) have been given a divine responsibility. They are participating in a divinely instituted office. They have been given divine instructions to feed the lambs and the sheep of the Good Shepherd, to watch over the souls entrusted to their care, to give an account of their ministry.<sup>101</sup>

The purpose of this eighth thesis is not to elevate the pastoral office to a position of supreme authority and domination. In the previous thesis, Walther has already shown us that the pastoral office is not one of higher authority. The purpose of this thesis was to correct the error that was being taught by Grabau, who would have established a bishopric system, a hierarchy. Walther wanted to show that church government is not supreme. Church government when carried out with the Word of God and on the basis of what Scripture teaches is a form of the public ministry. On the other hand, church government that imposes laws, ceremonies, and traditions upon the church

<sup>99</sup> Walther. *Church and Ministry*. pp. 268-270.

<sup>100</sup> Walther. *Church and Ministry*. p. 289.

<sup>101</sup> 1 Timothy 3:1,5,7; 1 Corinthians 4:1; Titus 1:7; Hebrews 13:17.

goes beyond what God's Word commands and forbids, and infringes upon the Christian liberty of its members.<sup>102</sup> The church has one task — to proclaim the Gospel. The proclamation of the Word is the most important task within the church.

To support this he uses a page to reference twelve Bible passages. Citations from the Confessions occupy almost two pages. Luther quotations are given on almost four pages. The dogmaticians and the church fathers are quoted on just over six pages.

### 3.5.2.9 Thesis IX

To the ministry there is due respect as well as unconditional obedience when the pastor uses God's Word. But the minister must not tyrannize the church. He has no authority to introduce new laws or arbitrarily to establish adiaphora or ceremonies. He has no right to inflict and carry out excommunication without his having first informed the whole congregation.

A. To the ministry there is due respect as well as unconditional obedience when the pastor uses God's Word.<sup>103</sup>

When the Word of God is proclaimed in its truth and purity, reverence and an unconditional obedience is proper and fitting on the part of all. This is not because those in the public ministry are a part of a more sacred state, as he has shown in Thesis VII. No, the respect and obedience are due because of the message that they present. "If a congregation has entrusted the official authority to a person by means of a regular and rightful call, that person has been placed at the head of the congregation by God Himself, through the congregation."<sup>104</sup>

Walther uses a page and a half to present his Scriptural proof. He refers to eleven Bible passages.<sup>105</sup> Just over two pages contain citations from the Confessions. Luther is cited on just over three pages. The dogmaticians are cited on two pages.

The next two parts of this thesis speak against those in the public ministry exercising their authority presumptuously; they have no right to exercise any authority that has not been conveyed upon them by their call. Here, again, Walther is speaking against the dictatorial spirit that was evident in Stephan at the time of the German immigration to the United States. He is also speaking against the domineering attitude evidenced by Grabau.

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<sup>102</sup> Lawrenz, p. 136.

<sup>103</sup> Walther. Church and Ministry, p. 303.

<sup>104</sup> Walther. Church and Ministry, p. 303.

<sup>105</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:28, Ephesians 4:11, Acts 20:28, 1 Corinthians 4:1, 2 Corinthians 5:18-20, Luke 10:16, Hebrews 13:17, 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13, 1 Timothy 5:17-18, Galatians 6:6-10, and Matthew 10:12-15.



- B. The minister must not tyrannize the church. He has no authority to introduce new laws or arbitrarily to establish adiaphora or ceremonies.<sup>106</sup>

Citing Matthew 20:25-26, Matthew 23:8, and John 18:36, Walther shows that the church was not to be a kingdom in which some ruled and others were subjects. All were equal. However, the pastors, by virtue of their call, publicly served the congregation and were responsible for the spiritual training of the congregation. The members were to respect and obey the pastor because of the Word of God, which he taught, and the office, which he held. On the other hand, the pastor was not to be a dictator or king introducing new laws or creating ceremonies not found and/or commanded in Scripture. Nor was the pastor to establish laws or practices regarding matters that were neither commanded nor forbidden by Scripture (adiaphora).

One and a quarter pages are used to present the Scriptural proof for this thesis. Seven Bible passages are cited.<sup>107</sup> There are two pages of references to the Confessions. There are three pages of Luther quotations and three and a half pages citing the dogmaticians and the church fathers.

- C. The minister has no right to inflict and carry out excommunication without his having first informed the whole congregation.<sup>108</sup>

Excommunication is the final step in church discipline (Matthew 18:17). It is the removal of all rights and privileges of membership from an individual because of their impenitence. It is the use of the binding key, which Christ has given to His believers. It closes heaven to the individual and forbids fellowship with that person. Ultimately, the church uses this key. The power to do this does not lie with any single individual, be it the pastor or any other person serving in the public ministry, or with any member of the congregation. The church discipline process is very clearly outlined in Matthew 18 (verses 15-18). First one Christian speaks to the guilty person on a one-to-one basis. If the guilty person does not repent, two or three other Christians confront the guilty person with the sin. The goal is always to convince the guilty person of the specific sin and lead that person to repentance. Finally, if the person still does not repent, the entire church tries to get the person to acknowledge that sin and repent. If that does not succeed, the guilty person is excommunicated. However, this is done not by one individual, but by the entire congregation. Although it may be the pastor that publicly proclaims it, it is the congregation's decision to excommunicate an individual.

Walther uses six bible passages to support this thesis.<sup>109</sup> A page is used to quote the Confessions. Citations from Luther occupy just over a page. Citations from the dogmaticians and the church fathers take up seven pages.

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<sup>106</sup> Walther. *Church and Ministry*. p. 311.

<sup>107</sup> In addition to the three cited in the text there are an additional four: 1 Peter 5:1-3, 2 Corinthians 8:8, 1 Corinthians 7:35, and 1 Corinthians 13:34.

<sup>108</sup> Walther. *Church and Ministry*. p. 321.

<sup>109</sup> Matthew 18:15-18; 1 Corinthians 5:4, 13; 3 John 9-10; 1 Timothy 5:20; and 2 Corinthians 2:6.

### 3.5.2.10 Thesis X

To the ministry of the Word, according to divine right, belongs also the duty [Amt] to judge doctrine, but laymen also possess this right. Therefore, in the ecclesiastical courts (consistories) and councils they are accorded both a seat and vote together with the clergy.<sup>110</sup>

The authority that those in the public ministry possess is the same authority that all believers possess as spiritual priests. This also pertains to the duty or the responsibility of determining and judging doctrine. An individual's ability to exercise this authority properly will depend upon the spiritual understanding gained through the study of God's Word. God has blessed the individual Christians with the gift of those in the public ministry to instruct and guide them so that their spiritual understanding may grow because of the preaching and teaching of God's Word. That those serving in the public ministry must judge doctrine is obvious. However, God has not taken the right to judge doctrine away from the laity. Rather He would have them grow in spiritual wisdom and knowledge because of their study of His Word so that they are better able to exercise this duty.

Scriptural proof is provided in a space of one page. Seven Bible passages are cited.<sup>111</sup> One short quotation from the Smalcald Articles on a half a page provides the proof from the Confessions. Citations from Luther appear on more than nine pages; citations from the dogmaticians and the church fathers occupy seven pages.

## 3.6 Conclusion: Walther's Format Continues To Be Used and Thus Foments Debate

The tally of how much space is dedicated to each of the three proofs — Bible passages, citations from the Lutheran Confessions, and quotations from Luther, the dogmaticians and the church fathers — clearly indicate that there really are very few references from the Scripture, even though they are provided first following each thesis. The Confessions occupy more space than do the Bible verses. The citations from Luther and the dogmaticians and the church fathers dominate the proof portion of each thesis. This is the format that Walther repeatedly used, as was mentioned earlier. Those who seek to emulate him have no choice but to walk in his footsteps and use the same format.

The Missouri Synod had a difficult beginning. From almost the moment this band of Saxons landed on the shores of the USA, they were embroiled in a controversy of gigantic proportions. It almost destroyed the group. Some even gave up and returned to Germany. But those who remained were a tightly knit group having a definite *esprit de corps*. They had sought a new life in a new land to escape the tyranny that dominated the state church and the Prussian Union that blurred the

<sup>110</sup> Walther. Church and Ministry. p. 332.

<sup>111</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:15-16, 1 John 4, 2 John 10-11, 1 Thessalonians 5:12, Matthew 7:15-16, John 10:5, and Acts 17:11.

confessional lines that marked the differences between the doctrinal positions of the Lutherans and the Reformed. They survived the problems that arose when their leader, Martin Stephan, fell from grace. They survived primarily because of the Scripture-based counsel and leadership of Walther. But then afterwards, because of the problems encountered with Stephan, they firmly resolved not to listen to any other voice than that of the Lutheran Confessions. This they accepted as a true, accurate, and clear presentation of God's Word. Because of what they had experienced, these founding fathers of the LCMS had a very low opinion of anyone, and especially any other Lutheran, who took a position other than the one that they held. The reason that the Lutheran Confessions loomed so large in their way of thinking and in their argumentation is that they were seeking to reclaim and reassert themselves as Lutherans in the New World.<sup>112</sup> This is reflected in the format Walther so frequently used. That format continues to be used by some Lutherans to this day.

In respect to our antithesis, can one arrive at true, orthodox Lutheran doctrine merely by primarily searching the writings of Luther, the Lutheran Confessions, and the orthodox Lutheran dogmaticians, as Walther did, the answer is yes. However, the answer is also no. What Walther and those who follow his format do with their citation theology is parrot back what someone else has already written on a particular doctrine. When they do this, they are adding their "Amen" to what was previously said. They agree; and so do all orthodox Lutherans as long as the quotation is not taken out of context. So, yes, one can arrive at orthodox Lutheran doctrine by primarily using the writings of Luther, the Lutheran Confessions, and the orthodox Lutheran dogmaticians. It is simply the position previously established.

On the other hand, to the question: "Can one arrive at orthodox Lutheran doctrine by following this format?" the answer is clearly no. Walther himself proves it. As we have noted, at times he used citations out of context, citations that were not from the original but from translations and rather poor translations at that. His constant use of the Latin language made him closer to the early Lutheran dogmaticians, but his lack of mastery of the language often caused him to lose his students. When he did use Scripture passages to support his position, because they were passages he had gotten from another source and not from his own Bible study, these passages did not always apply to what he said. Blessed as Walther was in so many ways and with so many talents, his use of citation theology to establish doctrine was not his strength. At times, as we have noted, his method led him to deduce doctrines that were not in agreement with the same dogmaticians that he had quoted. Some of his stances on matters of adiaphora were legalistic; i.e., he expected people to do something that neither Scripture nor the orthodox Lutheran theologians had set forth as a must do item. By using his format, Walther, and others, have not always arrived at orthodox Lutheran theology.

Was Walther an orthodox Lutheran? Most certainly! He brought many strengths and talents to the Lutheran Church. He was an admirable leader who served the Lord and the LCMS in an

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<sup>112</sup> Paul O. Wendland. Forward in Christ...At the Dawn of a New Millennium Changing Contexts—Eternal Word.

outstanding manner. At the same time, though, Walther had his weaknesses as every other human being. He was not perfect. What he said and wrote was not the inspired Word of God even though he was motivated to write as a result of what Luther had written about the Bible. Unfortunately his heavy reliance on the writings of Luther, the Confessions, and the Lutheran dogmaticians caused him to have views that were not always in accord with the rest of the orthodox Lutherans.

In the matter of the doctrine of the Church and its Ministry, some repeatedly cite statements made by Lutheran pastors and dogmaticians who lived in Germany hundreds of years ago. It is necessary that we are aware of the fact that the duties of the parish pastor have evolved from the days of Luther in Wittenberg in the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. They have changed since Dr. Walther was a pastor and seminary professor in St. Louis during the last half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Most pastors, today, do not teach seminary classes and serve as the pastor of four urban congregations at the same time. That Walther could do this is an indication of how the ministry has changed.

Moreover, the political situation has changed. In many countries, today, there is a separation of church and state. This has not always been the case. In some European countries, even today, such as Norway, the King and his government are members of a state-church. In some cases, these individuals participate in the affairs of the congregation and the ministry of the church. At times, as devout, Bible-believing Christians, these government officials serve the Lord and His people motivated by God's love for them in Christ Jesus. This is not always the case, however, as some are members in name only. They are members because it is a state-church, and most of the people of the country, having been baptized in a congregation of this church, consider themselves members, even though they do not attend worship services. As members of the church, however, there is nothing to prevent them from exercising their authority (backed by the government which supports the church). If these individuals do not really know Christ Jesus and do not know His Word, then the ways in which they would govern the affairs of the church are more than likely based on human wisdom and not on God's will. This was a problem in Luther's day. This problem influenced some of the things that the reformers and later Lutheran pastors and dogmaticians had to say about the Church and its Ministry. Because the situation is not the same, today, at least in every country, caution needs to be used when citing these Lutheran theologians of previous centuries. The situation in the USA in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is markedly different than it was in 16<sup>th</sup> century Germany.

In recent decades, the LCMS has been troubled by doctrinal problems, and not just in regard to the doctrines of the church and its ministry. Many of its more conservative pastors and congregations have come to the Biblically correct conclusion that they can no longer remain and participate with errorists, i.e., those who no longer preach and teach what the Bible says.

At the same time, the ELS, in a desire to grow and have more pastors and more congregations, has opened its arms and through a process of colloquies has accepted many of these former

LCMS pastors and congregations. When they joined the ELS, these former LCMS pastors brought, among other things, the narrow, restricted view of the Church and its Ministry. They also brought the format for developing doctrinal statements that commonly has been used in the LCMS. This approach, as previously stated, is based on the concept of citation theology, which Walther repeatedly used. Following this format, the Waltherian scholar relies primarily and heavily on what Luther, the Confessions, and earlier Lutheran theologians have already stated on a given topic. Any Scriptural passages that are used in reference to that topic usually are carried over from the citations of the earlier Lutherans. As we have pointed out, this format is still being heavily used today by members of the LCMS. It is the format that they are taught in the LCMS university and seminary. Thus the papers of those who follow this LCMS format are filled with long and frequent quotations from Luther and the Confessions as well as from Calov, Heshusius, Hunnius, Quenstedt, Chemnitz. In the recent past, the writings of Walther, F. Pieper, W. Maier, E. Klug, M. Franzmann, and others have been included in the citations.

There is nothing wrong with using quotations from others, especially Christian scholars and leaders. However, among orthodox Lutherans what these men have said in the past should not be the basis for the statement or the position; the Bible should be. The quotations from the Confessions and the citations from these men should be used to support the position or the statement, but only after a thorough searching of the Scriptures for God's word on the subject.

When there are those that establish their doctrinal positions directly from what the Bible says trying to establish doctrinal statements with those who establish their doctrinal positions in a derived sense, having gone through the writings of human beings, there is a possibility that those who espouse these two views will encounter problems. This will not always happen. Luther, the Confessions, and the orthodox Lutheran theologians of the past built their positions directly from what God says in the Bible. So, yes, there are many cases in which one can cite Luther, or Chemnitz, or Calov, or Quenstedt and have the Biblical position. On the other hand, there are topics, such as the doctrines of the church and its ministry in which the results are not always the same. At times, the statements of other people were made in an entirely different context, for an entirely different problem, and involved completely different circumstances. Citations in cases like these are no more applicable than taking a recipe for making an apple pie and using it to cook potatoes — both, after all involve peeling, slicing, and cooking.

Contributing to the problem is a misunderstanding of what Dr. Walther was referring to when he used the expression: "vom Gemeinschaftswegen". There are some, such as John Drickamer, a Walther scholar in the LCMS, who translates it as "in behalf of the congregation". A better translation, offered by Carl Lawrenz, is "in behalf of the whole group".<sup>113</sup> The term "congregation" is much more restrictive than is the term "group." This serves as but one example. If the church is only the local congregation, the word "church" can only have one meaning. On the other hand, if the church is a group of believers, there is an absolutely different, broader significance.

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<sup>113</sup> Bryan M. Gerlach. "The Difference between the WELS and LCMS on the Doctrine of the Holy Ministry". Paper delivered to the California Pastoral Conference Belmont, California January 25-26, 1988), p. 7.

In a paper written about the parish pastorate, Harold Wicke, a former editor of The Northwestern Lutheran, stated that Walther was not consistent when he spoke on this matter (i.e., the church).<sup>114</sup> If Walther was not consistent, then it is understandable that he was speaking in different situations each involving its own particular circumstances. As a result, those who rely on what he said on the matter should take note of those circumstances and not broadly apply Walther's statements to every conceivable situation as if it were some sort of law or guideline that must apply at all times and in all circumstances to all believers. The process of selectively choosing particular citations from Luther, the Confessions, or other Lutheran theologians and then using these quotations to support a position and insist that others adhere to that position has contributed to the struggle within the ELS.

Citing Professor Kurt Marquart of Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana, an LCMS seminary, Pastor Brian Gerlach in a letter written to the publication *Christian News* wrote: "I happen to believe with the late Dr. Wilhelm Oesch, that C.F.W. Walther was the greatest Luther ecclesiologist and the most faithful interpreter of Luther in the 19<sup>th</sup> century debate about the church and ministry. The trouble is that not everything given out as Walther's position nowadays really was Walther's position." (letter in *Christian News*, July 21, 1986, p. 9).<sup>115</sup>

This is very interesting, especially in the light of the fact that those that follow the LCMS approach tend to rely so heavily on quotations from men. If someone were to write a credible paper; we have no reason to doubt what the person said was true. And, if in that paper, this person quoted a statement made by someone else but mistakenly attributed it to Walther, we would conclude that Walther had said it. If we based a position on this misquotation, we would think that our position was the same as Walther's, when, in fact, it was not. Herein, too, lies a problem when citation theology is used to establish doctrinal positions. The resulting positions are based on what a human being has said and not on what God has said. Citation theology works well if you are setting forth church history or the history of a particular doctrine. Citation theology does not work, however, when it comes to establishing Biblical doctrine.

That is why we must rely first on what God says, and then support the Bible-based positions with statements of fellow believers. When one does exegesis and word studies as have been presented in chapters 5 and 6, it is evident that although the very limited definition of the church as being only the local congregation, and the ministry as being only the pastoral office do exist, and they have existed within the church in the past, even so it is apparent that the Scriptural definitions of both the church and its ministry are actually much broader and encompass much more.

Regrettably, some within the ELS followed the system of many modern LCMS theologians, that is, of seeking direction from what various dogmaticians said in the past. Those dogmaticians applied

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<sup>114</sup> Harold Wicke. "Is the Pastorate in the Congregation the Only God-ordained Office in the Church?", Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly. Vol. 68. Num. 2. April, 1971. p.114.

<sup>115</sup> Gerlach, p. 7.

the Word to a particular situation that existed at their particular time. They were not setting forth principles and teachings to be applied to all times, all situations, and all places. When this is done, they are limiting the scope of interpretation. They are relying too heavily on what man has said. I think that if all of the people involved with the present struggle within the Evangelical Lutheran Synod had approached their study of the Church and its Ministry by going directly to God's word, the synod in convention would have accepted the position set forth by the Doctrinal Committee. As a result, there would be no misunderstandings today.

We now take a look at the use of the Bible in determining doctrine. We shall see what the results have been as we look at how modern Lutherans in the USA use the Bible.

## Chapter

# 4 The Use of the Bible in Determining Doctrine

## 4.1 Introduction

Simply put, there are only two basic paths that Christian theology and religion follow, and have followed throughout all history. Christian theology either takes the path based on faith in Jesus Christ drawn without compromise and without doubts or questions from God's Holy Word. Or, it follows a path that is based on views and opinions developed and processed by human reason. This does not mean to say that those who base their personal beliefs on reason do not possess a faith. They do believe, but what they believe is determined by human reason. It is not determined by an unqualified trust in what the Scriptures say.

The theological position of every individual who belongs to a Christian church body is decided by faith or reason, even today. Faith or reason will determine how an individual views the Bible as well as how that individual will regard the very words within Scripture. Faith or reason will affect the way an individual perceives a doctrine of the church. Faith or reason will also influence the very meaning of words used by the individual. For example, if I use the words "justification," "sanctification," "inspiration," "inerrancy," "Bible," "Scripture," "the Word of God," "law," "Gospel", "gospel", "church," and "ministry," to name just a few; although I can find thousands of people who will agree with me on the meanings of these words, many of you who are reading this will not. Some of you may agree with me on the meaning of all of these terms; others may only agree on the meanings of some of these terms; and still others may not agree with me on the meanings of any of these terms. For some it will be like comparing apples and oranges. Why? Because reason influences the perception of the words and defines them, not necessarily in the way they have been used in the Bible. Many will say that justification means you are made just, and to be made just, you must perform works. Yet the Bible says we are "justified by faith, it is the gift of God and not of works, lest any man should boast." We may be using the same word – justification – but there are two distinct meanings to the word and doctrine. Reason tells me I must do something to be justified; faith says, "Jesus justified you completely, fully, uncompromisingly on the cross." This is more than just perspective; the influence of "faith" or "reason" pervades the doctrine and teachings of each and every church body and the beliefs of each and every individual.

Regarding the doctrines of the church and the ministry, this has also been the case. Every person who belongs to a Christian church body has a particular view, understanding, and opinion regarding these theological words. These positions arise on the basis of whether one uses faith or one uses reason to determine what they accept and believe.



Moreover, by using certain words and terms and molding one's reading of Scripture in a certain way, one gives oneself away as using certain Lutheran sense-making reading glasses for the understanding of God's intention with a specific stated doctrine. The words 'doctrine', 'Holy and inerrant Word of God,' and 'God's intention while inspiring the writing of His holy and inerrant Word,' as well as the heading of this chapter 'The Use of the Bible in Determining Doctrine,' express the sense-making ambience of orthodox Lutherans. 'Liberal' Lutherans would approach these words and phrases with bold remarks concerning people who actually believe that God verbally inspired the Bible, that God intends that we follow Him and live by His direction and seek His guidance. As a conservative Lutheran who attended an increasingly liberal Lutheran College, I am speaking from experience here, not being judgmental! While attending services in a liberal setting, I heard sermons preached in chapel and lectures given in the classroom that questioned and doubted the historical events and miracles recorded in the Scriptures, that God really did not mean that Jesus was born of a virgin; and that it was foolishness to believe in the Physical Resurrection because Jesus' death on the cross was just so sad and tragic and He was buried, period. Through associations outside the church, I have come in contact with numerous people, some of them close friends, some pastors in other Lutheran groups, who have belittled the Bible while others hold to its divine inspiration and inerrancy. My intention is to concentrate on the slightly different views, approaches and uses within the ambience of those who are conservative, orthodox Bible-believing Lutherans.

At times, this paper will refer to several types of believers, they are as follows: Bible-believers, partial Bible-believers or semi-Bible-believers, and non-Bible-believers or Bible-deniers. Because theological terminology often has different meanings based on geographical and denominational differences, it would be good to define these terms as they will be used in this paper. A **Bible-believer** is a person who regards everything that the Bible says as being true. There are no doubts, questions, or hesitations to believe even one verse of Scripture. For the Bible-believer, the entire Bible is the wholly inspired and inerrant word of God. Every word is true. Every event mentioned in the Bible has actually occurred or will occur. The **partial-Bible-believer** accepts and believes those parts of the Bible that pertain to what he or she wants to believe. This person may have misgivings, doubts, questions, and hesitations to accept certain portions of Scripture. This may be on one or two matters, or it may be on many matters. For example, the individual may have a hard time believing that the world was really created in six days, that Balaam's ass really spoke, or that Moses really wrote the first five books of the Bible. Perhaps they adhere to theistic-evolution because they cannot bring themselves to believe the creation account to be true, yet they do not want to deny that God is the Creator of all things. The partial-Bible-believer only believes part of the Bible. The **Bible-denier** is precisely that, one who cannot accept Scripture or anything in it as being true. For them, the Bible is nothing more than a literary work, to be judged like any literary work that has been written by a human being. The Bible is not the word of God. It is not inspired by God. It is not inerrant. It is merely a religious book of myths, legends, and fables about religious life among the early Hebrews and the early Christians.

In this chapter I will be presenting a brief overview of the history of theology. Our purpose is not to do a comparative study of every theological school of thought, of every theologian, of every religion, or of every denomination within the Christian religion. Our purpose is to merely present an overview of some of the major theological influences and opinions that have affected the way in which hermeneutics was carried out and the Bible interpreted. Because this paper deals with a matter within a Lutheran church body within the USA, there will always be an emphasis on the Lutheran position, and when necessary, statements regarding the doctrines and positions on the church and the ministry will predominate. We shall begin by looking at the common, predominant views in the three periods: before the Reformation (4.2.1), during the Reformation (4.2.2), and from the Reformation into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century (4.2.3). For the sake of showing how several doctrines are presently being interpreted, I will briefly touch upon the Word of God (4.3.1), Inspiration (4.3.2), Inerrancy (4.3.3), and Revelation (4.3.4). The purpose for doing this is not to cover any of these in detail. Rather it is to show that not every one understands these four doctrines in the same way. Then I will talk about four modern views, approaches, and uses of the Bible: the Grammatical-Historical Method (4.4.1), The Historical-Critical Method (4.4.2), The Vox Viva Approach (4.4.3), and The Syntactical Theological Exegesis Method (4.4.4). None of these will be an exhaustive presentation. Certainly much more can be said about any and all of them. What is presented is done so basically to acquaint the reader with each of the four views and to provide a brief discussion of each. In section 4.5, there will be a presentation of Evangelical, Evangelicals, and evangelical. It is the same word, but throughout the world and especially in the USA the word has different uses and different meanings (4.5.1). The Roots of the Fundamentalists and the Evangelicals in the USA will be discussed to present background information (4.5.2). The section will also show differences within modern Protestantism in the USA between the Fundamentalists (4.5.3), the Evangelicals (4.5.4), and the Pentecostals (4.5.5). In 4.6, I will show three common views, approaches, and ways of using the Bible by the “moderate” and “liberal” Lutherans in the USA. We will take brief looks at The Existential Demythologizing Approach (4.6.1), The Gospel Reductionism Approach (4.6.2), and The Divine Human Mystery Approach (4.6.3). The three views will be compared and commented upon in (4.6.4) and an indication will be made how each of these is influencing, or has influenced, theologians in the LCMS and the ELCA. Time does not permit me to go into any of these in any great depth. These approaches have influenced many within the Christian Church today. Some Lutherans have also been more influenced by them than others. My approach in this chapter and in this study is to demonstrate my *view* of, *approach* to and *use* of the Bible as the infallible and inerrant Word of God in the formulation of the doctrines of the Church and the Ministry.

In setting forth a doctrinal position on the doctrines of the Church and the Ministry one could, on the one hand, work with the premise that by going first to Walther, F. Pieper and Luther and only going to the Scripture after examining what these men have written, that the Evangelical Lutheran Synod has encountered its current difficulty in not being able to clearly and succinctly state the doctrine of the Church and the Ministry. We have already seen in Chapter 3, and we shall see again in this chapter, that the LCMS influenced men have a different view and approach to

Scripture, because many of them have been trained not to regard the Bible as divinely inspired, but as something on a par with the writings of human beings.

On the other hand, one could state that one has to approach Scripture first and thereafter may look at what C. F. W. Walther, the two Pieper brothers, and Martin Luther said about the specific sections of Scripture that are under examination regarding the doctrine of the Church and the Ministry. Thus, one deals with the particular doctrine directly embedded in Scripture and not with theological and philosophical approaches or with a study of human insights into it. One makes a choice to examine directly what Scripture has to say about this or any other particular doctrine. And by doing this, one could say that they put the Lord first, thereby letting God be God by letting Him state the doctrine as He intended it to be understood when He inspired the writing of His holy and inerrant Word.

To deal with the struggle within the ELS to set forth in precise language the doctrines of the Church and the Ministry, I could have used many approaches. I have chosen the approach which I believe will best illustrate why the differences exist and also will show the solution that I humbly suggest should be attained.

My intent in this paper is to discuss the current influence — the use of the writings of man and apparently regarding them as equal to or superior to the Word of God — that Walther and his theological descendants have had on a sizeable number, although a minority, of pastors and theologians within the Evangelical Lutheran Synod. It is my opinion, and not mine alone — as evidenced by a survey that I conducted of the 37 ELS pastors who have been active in the ministry and have witnessed and participated first-hand in this struggle during the past three decades — 34 out of those 37 agreeing with me, that without the influence pattern established by Walther in Kirche und Amt to establishing doctrine as we saw in chapter 3, and the views and opinions of his modern theological descendants who have strayed from the orthodox position due to their training and the influences within the LCMS, there would have been no problem in setting forth the doctrines of the church and the ministry decades ago. For the matter to be resolved, one has to go directly to the jugular of the problem in the ELS which is differences in the views of God's Word, the approaches to interpreting the Bible, and the uses of Scripture regarding the doctrines of the Church and the Ministry that creates the mega differences and results in the desire for different positions.

There is no other access route to any problem that arises in the ELS other than to search the Scriptures thoroughly and repeatedly, study it, search it in groups, and search it individually so that future generations can look back at our searching and finding direction from God's Word in the formation and formulations of our doctrinal statements. Thus the Scriptures should and must be used to decide the doctrine of the Church and the ministry as well as all other doctrines.

In order to resolve the issues, both sides in the ELS must meet together, lay aside all earthly encumbrances, and let the Word of God, to which both sides firmly adhere, decide the definition of these and all other doctrines.

In 4.7, we shall see some of the differences between the three major Lutheran church bodies in the USA. Working from liberal to the orthodox, conservative, we begin with the ELCA (4.7.1), proceed to the LCMS (4.7.2), and conclude with the WELS (4.7.3). In approaching the chapter in this method, the scene has been set for an understanding of two broad, seemingly strongly opposed, views, approaches and uses of the Bible concerning the formulation of the doctrines of the Church and the Ministry in the Evangelical Lutheran Synod in the USA.

In the final section, 4.8, there is a presentation of the relationship of the Bible and the doctrines of the church and the ministry, concluding with an explanation about why there are currently two vastly different views on these two doctrines within the same church body, the ELS. The chapter prepares the way for the presentation of the two Bible-based doctrines from an orthodox, conservative Lutheran point of view.

## **4.2 Background to the current struggle between views, approaches and uses of the Bible**

Ask any group of people on a street corner, “What is the Bible?” and you will receive almost as many responses as people that have been asked the question. For many people it is merely a religious book. For some the religious writing of any religion is considered “the bible”. Today, news reporters sometimes speak of Jews, Muslims, and Hindus reading “their bible”. One can also encounter those in the secular world who refer to a particular book to guide them in their daily activities, be it sales, computer programming, or management. These individuals refer to these guidebooks as “their bible”. It is even possible to go to a bookstore and purchase The C Programmer’s Bible. There are those who regard the Bible as merely as book, a history of the human race, something interesting to read about the experiences of our forbears. Still others regard it as interesting literature. More than one university has included the reading of the Bible in the curriculums of their literature departments. Outside the realm of Christendom, therefore, one can encounter a very different concept of the Bible than the one held by the Christian Church as the Judeo-Christian Holy Scripture of the Old and the New Testament. There may be some scholars throughout the world who prefer to use the names First and Second Testament, although within Christendom such terminology is rare.

The word “Bible” comes to us from the Greek word *biblia* (βιβλία) which means “books.” The Bible, as we have it, is a book of books, the number of books will vary depending on whether or not the individual is Lutheran, Protestant, or Catholic. Some of the more common synonyms for Bible are “Holy Writ,” “Scripture,” “Holy Scripture,” “The Scriptures,” “The Word,” and “The Word of God.” Not everyone today agrees that the Bible is “The Word of God.” Some say the Bible merely contains the Word of God. Others hold that these are two very separate and distinct terms.

The terms “Scripture,” “The Scripture,” and “Holy Scripture” comes from the Latin word *scriptura*, which Jerome included in some passages of his Latin translation of the Bible, more commonly known as the Vulgate. The word means “writing.” The terms are really synonymous and it really does not make a difference which term is used in the English speaking world. It is possible to find pastors, preachers, and professors using all of the expressions interchangeably, or in some cases, they may have a favorite that they use with more regularity. Walk into any bookstore in the world, or log on to any internet site of a vendor of Christian books and more than likely a person could use any of these terms and the vendor would know what is meant. Lutheran and Protestant theologians tend to use the terms “Scripture” and “Bible” most frequently. Other languages have similar terms, which also are used interchangeably *die heilige Schrift* and *das Biblia* in German, for example. Whatever term is preferred, all Bible-believing Christians will agree that there are two basic parts of the Bible, the first dealing with history and prophecy prior to the birth of Jesus Christ, the second dealing with the history and events involving the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and then the birth and development of the early Christian church during the first century AD.

Rather than enter into a long discourse on the various designations used for the Bible and any advantages that might be associated with each, my purpose in this chapter is to point out various views, approaches, and uses of the Bible among Bible-believing Christians and theologians. Toward the end of the chapter I will present some of the more specific differences among various Lutheran church bodies, especially those in the USA.

Christians and Bible-believing theologians tend to view the Bible differently. For some, the Bible is a book of laws that governs and rules their daily lives. Others consider the Bible to be an extensive divine map of words, each of which has to be mirrored in their lives to make sense and give meaning as they proceed along their path to an afterlife. Still others regard the Bible as the saving historical revelation of God, which they use as they practice their religion. For others, the Bible is from Genesis to Revelation God’s gracious plan of salvation for fallen human beings. There are also people in churches who view the Bible as a meaningful book of people’s religious experience in the past which could be rationalistically or historically approached and from which clues and guidelines for meaningful rationality and historicity could be extracted.

In line with our sense-making view, approach and use of the Bible as the Word of God, I will quickly pass over the history of theological interpretation and touch lightly upon the uses of allegory, rationalism, and historicism as these have influenced the views, approaches, and uses of the Bible. Most of these are really outside the scope and margins of our Bible-believing approach and thus will not be dealt with in extensive detail. The main emphasis will focus primarily on a number of Bible-believing views, approaches and uses of the Bible prominently in use among Lutherans and Protestants and the seemingly slight differences between these which have immense outcomes in the area of doctrine formulation and formation. Primarily, attention will be focused on the doctrines of the church and the ministry as these doctrines can be stated according to these views. The areas that will be covered will be theological views in the Christian Church

prior to the Reformation (4.2.1), the differences between the Lutheran and Reformed approaches to the Bible and Biblical interpretation (4.2.2), and from the Reformation into the 20<sup>th</sup> century (4.2.3).

## 4.2.1 Theological Views in the Christian Church Pre-Reformation

During the Old Testament times, the Hebrews heard the Word of God directly through His chosen prophets or through readings of various scrolls on which the books of the Old Testament had been written. There are instances in the Old Testament in which we are told of how lessons from a scroll, or even an entire scroll were read.

Outside of Judaism, there was a heavy influence on religious thought and interpretation from the Greek philosophers. Their preference for the allegorical method of interpreting the epic poems led to interpreting Scripture in an allegorical method, a method which continued up to the Reformation, and is still used by some today. We shall briefly look at the allegorical method (4.2.1.1) and then the literal method (4.2.1.2) as the two dominant methods of interpretation prior to the Reformation.

### 4.2.1.1 The Allegorical View, Approach And Use Of The Bible

Allegorizing is a method of interpretation that looks beyond the literal and obvious meaning of words as they are arranged in sentences and paragraphs and seeks a second, third, and sometimes even a fourth meaning for the text. Some trace the use of the allegorical approach back to the ancient Greeks in the 6<sup>th</sup> century before Christ. During the ensuing centuries, the process of interpreting literature allegorically continued to be used, refined, and developed.

In the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC it was used at the University in Alexandria, the leading center of education in the world of that day. The allegorical approach became a dominating method of interpretation after a conflict developed between the study of science and the study of Greek culture and writings. In order to permit the myths in Homer's writings, the legendary epic poet of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC., to exist side by side with scientific knowledge, the "scholars" felt compelled to use the allegorical method. By using allegory, the ancient Greek reader was not only entertained but was given a new-found value in Greek classical literature in which the foibles, frailties, idiosyncrasies and desires of the mythical gods were portrayed. These same gods were at the same time portrayed as being strong, beautiful and immortal interventionists in the lives and events of humankind. The Greek philosophers often found the actions and interventions of these mythical gods to be offensive. For them, allegory became a means of extracting both meaningful ideas and values from these epic writings.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> W. Klein, CL Blomberg, and RL Hubbard. Introduction to Biblical Interpretation. Dallas/London: Word Publishing, 1993, p. 26.

Allegorizing as a method of interpretation of Scripture was devised by heathen philosophers who neither knew nor believed in the Lord God. Their approach was based on reason, not as a result of a faith that Scripture had produced within them. Based on the success they had had allegorizing secular literature in order to reconcile the epic writings with the “new-found” scientific knowledge, they decided to do the same thing with Scripture, namely, to use allegory to reconcile the account in the Old Testament with scientific knowledge. The new interpretations soon spread to the Jews living in Alexandria who now learned that the Old Testament was in conflict with scientific thinking. What for centuries had been accepted by the Jewish people in terms of “divine cause and effect” was now cast aside as something that could not be grasped. The new understanding was that things happen because of some natural cause. Everything occurs “on its own.” It does not occur because of divine intervention. Aristobulus used allegory to theorize that Moses “was really the originator of many of the thoughts of Greek philosophy” and that many of Moses’ ideas had been borrowed and adapted by the Greeks.<sup>117</sup>

Philo (c. 20 BC – c. 40 AD), a contemporary of Jesus Christ, was a famous Jewish philosopher and theologian at the university in Alexandria. He was involved in promoting the allegorical methodology among the Jews and neo-platonic philosophers in this Egyptian city. Philo preferred to interpret the Old Testament using the allegorical approach. He established some guidelines that helped the reader determine when allegory *must* be used to provide an alternative meaning to what the text literally said. This he felt was necessary because at times, at least for him, the literal sense presented something that was “unworthy of God” or that implied a contradiction. Examples of this include the passages in Genesis which tells us that Adam “hid himself from God” and the reference to Abraham as the “father” of Jacob. Philo felt that these needed to be interpreted in another manner; the first because it dishonored the all-knowing and all-seeing God, the second because Abraham was Jacob’s grandfather. Thus Philo felt it was necessary to interpret Scripture in another way.

The early use of allegory was firmly rooted in platonic and neo-platonic philosophies. Plato’s idea that true reality actually lay behind what appeared to the human eye became the basis for using allegory. When applied to literature this suggested that a text’s true meaning lay behind the written words. The text serves as a kind of extended metaphorical screen. Behind it lay the real ideas and the actual hidden meaning. The reader thus had to “read between the lines” or peer behind the veiled meaning of the text to ascertain the author’s message.

The allegorical method continued to gain prominence among scholars in the late second and early third centuries AD primarily through the work of two men in Alexandria, both of whom had been influenced by Philo. These two men were Clement and Origen. Allegory was used not only at the university in Alexandria, but it became a prevalent means of interpretation among the Hellenists and the Gnostics.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Kuske. Biblical Interpretation: The Only Right Way. pp. 141-143.

<sup>118</sup> Walter C. Kaiser. p. 58.

Clement was originally a pagan philosopher who later was converted to Christianity.<sup>119</sup> He taught at Alexandria from 190 until 203 AD, using philosophy as an instrument to transform faith into science and revelation into theology. He based his doctrine on his personal beliefs. He faithfully studied Scripture but his downfall was faulty exegesis. Following the tradition of the university, he continued to use the approach set forth by Philo, namely allegorizing. In interpreting Scripture he tended to exaggerate the moral worth of religious knowledge, but he did not regard it as merely sterile knowledge. Rather he saw it as knowledge that turns to love. He found allegory everywhere. Facts which had been understood literally previously were regarded as mere symbols by Clement. In his teaching and in his writing, he loved to borrow from others, at times carelessly. This was true in his interpretation of Scripture as well. Borrowing from the Greek philosophy that was in vogue at the university, Clement decided that Scripture should be read allegorically applying the philosophical view. Because it was believed that human beings consist of two parts, a body and a soul<sup>120</sup>, Scripture was also viewed as having two parts and therefore a twofold meaning. The body symbolized its literal meaning and the soul represented its spiritual meaning, which is hidden behind the literal sense. Clement took upon himself the goal of synthesizing Greek philosophy with the Mosaic tradition, and then attempting to reconcile the Gnostics with the orthodox Christians.<sup>121</sup>

Clement's allegorical interpretation of Jesus' parable of the prodigal son demonstrates his view as he seeks a meaning for every element in the story: the father being God, the prodigal represents mankind who wanders aimlessly in wantonness following hedonistic desires and who finally is converted, the robe represents immortality, the shoes represent the soul's upward progress; the fatted calf represents Christ as the source of spiritual nourishment for Christians, etc. Clement found in the text not only a literal interpretation, but felt that the text pointed to some underlying spiritual truth that lay beyond.<sup>122</sup> Although he attacked Gnosticism, many regard him as a Christian Gnostic.<sup>123</sup>

Origen was a student of Clement and was also a professor at the university. As a prominent leader in the early Christian church, Origen encouraged the use of allegory to interpret all of Scripture. Seeking to find several meanings, he applied the then existing belief that the human being consists of three things: body, soul, and spirit. The body was represented by a literal interpretation, the soul was symbolized by a moral interpretation, and the spirit was indicated by a mystical meaning.

Following Origen's methodology, the interpreter of Scripture moves beyond the events in a passage (its literal sense) and proceeds to find hidden principles for Christian living (its moral sense) as well as doctrinal truth (its spiritual sense). An illustration of this can be seen in Origen's

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<sup>119</sup> Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson editors. *The Ante-Nicene Fathers Vol. II: Translations of the writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997, p. 166.

<sup>120</sup> P. P. Enns. *The Moody Handbook Of Theology*. Chicago, Ill.: Moody Press. 1989, 1997, p. 306.

<sup>121</sup> <http://www.ntcanon.org/Clement.shtml>

<sup>122</sup> Klein. p. 34.

<sup>123</sup> <http://www.bartleby.com/65/cl/ClementA.html>



interpretation of the sexual relations between Lot and his daughters (Gen 19:30-38). Origen finds not only a literal sense (it actually happened), but a moral meaning in that Lot represents the rational human mind, his wife the flesh inclined to pleasures, and his daughters representing vainglory and pride. From this he derived the spiritual (or doctrinal) meaning that Lot represents the Old Testament law, his daughters represent Jerusalem and Samaria, and his wife represents the Israelites who rebelled in the wilderness.<sup>124</sup> Another example can be seen in his interpretation of the account of Abraham's servant carrying out his master's command to find a wife for Isaac, and the subsequent encounter with Rebekah at the well (Genesis 24). Origen regarded the well as being Scripture and the servant represented Christ. The doctrinal or spiritual meaning that Origen derived from this account was that we must go to Scripture in order to meet Christ.<sup>125</sup>

The three-fold approach of Origen presents an early stage of the modernist triadic interpretation scheme of "understanding → explanation → application." Allegory was the method employed whenever 1) the text contained anything that was regarded as being "unworthy of being attributed to God," 2) the passage contained a difficulty which was not easily explained or solved, or 3) there was an expression which made absolutely no sense or that tended to be a contradiction.<sup>126</sup>

Although Origen's approach to theology may have been enlightening, the results of his method of interpretation are not. A couple of examples of how he interpreted Scripture illustrate the problem. In Genesis, Origen interpreted the trees in the Garden of Eden as really being angels. In Genesis 14, he interpreted the "the 318 trained men" of Abraham as symbolizing the crucified Christ. These strange interpretations are a matter of concern, especially for Bible-believing Christians. Anyone who would adopt such a method of interpretation certainly would be restricting their understanding of Scripture. If in their subjective view that the Bible clearly means trees when it mentions angels, or that it foretells the crucifixion of Jesus when it speaks about the men that were servants for Abraham, then how can the non-theologian who reads the Bible know what Scripture is actually saying?<sup>127</sup>

Allegorizing was a method for interpreting the Scriptures that was regularly used by many of the early Church Fathers. Polycarp (c. 70-c.157) held that the description of the clean and unclean animals in the Old Testament was symbolic of the classes of mankind. In Leviticus 11, those animals that chewed the cud and had cloven hooves were considered to be clean animals. Irenaeus (c 130-202 A.D.) took this a step further. He considered the animals with cloven hooves as symbolic of men who make their way toward the Father and the Son. The animals that chew the cud were symbolic of those who meditate on the Law of God day and night. He regarded the animals without cloven hooves and who did not chew the cud as representing the Gentiles. The animals that did not have cloven hooves but did chew the cud were symbolic of the Jews.<sup>128</sup>

<sup>124</sup> Klein. p. 34f.

<sup>125</sup> Kuske. Biblical Interpretation. p. 145.

<sup>126</sup> Kaiser. p. 58.

<sup>127</sup> Siegbert Becker. "The Historical-Critical Method of Bible Interpretation." Our Great Heritage. Volume I. Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1991, p. 275f.

<sup>128</sup> Kaiser. p. 58.

Not all Christians, however, openly embraced the allegorical interpretation of Scripture. Chrysostom (d. 407) and Theodor of Mopsuestia (d. 428) supported the literal interpretation and were critical of the allegorizing, especially as it was being done in Alexandria. The leaders of the church in Antioch and Syria vigorously opposed the allegorical approach. The church in Antioch upheld the rules of grammar as the means to obtain the *objective* meaning of Scripture while condemning allegorizing as “*subjective* imagination.”<sup>129</sup>

Jerome (d. 420) and Augustine (d. 430), on the other hand, made use of the allegorical method and can be credited with contributing to its use throughout the church. Both men also realized that there are dangers when multiple meanings can be derived from a portion of Scripture. To rein this in, they insisted that whenever an interpretation was subjectively derived through the use of the allegorical method, the meaning must remain within the confines of the church’s commonly accepted teachings, or traditions. Jerome pointed out that allegory should never be used to introduce new doctrine, nor should it ever be *purely* subjective. Augustine agreed with Jerome. Unlike Philo and Origen, Augustine “did not dismiss the literal meaning.” For him, a passage’s historical sense was its basic meaning and any other interpretation had to be based on the historical sense. Augustine developed a method of interpretation that was four-fold: 1) the historical, 2) the moral, 3) the allegorical, and 4) the analogical. This would eventually become the standard for interpretation until the Reformation.<sup>130</sup>

Luther (d. 1546) clearly lacked esteem for the allegorical method of interpretation. He referred to Origen’s allegorical interpretations as “empty speculation” and “the scum of Scripture.” He regarded allegorical interpretations as “awkward, absurd, and fabricated.”<sup>131</sup> As if that left any doubt, Luther further said, “Allegory is like a beautiful harlot who fondles men in such a way that it is impossible for her not to be loved, especially by idle men who are free from a trial. Men of this kind think that they are in the middle of Paradise and on God’s lap whenever they indulge in such speculations. At first allegories originated from stupid and idle monks.”<sup>132</sup>

Calvin (d. 1564) did not have any higher regard for those who used the allegorical method than did Luther. Regarding Galatians 4:21-26, Calvin blasted such interpretations as “a contrivance of Satan.” Calvin dedicated his commentary on the Epistle to the Romans to a friend. In the dedicatory letter he stated: “Since it is almost his [the interpreter’s] only task to unfold the mind of the writer whom he has undertaken to expound, he misses his mark, or at least strays outside his limits, by the extent to which he leads his readers away from the meaning of his author....It is...presumptuous and almost blasphemous to turn the meaning of scripture around without due

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<sup>129</sup> Kuske. Biblical Interpretation. p. 145.

<sup>130</sup> Kuske. Biblical Interpretation. p. 146.

<sup>131</sup> Kaiser. p. 60.

<sup>132</sup> M. Luther. Luther's Works, Volume 5: Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 26-30. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, p. 347.

care, as though it were some game that we were playing. And yet many scholars have done this at one time.”<sup>133</sup>

#### 4.2.1.2 The Literal Sense View, Approach And Use Of The Bible

Allegorizing continued to be used through the Middle Ages and was commonly used by many within the church. Although Hugh of St. Victor (d. 1141) continued to use Origen’s triad to interpret the Bible allegorically, he also “believed that the literal sense as intended by the author is *the* meaning of the text.”<sup>134</sup> Stephen Langton (d. 1228), who was the Archbishop of Canterbury, continued in the line that Jerome and Augustine had established, namely that all interpretations should conform to the Christian faith, therefore he favored the literal sense that Hugh of St. Victor had used.<sup>135</sup>

During the Middle Ages, the most prominent dogmatician was the Roman Catholic theologian Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274) who was heavily influenced by Aristotle. Aquinas tended to regard things as being either natural or supernatural. Using this approach with Scripture, he concluded that the Holy Spirit clearly speaks to us in some texts, which can be interpreted in a natural or literal sense and as such are “the basis for all solid teaching.” Upon these, the theologian is able to establish “his conclusions and theology.” Aquinas felt that there are also other passages of Scripture which could be considered to be supernatural and have a symbolic meaning. He did this for two reasons: 1) “heavenly things cannot be explained in earthly terms without some degree of symbolism;” and 2) “the history of Israel was disposed by the divine Master of history in such a way that He could bring in matters relating to the new covenant.”<sup>136</sup>

Thomas Aquinas opened new insights and established new teachings. An example of this can be seen in his interpretation of the prophecy in Isaiah 11:1 that a rod would come forth from the stem of Jesse. Aquinas saw the “rod” as being the Virgin Mary. Thus whenever the word rod occurred in a passage of Scripture it came to indicate the presence and the actions of Mary in regard to humankind in general and the church in particular. Aquinas and other medieval theologians took Aristotle’s dialectic method and combined it with their allegorical interpretations. This led to a systematization of Scripture into categories with “endless subdivisions: objections, solutions, definitions, correlations, propositions, proofs, replies, reasons, refutations, expectations, and distinctions.” The interpreter used these categories to develop theses and antitheses to present his argumentations using primarily syllogisms.<sup>137</sup>

Another prominent theologian of this era was the Jewish scholar, Nicolas of Lyra (1270 – c. 1340). Nicolas also stressed the literal sense of interpretation regarding it “as the only reasonable basis

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<sup>133</sup> Kaiser. p. 61.

<sup>134</sup> Kaiser. p. 59.

<sup>135</sup> Kaiser. p. 59.

<sup>136</sup> Kaiser. p. 60.

<sup>137</sup> Kuske. Biblical Interpretation. p. 149.

for exegesis.” This “old” approach was taught in the universities and influenced those involved in the Reformation and the epoch that followed. As this literal approach gained acceptance, the allegorical approach gradually diminished. The influential role of Nicolas of Lyra not only during the Middle Ages but also in the epoch that followed is shown by the well-known maxim: “If Lyra had not piped, Luther would not have danced.”<sup>138</sup>

During the Middle Ages the subjectivity of the allegorical method reached new heights. The traditional engagement and involvement approaches with the Bible to which Luther was exposed and which he confronted were all manifestations, to some extent, of the view that there are multiple meanings for Scripture. Predominantly there were four, all arising out of Augustine’s teachings; these were the literal (or historical), the allegorical (or mystical/ doctrinal), the moral (or tropological) and the anagogical (or eschatological). In the latter middle ages, Augustine’s method of having four meanings for passages of Scripture was extended and amplified so that now it applied also to individual words. “Jerusalem,” for example, had at least four meanings. Literally it could be taken to mean the ancient Jewish city. Allegorically it referred to the Christian church. Morally it symbolized the faithful soul. And viewed analogically it was considered to be the heavenly city,<sup>139</sup> or heaven itself. But beyond that, it could also refer to “a faithful Christian,” or to “the church militant,” or to “the church triumphant.” The multiplicity of meanings for individual words all depended upon the interpreter’s subjective view. Words came to mean whatever the interpreter thought they should mean. The common meanings of words were usually ignored. The word “sea” came to represent a whole variety of things: “water, Scripture, the present age, the human heart, an active life, the heathen, or baptism.”<sup>140</sup>

Over the course of the centuries the interpretation of Scripture had drifted away from the plain, common, simple, direct meaning of the words. Interpreters had looked for four meanings as they studied each passage. By applying the principle to individual words, passages came to have as many meanings as there were interpreters and as these various interpreters desired. During the Reformation, there was a return to having one, single, basic, fundamental meaning (**usus simplex sensus**) for the individual words and passages. Calvin (d.1564) and Luther (d.1546) both were familiar with the use of allegorical interpretations. Neither of them was favorable, however, toward this method of interpretation that had predominated the church’s hermeneutical approach for such a long time. Kuske summarizes Luther’s principles of biblical interpretation thusly:

- 1) The original languages should be used rather than the Latin Vulgate when interpreting Bible passages.
- 2) The historical background of the books of the Bible should be known by the interpreter. They should not create their own allegorical settings.
- 3) It was of the utmost importance that the interpreter accepts the unity of the entire Bible. They should not allegorize sections and passages using their own imagination.

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<sup>138</sup> Kaiser. p. 60.

<sup>139</sup> Klein. p. 38.

<sup>140</sup> Kuske. Biblical Interpretation. p. 148.

- 4) Jesus Christ is the center of Scripture. The interpretation of any portion of Scripture should be centered in Christ.
- 5) Scripture must be interpreted by Scripture. It should not be subject to any doctrine or tradition that was established by the church or devised by a human being.

Lay people, according to the doctrine of the universal priesthood of all believers, should read and interpret Scripture for themselves rather than having someone else's interpretation imposed upon them. This, however, did not give each person the freedom to interpret Scripture any way they chose. They, too, were bound by the principle that Scripture should interpret Scripture. That each Christian has the freedom to read Scripture for themselves became a key factor in the Reformation, as individuals began to learn about God's gift of forgiveness through Jesus Christ.<sup>141</sup>

In the Reformation and post-Reformation eras there was a shift in theology. Theology as Aquinas had seen it, namely as a speculative science (**scientia speculativa**) much like metaphysics or philosophy changed into a practical science (**scientia practica**). Beginning with the Reformation, theology no longer was considered to be a speculative type of knowledge cogitating and meditating about concepts of God in the abstract, a state to which it had degenerated through speculation and multiple hermeneutical approaches and meanings. Theology was rehabilitated and transformed in the Reformation. The literal meaning of Scripture returned to prominence in Wittenberg and other places. Theology became something practical. Theologians began making statements and clarifying doctrine on the basis of an objective study of God's Word. Theologians made statements based on the basis of God's plan of salvation. Theologians now saw God's saving acts recorded continuously and successively in the Biblical history as set forth in the Old and New Testaments. This would influence the formulation of Lutheran teaching and its confessional statements. It would be a principle applied during the time of writing the Lutheran Confessions, during the time of Lutheran orthodoxy, and this principle continues to be used by confessional Lutherans to this day.

In much the same way, it has influenced what has happened in other branches of the Christian Church, most notably among the Reformed church bodies. Calvin to a large extent taught a practical faith that reflects on what has been revealed in the pages of Holy Writ, that is "the salvation-historical divine process" which we can trace from the Garden of Eden in Genesis to the saints triumphant gathered around the throne of the Lamb in Revelation. Many of the current differences between Bible-believing Christians can, in fact, be traced back to the time of Luther and Calvin and the views that they possessed regarding the Bible, its inspiration, its inerrancy, its authority, its unity, its purpose, and how people are to interpret and use it.

Since the time of the Reformation, various ways of interpreting and regarding the Scripture have again arisen among those who are affiliated with Christian churches. These can be divided into those who fully accept and believe what the Bible says as it is written, on the one hand, and those who have reservations and doubts and therefore may be considered to be only "semi-Bible

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<sup>141</sup> Kuske. Biblical Interpretation. pp. 149-151.

believers.”<sup>142</sup> Moreover through post-Reformation history various different hermeneutical approaches have developed. The historical-grammatical has at least three branches: one places the emphasis on history, another places the emphasis on the grammar and syntax, a third takes it the way Karl A. G. Keil (d. 1888) first intended it when he introduced it, namely basing it on the Greek word *gramma* which is the equivalent term of the Latin derived synonym *literal*.<sup>143</sup> Some of these have branched out even further. Moving closer to the present, the Age of Enlightenment (1715-1799) stressed the historical side of interpretation. Following upon these different hermeneutical approaches, literary criticism, form criticism, source criticism, redaction criticism, and religion criticism arose. This led the way to the Historical Critical Method of Interpretation in which there are three primary players — existential demythologizing, gospel reductionism, and the divine-human mystery approach, all three of which had an effect on many of the Lutheran church bodies in the USA. These will be presented in due time.

The approach used by the Roman Catholic Church in interpreting the Bible during the Reformation Era was established at the Council of Trent (1545-1563). The *Sola Scriptura* which had become important in Lutheran interpretation was condemned. For the Roman church, interpretation was to be based on tradition and officially endorsed interpretations provided by the pope and the bishops in church councils. Their word was placed on a par with Scripture. In the event that the interpretations of men were in disagreement with what the Bible says, the interpretation of the pope and his council dominated. Some might say that the decisions of the Council of Trent and even Vatican II are old-fashioned and not all members of the Roman Catholic Church agree with these today; yet these statements have never been recanted and removed. They are, for all intents and purposes, still the official positions of the Roman church.<sup>144</sup>

Before continuing, we need to remember that this paper deals primarily with a problem within one particular Lutheran church body in the USA. Let us briefly review some of the differences between the doctrinal positions of the Lutheran church and the position of the Reformed or Protestant church (these are the church bodies that base their teachings primarily on the positions taken by U. Zwingli (d. 1531) and J. Calvin (d. 1564)).

#### **4.2.2 Differences between the Lutheran and Reformed Approaches to the Bible and Biblical Interpretation**

Among the various denominations and church bodies of Christendom, there are different interpretations of the Bible and hence different doctrines of which we will take note before we proceed. That there are major differences between the Roman Catholic Church and the rest of Christendom is obvious from the Reformation. Beginning with Huss (d. 1415) and Savonarola (d. 1498) then continuing with Luther’s *95 Theses* on October 31, 1517, and the debates and councils that followed, it became readily apparent that some major doctrinal differences existed, the most

<sup>142</sup> Klein. p. 38.

<sup>143</sup> Kaiser. pp. 87-88.

<sup>144</sup> Kuske. Biblical Interpretation. p. 153f.

obvious being “salvation by faith” versus “salvation by works.” There are also differences between the Reformed church bodies (i.e., those church bodies whose doctrines stem from U. Zwingli and J. Calvin) and the Lutheran church bodies. While we cannot look at every difference, much less go into great detail on any one of these, it is good to note the different perspectives. The differences, some say, are due to a matter of interpretation or because they feel that Scripture is not entirely clear. The problem is not with Scripture. The problem is with humankind, which is unable to fully grasp and accept some of the wondrous things that God has done by His almighty power. The fact that people cannot understand something that the Bible says does not mean that we have to change what the Bible means so that it appears to be logical and understandable. The solution lies in changing people’s perspective of the Bible — going to a theological ophthalmologist, so to speak, and getting a different prescription for the eyeglasses they use to read the Bible — so that they recognize God as He is and for what He is, and accept His Word as what the Almighty is saying to us,<sup>145</sup> to use an illustration from a modern day, conservative theologian.

There are three major divisions within the Christian Church today — the Roman Catholic, the Reformed churches, and the Lutheran churches. Each of these has a central emphasis that influences its doctrine and practice. In a very simplified form, these different central emphases are as follows: The primary focus in the Roman Catholic Church is love. This is not the love of God for the human being, be it individually or in general. Rather drawing upon Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan, the focus is placed on the love of one person for others — “love your neighbor”. A person earns God’s favor through the accomplishment of a life-long series of good works that are performed for the benefit of others. This is the Catholic emphasis, as described by numerous believing and practicing Catholics with whom I have spoken over the years and also in numerous publications which describe the belief and teaching of the Catholic church. In the Protestant or Reformed churches the emphasis is on the glory and sovereign majesty of God. They see God as a lawgiver, who has given us His book of laws (the Bible) that we must obey. They also see God as a stern Judge who in love has selected and predestined some of the human race to be saved, at the same time, the rest to be eternally damned. God is our King and we are his subjects. A person earns God’s favor through the keeping of the law and thus leading a holy life. This is the emphasis in the Reformed church bodies. The primary focus of the Lutheran church is justification by grace through faith. In other words, a person is not able to earn God’s favor. However, God in His grace, His love for us which we do not deserve, has justified us — that is declared us to be not guilty of any moral or spiritual wrongdoing — because of the redemptive work of Jesus Christ on Calvary’s cross. The benefits of this are ours only through faith in Christ Jesus. This approach enables members of the Lutheran church to give glory to God, who has created us, redeemed us, and given us our faith so that we can believe in Him and what He has done and continues to do for us and for all people. In joyful response for His love for us, we demonstrate our faith in our daily lives as we show love for both God and our fellow human beings. This is the emphasis in the Lutheran church. These are oversimplifications, and they certainly do not present all of the facets of the doctrines in each of these three denominations. They do, however, indicate that there are

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<sup>145</sup> Kuske. Biblical Interpretation. pp. 152-153.

major differences between the three. These differences affect the presuppositions with which the theologians of these three divisions approach their respective theologies. Without knowledge of these primary emphases and presuppositions of these theologians, the inevitable result will be a thorough misunderstanding of the respective theology. In this section, we will look briefly at some of the differences between the approaches taken by Luther and the other reformers.

In the early decades of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, theologians began moving more and more away from the four-fold manner of interpretation that had been used previously. At the University of Wittenberg, there was a return to interpreting Scripture in a literal sense (**sensus literalis**). Luther, the eminent theologian at this German university, although having been exposed to the other interpretative approaches, favored the plain, simple, literal meaning of the words as they were written in the particular clause, sentence, paragraph, or section. Not all the reformers held to this view. Luther does not say that everything should be read literally, but “naturally,” as it would ordinarily be understood. At times it was very obvious that a text should have a literal meaning. At times, however, the context clearly indicated that there should be a figurative meaning. Referring to Herod as a fox (Luke 13:32) did not mean that Jesus did not know the difference between the king and a little four-footed red or silver animal. Rather, He was referring to the crafty, cunning nature of the king. We use similar expressions when we speak, for example using expressions such as “blind as a bat,” or “wise as an owl,” etc.

Based on his studies of the Dutch humanist, Erasmus (d. 1536) and Wessel (d. 1489),<sup>146</sup> the Swiss reformer Ulrich Zwingli (d. 1531) tended to interpret Scripture literally at times and figuratively at other times. This was particularly noticeable at the famous Marburg Conference in 1529, where he and Luther set forth differing positions on the Lord’s Supper. Luther held to the literal sense, saying that when Jesus used the word “is”, He meant “is.” “Is” (ἐστί) always means “is” and nowhere in Scripture does it mean anything else. Zwingli disagreed and said that in this case “is” had to mean “represents” or “symbolizes.”

Calvin, the French reformer, considered the literal meaning of a text (**sensus literalis**) and at the same time tended to place himself “in the author’s shoes,” so to speak, and considered the historic setting (**sensus historicus**) in which the words were originally written. Calvin thus sought to understand what the author was saying to the audience of the author’s day within the setting or perspective of a certain event or situation.<sup>147</sup> One could also consider Calvin to be an early rationalist. When Calvin encountered something that was difficult or even impossible to understand, rather than accepting it by faith because it is God’s Word, as Luther did, Calvin deferred to his human reason. From there he tried to rationalize the passage factoring in the historical perspectives. God as sovereign was the center of Calvin’s theology, and is reflected in his five points as they were set forth at the Synod of Dort (1618-1619), which had been called by Jacobus Arminius (d. 1609) to deal with growing opposition to Calvin’s teachings, especially that of

<sup>146</sup> P.Schaff. History Of The Christian Church. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons. 1911. Volume VI. §106. p. 620.

<sup>147</sup> H.J. Kraus. Geschichte der historisch-kritischen Erforschung des Alten Testaments. Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1969., p. 10.



predestination.<sup>148</sup> The Synod of Dort supported the teachings of Calvin, summarizing them in five points — all of which emphasized God in His sovereignty and grace but also man in his depravity and sin. The five points are popularly named TULIP, which is an acronym for the first letter of each of these points. Those points are: total depravity; unconditional election; limited atonement; irresistible grace; and perseverance of the saints.<sup>149</sup>

The polemics of the Reformers Luther, Melancthon, and Calvin and others were directed against the multiple approaches to interpret Scripture that had previously been used. Luther in particular was not favorable to the old methods of interpretation, declaring: “The unlearned monks and the school doctors ... taught that the Scripture has four senses: the literal sense, the moral sense, the allegorical sense, and the mystical sense; and according to these senses they have foolishly interpreted almost all the words of the Scripture — for example: the word ‘Jerusalem’ which literally signifies that city that was so named; but they also interpret it morally to be a pure conscience; allegorically to be the Church militant; mystically to be the celestial city or the Church triumphant. With these trifling and foolish fables they rent the Scriptures into so many and diverse senses that poor simple consciences could receive no certain doctrine of anything.”<sup>150</sup> Luther demanded that in every part of Scripture one should stay with the simple, clear and natural meaning of the words according to the grammar and language-use that God has created into human beings. In his *Foreword to the Sermons on Genesis*, Luther states: “I have often emphasized that he who would study Holy Writ must always be intent on abiding by the simple words wherever that is possible, and not depart therefrom unless an article of faith demands that the passage be taken otherwise than in the literal sense.”<sup>151</sup> He maintained “Our diligence ought in the first place to be centered on this, if we would treat Scripture properly, that we determine the simple, straightforward, and certain historical sense (*einfaeltigen rechtschaffenen und gewissen historischen Verstand*).”<sup>152</sup>

We can refer to this as the “**cognitio grammatica et historiae**” of the Bible. To attain this, the interpreter had to have knowledge of history to be sure, but even more important was knowledge of the original languages in which Scripture was originally written<sup>153</sup> — the Old Testament in Hebrew and the New Testament in Greek. This is still an important part of the theological training that orthodox Lutheran pastors receive at confessional Lutheran seminaries. For Luther, Scripture was all-important. It was much more than a guide or rule book to show people how to live. It produced faith in the only true God within the hearer. It provided God’s plan to redeem and save a human race that had condemned itself to an eternity of suffering in hell. It brought the Good News to people that all their sins have been forgiven and everlasting life is theirs as a gift of God’s

<sup>148</sup> B. Hagglund. *History of Theology*. Translation of *Teologins Historia*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, p. 268.

<sup>149</sup> Enns. p. 479.

<sup>150</sup> Martin Luther. *Martin Luthers Werke*. [The St. Louis edition] (herausgegeben von Albert Friedrich Hoppe). Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1886-1911, Band IX p. 574.

<sup>151</sup> Martin Luther. *Martin Luthers Werke*. [The St. Louis edition] Band III p. 20.

<sup>152</sup> Martin Luther. *Martin Luthers Werke*. [The St. Louis edition] Band I p. 950.

<sup>153</sup> M. Luther, *Martin Luthers Werke*. Kritische Gesamtausgabe Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883. WA 31,2; 1ff.

unlimited and undeserved love. Luther wanted nothing to interfere with this message. **Sola scriptura** (Scripture alone) became one of the foundation stones of the Lutheran Reformation, the other two being **sola fe** (faith alone) and **sola gratia** (grace alone).

Luther and Calvin were in agreement in that Scripture should be interpreted literally. Luther stresses the importance of word order, grammar, syntax, and context. Calvin stressed the historical background of the author and the setting of the writing. Melancthon and Calvin tended to agree on this approach to interpretation. To achieve their interpretation which incorporated the **sensus literalis** with the **sensus historicus** necessitated a thorough investigation of the time and the setting in which the words or the books of the Bible were written. To attain their interpretation, they sought to walk in the author's shoes and see through the author's eyes.<sup>154</sup> In doing this, Calvin and Melancthon brought a humanistic reflection and a subjective insight to their study and interpretation of the Scriptures.

To the non-Christian, these differences may appear petty and slight — history or grammar, grammar or history — what's the difference? This book, they believe, is at best one of many holy books, and certainly not God's Word, because for them the concept of God is totally different. The approaches used by Calvin and Luther can be summarized in a few Latin words that are very similar in appearance. When a casual, superficial comparison is made of these Latin expressions, the differences do not appear to be very great at all — only a few letters are different. But this slightest of differences in emphasis between Luther on the one hand and Melancthon and Calvin on the other hand already at this point, show that there was a difference in the exegetical and hermeneutical approaches used by both sides. We should point out that these were two avenues taken by Bible believing Christians. The emphasis of Luther was **grammatical**-historical and the emphasis of the other two reformers, Calvin and Melancthon, was **historical**-grammatical. While Luther was also aware of the importance of the relationship of Biblical history to the text, and Calvin was aware of the importance of the words of the text, both had different emphases in their approaches to Scripture.

This difference of approach has continued to be held by the modern day conservative Lutherans and the conservative Reformed in the USA. For those who are conservative members of Reformed church bodies in the USA, the context of a passage is as important as is the historical and grammatical setting, but the final deciding factor in determining the meaning of a verse or a section of Scripture is **reason**. If it makes sense as it stands, it is accepted. If it does not make sense, the meaning must be tweaked and massaged until the meaning makes sense. This approach has had an influence on the Reformed doctrines of conversion, election, the means of grace, and the person and work of Jesus Christ.<sup>155</sup>

What about Lutherans? Do they not rush off for a copy of *Luther's Works* to see what Luther said, and how he interpreted a particular portion of Scripture? The answer is that some may do this in

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<sup>154</sup> Kraus. p. 10.

<sup>155</sup> Kuske. Biblical Interpretation. p. 114.

certain, more liberal Lutheran church bodies, however conservative Lutherans do not. Conservative Lutherans, while respecting and thanking God for the many blessings which He gave to the church through Martin Luther and other devout men, strive to avoid any appearance of making anyone into a pope who has spoken *ex cathedra* rendering an interpretation that is equal to or even above the Word of God. They may, in their text study, read Luther's comments in the same way they read Chemnitz, Gerhardt, Walther, Hoenecke, and Pieper. They also consult commentaries such as Lenski, Hendriksen, Lightfoot, Spurgeon, and others. However, there is always a marked distinction between God's Word and man's word. They are never equal. God's Word is always supreme and the final authority in every subject matter. What about the Lutheran Confessions? Do not Lutherans continually quote the Lutheran Confessions as the basis for their interpretation of Scripture passages and thus the basis for their doctrinal positions? That, again, may be what some do. However, conservative Lutherans follow the same principle that Luther himself used, namely using Scripture first. Conservative Lutherans let Scripture interpret Scripture. Because conservative Lutherans regard everything written in the sixty-six books of the Bible as the wholly inspired and inerrant Word of God, Scripture is regarded as authoritative and the final determining factor in what a passage means and what a particular doctrine is. Conservative Lutherans respect, use, and adhere to the Lutheran Confessions, but only as a secondary source. They do not place the Lutheran Confessions on a par with the Word of God, the Bible. The Lutheran Confessions are accepted only because they are in agreement with Scripture. It would be a mistake to think that conservative Lutherans might alter their interpretation of the Bible in order to make it agree with someone's perceived understanding of what the Lutheran Confessions are saying. While Luther considered the Biblical meaning of the individual words in their context and the historical background of the particular event and person to be important, the most important factor of all in Luther's approach to interpretation is "what does the Bible say?" For Luther and conservative Lutherans, the Bible cannot contradict itself. Therefore, every passage of Scripture is viewed in the light of what the rest of God's Word says.

Thus there is a difference in the approach to interpreting Scripture. Conservative members of the Reformed church bodies in the USA use the powers of human reason as the determining factor to determine doctrine. On the other hand, conservative Lutherans use Scripture as the deciding factor to determine doctrine.

Within Christendom, and especially within the Lutheran church, the differences were more than just a few letters in a Latin word or how one stresses a particular phrase. The narrow crack that developed in the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century continued to widen. The Prussian Union announced by Frederick Wilhelm III on Reformation Day 1817 (the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation) was an attempt to establish ecumenism and unite the Lutheran congregations with the congregations of the Reformed church in Prussia. To some extent, it worked. It had an influence on the theology of Johannes Grabau (d. 1879) and other Prussians who came to the USA forming the Buffalo Synod of the Lutheran church. It did not influence the German Lutherans living in Saxony who immigrated to the USA forming the Missouri Synod. It did not influence the German Lutherans living in Wuerttemberg. Nor did it influence the Scandinavian Lutherans. The

leaders of each of these groups had encountered different influences in their theological training and development. How these influences affected these men and consequently the theological views and positions of their respective synods, each of which comprised but one of the Lutheran church bodies in the USA, we shall discuss later.

It should be noted that not all Lutheran theologians view Scripture in the same light and interpret Scripture in the same way. One cannot make a generalization that there is a universal Lutheran interpretation and a universal Lutheran doctrine. To do so would be the equivalent of saying that all football fans throughout the world hold that the Brazilian national team is by far the best football team in the world; and the Brazilian team will always win the World Cup. This simply could not be true because it would ignore the fact that football is perceived in a totally different way in Australia, Canada, and the United States than it is in the rest of the world. Soccer, rugby, and Canadian and American football are all different games with different rules, yet all can be referred to as football. Or another example to show that one cannot generalize would be to say that all of the people working in the South African mines are citizens of Malawi who have entered the country with work visas. True, Malawians come to South Africa with a work visa and work in the mines. However, not everyone who works in the mines is a Malawian citizen. Nor can we generalize about persons having membership in one of the many Lutheran church bodies throughout the world. Merely because someone has some affiliation with a Lutheran church body does not mean that this person truly speaks for all the Lutheran church bodies, although they may speak for some or even many of them. The differences between Luther and Melancthon indicate that differences were already occurring among those affiliated with the Lutheran church at the time of the Reformation. The official position of the Lutheran church is based first of all on the Bible and expounded upon in its symbolic books — The Three Universal or Ecumenical Creeds, the Augsburg Confession, the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the Smalcald Articles, the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope, the Small Catechism of Dr. Martin Luther, the Large Catechism of Dr. Martin Luther, the Epitome of the Formula of Concord, and the Thorough Declaration of the Formula of Concord — which are contained in the *Book of Concord* of 1580, and also appear in the *Concordia Triglot*, which is the Book of Concord in the three languages: Latin, German, and English.

Melancthon probably can be considered the first “moderate” Lutheran theologian. Although a brilliant scholar and a very intelligent individual, he was not satisfied with the doctrinal statements to which the other Lutherans had formally agreed. Tweaking and revising the text, adding and subtracting various elements, Melancthon actually made substantial departures from what is still considered to be Lutheran doctrine. The *Variata* of Melancthon changed the meanings of some Lutheran doctrines and rendered others ambiguous. “The changes made in the Augsburg Confession brought great distress, heavy cares, and bitter struggles upon the Lutheran church both from within and without. Church history records the manifold and sinister ways in which they were exploited by the Reformed as well as the Papists; especially by the latter (the Jesuits) at the religious colloquies beginning in 1540, until far into the time of the Thirty Years’ War (1618 to 1648), in order to deprive the Lutherans of the blessings guaranteed by the religious Peace of

Augsburg (1555) (Salig, *Gesch. d. A. K.*, 1, 770ff.; *Lehre und Wehre* 1919, 218ff.)<sup>156</sup> “Thus the changes made in the Augsburg Confession did much harm to the Lutheran cause. Melanchthon belongs to the class of men that have greatly benefited [the Lutheran] Church, but have also seriously harmed it...Melanchthon’s changes ‘have deterred and alienated many good men from [the Lutheran] churches, schools, doctrine, faith, and confession.’”<sup>157</sup> Thus, although he was affiliated with the Lutheran church, and even worked on the writing of some of the symbolic books, Melanchthon cannot be considered to be a true Lutheran. “Melanchthon by constantly altering the *Augsburg Confession* had muddied the water to such an extent that the adoption of the *Augustana* was no longer a clear test of Lutheran orthodoxy and loyalty.”<sup>158</sup> In fact, in some respects, Melanchthon was more of a Calvinist than he was a Lutheran even though in his early years he was a key player and a valuable asset in the formation of the Lutheran church.

We need to look closer at some of these differences between Luther and the Reformed as we proceed toward the doctrines of the church and the ministry. We have already noted that there was a difference in the hermeneutical and exegetical approaches. There was also a difference in the way they viewed theology. This led to different emphases and in some ways different results. Luther was burdened by a deep consciousness of sin. He spent long, agonizing hours searching for peace which he finally found in the gospel of free forgiveness in Christ. Both Ulrich Zwingli (1484–1531) and John Calvin (1509–1564) approached theology from a more detached point of view since they did not go through the severe spiritual struggles that Luther had experienced. Zwingli was heavily affected by the rationalistic, humanistic spirit of the day. Luther was also well acquainted with humanism as advanced by Erasmus of Rotterdam; but his reason always was subservient to the Word. Conservative Reformed theologian, M. Eugene Osterhaven, compares Luther and Zwingli in this way: “Luther was a theologian steeped in the tradition of the church, conservative, biblical and uncompromising. Zwingli was first a humanist influenced by the new learning of the Renaissance, *then* a theologian, and a radical in thought.”<sup>159</sup>

Calvin tried to take a mediating position between Luther and Zwingli, especially regarding the doctrine of the Real Presence in the Lord’s Supper, but was influenced by his close ties with humanism. Osterhaven quotes from A.M. Fairbairn’s article *Calvin and the Reformed Church* stating, “Calvin, like Zwingli, was a humanist before he became a Reformer, and what he was at first he never ceased to be. On the intellectual side, as a scholar and thinker, his affinities were with Erasmus, though on the religious side they were rather with Luther.... In Calvin the historical sense of the humanist, and the spiritual passion of the Reformer, are united; he knows the sacred literature which his reason has analyzed, while his imagination has seen the Apostolic Church as an ideal which his conscience feels bound to realize.”<sup>160</sup> The difference between Calvin and Luther can also be seen in their writings. Calvin was a very logical, orderly person. By the age of 26 he

<sup>156</sup> F. Bente. *Concordia Triglot*. “Historical Introductions to the Symbolic Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church.” “IV. Melanchthon’s Alterations to the Augsburg Confession.” St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921. p. 24.

<sup>157</sup> Bente. p. 25.

<sup>158</sup> Bente. p. 253.

<sup>159</sup> M. Eugene Osterhaven. *The Spirit of the Reformed Tradition*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971, p 21.

<sup>160</sup> Osterhaven. p 28.

had already published his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, which is a thorough, orderly presentation of all of Christian doctrine as Calvin saw it. Luther never published such a work. He looked upon God's Word more as a powerful message to be proclaimed than as a series of doctrines to be systematized in logical form.<sup>161</sup> Even today this difference continues between Reformed theologians, at least in the USA, who seek to nicely categorize and place everything in its appropriate little box, much as the mail gets sorted in the post office. For these modern Reformed theologian everything must go into some little box to help define and pigeonhole it. If the box did not previously exist, a new one is created. The modern orthodox Lutheran theologian, like those before, is more concerned about rightly dividing Law and Gospel in their proclamation of God's Word to humankind. Today's "moderate" and liberal Lutheran theologian follows in Melanchthon's footsteps, claiming to be Lutheran while actually following an approach similar to that of the Reformed theologians.

Thus we find a basic difference among the reformers regarding some teachings which Christians regard as being important. Luther was not in agreement with Zwingli and Calvin, and even to some extent Melanchthon on some doctrines, for example: predestination, the two natures of Christ, and the Lord's Supper. There are other differences as well. Let's look at some of these.

#### 4.2.2.1 Law and Gospel

One of the major differences between the Lutheran Church and the Reformed Churches is the Law and the Gospel — divine doctrine or merely a human concept?

God, according to what Luther read in Scripture and had personally experienced, confronts man either as the Lawgiver or as the Law-Fulfiller. As the Lawgiver he demands perfection and threatens punishment. As the Law-Fulfiller he reveals himself as a God of love who forgives our sins because of Christ. Under the law, God is to man a dreadful God whom man fears and hates and from whom he flees. Under the gospel, God is to man a God of grace and mercy in whom one is freed from the law's demands and threats of punishment and to whom one turns for refuge. The law always accuses; the gospel always comforts.<sup>162</sup> Paul Peters in an essay, *The Historical Development of the Protestant Churches of the Reformation Era*, states that for Zwingli the Bible is the Word of God "not because it contains the gospel of God's forgiving love in Christ, but because it reveals God's will. It is no means of grace in Luther's sense, but a guide for Christian faith and life. The work of Christ consisted chiefly in the revelation of the divine will. The gospel is this total revelation and includes the law. The two are in principle one. The gospel is itself a new law."<sup>163</sup>

<sup>161</sup> David Kuske. "Evangelical Lutheranism and Today's Evangelicals and Fundamentalists". *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*. Volume 80 Number 3, Summer 1983, p. 189.

<sup>162</sup> Kuske. "Evangelical Lutheranism And Today's Evangelicals And Fundamentalists". p. 193.

<sup>163</sup> Paul Peters, "The Historical Development of the Protestant Churches of the Reformation Era: The Lutheran, the Reformed, and the Anabaptist Churches," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*. Volume 57 Number 4, October, 1960. p 269.

While the Law and the Gospel is not a matter of prime concern for the theological descendants of Zwingli and Calvin because they do not see it when they approach the Bible and view it through their Reformed spectacles — yet, it is very different in the Lutheran Church, which through its spectacles sees things differently and holds that the doctrine of the Law and the Gospel are very important! In fact, for Lutherans these are the two basic teachings of the Bible. In orthodox Lutheranism, the proper distinction between the Law and the Gospel is highly significant. Each of these plays a separate and important role in the life of the Lutheran. The **Law** is not a series of things that we must do in order to be saved. Rather, the Law is the immutable, unchanging, will of God that shows the individual how to behave in desire, thought, word, and action. In Scripture, Lutherans find three uses or purposes of the law. In its first use, the Law serves as a curb helping to maintain order in the world by keeping the wicked actions of all people within bounds. The second use of the Law is to show all people their sin and their need for a Savior. The third use of the Law is to serve as a guide. God tells Christians, surrounded by a sinful world, the way of life that is pleasing to God. The **Gospel** is the good news that God has saved every one of us, and all humankind, by sending Christ Jesus to obey God’s law perfectly for us — because we could not — and to suffer the punishment that we rightfully deserved for all our sins in our place as our Substitute.

The purpose of this paper, however, is not to present and defend the various Lutheran doctrines. It concerns itself only with the doctrines of the church and its ministry. The purpose of this section is to help the non- Lutheran better understand the Lutheran position.

#### 4.2.2.2 Reason

One of the areas in which the first reformers differed vastly was in regard to human reason. Early in his career as a professor at the University of Wittenberg, Martin Luther taught classes about Aristotle. He was very familiar with the inductive and deductive method of philosophy used by this ancient Greek philosopher as well as Aristotelian logic. At times, the conclusions reached using Aristotelian principles “drove Luther up the walls,” one might say. This was especially true when it came to theological matters. Because of the influence Aristotle had on Thomas Aquinas, Luther tended to feel that many of the doctrinal problems of his day were the result of applying Aristotle’s principles to the interpretation of Scripture. Because Aristotle dominated the theological and philosophical studies at the universities, Luther thought that much of the scholarly activity of the time had been tainted. “Luther’s studies ... led him to the conclusion that there was an irreconcilable conflict between his evangelical theology and scholasticism. By means of Aristotelian logic the schoolmen sought a synthesis of all things, divine and human. By means of reason they would explain their faith. In search of principles for achieving this, they studied the philosophical writings of ancient philosophers from Plato to Boethius; for them the prince of them all was Aristotle.”<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Martin Luther. Luther’s Works, Volume 31: Career of the Reformer I. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, p.5.

Luther saw only two types of theology; one that followed faith, and the other that followed human reason. In his eyes, there was really no way of reconciling a theology that was based on human reason with the teachings of the Bible. Those who chose to follow a theology based on reason often regarded the plain, child-like, undoubting and unquestioning faith of Luther as being naïve. “How could anyone possibly believe such things?” they might ask. How is it possible for Christ’s body and blood could really be present in, with, and under the bread and the wine in the Lord’s Supper? When Luther was told that certain things did not make sense to someone, that these things could not be understood in a literal sense, that instead they should be taken figuratively or interpreted allegorically, etc., he replied: “What does it matter if philosophy cannot fathom this? The Holy Spirit is greater than Aristotle.”<sup>165</sup> Luther viewed Philosophy and human reason as impediments to the faith. The person most responsible for the emphasis on philosophy and human reason was Aristotle, according to Luther. Also bearing some of the responsibility were the scholars of the day who should have been able to see the problems with Aristotle as Luther had done. They continued not merely to teach Aristotle, but also to promote his ideas. They shared the blame with Aristotle. “Because [Luther] believed that it actually hindered God’s work of saving man he vehemently attacked the schoolmen, Aristotle, and reason.”<sup>166</sup>

Luther held that “foolish and blasphemous statements of this kind are a sure proof that scholastic theology has clearly degenerated into a kind of philosophy that has no true knowledge of God. But because it does not know the Word, it also does not know God and is in darkness. Aristotle and Cicero, who are the most eminent men in this class, teach many things about the virtues and bestow superb praise on them because of their civil purpose; for they see that they are beneficial both in public and in private life. Concerning God, however, they teach nothing. They do not teach that His will and command are to be considered in preference to either public or private advantage; for men who do not have the Word lack the knowledge of this will of God. Assuredly, the scholastic theologians have likewise been captivated by philosophical fancies and have failed to preserve the true knowledge either of God or of themselves. For this reason they have fallen into such fearful errors. And indeed the fall is easy after one has departed from the Word, for the luster of civil virtues captivates the minds in a marvelous manner.”<sup>167</sup>

Referring to Aristotle, Daniel Fuller cites Luther in an article entitled, *Biblical Theology and the Analogy of Faith*, saying: Aristotle “that damned, proud, rascally heathen has attained supremacy [in the universities]; [he has] impeded, and almost suppressed, the Scripture of the living God. When I think of this lamentable state of affairs, I cannot avoid believing that the Evil One introduced the study of Aristotle (WA 6,457).”<sup>168</sup> Thus for Luther a theology based on faith drawn from Scripture was better by far than a theology based on human reason and developed through following someone’s system of philosophy.

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<sup>165</sup> Martin Luther. *Luther’s Works, Volume 36: Word and Sacrament II*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, p.34.

<sup>166</sup> Martin. Luther. *Luther’s Works, vol. 31: Career of the Reformer I*. p.6.

<sup>167</sup> Martin Luther. *Luther’s Works, Volume 2: Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 6-14*. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, p.125.

<sup>168</sup> Daniel Fuller. “Biblical Theology and the Analogy of Faith”. <http://www.fuller.edu/ministry/berean/analogy.htm>.



The two leading Reformed theologians, who were contemporaries of Luther, chose a different approach. It is necessary for us to have an understanding of the place that reason held in the theology of Zwingli and Calvin so that we can better understand its influence on today's evangelicals and fundamentalists and also on Lutheran church bodies that are associated with them especially in the USA. We need to remember that both these Reformed theologians were humanists, as even conservative Reformed theologians sympathetic to them acknowledge, we will not be surprised that they gave a higher place to reason than did Luther. Not that Luther disparaged reason. Far from it! But Luther refused to let reason rule the Scriptures. Zwingli, on the other hand, is reported to have said, "God does not ask us to believe anything we cannot comprehend." He couldn't comprehend the real presence of Jesus' body and blood, in the Sacrament of the Altar, for example, and therefore could not believe it. He couldn't comprehend how God could condemn some of the great classical writers of antiquity who had never heard of Christ, so he believed that some of them might have been saved apart from a knowledge of the Gospel, which led Luther to exclaim that either he or Zwingli must be "the minister of the devil," and Luther was quite certain that it was not himself. As Osterhaven admits, Zwingli "held the power of human reason in high esteem."<sup>169</sup> Calvin, again, was not as radical as Zwingli. E. Arnold Sitz tells us, "Zwingli often found his "facts" outside of Scripture, developed his premises from these "facts," and then intruded his conclusion upon Scripture. Calvin, more careful, usually found his premises in Scripture, but believed it legitimate to draw hard and fast conclusions from these premises, conclusions which are not found in the Word of God. This principle of Calvin's found express statement in the Westminster Confession in the words, 'The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, men's salvation, faith, and life is either expressly set down in Scripture, or *by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture*' [italics added]."<sup>170</sup> In other words, for Calvin, logical deductions drawn from the Scriptures carry the same weight as those teachings clearly set forth in the Scriptures. Thus for Calvin and the Calvinists any confessional statement or writing based on Scripture can be and often is placed on a par with Scripture. The writings of human beings having been influenced and motivated by their reading of Scripture, are regarded as having been inspired and because they can reveal something in their writings these are placed on an equal level with the Scriptures. Luther and orthodox Lutherans cannot concur. Sitz points out, "Luther found facts, premises, and conclusions in Scripture. If Holy Writ offered premises from which according to logic a certain conclusion must follow, Luther still searched the Word for the conclusion, and if he found it not, he left it unconcluded. To Calvin this was intolerable. His sense of the logical drove him to force himself through, though in doing so he tore the page of Scripture."<sup>171</sup> For Luther if something was clearly set forth in Scripture, it should be believed and practiced. If something was not clearly set forth in Scripture, it was not necessary to believe it. Matters not clearly defined by Scripture are considered to be adiaphora, and no one can impose their ideas regarding these on another. Calvin, on the other hand, felt that everything had to be explained and understood. Like Luther he

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<sup>169</sup> Osterhaven. p 21.

<sup>170</sup> E. Arnold Sitz. "Calvinism: Its Essence and Its Menacing Impact upon American Lutheran Doctrine and Practice," Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly Volume 43 Number 4, October 1946. p. 239.

<sup>171</sup> Sitz. p 239.

felt that if something was clearly set forth in Scripture, it was necessary to believe it. But unlike Luther he felt that if something was not clearly set forth in Scripture the matter had to be clarified so that it could be understood. The difference between the two was the reason of Calvin and the faith of Luther.

The difference between the ways in which Luther and Calvin used reason is illustrated in the way Calvin arrived at the Five Points (TULIP). Starting with two clear scriptural teachings, the doctrines of the total depravity of man and of eternal election, Calvin from there logically deduced doctrines that come more from reason than they do from Scripture — election to damnation, limited atonement, irresistible grace and the perseverance of the saints.

Luther, on the other hand, “could preach undisturbed to the reason illogical and contradictory scriptural doctrines, of universal grace, particular predestination, temporary faith, and the personal responsibility of the finally condemned.”<sup>172</sup> It did not matter that these teachings were not compatible with human reason. If God said it, that was sufficient for Luther. The same thing is true for orthodox or confessional Lutherans to this day.

#### 4.2.2.3 The Means of Grace

For Luther there was no doubt as to what the Means of Grace are. It was crystal clear. In the Smalcald Articles he wrote, “We must firmly hold that God grants his Spirit of grace to no one, except through and with the preceding outward Word,” i.e. the Gospel in God’s Word and Sacraments.<sup>173</sup> Therefore, as the Augsburg Confession puts it, “They [the followers of Luther] condemn the Anabaptists and others who think that the Holy Spirit comes to men without the external Word, through their own preparations and work.”<sup>174</sup> Peters points out, “The Anabaptists mentioned in the Augsburg Confession... sought to found a truly Christian church separate entirely from the state, a church in which every member was an earnest Christian. Among their marks were the rejection of infant baptism as a means of entrance into the kingdom (they required adult baptism instead), perfectionism and the insistence that ‘God’s Spirit will move and act without the means of grace.’”<sup>175</sup> Zwingli did not go so to such extremes as the Anabaptists. However, he, too, divorced the Spirit from the means of grace. He held that the Holy Spirit did not need a guide or a vehicle to do His work. “Zwingli,” the Reformed theologian Bernard Ramm tells us, “saw the relationship between man and God as direct and immediate through the Holy Spirit. In this immediacy of grace, and in this direct mediation of the Spirit, substances were unnecessary.”<sup>176</sup> Calvin, on the other hand, was much closer to Luther. “In his *Institutes*, Calvin speaks about the necessity of the means of grace in order for the Spirit to be able to work in man’s heart. And yet, perhaps because of his desire to be logical and precise, he defines things too finely and ends up

<sup>172</sup> Sitz. pp 239–240.

<sup>173</sup> Concordia Triglott. The Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church (The Book of Concord in German, Latin, and English). St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, Smalcald Articles, Part III, Article VIII., p. 495.

<sup>174</sup> Concordia Triglott. Augsburg Confession, Article V. p. 45.

<sup>175</sup> Paul Peters. p. 276.

<sup>176</sup> Bernard L. Ramm. The Evangelical Heritage. Waco: Word Books, 1973. p. 42-43.

separating the Spirit and the Word, as, for example, in this statement in his *Institutes*: ‘The Word will not find acceptance in men’s hearts before it is sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit.’<sup>177</sup>

Neither Calvin nor Zwingli looked upon the Sacraments as a means of grace. Although Calvin, once again is closer to Luther than is Zwingli. The Swiss reformer (Zwingli) maintained that not only do Sacraments not bestow God’s grace, but that they neither bring it nor administer it. Instead, he insisted on making a distinction between the Word, the sign, and the thing signified in the sacraments: “The sign in baptism is the water, the thing signified is regeneration or washing from sins. The sign in the Lord’s Supper is bread and wine, the thing signified is the veritable body and blood of Christ.”<sup>178</sup> Mention has already been made of Zwingli’s use of rationalism regarding the Lord’s Supper at Marburg. Zwingli and Luther could not agree on the meaning of the word “is.” Zwingli’s reason only could accept “signifies.” This was an indication to Luther that in Zwingli and his theology was “another spirit.” How, argued Zwingli, can Christ be in heaven at God’s right hand and in the bread and wine at the same time? Zwingli reasoned that it is impossible! He cannot be, and therefore rejected the concept. Accordingly, the Heidelberg Catechism, following Zwinglian logic, says of Christ after his ascension: “Christ is true man and true God. According to His human nature He is not now on the earth, but according to His divinity, majesty, grace, and Spirit He never leaves us.”<sup>179</sup> For Zwingli and his followers, human reason determined their position. Neither Zwingli nor his followers could accept that when Jesus says “is” He means “is,” and therefore Zwingli could not comprehend the Lutheran doctrine of the real presence.

Calvin, who came upon the scene somewhat later, took a mediating stance between Zwingli and Luther. Calvin maintained that the sacraments are the same as the Word of God in that they offer Christ to us, and that in Him we have the treasures of heavenly grace. His position sounds remarkably like Luther’s, doesn’t it? Yet Calvin does not teach a baptismal regeneration. The Reformed theologian Osterhaven points out: “The practice of baptizing in the Reformed church follows from its doctrine that the church is the new Israel. As the people of God under the old covenant comprised believers *and their children*, the people of God under the new covenant include the same.”<sup>180</sup> For Calvin, God takes a person from birth and from then on acknowledges them to be His children. Infant baptism, therefore, is merely an act that declares publicly that the infant is a child of God. For Calvin, baptism does not *make* the person baptized (infant or adult) a member of God’s family as Luther and orthodox Lutherans believe.

In the Lord’s Supper, Calvin did accept the real presence in a manner of speaking, but not in the same way that Luther did. The Calvinist Belgic Confession (Article 35) states: “We err not when we say what is eaten and drunk by us is the proper and natural body and the proper blood of Christ.” If that were the entire statement, Calvin would be in agreement with Luther. However, this article of confession goes on to say, “But the manner of our partaking of the same is not by the mouth but

<sup>177</sup> David J. Valleskey. *Evangelical Lutheranism and Today’s Evangelicals and Fundamentalists*. Paper Presented to the WELS Arizona-California District Convention, 1982. p. 11.

<sup>178</sup> Sitz. p. 250.

<sup>179</sup> Sitz. p. 247.

<sup>180</sup> Osterhaven. p 51.

by the Spirit through faith. Thus, then, though Christ always sits at the right hand of the Father in the heavens, yet he does not therefore cease to make us partakers of himself by faith.”<sup>181</sup> Here is where the two sides (Calvinists and orthodox Lutherans) part.

Therefore, in spite of the previous fine-sounding words, ask a Calvinist, “What do you truly and really, physically receive when you partake of the Lord’s Supper?” Their response will be that of Zwingli, “Bread and wine only.” For the Calvinists, there is only a spiritual partaking of the body and blood of Christ.<sup>182</sup> Lutherans, on the other hand, insist that according to the Scriptures you cannot separate the human and divine natures of Christ. Therefore, even according to His human nature Christ is present everywhere, and confessional Lutherans have no difficulty in believing that His body and blood are really and truly present in, with and under the bread and wine in His Holy Supper. Once again, it becomes something that reason cannot accept, but which faith can and does accept.

The Calvinistic Confessions leave the door open for the concept that is quite prevalent today, namely that prayer is a means of grace. In the Westminster Confession (XIV, 1) we are told: “The grace of faith, whereby the elect are enabled to believe to the saving of their souls, is the work of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts, and is ordinarily wrought by the ministry of the Word, by which also, and by the administration of the Sacraments *and prayer*, it is increased and strengthened” [italics added]. When this is done, the Sacraments and prayer are put on the same level. They are both thought to function for the purpose of increasing and strengthening faith. Luther and confessional Lutherans do not concur with this type of thinking. Instead orthodox Lutherans think of prayer as a *fruit of faith* (a product or result of faith) and not as a *way to faith*.<sup>183</sup>

#### 4.2.2.4 Justification and Sanctification

For the sake of the non-Lutheran reader, we should touch briefly on the doctrines of justification and sanctification in order that they may better understand the Lutheran position. What do orthodox Lutherans mean by the terms “justification” and “sanctification”?

**Justification** is a declaratory act. It is God declaring lost and guilty sinners “not guilty” because of the atoning work of Jesus Christ. God declares sinners “righteous” because of Jesus’ atoning work. Justification is brought about by God’s grace through faith in Christ apart from any in-born worthiness, merit, or works on the part of the individual human being.

**Sanctification** is the new life that a person lives after being brought to faith by the Spirit and believing in Jesus Christ as their personal Savior and Redeemer. In this new life of faith the Holy Spirit leads the believer to obey God’s Law for the sake of Christ Jesus. Like faith, sanctification is

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<sup>181</sup> Charles Hodge. *Systematic Theology*. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc. 1872, 1997. Vol. 3, p. 634

<sup>182</sup> Hodge. Vol. 3, p. 642.

<sup>183</sup> Valleskey. p. 12.

worked by the Holy Spirit through the means of grace, the Word and the Sacraments (baptism and Lord's Supper).

That is but a brief summary of these two doctrines. This summary shows the reader what Bible-believing orthodox, conservative Lutherans believe.

#### 4.2.2.5 Church and State

For Luther the church and the state were not one and the same. They were two separate entities with two distinct purposes. The church deals with the spiritual and eternal; the state deals with the temporal, physical and earthly. Luther held that the church is the communion of believers. "When Luther contrasts the 'spiritual communion' (*geistliche Gemeinde*) with the 'physical assembly' (*leibliche Versammlung*), he wants the former to be regarded as the 'natural, real, true, essential Christendom' (*natürlich, eygentlich, rechte, wesentliche Christenheit*) (cf. WA 6,296,7)." He did not regard it as something of this world, something that was visible. It was "not bound to any place, person, or time (*nit an yrgend eyne statt, person odder zeytt gehafft*)." The church consists only of believers, no matter what their calling or station in life. The church exists "in the Spirit (*steht im Geist*)" and "not in canon law." Moreover, "it is a spiritual — not a political — assembly (cf. WA 7, 684,20; 719, 26ff; 721, 30)."<sup>184</sup> In contrast to the Roman church and contemporary reformers, Luther based his doctrine of the church on the doctrine of justification. The church was thus to produce believers through the proclamation of the Word of God, help the believers to grow spiritually, and prepare these believers for everlasting life in heaven. Thus, for Luther the Word of God, the Scripture, the Bible was all important. The Gospel was the means by which a person was brought to faith, strengthened in that faith, gathered together with other believers, and prepared for everlasting life in heaven. The Gospel message is proclaimed not only among the believers, but also to non-believers so that they may know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. While the church itself is invisible because it consists only of believers, and no one can look into the heart of another to see the presence or the absence of Christian faith, still one can tell where the church is present because there, the unadulterated Gospel is proclaimed in its truth and purity and the sacraments are administered in the manner in which Christ instituted them. The state, on the other hand, exists to maintain law and order; and to establish and restore peace and harmony among its citizens. To do this, the state may establish laws and enforce those laws as it sees fit. Christians, because they live in this world and are citizens of the realm in which the civil government exists, serve as members of the government and support it. But the church should not dictate what the state must do, nor should the state dictate what the church must do. This is the position held by Luther and which orthodox Lutherans still believe.

Quoting Reformed author Ernst Troeltsch (*The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*), Osterhaven notes that it is in the area of the proper relationship of church and state, and especially the place of the church in society that "the difference between Lutheranism and Calvinism is most

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<sup>184</sup> Werner Elert. *The Structure of Lutheranism*. tr. Walter A. Hansen. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1962, p. 258f.

manifest.”<sup>185</sup> Although Lutherans may not necessarily agree that this is where the difference “is most manifest,” Lutherans certainly would not disagree that this is but another major difference between evangelical, confessional Lutherans and the members of even the most conservative Reformed churches. It started with Zwingli and Calvin. According to Zwingli, and to an even greater degree Calvin after him, the church and the state have the same purpose — to establish the rule of God, a theocracy that will glorify God here on earth. To accomplish this, the church needs to infuse a proper religious spirit into the state. The state, on the other hand, is to protect and promote the interests of the church. This is very much the same kind of rationale that the Roman Catholic Church used to carry out its infamous Inquisition with the help of the secular government.<sup>186</sup>

Quoting Zwingli in his *Exposition of the Faith*, Peters writes: “The visible church contains within itself many that are insolent and hostile, thinking nothing of it if they are excommunicated a hundred times, seeing that they have no faith. Hence there arises the need of government for the punishment of flagrant sinners.... For the higher powers do not bear the sword in vain.... Without civil government a church is impotent and maimed.... Authority is necessary to the completeness of the body of the church.... To sum up: in the church of Christ government and prophecy are both necessary.... For just as man is necessarily constituted of both body and soul ... so there can be no church without government, although government supervises and controls those more mundane circumstances which are far removed from the things of the Spirit.”<sup>187</sup>

For both Zwingli and Calvin, the church and the state are not two separate entities as Luther taught. The German reformer, based on his study of the Scriptures, especially Romans 13, only regarded the state as a *Schwertmacht*, as a *Büttel Gottes*, a jailer of God, to keep outward order and to preserve the evil world for the day of judgment. Calvin, on the other hand, regarded the state as a *Gemeinschaft*, a community, in which the believer is to prove his moral worth, making every effort to see realized the *Christiana politia* as the glorious work of God. According to the way in which Zwingli and Calvin thought, the church and state are interwoven to such an extent that the two become virtually equated. They function as one. As Peters puts it: “The magistrate as the commissioner of God executes the law, the minister as God’s servant proclaims the law. The magistrate must know what God has revealed in his law and therefore is in constant need of the church. The ... minister must keep watch that the law is not being transgressed.”<sup>188</sup> These principles were carried out to the extreme in Zurich under Zwingli and in Geneva under Calvin where both secular and ecclesiastical authorities were given the responsibility of subjecting the lives of the people in the community to God’s will.

Thus we see that between Luther and the Reformed theologians there was a different concept of the church, its purpose and its function. Because of these differences, there was also a different

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<sup>185</sup> Osterhaven. p. 145.

<sup>186</sup> Paul Peters. p. 267.

<sup>187</sup> Paul Peters. pp. 267-269.

<sup>188</sup> Paul Peters. p. 269.

concept of the purpose and function of those involved in the work of the church — the ministry. There are certainly other differences as well but our purpose here is not to compare the Bible believing church bodies, but rather to indicate that there was and still is a difference of perspective which has had an effect on the doctrine of the church and the ministry, especially among Lutherans in the USA.

We proceed to review some of the theological views within the Christian Churches during the Post-Reformation Era up to the time of the immigration to North America.

### **4.2.3 Theological Views in the Christian Church from the Reformation into the 20th century**

In this section we will look at theological movements that had their effect on the non-Catholic Christian Church as it emerged from the Reformation. Where an individual lived and where that individual's pastor studied will have somewhat of an effect not only on that person but on the church as it moves into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and for the purposes of this paper we will briefly consider that effect as the church moves to the USA with the European immigrants. We will primarily look at three movements: Orthodoxy (4.2.3.1), Pietism (4.2.3.2), and Rationalism (4.2.3.3). This presentation will concentrate on the effects these movements had within the Lutheran church as it was found in various parts of Germany and Scandinavia. We will also look at: Neo-Protestantism (4.2.3.4), Restoration Theology (4.2.3.5), Mediating Theology (4.2.3.6), New Lutheranism (4.2.3.7), Erlangen Theology (4.2.3.8), Liberal Protestantism (4.2.3.9), and Neo-orthodoxy (4.2.3.10) because of the influence these have had on the Lutheran church bodies in the USA.

During the 17<sup>th</sup> century in the Age of Orthodoxy, the embryonic split between the Lutheran and Reformed church bodies appeared to be healing as both the Lutherans and the Protestants viewed and approached Scripture from a similar angle. When one looks closer at the theological positions of both sides, even though both sides established their positions using Scripture, the embryonic split continued to exist in the respective emphases of both the Lutheran and the Reformed churches alike. For the Protestants the dominating and controlling factor continued to be reason, just as it had been for Zwingli and Calvin in the Reformation era. For the Lutherans the dominating and controlling factor continued to be a faith firmly rooted in what the Bible says, even as it had been for Luther. We thus see the two approaches continuing — faith and reason — just as they had before.

#### **4.2.3.1 Orthodoxy**

During the Age of Orthodoxy (1580-1715) Lutheranism was often fighting for its very existence. They wanted to hold on to the doctrine that had been restored through the Reformation, and which confessional Lutherans then and now believe and accept as genuine and biblical. This did not prove to be an easy task. The Counter Reformation won back large areas of Europe for Roman

Catholicism. Some Lutheran rulers converted to Calvinism as the Reformed faith spread. Lutherans countered with precise doctrinal formulations, extensive dogmatic works, and often-bitter polemics. Lutheranism of this age, therefore, tended to be a bit dry and to aim at the head more than the heart. Both the state church mentality and the fact that Lutheranism was often fighting for its very existence resulted in little emphasis on mission work.<sup>189</sup> Those favoring pietism will often accuse the orthodox of not having a desire to do mission work. A very conscious and deliberate effort was being made to remain faithful to the Bible and to the Lutheran Confessions. The result was a remarkable unity that existed among all the orthodox Lutherans.<sup>190</sup> The Lutheran church was thoroughly involved in preserving its doctrinal teachings and had little time for anything else.

Robert Preus, the first graduate of the ELS seminary in Mankato, Minnesota, tells us that orthodoxy is not just an attitude or a spirit. He says, "The concrete feature of Lutheran orthodoxy is its doctrinal platform, a definite and permanent doctrinal position based on Scripture .... Since theology is based solely on God's written Word, its content does not change; Law and Gospel and the articles of faith remain the same, being the summation of God's unchangeable Word to man. This confessional and doctrinal constant is to the old dogmaticians more than a mere statement of belief and platform for action; it is an expression of the very Gospel, a power that controls and changes lives and ideas and movements in history."<sup>191</sup>

It should be noted that the Lutheran Confessions, like the three creeds (Apostles', Nicene, and Athanasian) before them, were not written to be put on a par with Scripture or to stand above it. Rather they were written with a two-fold purpose in mind. 1) They were to clearly set forth a brief summary of doctrine as Scripture teaches. This was to preserve a unity of belief among Lutherans, provide a means for setting forth and instructing members regarding the teachings of the Lutheran church, and to provide a doctrinal statement for those outside the Lutheran church as to what Lutherans believe, teach, and confess. 2) They were written to combat and reject errors in doctrine and practice, false teachings, and to condemn heresies. They were formed solely from the teachings of Scripture and were not expounding some contrived sense of superiority based on human reason. They are an appropriation and application of Scripture to certain specific problems that were confronting the Church and especially the Lutheran Church. This is the same position held today by orthodox or confessional Lutherans. The Lutheran Confessions were never written with the intent and purpose of being some sort of ecumenical document that would universally gain the approval and win the support of those outside the Lutheran church.

Moreover, as the Lutheran church struggled against problems on the outside, such as the Counter Reformation, and problems on the inside, such as the Philippists (followers of Melancthon's errors) and crypto-Calvinism, Scripture was the tool which the Lutherans used. Outside of the

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<sup>189</sup> John M. Brenner. Pietism: Past and Present. Paper delivered at WELS Michigan District Southeastern Conference Pastor/Teacher/Delegate Conference on January 23, 1989 and WELS Michigan District Northern Pastoral Conference on April 3, 1989, p. 2.

<sup>190</sup> Robert D. Preus. The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism, A Study of Theological Prolegomena. St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 1970. p. 31.

<sup>191</sup> Preus. p. 30.



writings of Luther (d. 1546) and Chemnitz (d. 1586), some sermons by Bugenhagen (d. 1558), and the confessional writings that were developed between 1530 and 1580 — all of which were based on Scripture — there were few reliable and worthy secondary level sources for the Lutherans to use. In some cases they could use some of the material Melanchthon (d. 1560) produced, but because of his vacillations regarding doctrines shortly after the adoption of the *Augsburg Confession* (1530), his work was not universally accepted. If the first generation Lutherans wanted to quote someone, they had to cite one of the Church Fathers, Augustine, or one of the other Roman Catholic theologians of the past. It was not until after the *Book of Concord* (containing all of the symbolic writings of the Lutheran church) was produced under the editorship of Jacob Andreae and printed in 1580 that written copies were available and Lutheran theologians began writing detailed, and in some cases, lengthy documents regarding the teachings of the Lutheran church. The age of Lutheran orthodoxy was born.

This second generation of Lutherans, many of whom had experienced the controversies first-hand as students and young pastors or who had heard about them from those who personally had been engaged in the theological struggles, took it upon themselves to write down and thoroughly expound Lutheran doctrine so that the church would never again have to endure such theological struggles. Among these were Aegidius Hunnius (d. 1603), Leonard Hutter (d. 1616), Johann Gerhard (d. 1637), Johann Dannhauer (d. 1666), Abraham Calov (d. 1686), Johann Quenstedt (d. 1688), Johann Baier (d. 1695), and David Hollaz (d. 1713). All were respected theologians. Some had the distinct privilege of studying under one or more of these dogmaticians. For the most part, their writings were in Latin, the scholarly language of the day. (Today confessional Lutheran seminarians still learn some Latin so that they can have an understanding of what their theological ancestors wrote, although the emphasis is not as strong as it was a century ago). Robert Preus tells us “the purpose of” their writings “was to show that the Lutheran church was no new sect but the continuation of the apostolic church.”<sup>192</sup>

Robert Preus summarizes Hutter’s distinctions between the Confessions and Scripture as follows: 1) Scripture is the infallible rule of faith; all confessions must be based on and judged by Scripture. 2) Scripture is the judge in all controversy in the church; the Confessions are only a witness to this judge. 3) Scripture is self-authenticating (αὐτόνπιστος and ἀνάπονδεικτος) and in need of no outside source for its authority; symbolic and ecclesiastical writings are to be believed only insofar as they agree with Scripture (*quatenus nimirum cum scripturas consentiunt*).<sup>193</sup>

A similar view is set forth by Calov. Citing the differences this Lutheran dogmatician sees between Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, Preus summarizes: 1) the Scriptures come to us directly or immediately from God through inspiration; the Confessions come to us indirectly from God, or mediately, because they are based on God’s Word. 2) The Scriptures “formally represent the thought and mind of God”; the Confessions are the consensus of those who believe in God within the Lutheran church. “For this reason only Scripture is self-authenticating, above all criticism

<sup>192</sup> Preus. p.36.

<sup>193</sup> Preus. p.38f.

(ἀνυπεύθυνος), and of necessity true.” 3) Materially speaking, “Scripture is the source of divine truth”; the confessions only contain conclusions that have been based upon Scripture. Therefore, the authority of Scripture is supreme and intrinsic (κατ’ αὐτόν). The conclusions presented in and drawn from the Lutheran Confessions can only be accepted, therefore, on the basis of their source, which is God’s Word. 4) The Bible is “the rule and norm of faith”; the Lutheran Confessions “are a witness of the faith of the church.”<sup>194</sup>

When we think of Lutheran Orthodoxy, we know, of course, that it began in Wittenberg, where Luther taught. But it was developed and practiced among the faculty of Jena, Leipzig, Strasbourg, and Tuebingen.<sup>195</sup>

It was and is a trait among orthodox Lutherans to have complete trust in the clarity of Scripture and the power of God’s Word to convince. *Sola Scriptura* is an important tenet of the Lutheran church. God’s Word is all that is needed, nothing more, nothing less. For this reason, orthodox Lutherans will often cite numerous Scripture references supporting their doctrinal statements yet provide little or no exposition of those verses cited.

Preus divides Lutheran Orthodoxy into three periods. The first he refers to as “the Golden Age” which runs from 1580 to about 1620. During this period much attention was given to Christology, soteriology, sacramentology, the authority of Scripture, God, creation, man, and sin. Dogmatics during this period was in its rudimentary stage and was similar in form to Melancthon’s *Loci Communes* — a list of categories to which arguments and proofs were attached. The second period he refers to as “High Orthodoxy.” It occurs during the Thirty Years War (1618 to 1648). During this period the doctrinal position of the Lutheran church was clarified, especially over and against Romanism and Calvinism. The third and final period he refers to as the “Silver Age.” This period occurs during the time following the Peace of Westphalia (1648), which concluded the Thirty Years War. The approach to theology is more analytical. The loci are now arranged in a more unified manner. There seems to be less redundancy and the reader must do more cross-referencing. In this period, Pietism begins to have an influence on the religious world and the religious life of the individual. It also begins to have an impact on the orthodox theologians whose doctrinal writings, instead of being formalized and straight forward statements of belief, now begin to take on a more devotional tone.<sup>196</sup>

One must be careful not to judge the theology of post-Reformation Lutheran orthodoxy through the lenses tinted with “modern” opinions and perspectives. The German theologian Gottfried Wachler in an article entitled *The Inspiration and Inerrancy of Scripture* tells us: “One must therefore desist from the unpromising attempt to judge the theology of the fathers according to the degree in which they address themselves to our theological problems.... That they speak of that about which evangelical theology must also concern itself today, namely, about the way salvation was

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<sup>194</sup> Preus. p.39.

<sup>195</sup> Preus. p.66.

<sup>196</sup> Preus. pp.44-47.

understood by the Lutheran Reformation subject to the truth of the biblical Word, is on the one hand a problem of ... analysis, on the other hand however a matter of the certainty of faith which knows itself and the fathers to be members in the *ecclesia perpetuo mansura*" (*Die Vernunft zwischen Ontologie und Evangelium*, Guetersloh 1962, 7.15)."<sup>197</sup> Today, orthodox Lutherans view theology much as did the earliest orthodox Lutherans. Their views most likely are going to be different, in some cases very different, from the views and opinions of modern theologians who are not orthodox Lutherans.

Lutheran Orthodoxy views the church as a gathering together or a community of believers. The church is comprised only of people who believe that Jesus Christ is, at one and the same time, both true God and true man, who by virtue of His perfect life and His innocent suffering and death is the Savior from sin, death, and the power of the devil. It is through Him, and only through Him, that one receives the forgiveness of sins, eternal salvation, and everlasting life in heaven. Because faith is the determining factor, and only God can see what is in the heart of an individual, the church is invisible. The most common visible manifestation of the church is a congregation where God's Word is proclaimed in its truth and purity and the sacraments are administered as Christ instituted them. Congregations have worship services which consist of Scripture readings, Bible study, the singing of hymns, and prayers. The function of the church is to make disciples of all nations. The ministry is the teaching and preaching of the Good News about what Christ has done for us and all people, which is the Gospel. The emphasis is that the sinner is justified solely by the grace of God. God's spiritual blessings are received solely by faith. In joyful response a person lives a life of faith in which love is shown for God and one's fellow human beings. Worship services and Bible classes are normally taught by a person who is qualified according to the Scriptural requisites (which are found in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1) and who is formally called to be the pastor. All Christians, not just the pastor, have the responsibility to tell others about sin and its consequences as well as the comforting news about Jesus Christ.

#### 4.2.3.2 Pietism

As the church moved further away from the Reformation, a reaction occurred to what was happening in many congregations. This attempt to change the religious lives of parishioners is known as Pietism. It had its effects on all the bodies of Christendom during the 17<sup>th</sup> century and remnants of its influences continue to exist in some church bodies and religious movements in the USA today.

Pietism should not be confused with piety. Christian piety is a goal that all Christians continually should have for themselves during their temporal lives. Pietism is totally different. Like most English words ending with the suffix "-ism", pietism was a reaction to existing conditions.<sup>198</sup> Examples of these contributing factors or conditions are as follows. During the Thirty Years War

<sup>197</sup> Gottfried Wachler. "The Inspiration and Inerrancy of Scripture". *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Volume 81, Number 4, Fall 1984, p. 279.

<sup>198</sup> Holub, Curtis J. *The Pietism of the New Evangelicals: A Confusion of Justification and Sanctification*. Paper presented to the WELS Western Wisconsin District, Central Pastors' Conference, January 20, 1992, p. 1.

(1618-1648), the purpose and the mission of the church had changed. It had stopped being a church and had become an institution.

Pietism was a theological protest against “the institutionalism” of the church and the lack of personal faith within much of the church during the late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. The goal and highest priority of pietism was to place an emphasis on the personal experience of conversion and works of piety. No one denies that the spiritual life among the church’s members at that time was often deplorable.

Some people might say that pietism was a reaction to the theology of Lutheran orthodoxy. However, that would be an oversimplification at best, and at its worst it would be attack on orthodox theology. In reality, Pietism was not a reaction to the orthodox teachings but to the deplorable spiritual conditions that existed in the organized churches of Europe following the Thirty Years War. The war was devastating and had a negative effect on the lives of the people of Europe not only from a secular standpoint, but especially from a religious one.

Many of the people had spent an entire generation, growing to adulthood, without having the benefit of a pastor. Without pastoral care, many people were members of the church solely because they were born into it. Membership in a church in Germany — be it Lutheran or Catholic — was based on the territory in which one was born and lived. The religion of the prince or the elector for an area established the religion of his citizens based on the principle of *cuius regio, eius religio* set forth in the Peace of Augsburg in 1555, by the Emperor Charles V and the Schmalkaldic league<sup>199</sup>.

Anyone who is a member of a church in name only really has no heart-felt conviction that the teachings of the church are true and biblical. In most cases at this time, any profession of faith was weak at best. Many people were members simply because their parents had been members, or perhaps they had been baptized, but nothing more. Moreover, a goodly number of men knew no other trade except fighting. They had little or no respect for any authority that was not backed up by the sword. Consequently, the pastors that were present often had to resort to the use of secular authorities to exercise church discipline. Such methods did not teach people to love God or His Word, nor did it result in a living Christianity. Another factor was the political organization that existed in the church in Germany after the Reformation. The Roman Catholic hierarchy that formerly had dominated the Church was replaced by a new governing force, a kind of “Caesaropapism.” German princes, who were the most prominent and influential members, replaced the Roman Catholic bishops as the administrators of the church. There were problems with this. Many of these princes were only nominal Christians who were living impenitently in open sin. Others had no real knowledge of doctrine, thus in an effort to establish peace, harmony, and unity ignored doctrinal differences. Still others wanted to remain loyal to the Lutheran Confessions

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<sup>199</sup> The Schmalkaldic league was assembled by Philipp I of Hesse and John Frederick, the Elector of Saxony at Schmalkalden in 1531. Members promised to protect and defend one another and their territories if attacked by Charles V. The league can be credited with helping the spread of the Lutheran church through parts of Germany.

but were not the best administrators and through their ineptness wound up muddying the waters of church affairs. Pastors were appointed by princes and town councils; often solely on the basis of political considerations. Many of the appointees were not apt to teach. Some took the office merely to have a job. They really had no love for souls. Some were poor examples to their members in that they lived lives that were often openly contrary to what they preached. Furthermore, when it came to matters of church discipline the pastors' hands were often tied. Their superiors did not always support them; this was especially true when it came to dealing with people of noble birth or high station.<sup>200</sup> Also missing was a sense of need to do any kind of mission work, reaching out with the Gospel so that the spiritually lost could be eternally saved.<sup>201</sup> If in a town of ten or fifteen thousand people today there was but one church and only one pastor and all of the people were regarded as members of that church, no doubt we would find similar conditions — gross sinners and those who despise God's grace. Are such conditions the result of the teaching of the church?<sup>202</sup>

Among those who took note of the spiritual demise of the people was Philip Jacob Spener (d. 1705). Spener regarded himself as an orthodox Lutheran, but felt that the Reformation had not been completed. In a sermon in 1669, Spener set forth his *collegia pietatis*, "gatherings in the interest of piety." His "conventicle Christianity", or small group gatherings on an irregular basis for Bible reading and singing, tends to resemble, in certain ways, what we today refer to as "cottage Bible studies." There is nothing wrong with studying the Bible. And whenever there is mutual edification among the members; instruction of those who are new to the faith or who have a weak faith or doubts; and the discussion of difficult passages with the pastor — these are all admirable. But Spener also hoped that these meetings would correct and reform the lives of others. This leaned more toward legalism than it did toward evangelism. In 1675, he decried such conditions in his *Pia Desideria* (*Pious Desires*), a six-point program to improve the church.<sup>203</sup> Much of Spener's work was done from Frankfurt am Main. He later served at Dresden and Berlin.<sup>204</sup> The movement that Spener is credited with beginning is called pietism.

However, Spener was not the first to attempt to edify the members of the church in this manner. The dogmatician Johann Gerhard (d. 1637), the hymn writer Paul Gerhardt (d. 1676), the author of *True Christianity*, Johannes Arndt (d. 1621), and others were among the men who had sought to instill a living Christianity while they adhered to the biblical truth as it is confessed in the *Book of Concord*.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> Richard D. Balge, "Pietism's Teaching on Church and Ministry As Evidenced in its Pastoral Practice." *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*. Volume 82. Number 4. Fall 1985. p. 248.

<sup>201</sup> Wendland, Ernst H. "Pietism's World Mission Enterprise." *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*. Volume 82. Number 3. Summer 1985. p. 186.

<sup>202</sup> Balge. "Pietism's Teaching on Church and Ministry As Evidenced in its Pastoral Practice." p. 248.

<sup>203</sup> Balge. "Pietism's Teaching on Church and Ministry As Evidenced in its Pastoral Practice." p. 250.

<sup>204</sup> Brenner. p. 4.

<sup>205</sup> Balge. "Pietism's Teaching on Church and Ministry As Evidenced in its Pastoral Practice." p. 248.

There are several concurrent types of pietism. They are not all the same. They are separate and individual. There was a pietism among Lutherans. At the same time there was a pietism among the Reformed churches. There was also pietism among the Roman Catholics involving the Jansenist controversy regarding Jesuit morality. Because this paper deals with a Lutheran church body, it will deal exclusively with pietism as it affected the Lutheran church.

Several branches of pietism existed within the Lutheran churches. One branch of Lutheran pietism could be found in Germany. There we find three primary variations: Halle Pietism, Württemberg Pietism, and Frankfurt Pietism, which also is known as "Radical Pietism."<sup>206</sup> The **Halle variation** of pietism can most closely be associated with August Herman Francke (d.1727). The **Frankfurt variation** is most closely associated with Spener and later with his godchild, Count Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf (d. 1760). The **Württemberg variation** was the mildest of the three and would have an influence on the WELS during its formative years in the USA. This variation was not a pure pietism and included a tradition of careful biblical exegesis. It was more faithful to orthodoxy and closer to the Lutheran church than other forms of pietism.<sup>207</sup> Among those associated with this variation is the scholar Johann Bengel (d. 1752).<sup>208</sup> From Germany, pietism spread to all of the **Scandinavian** countries, where, again, there were variations of piety. In **Norway**, pietism would gain a foothold, go dormant, and eventually be awakened by Hans Hauge (d. 1824) and was later be used by Elling Eielsen (d. 1883), a lay preacher who brought Haugeanism and Norwegian pietism to the USA.<sup>209</sup> This not only affected the fledgling Norwegian Lutheran Church in the USA, but continues to show its influence more than 150 years later in some of the descendant church bodies (denominations or synods).

There are those who consider pietism to be a reaction to Lutheran orthodoxy. They describe Lutheran orthodoxy as being "dead orthodoxy" because they feel as if sanctification was totally ignored, that there was little or no piety among Lutheran pastors of the time. John Brenner indicates that this was not the case at all; he cites the historian John Henry Kurtz, who said, "This period, so commonly reviled as that of 'dead orthodoxy,' possessed more true piety and spiritual life, than the period (18th century) which most decried it."<sup>210</sup>

While we can applaud Spener's efforts to edify the people within the church, we must note that he also had problems, serious problems. As the conventicles increased in popularity, Spener began to lose personal contact with the members. Each of the groups became a smaller congregation within the larger congregation. His church was fragmenting. Members of each group began comparing themselves with those who were not in their group. The resulting Pharisaism caused the groups and the congregation to split when individuals considered themselves to be more spiritual and morally

<sup>206</sup> E. C. Fredrich. After Three Centuries - The Legacy of Pietism. Paper presented to the Southeastern Wisconsin District Pastor - Teacher Conference Hales Corners, Wisconsin June 11, 1985. p. 2.

<sup>207</sup> Hagglund. History of Theology. p. 333.

<sup>208</sup> Brenner. p. 11.

<sup>209</sup> Edward C. Fredrich. "Lutheran Pietism Comes to America." Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly. Volume 82. Number 4. Fall 1985. p. 263.

<sup>210</sup> Brenner. p. 3.

superior to others. Cliques were formed separating the “righteous” from those considered to be unconverted or second-class Christians within established congregations. Such splits occurred repeatedly within Lutheran congregations throughout the seventeenth century because of the influence of pietism.<sup>211</sup>

August Hermann Francke succeeded Spener as the leader of Pietism. When Francke looked at his congregation he saw a three-fold division within it. The largest group was comprised of those whom he felt had the form of godliness, but lacked the substance. The next largest group consisted of those whom he regarded as having made a start but had not yet fully committed themselves. The third and smallest group could be defined as those whom he believed were the “core members of the congregation.” This third group he regarded as being the “fully committed” members; they were, in Francke’s eyes, the “true church.” The church for him, therefore, was something visible.

Francke was an organizer whereas Spener was not. Under Francke’s energy and leadership the movement achieved new heights. Francke had undergone a profound conversion experience which led him to consider himself to have been spiritually reborn. As a result, spiritual rebirth became an important concept in Francke’s theology and a central teaching of pietism. Under his leadership religious activity flourished. He founded schools, an orphanage, a Bible society, and trained men who spread Pietism in various parts of the world.<sup>212</sup> Francke is considered to be the “father of the Danish-Halle Mission.” As a result of his influence and guidance, as many as sixty missionaries were sent out from Halle in the 18th century.

One of these was Henry Melchior Muhlenberg who is known as the “patriarch of the Lutheran church in America.”<sup>213</sup> Needless to say, Muhlenberg (d. 1787) brought many pietistic tendencies with him when he settled in the state of Pennsylvania, and formed the roots of the old Lutheran Church in America (LCA), which merged with other liberal Lutheran church bodies in January 1988 to form the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA), now the most liberal Lutheran church body in North America.

Gustav Warneck, regarded as being the leading authority of the 19<sup>th</sup> century on world mission history sees the missionary efforts of the 18<sup>th</sup> century as flowing out of pietism rather than from Lutheran orthodoxy. Many modern historians would concur. When one considers the origin and success of the Danish-Halle Mission, it is possible to see how such a view became generally accepted. Such a view, however, tends to put Lutheran Orthodoxy in a bad light and makes pietism appear to be “a saving force.” Such a comparison is neither fair nor entirely true.

“At the time when this missionary movement occurred, there was in force a situation when a lively, positive kind of Pietism was awakening as a reaction to a cold, intellectualized kind of orthodoxy,

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<sup>211</sup> Brenner. p. 3.

<sup>212</sup> Brenner. pp. 4-5.

<sup>213</sup> Ernst H. Wendland. “Pietism’s World Mission Enterprise.” p. 199.

better termed **orthodoxism**.<sup>214</sup> The two are not one and the same. Orthodoxism is in reality a perversion of orthodoxy both in its content and its spirit. Warneck tells us that orthodoxism assumes to know the truth and is unwilling to learn; it is haughty and arrogant, assuming the divine prerogatives of infallibility and inerrancy; it hates all truth that is unfamiliar to it, and persecutes it to the uttermost.<sup>215</sup> Pietism, therefore, was a reaction to orthodoxism, not orthodoxy.

Pietism also can have its negative side as far as mission work is concerned. This is evident from what happened to the Danish-Halle Mission in its later development when Spener and Francke no longer were around, and their successors lacked similar commitment to do the work. An example of this can be seen in “Christian Wendt, a confirmed Pietist, who interpreted ‘true spirituality’ to mean that a missionary must receive little or no outside support, should remain unmarried lest he be tempted to live too comfortably, must busy himself with no charitable work whatsoever, ought to refrain from studying the traditions and customs of the people to whom he has been sent lest he waste valuable time. Wendt’s activities in the Danish-Halle enterprise nearly killed it.”<sup>216</sup>

“With the rise of Rationalism in Europe even the University of Halle was influenced to the extent that it became difficult to find qualified men to serve as missionaries. Those who were sent, according to historian Gustav Warneck, ‘admired in Jesus the sage of Nazareth, and at best sought to perfect the morality of the heathen poets.’ They affirmed the proposition, according to Warneck, that ‘missions must cease to be an institution for conversion.’”<sup>217</sup> The missionary endeavor had now changed from being one of sharing the message of salvation in Jesus Christ for a world doomed to damnation because of sin to a message promoting better living for today.

Pietism probably receives too much credit for the mission work that was done once it came into vogue. In reality, “the practical missionary methods which the Danish-Halle men employed were neither a part of Pietism nor of Orthodoxy. They were simply the result of using good common sense. First of all, to work among people one must have a heart for them, learn their customs and their language to be able to understand them and communicate with them evangelically. Secondly, one must have literary tools to work with—Bibles, instruction materials, liturgies, hymns—written and printed in contextually understandable language. Finally, one needs to have a training program for nationals so that they from the very beginning become involved in its activities and growth. These basic objectives of mission methodology are axiomatic today. At that time they were revolutionary. It just so happened that Lutherans out of the Pietist movement were the first to put them to use effectively. In later years they have been employed just as effectively by Lutherans who do not have the Pietist label.”<sup>218</sup> Orthodox Lutheran missionaries continue to use these methods today.

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<sup>214</sup> Ernst H Wendland. “Pietism’s World Mission Enterprise.” p. 200.

<sup>215</sup> Gustav Warneck, John Patrick Mitchell and Campbell Macqueen Macleroy. Outline Of A History Of Protestant Missions From The Reformation To The Present Time. New York, Fleming H. Revell, 1901, pp. 52-53.

<sup>216</sup> Ernst H Wendland. “Pietism’s World Mission Enterprise.” p. 200.

<sup>217</sup> Ernst H Wendland. “Pietism’s World Mission Enterprise.” p. 197.

<sup>218</sup> Ernst H Wendland. “Pietism’s World Mission Enterprise.” p. 201.



The increased emphasis upon private Bible study encouraged a greater concern for obedience to Christ's Great Commission, also among the laity. No longer was this first command of the Lord of the church obscured by all sorts of dogmatic formulations by those presumed to be theological experts (**orthodoxism**). Scripture itself was clear, convincing. Paradoxically out of a "conventicle Christianity" came a Christianity which embraced the whole world.<sup>219</sup> This is good in that once again the church was involved in making disciples of all nations through the preaching and teaching of God's Word. It was bad in that, if the pendulum had swung too far in one direction to establish and maintain biblical doctrine under orthodoxy, it now had swung too far in the opposite direction and biblical doctrine was de-emphasized. What people believed no longer was all that important.<sup>220</sup> What mattered was living what was considered to be a holy life and enjoying the religious experience.

Brenner notes, "By the mid-nineteenth century Pietism and American Protestantism had influenced some Lutherans enough that they issued the *Definite Synodical Platform* and sent it to Lutherans throughout the United States."<sup>221</sup> This document included a revision of the Augsburg Confession and eliminated everything which they considered to be separating Lutherans from Protestants in the USA. The authors believed that the only way that the Lutheran church could survive in America was to adopt and adapt to American Protestantism with its revivalistic techniques and its rejection of liturgical worship and the means of grace.

Through pietism, people began to interpret the Bible subjectively. Instead of objectively approaching a passage, as had been done previously, the pietist looked at Scripture through the lenses of their personal emotions. The result was that they were always seeking a meaning from their interpretation that would move them to show their love for God in their everyday lives. In some instances the pietist took it a step further and tried to feel the emotions that the writer had experienced when writing a particular Bible passage. If the feelings of the reader could establish a harmonious connection with those of the writer it was assumed that a mystical relationship resulted. This was not true for all pietists, however. Some took great precautions not go to extremes. Radical pietists, on the other hand, went all out, "became very subjective and believed that they were directly illuminated by the Holy Spirit." Their interpretations, they felt, was the result of an "inner light."<sup>222</sup>

Pietism is difficult to evaluate because its founders, who were constantly on the defensive theologically, never really got around to the development of a theological system. Some tried, but their efforts never gained much following. Although its influence is still alive to the present day, it never reached a point where it controlled theological thought completely.<sup>223</sup> An evaluation of

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<sup>219</sup> Ernst H Wendland. "Pietism's World Mission Enterprise." p. 199.

<sup>220</sup> E. C. Fredrich, *After Three Centuries - The Legacy of Pietism*. p. 3.

<sup>221</sup> Brenner. p. 10f.

<sup>222</sup> Kuske. *Biblical Interpretation*. pp. 157-159.

<sup>223</sup> Ernst H. Wendland. "Present-Day Pietism." *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*. Volume 49. Number 1. January 1952. p. 19.

pietism is difficult, but not impossible. To evaluate it, we need to look at the teachings of its leading proponents.

Although both Spener and Francke thought that they held faithfully to Lutheran doctrine, the fact is that neither of them did. In relation to the topic of this paper, the doctrines of the church and the ministry, they and other Lutheran pietists, who followed in their wake, adhered to the definitions of the church and the ministry as they are set forth in the Lutheran Confessions, in particular in the *Augsburg Confession*. Where they chose to follow another path was in regard to the mission of the church and the function of the ministry. The Gospel message, the proclamation of the forgiveness of sins, was relegated to an ancillary role. Instead of this essential message, they stressed a message of how to live and “feel” like a “true Christian”. The pastors decided who was and who was not a “true Christian.”<sup>224</sup> It can be said that they “over-reacted” to the situation of their time and as a result not only had an improper doctrinal emphasis but actually deviated from objectively sound Lutheran doctrine. In 1695, in its *Gutachten*, the Wittenberg faculty found more than 200 doctrinal deviations in the teachings of Spener. In the matter of orthodox Lutheran’s *norma normata*,<sup>225</sup> Spener had a way of combining high praise with a reluctance to completely commit himself to a *quia* subscription (i.e., I agree with them because they are the correct exposition of the doctrine of Scripture). He rather preferred the lesser and much softer *quatenus* subscription (i.e., I agree with them only in so far as they agree with what is taught).<sup>226</sup>

The doctrinal aberrations become apparent when we examine the *theological structure* that developed under their leadership. First of all, and this is of primary importance if we wish to understand Pietism, in their sermons there is an improper presentation of the two basic teachings of Scripture: the Law and the Gospel. There is also a confounding and commingling of the doctrines of justification and sanctification. We need to remember that they were seeking to arouse the hearts of their hearers from spiritual lethargy. Their preaching of the law, however, deals much more with sweeping denunciations of worldly-mindedness. Absent from the preaching, especially from Spener’s preaching, was a clear presentation of God’s Law in order to awaken a deep, personal conviction of sin within the individual hearer.

E.H. Wendland, referring to Walther’s evaluation of Spener’s teaching and of pietism in his *Gesetz und Evangelium*, says that the Pietists used the Gospel in a legalistic manner raising pointed questions to keep their hearers in constant suspense as to whether or not they could actually lay claim to a true and living faith. Pietists denied that those who were weak in faith were truly converted. True conversion in their opinion was something that the individual sinner had to achieve through a prolonged period of tearful contrition and the agonizing struggle of prayer. In order to know whether or not one is truly converted, the person had to be able to point to the exact hour of their *Gnadendurchbruch*, an emotional experience in which the person becomes

<sup>224</sup> Balge. “Pietism’s Teaching on Church and Ministry As Evidenced in its Pastoral Practice.” p. 261.

<sup>225</sup> the guided norm, the term applies to a Confession, or body of Confessions, as secondary norm (*norma secundum quid; norma secundaria; norma discretionis*), determined by the *norma normans*[Scripture]. The *norma normata* is only relatively necessary. It decides whether a person has clearly understood the true doctrines of Scripture.

<sup>226</sup> E.C. Fredrich, p. 6.

personally convinced of God's grace "breaking through" in their personal life. The importance of the true Means of Grace was shunted into the background, because the complacent Pietists merely used them as an *opus operatum*. In place of the true Means of Grace, they substituted prayer. For the pietist, prayer became a means of attaining the grace of God. No longer was the assurance of salvation objectively based upon God's Word. Rather it was to be subjectively experienced in the individual's emotional life and in the fruits of faith. People were taught that it was possible to live a life of perfect sanctification. An excessive emphasis was placed on the rite of confirmation. During this rite, the confirmand publicly repeats and renews his or her baptismal vow. Pietism stressed confirmation to the extent that every baptized child was looked upon as having fallen from the state of baptismal grace. This made it necessary for the individual to make a conscious pledge as a completion of the efficacy of the covenantal vow. Thus, although time and again Pietism in Germany had claimed that it adhered to the Lutheran Confessions, it betrayed itself through its insistence on experiential conversion or regeneration and the fact that it obscured objective justification based upon the Means of Grace. If anything, Pietism in Germany was "more akin to Calvinism than anything else."<sup>227</sup> For pietism, baptism was no longer considered an act that regenerates, saves, and conveys the forgiveness of sins. It became nothing more than an initiation rite. Confirmation became more important than baptism. It was no longer important to receive the Lord's Supper frequently. The Means of Grace as adhered to by the Lutheran church were no longer considered to be all that necessary. Prayer was also thought of as being a means by which the grace of God was obtained.

For Luther, the doctrine of justification (i.e., God has declared sinners not guilty for Jesus' sake) was the foundation, the doctrine on which the church either stands or falls. What Jesus has done for us is supreme; it is all-important. Pietism, however, changed the emphasis around. No longer was what Christ has done *for* us important. Now, for the pietist the important thing is what Christ does *in* us. Rather than emphasize the forgiveness of sins through Jesus' atoning merits, the pietist emphasized holy living. Sanctification (i.e., the work of the Holy Spirit in leading us to live a life of faith that bears fruit — the fruits of faith, or to do good works, as it is more commonly explained) now became the center of theology and practice instead of justification. By switching the emphasis to sanctification and good works the result was legalism and the confounding of sanctification and justification, the Law and the Gospel. The Bible teaches us that good works have no part in our justification. Our sanctification follows after our justification. It cannot come before it. Good works are part of our sanctification. They are produced as a result of our being justified. Spener and the pietists turned it around, however. Spener made justification dependent on sanctification: on one's desire to live a holy life. He taught that good works are the reason why a person is justified. As a result of Spener and pietism's teaching, the hearer is taught "Give your heart to Jesus, and He'll wash your sins away." In other words, according to pietism, the hearer has to make the first move. Salvation depends on a person's actions. Pietism shifted the emphasis from the objective truths of God's Word to the individual's personal subjective experience; and from a theocentric (God-centered) system to an anthropocentric (human-centered) system.

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<sup>227</sup> Wendland. "Present-Day Pietism." p. 26.

Objective or universal justification (i.e., the fact that God declared the whole world innocent when Jesus died on the cross) is denied and God's forgiveness becomes conditioned on the individual's behavior or reception of grace: For the pietist, being "born again" is more important than justification. And their doctrine of regeneration (i.e., spiritual rebirth) is synergistic,<sup>228</sup> in other words, for the pietist the individual contributes to their own spiritual regeneration. Although they claimed to be adhering to Lutheran doctrine, Spener and the pietists were following a different path in these matters.

Spener made every effort to avoid being considered to be a legalist, but in his later life he had a tendency to systematize, prescribe and methodize Christian living. Thus he and others were actually doing the very same thing in the area of Christian life that they opposed in the area of Christian doctrine. Pietists have a tendency to judge the Christianity of others, quite often through the use of subjective and arbitrary standards based on their own conduct. We should not be surprised, then, that for some Pietists an adherence to a set of rules, most of which are negative, has become the identifying mark of the Christian.<sup>229</sup> As we summarize early Pietism and attempt to place our finger upon its fundamental error, it is simply this: the difference between the teachings of the orthodox Lutherans and Pietists is religious objectivism in distinction from religious subjectivism.<sup>230</sup> The Pietist looks at what the individual has done; the orthodox Lutheran clings to what Jesus has done.

Spener's methods as he attempted to achieve his goals have created doubts within the Lutheran church regarding his understanding of the church and the ministry. Spener really wanted to uphold the Lutheran position on the church. He did not have any desire to undermine the effectiveness of the public ministry. Formally, both he and Francke adhered to the teaching of the Augsburg Confession, Article VII on the church and Article VIII on the ministry. Neither of them wanted to equate the true church, which is invisible, with any visible community. However in the process of relegating doctrine to a secondary position and by giving Christian living priority, the "marks of the Church" for the pietists shifted radically from "the teaching of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments" (A. C. VII) to "chastity, patience, the fear of God, love for one's neighbor, and the works of love" (Apology VII and VIII). In essence, by stressing sanctification, as they did, there was a distinct shift from thinking of the church as the communion of those who are righteous by faith to those who are ethically righteous, that is, those who have a "living Christianity."<sup>231</sup>

Although Spener and Francke are perhaps the best known among the leading Pietists, we should not overlook John Albert Bengel (d. 1752 ). Bengel was an exegete from Wuerttemberg who classified the various New Testament Greek manuscripts into groups or families based on

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<sup>228</sup> Holub. pp. 3-5.

<sup>229</sup> Balge. "Pietism's Teaching on Church and Ministry As Evidenced in its Pastoral Practice." p. 6.

<sup>230</sup> Ernst H. Wendland. "Present-Day Pietism." p. 27.

<sup>231</sup> Balge. "Pietism's Teaching on Church and Ministry As Evidenced in its Pastoral Practice." p. 2.

similarities within the manuscripts.<sup>232</sup> Bengel and others from Wuerttemberg would influence the theological position of the founding fathers of the Wisconsin Synod (WELS) in the USA.

Another prominent leader in pietism was the 18<sup>th</sup> century English Protestant theologian, churchman, and founder of the Methodist church John Wesley (d. 1791) As a result of his life and preaching, pietism became more visible especially in regard to working toward prison reform and abolitionism. Men and women were called back to God and as a result there was an increase in individual and group Bible study.<sup>233</sup> Wesley based his theology on four sources: scripture, tradition, reason, and experience.<sup>234</sup> In so doing, he not only adheres to Scripture but also interpolates the Calvinistic sense of human reason and the Pietistic sense of religious experience into his findings from his study of the Bible.

Pietism really had no system of dogmatics. It has been said that there were no real dogmaticians among the pietists. There were those, however, who worked at theology, so to speak. Although earlier theologians had advanced ideas about distinctions between the *analogia fidei* and the *analogia scripturae* or *parallelismus scripturae*, it was the Pietists who can be credited with fully developing the theory of placing an *analogia fidei* as a ruler over the *sedes*. A. H. Francke maintained (Prael. herm. 187) that these two concepts — the *analogia fidei* and the *analogia scripturae* — have the greatest similarity when it comes to the matter of the interpretation of the Scriptures. The orthodox Lutheran dogmaticians, on the other hand, had maintained that both were actually the same thing.<sup>235</sup>

The theory of the analogy of faith was most fully developed as a theological system by the pietist, Johann Jakob Rambach (d. 1735). He held (Inst. h.s. II, 1–2) that all of the truths that we know are somehow connected with each other so that it is possible to start with one general truth and from it develop many special truths. If from the general truths, *principiis*, one could derive special truths, then you had a doctrinal system, a *systema doctrinae*. When there is an accord among the preceding, the conclusions together with the *principiis*, can be referred to as an *analogia doctrinae*, an analogy of doctrine. It was felt that this connection, this *nexus*, this *relationship*, could also be found in the revealed truths. As a result, it was felt that one could develop a system in which certain *conclusiones* or more specific truths could be derived from certain fundamental doctrines. While the Pietists sought to follow this theory, they only did so to a limited extent and that mostly in the interest of unionism, or the joining together with others.<sup>236</sup>

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<sup>232</sup> Walter C. Kaiser. p. 62.

<sup>233</sup> Walter C. Kaiser. p. 62.

<sup>234</sup> David C. Ratke, “The Current State of Lutheran Systematic Theology”. Essay delivered at Center for Theology Colloquium, Lenoir-Rhyne College. Hickory, North Carolina: March 14, 2002.  
<http://www.lrc.edu/rel/center/colloquium/col0302.html>. p. 4.

<sup>235</sup> Adolf Hoenecke. “Agreement On The Correct View Of The Authority Of Scripture As The Source Of Doctrine: The Way To Unity In The Church”, *Theologische Quartalschrift* Vol. I, No. 4, pp 177–205. Tr. Prof. Martin Westerhaus. Reprinted Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly. Volume 73, Number 1, January 1976. and Volume 73, Number 2, April 1976. p. 128.

<sup>236</sup> Hoenecke. “Agreement On The Correct View Of The Authority Of Scripture As The Source Of Doctrine: The Way To Unity In The Church”. p. 128.

Toward the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century a proponent of this theory was a German Lutheran dogmatician by the name of Prof. Dr. von Oettingen (d. 1905). Dr. Adolf Hoenecke (d. 1908), a highly respected orthodox Lutheran theologian in his own right, provided a review of one of von Oettingen's books as well as an analysis of von Oettingen's theological position in article that he wrote for the Theologische Quartalschrift. The article shows how von Oettingen developed his theology using Rambach's theory. Referring to the first volume of von Oettingen's textbook, *Fundamental Principles*, of his *Lutheran Dogmatics* (1897) Hoenecke proceeded to follow the steps laid out by von Oettingen for developing a theology based on this theory. The result is a development of dogmatics which comes out of Christian consciousness. This tends to be a trait that is almost universal in German theology. There is no way that anyone could mistake von Oettingen for an orthodox or confessional Lutheran. Von Oettingen ignores the authority that God Himself has given Scripture. He disavows inspiration, the basis for the divine authority of Scripture. He emphatically denies that the Bible can be described as a letter of God to the human race dictated by the Holy Spirit to specially chosen, holy writers. In denying the verbal and plenary or complete inspiration of Scripture, von Oettingen set himself apart from many Lutherans, past and present. Rather than an inspiration of the books of the Bible and the very words within those books, von Oettingen wrote of an "inspiration of persons". He did not equate Scripture with the supernatural revelation of God. He felt that Scripture had a purely human side, which he felt the interpreter must take into account. Consequently, he held that an occasional imperfection and obscuring of the truth must be recognized within Scripture.<sup>237</sup>

Following Rambach's theory, previously referenced, von Oettingen indicates that it is necessary build upon a fundamental idea, a principle. This, however, is not Scripture. One has to build on the idea of "Christ in us." The fundamental idea, therefore, becomes "salvation in Christ." Using a Christocentric fundamental idea, von Oettingen sought to deduce doctrines such as that of the Lord's Supper and thus make them scientifically certain. To do this, of course, one has to have certain presuppositions. Von Oettingen felt every dogmatician needed to have these presuppositions in order to dogmatize.<sup>238</sup> We need to remember there are positive presuppositions and there are presuppositions that are negative. If those presuppositions are negative, i.e., the conclusion has already been determined that nothing good can be found in the object being studied, that will influence the results. By casting the authority of Scripture aside and trying to formulate doctrine by logic rather than basing it on Scripture, one cannot and will not produce a Scripture-based doctrine. When one follows an approach such as von Oettingen's, they certainly are not being objective. On the contrary they are using an approach that can only produce subjective conclusions.

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<sup>237</sup> Hoenecke. "Agreement On The Correct View Of The Authority Of Scripture As The Source Of Doctrine: The Way To Unity In The Church", pp. 128-129.

<sup>238</sup> Hoenecke. "Agreement On The Correct View Of The Authority Of Scripture As The Source Of Doctrine: The Way To Unity In The Church", p. 130.

The practice of equating revelation and Scripture (*revelatio sive scriptura*) which the orthodox dogmatists had used was repulsive for von Oettingen. For him, the revelation of Scripture is not a part of the revelation principle; for him, they were not one and the same. Von Oettingen considered Scripture to be only a documentary testimony, only a lasting *memorial* of the revelation of salvation. He viewed Scripture as nothing more than a periodical describing some historical event like the astronauts landing on the moon (1969). Commenting on this, Hoenecke wrote, "It is strange how theologians like von Oettingen and likewise Francke in their discussion of revelation and Scripture reveal their doubts about the independent effectiveness of Scripture (actually: their downgrading of Scripture) in the distrust they display toward various mission stories concerning the effect of Scripture *without ecclesiastical, oral proclamation of salvation.*" Von Oettingen clearly did not equate "*inspiration*" with the "inspiration of Scripture." Nor could he regard inspiration as a special act of the Holy Spirit who dictated the words to specially chosen human secretarial assistants who wrote down the divinely revealed thoughts. He felt that this would have been a mechanical verbal inspiration that would be *unworthy* of the living God who reveals himself in the history of salvation. Von Oettingen could not accept the manner in which the orthodox Lutheran dogmatized from Scripture because it is the holy inspired and inerrant Word of God. He could not accept this. He preferred to think instead that there was a continuous, on-going revelation of salvation. And that it was the church's repeated and continual testimony about salvation and a living experience of salvation that became the *criterion* in the use of Scripture. He envisioned the task of dogmatics as the *systematic development* of the evangelical truth of salvation in which the peculiarly divine-human nature of the inspiration of the word of Scripture is set forth over and against the superstitious doctrine of inerrancy. This moved Hoenecke to comment on the approach used by von Oettingen and others, "This ongoing revelation of the salvation of God in the church (and, to be sure, precisely not through the authority and power of the *Scriptures*), this is the true magic wand of the more recent theologians.... Now, I always thought that our dear Lord Christ through His Word had given this divine monopoly of the knowledge of the truth precisely to us. (Jesus said, 'If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free' [John 8:31–32]). That is sufficient for us orthodox people even if it annoys the admirers of scholarship who in spite of all their modesty with regard to open questions still want to be the indispensable ones."<sup>239</sup>

Hoenecke, born in Brandenburg, studied theology at the University of Halle where he was especially influenced by FA Tholuck (d. 1877).<sup>240</sup> As a result of his theological struggles, which caused him to return repeatedly to Scripture, the WELS seminary professor could conclude: "It really gives one an uncanny feeling of familiarity, like something heard over and over again, when a person hears the catchwords from a dogmatics text as von Oettingen offers them: Context — connection — totality of Scripture — kernel of salvation-truth as analogy of faith — understanding of the Scriptures in the individual doctrines according to this analogy — harmonious structure of

<sup>239</sup> Hoenecke. "Agreement On The Correct View Of The Authority Of Scripture As The Source Of Doctrine: The Way To Unity In The Church", pp. 132-135.

<sup>240</sup> F. A. Tholuck was a student of F. Schleiermacher among others. As a result of his studies at Breslau and Berlin he opposed both rationalism and Lutheran Orthodoxy, while supporting the Prussian Union.

doctrine — guarding against a mechanical authority of Scripture — rejection of the view of Scripture as a source book of individual doctrines and of the inherent and inerrant validity of the *dicta probantia*, the *sedes* — charge of atomizing Scripture and that which God joined together — rejection of the point of view that certainty is possible and relaxing on fixed doctrine — recognition of problems and open questions with regard to doctrines — yes, we have heard the like of this often enough here. To point this out seemed to us to be of importance. It is significant that so much of what is brought up against and in opposition to us was not supplied by Scripture or the Confessions, but rather by the modern, so-called positive theology of Germany. And for those who accept the like of this there is a no little danger.”<sup>241</sup> Although some might take offense at what Dr. Hoenecke wrote more than a century ago, it was spoken in Christian love with a genuine concern for souls that have gone astray. That same loving concern still exists today.

All Pietism with its emphasis on reforming one’s life in order to become more sanctified and spiritual has a legalistic character. While it seeks to help the inner person become more spiritual it actually does the opposite because it strongly overemphasizes externals, forms and what is mechanical. The outward form determines what is pious and what is ungodly. Even accepting or participating in the world’s outward forms of life puts a person on a level with the world.<sup>242</sup>

The fact that modern Protestantism, especially in the USA, is saturated with a theology that is basically pietistic goes without saying. For example, there are the emotional appeals of present day revivalists, the sentimentalism and unionism of Protestantism in general, the stress upon emotional experience in conversion and a standard of super-holiness which finds its goals in legalistic observances as demonstrated in the Pentecostal churches, and the wholesale relegation of the true Means of Grace to a secondary position. It has become a religion which in sum and substance is the product of man’s subjective experience.<sup>243</sup>

The Lutheran view of the church according to Lutheran pietists was a gathering together of believers in Jesus Christ. Like orthodox Lutherans, Lutheran pietists believe Jesus to be both true God and true man, and that by virtue of His perfect life and His innocent suffering and death He is the Savior from sin, death, and the power of the devil. Through Him, and only through Him does one receive the forgiveness of sins, eternal salvation, and everlasting life in heaven. Unlike the orthodox Lutherans, however, the pietist believes that justification comes as a result of one’s sanctification. They gather for Bible study, singing hymns, and prayers, again, like the orthodox Lutherans. The church is thought of as being a visible organization with few restrictions on membership. The function of the church is to cause a spiritual reformation in society and especially in its members. The ministry is the teaching and preaching of the Good News about what Christ has done for us and all people. The emphasis is on the kind of life that a person lives or sanctification. As a result, the two sacraments (Baptism and the Lord’s Supper) are deemphasized

<sup>241</sup> Hoenecke. “Agreement On The Correct View Of The Authority Of Scripture As The Source Of Doctrine: The Way To Unity In The Church”, pp. 132-135.

<sup>242</sup> August Pieper. “Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther 1811–1887 Anniversary Reflections.” Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly. Volume 84. Number 2. Spring 1987. p. 109.

<sup>243</sup> Ernst H. Wendland. “Present-Day Pietism.” p. 28.



and personal actions, such as public pronouncements of commitment and personal testimonies become important. Attention seems to be directed to one's earthly life at the expense of one's eternal life. There is a tendency toward legalism because of the emphasis on the way people ought to live. There is a concern for telling others about Christ.

#### 4.2.3.3 Rationalism

We now proceed to look at the approach that has perhaps had the most affect on Christianity and the most influence on Christian theology from the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the present. I am talking about rationalism, which as we enter the 21<sup>st</sup> century, continues to take many a theologian by the hand and lead them down its broad avenue of interpretation.

Beginning in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, during the Age of Enlightenment, the embryonic split of the Reformation concerning views, approaches and uses of the Bible appeared to be a rupture that from then on could not be healed or pushed back into its embryonic state. In the world and to some extent in many churches, there now existed people who totally and without a single doubt accepted Scripture as God's word. There were others who had doubts and hesitations about accepting all of Scripture and thus only accepted those part of it that applied to their personal belief systems. A third group thoroughly, wholeheartedly, and completely rejected Scripture, considering it to be nothing more than a book of religious fables, myths, and legends -- some of which may or may not be interesting to read -- which may or may not provide some type of spiritual comfort to the reader.

Rationalism is generally attributed to the period between 1700-1775. It has been described as a reaction to the excessiveness of the Baroque Age (1600-1750).<sup>244</sup> The adherents of rationalism believe that one determines truth through reason and factual analysis. They have chosen not to use faith, dogma, or religious teaching as were used by the proponents of religious orthodoxy and pietism. When one considers that the aim of rationalism is to provide a framework for social and philosophical discourse apart from religious or supernatural beliefs, it is possible to see that in some ways rationalism is similar in ideology and intent to both atheism and humanism. And yet rationalism is different from these.<sup>245</sup>

A very simple definition of rationalism is that human reason is used to seek to understand all things. On the basis of that comprehension, a matter is either accepted, rationalized to the point of making it acceptable, or rejected. Only what was reasonable, perceptible, and real could be accepted and believed. If it makes sense, it probably exists. If it is implausible, it probably does not exist. Furthermore, something can be considered to be real only if modern research methods can verify it. If something does not lie within the realm of human experience it cannot be real.

<sup>244</sup> <http://www.usd.edu/eric/deutsch/literatur/projekt/rationalism.html>

<sup>245</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rationalism>

The age of rationalism can trace its roots to the humanism of the Renaissance, Socinianism,<sup>246</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century deism as found in England. Discoveries in the areas of natural science by Newton (d. 1727) and others as well as in the area of jurisprudence by Grotius (d. 1645) and Pufendorf (d. 1694) helped contribute to changing thought patterns and a more modern point of view for the new age.

The roots of philosophical rationalism can be found in the writings of René Descartes (d.1650), Thomas Hobbes (d. 1679), Baruch Spinoza (d. 1677), and John Locke (d. 1704). The older Aristotelian philosophical structure was replaced by philosophical systems that helped to prepare the way for the Enlightenment. Philosophy no longer was regarded as the handmaiden of theology (*ancilla theologiae*). What began to develop was a so-called “natural system of knowledge” that was “based on humanistic erudition, religion and morals, law and politics.” The foundation for this was distinct rational principles that are common to all people, everywhere, in every epoch of time. “This rational knowledge was thought of as being autonomous, immediately accessible, and fully evident to all without having been obscured by original sin.”<sup>247</sup> In rejecting original sin, the philosophers of rationalism separated themselves from what had long been taught by the Christian Church, namely the doctrine of original sin. In so doing, they were also consciously or unconsciously rejecting every other Christian doctrine that has a connection with the doctrine of original sin including those pertaining to soteriology and Christology.

One man who was involved not only in philosophical rationalism but also in theological rationalism was Christian Thomasius (d. 1728), who had been influenced by Spener and the pietists. One might note that he is the founder of the University of Halle and its philosophical approach to religion.<sup>248</sup> However, theological rationalism can be linked more directly to three eminent scholars: Christian von Wolff (d. 1754), Hermann Samuel Reimarus (d. 1768), and Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (d. 1781). Von Wolff sought to link Biblical revelation with natural revelation. Reimarus was unable to reconcile faith and reason and therefore rejected any concept of special revelation; therefore he took natural revelation and made it the source of Christianity. Lessing, a German dramatist, literary critic, and amateur theologian held that “the contingent truths of history could never be a proof for the necessary truths of reason.” Much of what today is regarded as liberal theology goes back to these men, as well as to the “destructive Biblical criticism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.”<sup>249</sup>

For Lessing freedom of thought was an important concept. He had serious doubts about divine revelation, even to the point of denying it. And he rejected the literal interpretation of the Bible. Lessing had sought to rationalize history in the same way that one can rationalize mathematics. Because he could not do this, the theory arose that there were problems in the history within the

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<sup>246</sup> Socinianism was a 16<sup>th</sup> century sect having roots among the Anabaptists and the anti-Trinitarians named for Laelius Socinus (d. 1562) and his nephew Faustus Socinus (d. 1604). Its teachings are super-naturalistic with the tendency toward increasing rationalism. It is sometimes referred to as Old Unitarianism.

<sup>247</sup> Hagglund. pp. 335-337.

<sup>248</sup> <http://www.indiana.edu/~intell/thomasius.shtml>

<sup>249</sup> Walter C. Kaiser. p. 62.

Bible.<sup>250</sup> Geometry, for example, is very logical. One follows all of the various proofs to solve, or rationalize, the conclusion and as a result one understands both the answer and how it was attained. One cannot necessarily seek to logically understand or determine history following such a course of study. Various uncertainties can always arise which produce different results. For example, your favorite football team may, on paper, be a championship team. It may have championship flags and cups decorating its home stadium. But does that mean that this team will win every game? That it can never be defeated? Does it mean that the team with the worst record in the league, the team with the poorest statistics, cannot pull off a stunning and surprising defeat of the champions — David vs. Goliath, so to speak? Certainly not! In history there have been many predicted outcomes. Those predictions, however, have not always occurred. History cannot be studied in the same way one studies mathematics.

Because the supernatural is beyond human experience and in many cases beyond human understanding, the rationalist concludes that the supernatural is impossible and therefore cannot exist. This denial of the supernatural will affect the way in which the rationalist views both how the Bible was written, and how to interpret the Bible. With this type of theological approach, it is obvious that a rationalist will view Scripture in a totally different light than will a Christian who views the Bible as the wholly inspired and inerrant Word of God.<sup>251</sup> Divine revelation, which involves the supernatural but cannot be verified by the modern methods of historical research, is rejected therefore by the proponents of rationalism. That Scripture is verbally inspired by the Holy Spirit working through certain select writers and that the Scriptures are God's inerrant Word are also denied by the rationalists. These two scriptural doctrines that tell us what kind of book the Bible is have been replaced by various theories of revelation all of which emphasize the human origin of the Bible.<sup>252</sup> The rationalists were guided by human reason and not Scripture-based faith. The preoccupation of the rationalists with various theories of revelation continues to dominate much of modern theology to this day.

“On the premise that Scripture was given for rational beings rationalism makes the demand that all that Scripture says must agree with man's reason.... Conflicts with clear statements of Scripture come solely from our reason.”<sup>253</sup> Whenever the need arises to resolve a conflict, the rationalist chooses reason over faith. Human reason, human thoughts and ideas, therefore, are given a more prominent place in the theology of the rationalist than is the Bible.

The interpretation of the Bible that the rationalist provides, therefore, is clearly affected by the denial of the supernatural and the rejection of the doctrines of the verbal inspiration and the

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<sup>250</sup> Wenham, Gordon J., FF Bruce, RT France, Colin Brown. History, Criticism & Faith. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, p. 147.

<sup>251</sup> Kuske. Biblical Interpretation. p. 159.

<sup>252</sup> Kuske, David. “An Analysis Of Three Approaches Of The Historical-Critical Method Of Interpretation: Radical (Bultmann), Moderate (Uniting Lutherans) And Conservative (Boer)”. Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly. Volume 80 Number 3, Summer 1983, p. 84.

<sup>253</sup> Hoenecke, Adolf. “Agreement On The Correct View Of The Authority Of Scripture As The Source Of Doctrine: The Way To Unity In The Church”, Theologische Quartalschrift Vol. I, No. 4, pp 177–205. Tr. Prof. Martin Westerhaus. Reprinted Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly. Volume 73, Number 1, January 1976. p. 44.

inerrancy of Scripture. At times, the rationalist will use allegory to interpret the Bible. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the only religious truths in the Bible that were to be accepted were those truths which agreed with man's understanding, according to the rationalist. Distinctions between what the rationalists considered to be fact and fiction in the Bible were made on the basis of their reason and logic. When they identified something in the Bible as fiction it was dismissed as something that the first century Christians had interpreted and added to the text. Anything that was supernatural, they said, had been added solely to magnify Jesus or make him look like a "super-hero". Consequently the miracles of Jesus were given naturalistic or mythical interpretations. Examples of this are as follows: Jesus' resurrection is explained away by saying that He did not really die; He merely passed out and became unconscious because of the intense and severe pain. After His body was placed in the cool tomb, the rationalist says, Jesus revived, and after resting came out of the tomb. The miracle of changing water into wine at the wedding at Cana was allegorically interpreted to mean that Jesus can change an ordinary life (the water) into a very special life (the wine).<sup>254</sup> The rationalist looked at the supernatural elements of the New Testament and concluded that these were written because of the writers' own ancient world-views. The writers were thought to be especially superstitious and to believe that gods could influence events among men. Thus in the eyes of the rationalist, Christianity was no more and no less than the religion of the ancient Greeks and Romans, or other primitive peoples.

### **Natural Religion**

Perhaps the most influential of the new theological ideas was the concept of natural religion that developed in 17<sup>th</sup> century deism. Herbert of Cherbury (d. 1648), in his book *De veritate* (1625), presented the idea that a natural religion exists that is common to all people. He postulated that this natural religion was independent of revelation. And he held that through it people are able to have spiritual blessings without any knowledge of revelation. He thought of Christ as a wise teacher and virtuous example, but nothing more. He set forth five propositions for natural religion: 1) There is a God, who is the highest being. 2) People ought to worship and serve this God. 3) Worship is made up of piety and virtue above all else. 4) Deviations from virtue are regarded as sin. An individual must repent of these deviations. If there is repentance, there is forgiveness. 5) There is a life to come in which evil will be punished and good will be rewarded. These composite and simple doctrines of "God, virtue, and immortality" form a rudimentary summary of religion that was highly cherished during the age of the Enlightenment.<sup>255</sup>

During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, natural religion, or deism, appeared in a more radical form especially in German rationalism (e.g., in the *Wolfenbüttel Fragments*, written by Reimarus and published by G E Lessing).<sup>256</sup> With his semi-Biblical believing emphasis on the reading of Biblical history Lessing, together with Emmanuel Kant (d.1804), who also used a semi-Biblical believing approach,

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<sup>254</sup> Kuske, "An Analysis Of Three Approaches Of The Historical-Critical Method Of Interpretation: Radical (Bultmann), Moderate (Uniting Lutherans) And Conservative (Boer)", p. 85.

<sup>255</sup> Hagglund. p. 337.

<sup>256</sup> Hagglund. p. 338.

subsumed faith under the auspices of reason and rationality and thereby set the scene for a very broad semi-biblical interpretational-hermeneutical avenue in which, up to this very day, the Bible continues to be treated as merely an ordinary book amongst the many books of literature and science.

As the Age of Enlightenment continued, there was an increasing emphasis on secularization. Although this was not a rejection of Christianity or of religion, it did result in changes in theology and the ministry of the church. Hagglund indicates four such changes:

1. Philosophy and rational thought began to dominate theology. Divine revelation and rational principles were regarded as being in complete harmony. No longer was human reason subjected to Scripture.
2. The rationalization of theology produced a tendency to moralize. The main objective of Christianity became the promotion of good morals.
3. Religion became a personal and private matter. It was based on a person's own experiences grounded in human reason and supported by an individualistic conception.
4. There was a tendency to "humanize" Christianity as religion shifted from the theocentric to the anthropocentric. In a mixture of the ancient Greek hedonism, stoicism and Epicureanism, the person became the center of their own religion and their personal happiness and satisfaction became the goal.<sup>257</sup>

The great philosopher John Locke (1632–1704) clearly distinguished between revelation and reason asserting that the propositions of faith are based on something totally different than the truths of reason. He felt that while we do not receive a direct revelation from God as some people in the Old Testament did, nevertheless we do receive a revelation through language and human understanding. Because of this, he felt that the Christian faith always needed to be judged, at least to some extent, by human reason. And, it could be accepted only if it did not contradict the evident principles of reason. Locke sought to present a Christianity that was totally independent from the three accepted Creeds of Christendom — the Apostles', the Nicene, and the Athanasian. While not denying the Trinity, he sought to find other terms that could be used in place of it. Locke serves as a prototype of two tendencies that we find in the theology in England at this time. One is a desire to show the reasonableness of Christianity, the other is an adherence to what was thought to be a pure and unadulterated form of Christian doctrine as found in the Bible.<sup>258</sup>

German theologians of the early 18<sup>th</sup> century varied from conservatives to liberals. The conservatives adhered fairly closely to Lutheran Orthodoxy. The moderates and liberals held to a mixture of the older orthodox teachings combined in varying degrees with the theology of the pietists and the philosophical ideas of the period. Unlike earlier theologians, this new breed of theologian was more interested in systematic and historical theology. As a result, they can be credited for significant work in these areas of theological study. Johann Franz Buddeus (d. 1729) wrote a history of the Old Testament period and of the apostolic age. He stressed the practical use of knowledge. He placed natural religion side by side with revelation. Among his theological positions was the idea that a person has the ability within their innermost being to perceive and

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<sup>257</sup> Hagglund. p. 339.

<sup>258</sup> Hagglund. p. 340.

know God as the highest good. Others that can be mentioned in this time frame include Christian Thomasius (d. 1728), Christoph Matthäus Pfaff (d. 1760), and Johann Lorenz von Mosheim (d. 1755).<sup>259</sup>

A professor of mathematics and philosophy at the University of Halle, and later at Marburg, like Lessing before him, Christian Wolff (d. 1754) sought to apply mathematical principles to theology. Wolff formed his philosophical approach using the law of contradiction (i.e., the same thing cannot be and not be at the same time) combined with the “principle of sufficient reason”, (i.e., “anything that exists must have a sufficient rational basis” and “nothing exists apart from a sufficient rational basis”) first set forth by Leibniz (d. 1716). Wolff held that theology, when not encumbered with practical goals and subjective experience, becomes a logically consequent system to which one can apply rational argumentation. This approach would influence theology for several decades in the mid 1700s. Among those who would use this methodology in the area of dogmatics were Israel Gottlieb Canz (d. 1753), Jakob Carpov (d. 1768), and Sigmund Jakob Baumgarten (d. 1757) who wrote the first major work on dogmatics written in the German language.<sup>260</sup> Previously, all books dealing with dogmatics had been written in Latin.

### **Latitudinarianism**

By the end of the 17th century, a prominent view in English theology was called “latitudinarianism.” Revelation was in full accord with reason and the religious principles that were developed through reason. They were not like the deists. They did not want to use natural religion to replace traditional Christianity. They did feel, however, that the best support for revealed religion lay in human reason. Faith came be regarded as a conviction that was founded on rational considerations. They held that religious truths could not be proved. As semi-Bible believers, they did not completely accept the Bible as the inspired Word of God, but rather taught that moral certainty can be attained partly because they accepted the Bible to be a reliable source whose authority is confirmed by the miracles. The decisive proof for faith for the latitudinarians was an upright conduct of life. For them the moral aspect was superior to the religious.<sup>261</sup>

### **Neology**

The entrance of English deism into the German cultural life together with the entrance of the new philosophical thoughts of the Enlightenment into the existing Protestant theology produced what is commonly known as Neology, which is the formulation of new doctrines through rationalism and the use of reason. Previously, Wolff had tried to maintain the traditional doctrines of the church in so far as they agreed with human reason. In neology, there was a conscious criticism of church doctrine. It not only questioned but openly rejected in particular the doctrines of original sin, the Trinity, and Christology. Christian doctrine was now subjected to the historical point of view, as

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<sup>259</sup> Hagglund. p. 344.

<sup>260</sup> Hagglund. p. 345.

<sup>261</sup> Hagglund. p. 339.

was Scripture. The Bible was placed into the framework of the development of humankind. The Old Testament was no longer regarded as being on the same level as the New Testament; rather, because it dealt with an earlier time, it was placed on a lower level. The use of reason continued to increase. A major emphasis was placed on feeling (*das Gemüt*) and moral consciousness. Religion was now evaluated on the basis of its practical benefit and if it fulfilled a “spiritual need” for people. Dogma, for the most part, was regarded as being ineffective, and to some extent even downright harmful, especially with respect to morality. Consequently, dogma was severely reduced or reinterpreted.

There was “moralistic psychologizing” mixed together with an optimistic view of humankind that gave rise to a type of humanism that has continued to influence society and theology to the present day. Original sin was rejected because it contradicted the idea of human value. It was thought that inherent goodness resided in all people. Hence the current concept developed that there is “a little bit of good in everyone.” Any concept of man’s total depravity as taught by Scripture was thrown out. The doctrines of the Trinity and of Christology had to be rejected when viewed through the eyeglasses of Biblical criticism. According to the neologist’s view, Christ could not be true God and true man at the same time. Nor did they see Him as the Son of God. They did maintain that He was the Savior sent by the Father. Their concept of the Savior and salvation could not be rationalized with the Scriptural presentation of these and the doctrine of the Christian Church that had existed previously. They not only rejected sin and a Savior from sin, but they also rejected all references to expiation, atonement, redemption, and the like. This was a forerunner to today’s modern concept of downplaying or even avoiding mention of blood and blood sacrifices in translations of the New Testament. The third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, came to be regarded under neology as nothing more than “a power to do good.” From neology arose a completely new theological perspective. It was completely different from what had existed among the orthodox and among the pietists. This was what many refer to as the “new Protestantism.” Among the neologists can be included Johann Friedrich Wilhelm Jerusalem (d. 1789), Johann Joachim Spalding (d. 1804), Johann Gottlieb Toellner (d. 1774), Johann Christoph Döderlein (d. 1792) and Johann Salomo Semler (d. 1791).<sup>262</sup>

Semler is considered the Father of German nationalism. He is also regarded as the father of the historical-critical method and rationalism. He held that in theology, the root of all evil was the confusion of equating Scripture with the Word of God. This view has since been adopted by all forms of liberal Christian theology.<sup>263</sup> He was opposed to the naturalism of Karl Friedrich Bahrtd (d. 1792) and Hermann Samuel Reimarus (d. 1768) and at the same time was somewhat critical of the new ideas that were being used in theology. However, using a historicocritical approach to interpreting Scripture and the history of dogma, Semler did much to promote the development of neology. He was one of the first Bible critics to apply the critical method of historical research to the Scriptures. Working with the assumption that there were distinct differences between the Old

<sup>262</sup> Hagglund. pp. 346-347.

<sup>263</sup> Siegbert Becker. “The Historical-Critical Method of Bible Interpretation.” Our Great Heritage. Volume I. Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, p. 309.

and New Testaments, he theorized that Scripture was nothing more than a collection of writings that had been accepted by the church. Using a moralistic position, he proceeded to judge the content of Scripture beginning with the writings of the Apostle John. He felt that Jesus and His disciples merely adapted or accommodated themselves to the ideas and circumstances of the time. For Semler, Christianity could be developed beyond what was set forth in Scripture. In developing his theology, he sought to express new ideas without completely rejecting the old. Moreover, he made a distinction between theology and religion. For him, theology was something to be considered from a human and historic point of view, having a variable content that can change according to time, place, and religious groups or parties. Religion, on the other hand, was a living piety that coincided with a universal religious consciousness yet was also based on the Christian revelation. He also made a distinction between private and public religion, i.e., a difference between what one believes individually and how one publicly practices those beliefs in society, “for the sake of public order and uniform religious practice.” Much of what Semler set forth was used by Friedrich Schleiermacher (d. 1834), especially the idea that there was a historical development of church doctrine, the concept of working free from the authority of Scripture, criticizing church doctrine, and analyzing religion subjectively rather than objectively.<sup>264</sup>

Meanwhile in Leipzig, Professor Johann August Ernesti (d. 1781), who is best known for his work in hermeneutics, fostered the idea that the basis for theology should be an historical-grammatical interpretation of Scripture. He wanted to do exegesis without being encumbered with dogma. He did not agree with the pietists that the interpreter’s personal piety was important to understand Scripture. He also departed from the position of the orthodox in rejecting, among other things, Christ’s three-fold office (Prophet, Priest, and King).

The Age of Enlightenment is responsible for introducing rationalism into theology. Scholars disagree, however, how broad a brush they want to use when they paint a picture of rationalism. Some view it in its broadest terms thereby incorporating all of the approaches that used human reason to criticize Scripture. Others prefer a more narrow description limiting rationalism to the concept of a progressive revelation in which it gradually evolves into a religion based entirely on reason. The early rationalists had a consciousness of their Christian heritage while opposing both neology and orthodoxy. Among these was GE Lessing, who sought to change what had been revealed into rational truths. This was refined and taken further by Immanuel Kant (d. 1804). In the theological approach of Kant, there was a place for revelation. According to Kant, the only religion that people needed was the moralistic religion of reason. People undergo a religious experience in which their character changes and the “radical evil” is overcome and the good triumphs and emerges. A combination of punishment and repentance is necessary to accomplish this. For Kant, this was salvation. The purpose of the church, and Christianity, was to provide the necessary impulse to achieve this salvation. Anything taught by the church had to be interpreted with respect to moral ideas, which are universal and consistent with reason. In the mind of Kant, and many of his contemporaries, reason had become a religion. In Kant’s theology one finds a thread of

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<sup>264</sup> Hagglund. pp. 347-348.



Pelagian's teachings about salvation, woven together with a moralistic concept of religion, these being united with firmly entrenched deistic views about God, virtue, and immortality.<sup>265</sup> Thus we see a totally different concept of the church, its purpose, and goal emerging in the theology of rationalism and neology during the transition from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Julius August Ludwig Wegscheider (d. 1849) was one the most eminent dogmaticians of his era. He was not an orthodox theologian. He ignored, or completely misinterpreted, the principle doctrines of Scripture previously adhered to by most of those claiming to be Christians. The supernatural was cast out and miracles were denied. He accepted Pelagian's teaching of conversion. He did not accept the atoning work of Christ on Calvary's cross. He believed that Jesus resuscitated rather than resurrected. For Wegscheider, the ascension was nothing more than a fairy tale. Original sin was rejected; baptism was nothing more than a dedicatory rite, and the Lord's Supper nothing more than a memorial feast. In his theology there were no Means of Grace; for him, they were not necessary.

### **Modernity**

The emergence and influence of Modernity since the inception thereof in the 17<sup>th</sup> century by Sir Francis Bacon (d. 1626) and René Descartes (d.1650) and the subsequent emergence of the modern mindset during the Enlightenment of the 18<sup>th</sup> century built on embryonic impulses which emerged during the Reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and even impulses drawn from the pre-Reformational Renaissance and humanism's sense making systems.

The interpretational-hermeneutical avenue of the partial-Bible believers or the semi-Bible-believers, which emerged through an increasingly critical mind and spirit towards people's 'thinking', 'historical' and 'ethical-existential' experience in Modernity, manifested in itself a total rationalizing of the mind and behavior of a human person in the present, or a total historicizing of the human mind and behavior of the past or an existential ethicalizing of the human mind and human behavior. The modern spirit of this period, the 17<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> century, permeated much of the theological exegesis and dogmatics of the Bible. The results that emerged from this were critical rational and historical critical views, approaches and uses of the Bible. Rational and historical critical research of the Bible in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century did not leave orthodox Lutheran exegesis and dogmatics untouched. With a growing number of university professors adopting the practice of using rationalism and its child, the historical-critical method, it was almost impossible to not to study under an adherent and proponent of this manner of interpretation. Different philosophical sense making views of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century contributed in a real sense to the permeation of an array of humanly-devised modern ideas and insights into traditional Bible-believing views, approaches and uses of Scriptures by many theologians.

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<sup>265</sup> Hagglund. pp. 349-350.

The interpretational-hermeneutical approach in Modernity operates with the triad of ‘understanding→explanation→application’ which can be used on any text, especially a Biblical text. The critic studies the text in its totality and in its parts in order to seek human insights and to ferret out the parts that are not regarded as being divine. Because these critics consider Scripture to be partly of divine origin and partly of human origin, the phrase “partial-Bible-believing” or “semi-Bible-believing” can be used for those who adhere to this type of views, approaches and uses of the Bible.

Following the war of independence in the USA, the Age of Romanticism (1793-1815) began to have its effect on European theology. There was a renewed awareness of the historical aspect in religion. Religion was no longer thought of as a collection of doctrines, it was no longer viewed in terms of morality and metaphysics; rather, it had become something that was manifested independently in a person’s spiritual life. Rationalism and supernaturalism were no longer seen as opposing forces; now, just as there was peace in the world, there could be peace in theology and these two also could be united.<sup>266</sup>

#### 4.2.3.4 Neo-Protestantism

The 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century gave rise to a new form of Lutheran Protestantism, namely Neo-Protestantism. Karl Barth (d.1968), the 20<sup>th</sup> century Swiss Evangelical-Reformed dogmatician, applied the name Neo-Protestantism to Lutheran as well as Reformed theology which yielded and succumbed to the powers and energies of the modern spirit of 18<sup>th</sup> century Enlightenment concerning faith, the Church and the Bible. For Barth, the great representative of Reformed Neo-Protestantism at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was Friedrich Schleiermacher (d.1834). Later in the 19<sup>th</sup> century another representative was Albrecht Ritschl (d.1889), who was the main representative of Lutheran Neo-Protestantism.

#### Schleiermacher

Schleiermacher associated himself with Romanticism. Although at times he is lumped together with the rationalists, Schleiermacher actually held views that differed from the rationalists. Religion for him had to do with one’s spirit, an independent area in their life. It was not something made up of intellectual or moralistic elements. It was an immediate consciousness rather than a knowing or a doing. In his major dogmatic work, *Der Christliche Glaube* (1820–22), he defined religion as “‘the feeling of absolute dependence’ (*das schlechthinige Abhängigkeitsgefühl*).” The word *Gefühl*, or feeling, was not used in the common, ordinary sense of the word. Rather, Schleiermacher used it in reference to something that helps comprise “the immediate self-consciousness.” He regarded human feelings, *Gefühl*, as “the seat of man’s consciousness of God.” For Schleiermacher, religion did not have its source in a book, in reason, or in anything that was external. The primary source of religion was a feeling of dependence on someone or something outside us. That upon which a

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<sup>266</sup> Hagglund. p. 351.

person depends is God. He considered sin to be a disruption of one's dependence upon God and not as a rebellion against God.<sup>267</sup>

In his view, religion was monistic. His concept of God coincided with a sense of "universal unity and identity with the infinite." When all was said and done, God and the world could be said to be the same thing. They were identical. We can also find a thread of pantheism in his theology. He could not conceive of anything being evil and hostile to God. The concepts of the devil and evil spirits were rejected. His concept of religion is not viewed as being purely subjective. Rather, it is said that in Schleiermacher the objective and the subjective merge together into one. Christianity through Schleiermacher's eyes is "a monotheistic form of piety of a teleological variety, in which all refers to the salvation brought to completion through Jesus of Nazareth." Salvation is the realization of absolute dependence within devout self-consciousness. For him, doctrine has both historical and speculative elements. The Christian church is "an empirically discernible fellowship of faith. Dogmatics has the function of describing the doctrine of faith that can be found "in the church at a given point in time." Thus he included dogmatics in historical theology. What he intended to do was present faith as it was found at that time within the evangelical church. This being after the Prussian Union, many Lutheran congregations in Prussia were aligned with Protestant congregations to form the Evangelical church, which still has remnants in parts of the world today. In the USA, it is more commonly known as the Evangelical Free Church. Dogmatics, then, has the task of setting forth historically "the concept of faith" as it actually exists within the entire Christian Church or within a denomination or a particular branch of the church. Schleiermacher built a system that included various branches of theology and religion. In this system we find ethics, the philosophy of religion, philosophical theology (which became apologetics and polemics), practical theology, historical theology, and dogmatics.<sup>268</sup>

Schleiermacher's theology as presented in *Der Christliche Glaube* can be summarized thusly:

- **God:** The consciousness of God coincides with and is involved in devout self-consciousness. The question of whether or not God exists is irrelevant. Yet, that the world is completely dependent on God is an absolute truth. However, creation does not refer to an event in time but rather a consciousness of existence. The concepts of divine providence and preservation are actually an individual's awareness of their dependence. The devil and evil do not exist. Divine intervention, miracles, and revelation are rejected.
- **Sin:** Original sin was unfathomable. The idea of sin as a breaking of God's holy law was unequivocally rejected. In its place was inserted a concept that sin is the flesh in opposition to the spirit. Schleiermacher viewed sin not as something that was contrary to creation, but part of it. He thought of sin as being "something included in the consciousness of God—the necessary presupposition for the need of salvation and thereby also for the development of a superior consciousness of God."
- **Salvation:** is a transition of human consciousness to a superior consciousness of God, "which can be realized in the Christian congregation through faith in Jesus Christ." Accordingly, Schleiermacher saw the entire congregation being saved rather than each individual. Jesus had a perfect consciousness of God. This He imparts to human nature. Jesus is the prototype of the new humanity; He is the second Adam. His perfect and unimpaired consciousness of God instilled within the human race is the goal or the

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<sup>267</sup> Kaiser. p. 63.

<sup>268</sup> Hagglund. pp. 353-355.

fulfillment of creation. Humankind's nature strove to attain this consciousness and unity with God, but had been prevented from doing so because of sin. Through faith, sin is overcome and harmony is attained. The work of Christ, His suffering and death are not important for salvation. What is important is His person, because it represents the perfect consciousness of God. Salvation has nothing to do with the forgiveness of sin. Rather it is the transformation of a person and the subsequent improvement of their religious feelings. The account of Christ's Passion merely is an example of perseverance in suffering. For Schleiermacher, Jesus did not rise from the dead, He merely resuscitated. The account of His ascension is when He actually died.

- **Christology:** The divine and the human are united, but the person of Christ is only the highest possible stage of human development. Because Schleiermacher disavows Christ's participation in the divine works of creation and salvation and he reinterprets Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and ascension; the work ascribed to Christ in Scripture does not exist. He did not see Jesus as the Lord of lords and the King of kings. The individual is related to Christ only in their "own inner life and in the fellowship of the church." The unity of the divine and human which can be seen in Christ is also found in Christian fellowship, in the church. "The church is the direct continuation of Christ's appearance; it represents the new humanity, for which Christ is the prototype."
- **Trinity:** Schleiermacher saw God as being "one indivisible substance" and thus he could not accept the doctrine of the Trinity in the sense that Christendom previously had believed.
- **Eschatology:** Statements dealing with eschatology do not have anything to do with devout self-consciousness. References to eternal judgment and condemnation were repudiated. In their place Schleiermacher favored a concept of universal restoration.
- **Scripture:** Scripture has only a limited role in the theology of Schleiermacher and that by design. His intent was to focus on religious experience and describe faith as it occurs within religious experience. Scripture was used only when it agreed and expressed the same consciousness of faith. He regarded the New Testament as being more important than the Old. He placed all of Scripture on a par with church tradition, although he gave it an historical priority. Scripture could not serve as the basis of faith nor could it be credited with being able to create faith. Revelation was equated with devout self-consciousness, or God's presence within an individual. Scripture was not the same thing as God's Word. Religion was superior to and more important than both Scripture and the Word.<sup>269</sup>

Schleiermacher completely transformed traditional dogmatics and revolutionized theology. In spite of bringing theology to a more eminent place at the academic round table, the content of what he presented and taught was completely foreign to the theology of Christendom as held by Lutherans, Protestants, and Catholics. Although few theologians could be associated with him as "disciples," Schleiermacher would continue to have an impact on the theological world throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Even today, one can hardly study theology without including a study of Schleiermacher.

Albrecht Ritschl agreed with Schleiermacher that a person's religion could not be based on any particular event in history neither could it be based on what had been written in a book. For Ritschl, Christianity was based upon a moral judgment. He, therefore, stressed the moral side and the ethical value of Christianity.<sup>270</sup>

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<sup>269</sup> Hagglund. pp. 355-359.

<sup>270</sup> Kaiser. p. 63.

According to Ritschl, the religious experience of human beings is not to be looked for primarily in the framework of feelings as Schleiermacher had done, nor to be speculatively rolled out from the conjecture of the Spirit that embraced world history. Rather it is to be revealed in the calling of a human being to uphold and maintain his or her ethical personality. Basically Ritschl's points of departure, according to Barth (1870-1874) could be summed up in the title of his main work *Justification and Reconciliation* (Rechtfertigung und Versöhnung (Barth: 1972: 651) in which reconciliation means the realized ideal of human life and this realized ideal of human life is the intended result of justification.

This line of thought seems to have reached its climax in the theology of Adolf von Harnack (d. 1930), a student of Ritschl. Von Harnack was in favor of a return to "the religion of Jesus," but he wanted nothing to do with a "religion about Jesus." He thus sought to purge the Gospels of what he deemed improper.<sup>271</sup> He taught that people should live according to the Golden Rule — do unto others as you would have them do unto you. And the message that he got out of the Gospels was "the Fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of man, and the infinite value of the individual soul," which began the American social movement in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>272</sup> The concept has also been adopted into the teachings of the Masonic Lodge<sup>273</sup> and other groups and movements.

The modern triad of the interpretational-hermeneutical approach that is 'understanding → explanation → application' in regard to its engagement and involvement with the Bible underwent a change. The Bible was viewed in a different light. Scholars began applying a whole variety of clip-on glasses over their regular eye glasses. These clip-on lenses were readily mixed and matched. Each clip-on lens altered the view of Scripture. These clip-ons were the humanistic lenses of rational-criticism, materialistic-criticism, historical-criticism, and ethical existential-criticism. All of these are one-sided and reductionistic in nature being almost completely based on human insights and human nature and molded together under the crafty hand of human reason.

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (d. 1831) came out against Schleiermacher and the Romantics. Through his religious and philosophical principles he had a tremendous impact on theology and historical research during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Hegel had grown up in Swabia in an "old Protestant" environment. He held that the ability to think separates humans from animals. Thoughts, therefore, are the highest expression of consciousness, whereas feelings are the lowest. One finds truth in a system that gives expression to thoughts that have become conscious of themselves. He referred to this as the spirit — *der Geist* — which he regarded as the absolute and only reality. This, together with fully developed knowledge, always involves a dialectical, logical progression, which was an historical change. This became known as the so-called "dialectical method" in which every

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<sup>271</sup> Kaiser. p. 63.

<sup>272</sup> "The Golden Rule of the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man"

<http://www.personal.kent.edu/~jwattles/grbro.htm>.

<sup>273</sup> "Facts On The Masonic Lodge — Chapter Fifteen"

<http://home.insightbb.com/~cathiadenham2/Facts%20on%20The%20Masonic%20Lodge/Masonic%20Lodge%20--%2015.htm>

concept points to yet another from thesis to antithesis to synthesis until it is resolved in a higher unity. The first stage was the absolute. In the second state it is transformed into *das Anderssein*, its opposite. This constitutes natural philosophy. In the final stage, the absolute becomes conscious of itself and becomes spirit. The spirit can be divided into “the subjective spirit (anthropology, phenomenology, and psychology), the objective spirit (morality, law, politics), and the absolute spirit (art, religion, and philosophy).” Within this system, there is harmony between religion and philosophy. The final stage in the development of religion is Christianity, which according to Hegel was the absolute religion. He felt that his dialectical system could be found in the doctrine of the Trinity, which he felt developed in three stages. First, is the stage that he refers to as the Father’s kingdom in which God exists in His eternal idea. Secondly “He reveals Himself in finitude, in consciousness, and in action (the Son’s kingdom), and then reverts to Himself in unity with the finite in the congregation (the Spirit’s kingdom).” Hegel’s system has been applied to both philosophy and theology. Some looked upon his system as the absolute and ultimate solution to theological problems. Not all who used his system, however, came to the same conclusions. The “orthodox Hegelians” held true to the line. The “Hegelian left”, however wound up following a totally different path. Among these was Friedrich Strauss (d. 1874), who regarded the gospel as myth. Humanity became the center of his religious faith, rather than Jesus Christ. He viewed Jesus as merely an ordinary man who taught religion and morality. Another on the left was Ludwig Feuerbach (d. 1872) who denied the existence of God and became an atheist. He explained religion anthropologically; and taught that God, heaven, eternal life are merely human desires.<sup>274</sup>

#### 4.2.3.5 Restoration Theology

In the 1830s and 1840s the influences of Romanticism and German idealism began to wane. Coming to the forefront were the ideologies of socialism and materialism which caused the influence of rationalism to once again have an effect on theology. Industrialism and liberalism were affecting the economic and political scenes. Some theologians made attempts to restore the older traditions of the church and to preserve its doctrine without change. At the same time, other theologians became captives of the spirit of the age and sought a more “liberal” or free theology which did away with certain fundamental aspects of Christianity. A rift developed between the two. It was no longer possible to achieve a synthesis in theology and have uniformity. The rift spread into the congregations as well.

The 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation (1817) had served to reawaken the ideals of the Reformation. With its roots in the pietism of Württemberg, an “awakening”, *Die Erweckung*, was taking place in the church. The revival movement that was developing sought to restore the teachings and the church life of the past. Luther was regarded as the “patron saint” of the movement.

The leading theological spokespersons of this period were Ernst Wilhelm Hengstenberg (d. 1869) and Friedrich Adolf Philippi (d.1882). These men, and others like them, sought to restore the old

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<sup>274</sup> Hagglund. pp. 360-362.

Protestant theology which was normative for the evangelical church and regarded as an adequate interpretation of both Scripture and the confessions. There was a renewed influence on church life and a greater interest in church history than in systematic theology. There was no desire to apply modern science and its theories to theology. This approach to theology has been given the name “**repristination theology**.”

The effects of the movement were limited. Although there was a great influence on church life and the older traditions, very little was actually accomplished. This has been attributed to a lack of concern for the theology of Luther as well as ignoring the differences in the intellectual assumptions between old Protestant theology and those of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As the leaders of the period continued to be swayed by contemporary views as opposed to what had previously been established, there were continual contradictions. This made any kind of real repristination impossible. The differences between Lutheran and Reformed theology were barely noticed. Those that did notice them regarded them as being unimportant. Hengstenberg strove to achieve union, but his efforts at this were doomed from the start. He was successful, however, in restoring the Old Testament to its rightful place in church life, at least for a while. Because repristination theology opposed pietism, the Enlightenment, Schleiermacher, and idealism; it can be credited with keeping the older, traditional Lutheran teachings alive during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. One result of this was the publication of Heinrich Schmid’s (d. 1885) *Die Dogmatik der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*, a summary of old Lutheran theology, in 1843.<sup>275</sup>

#### 4.2.3.6 Mediating Theology

Building on what Schleiermacher and Hegel had previously laid, Karl Immanuel Nitzsch (d. 1868), August Detler Christian Twesten (d. 1876), and Isaak August Dorner (d. 1884) developed what has come to be known as “mediating” theology. It sought to reconcile Biblical faith with the new scientific ideas that were arising. The result primarily dealt with Christology. The old doctrine of the Incarnation was compromised. Christ’s divine nature was seen as being united with the divine nature of the Father, whereas His human nature became a normal person, like you and me.

Another attempt to deal with the matter of Christology is known as “**kenoticism**.” The idea was promoted by Gottfried Thomasius (d. 1875), who held that Christ set aside His divine attributes while living in this world and did not take them up again until after He was glorified.<sup>276</sup> Such new opinions regarding Christology were so diversely different to the doctrine which the church had generally accepted that they were picked up and adhered to by those preferring human reason and used in their theology throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Some theologians reached the point where they sought to use reason in order to determine “who and what was Jesus Christ?”

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<sup>275</sup> Hagglund. pp. 362-364.

<sup>276</sup> Hagglund. p. 367.

#### 4.2.3.7 New Lutheranism

Another type of Lutheran theology developed about this same time. It is sometimes referred to as “**New Lutheranism**” and was in many ways similar to repositioning theology. It was strongly confessional and very much opposed to the spirit of the new age that had developed. New Lutheranism rejected the subjective interpretation of religion seeking instead an objective approach which could guarantee the truth of Christianity. The objective foundation that they sought, however, was not to be found in the Word, nor in faith, but rather in the church which they regarded as an “institution” through which the gifts of salvation are bestowed from generation to generation. Adherents to this movement sought to return to what they considered the original Lutheran position, rather than merely use what Lutheran Orthodoxy had held. They strongly opposed the theology of the Reformed churches as well as the “free” churches that were arising in various places. They viewed the visible and the invisible church as being one and the same in which there was spiritual fellowship among the “true believers.” In doing so they criticized the pietists who had maintained that the visible and the invisible church were separate entities. In their vigor to establish their new Lutheran position, they overlooked many “old Lutheran” ideas. They regarded the church and the sacraments as institutional ordinances, which, at times, were independent from God’s Word.

Prominent theologians in New Lutheranism include Theodor Kliefoth (d. 1895), August Friedrich Christian Vilmar (d. 1868), and Wilhelm Löhe (d. 1872). The group can be described as being “high-church” and emphasizing the sacraments, even to the extent of considering them to be of more value than Scripture.<sup>277</sup> Löhe, a pastor in Neuendettelsau, Germany, had ties with the fledgling Missouri Synod in America. In the 1840s, he responded to pleas by F.C.D. Wyneken (d. 1876) to send church workers and especially pastors to the USA. Those that Löhe sent became part of the LCMS. Löhe held that the office of the ministry is a divine institution in its own right and does not derive its right and authority from the local congregation. He felt that a congregation does not transfer its powers to bearers of the ministry but is simply the instrument of Christ for conferring the ministry. Löhe felt that Walther gave the congregations too much power and the result eventually would be chaos. Löhe also held that the pastor should rule and govern the congregation as “Herr Pastor,” rather than be the spiritual servant of those who called him. This idea still exists among some theologians and pastors in both the LCMS and the ELS today.

The resurgence of the conservative Lutheran element resulted in a renewal of basing theology on the Bible. A leading theologian in this area was Johann Tobias Beck (d. 1878) a professor in Tübingen, who combined the older Württemberg tradition of Bengel with idealistic philosophy. His ideas were popular in Scandinavia, especially in Finland.<sup>278</sup>

Meanwhile, in Scandinavia there were also changes taking place in the church. A type of Lutheranism arose in Sweden that was similar to the “new Lutheranism” in Germany. In Denmark,

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<sup>277</sup> Hagglund. p. 364.

<sup>278</sup> Hagglund. p. 365.



a type of “restoration” Lutheranism developed into the “Grundtvig movement,” which, as has been stated earlier in this paper, had an influence on the Norwegians who migrated to the USA. Grundtvig claimed that the foundation for faith was not found in the written word of Scripture, but in the sacraments, especially in the confession found in the sacrament of baptism. From there, he developed his concept of the church, which for him was a “free state church” in which the members could adhere to any variety of beliefs “without organizational coercion or compulsion of belief.” Within this church, national and church elements were woven together. Having been motivated by the theology of Irenaeus, Grundtvig opposed the doctrine of original sin.<sup>279</sup>

### **Kierkegaard**

Søren Kierkegaard (d. 1855) was a well educated man and considered knowledgeable in various areas of academia including theology although he never served a position in the church. In his writings, he sought to describe what the real Christianity is. Ultimately, he presented Christianity as “the imitation of Christ in the tribulation of obedience and loneliness.” Late in his life, he regarded “official” Christianity as it existed in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to be nothing more than a scandalous falsification of what had gone before. He felt that Christianity, as described in the New Testament, no longer existed. His ideas were regarded as being too far afield for the scholars of his day; hence he had little influence on his contemporaries. His “existentialist philosophy” did gain a following during the 20<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>280</sup> however, and some theologians and students are still influenced by him today.

#### **4.2.3.8 Erlangen Theology**

In Erlangen, another form of theology developed. The leading theologians were Adolf Harless (d. 1879), who had done extensive studies in the writings of Luther, and Johann Christian Konrad von Hofmann (d. 1877), who primarily worked in the area of biblical interpretation. Von Hofmann developed a theological system that could be tested using three objective factors: “the experience of the new birth, the church, and the Holy Scriptures.” Von Hofmann held that theology has immediate access to whatever it is that makes a person a Christian. Von Hofmann’s position can best be summarized in his well-known statement: “*Ich der Christ bin mir dem Theologen eigenster Stoff meiner Wissenschaft*” i.e., “I as a Christian am the most fitting material for me as a theologian.” The theology of von Hoffmann marks a transition from the philosophical and speculative theology to one that is more tempered by the perspective of history. In it he developed a new theory regarding the doctrine of salvation. Christ’s death, he held, displays an obedience and a love that conquers sin and death. In order to defend his position against criticism, he claimed that Luther, too, had a similar position. His efforts to show that Luther held positions that differed, sometimes greatly, from those of the later theologians can be considered the beginning of “modern Luther research.”<sup>281</sup> Many Lutherans in the USA today use a Luther quote or a reference

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<sup>279</sup> Hagglund. p. 366.

<sup>280</sup> Hagglund. pp. 370-373.

<sup>281</sup> Hagglund. pp. 368-369.

to something to which Luther referred in order to support their positions. This is very common among the theologians of the LCMS and some of the theologians and pastors within the ELS.

#### 4.2.3.9 Liberal Protestantism

During the 19th century “liberal” Protestantism appeared in varying forms and contexts. Usually those participating in this applied the historical-critical method to theology. Among the better-known of these were David F. Strauss (d. 1874) and Ferdinand Christian Baur (d. 1860). At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Albrecht Ritschl (d. 1889) came up with a somewhat new and unique style of liberal theology. Drawing heavily on Kant and Schleiermacher, Ritschl placed the essence of religion in the ideas of religious fellowship. Ritschl did not accept revelation in the traditional sense of the word; but rather he felt that it was “positive religion.” He used dogmatics to describe faith historically. For him, salvation was the forgiveness of sins which restored the ethical freedom that had been impeded by sin. He felt that one could refer to Christ as God only in a figurative sense because the divinity of Christ only exists in the unity of His will with the Father’s. The sufferings and death of Christ are merely proof of His obedience to God’s call. This obedience is a manifestation of His perfect fellowship with God. Theology, as Ritschl saw it, had the task of reconciling traditional Christianity with the “world consciousness” of the person living in the here and now. Ritschl’s ideas were very in-tune with contemporary ideas and theological thinking, hence they gained a widespread acceptance.<sup>282</sup>

Strauss felt that there should be an interpretative approach between that held by the “supernaturalists,” on the one hand, who accepted Scripture pretty much as it is written and other hand the rationalists who pretty much rejected or rationalized away everything in Scripture. This led to what has been referred to as “the mythical.” What exactly Strauss meant by “the mythical” was never really clearly explained. Because “myth” can be understood in a variety of ways, it never was delimited in any way. Without limitations, the mind can “run wild” resulting in innumerable conclusions.

Strauss used the “mythical” as the key to understand all the mysteries of the Gospels. Strauss’ studies produced his book, *The Life of Jesus*. In researching, compiling, and writing this book, he was not really interested in subjecting each of the four gospels to literary and historical criticism, as other theological scholars did. He ignored the historical, literary, and theological characteristics of each of the gospels. Instead, he merely contrasted what he found in John with what he found in the Synoptics (Matthew, Mark, and Luke). Moreover, in developing his description of Jesus, he completely ignored the existence of the Christian church. The Christ that Strauss describes could not possibly have gathered such a following, nor influenced such a large group that believed in Jesus’ resurrection.<sup>283</sup> Strauss never could bring himself to accept that there are persons in history

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<sup>282</sup> Hagglund, pp. 374-376.

<sup>283</sup> Stephen Neill. *The Interpretation of the New Testament 1861-1961*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1975. pp. 12-19.

about whom not all the details are known. Mysteries do exist. Certainly not everything about Jesus Christ can or will be known this side of eternity.

Baur, a student of Strauss, approached his study of Scripture from an historical point of view. He felt that every book of the New Testament should be examined in the light of its historical circumstances. In spite of his renown, there are two weaknesses in his work: first, his provincialism and second, his special pleading. He was one of the first scholars to emphasize the differences between the synoptic Gospels and the Gospel of John. In 1833, he came under the influence of Hegel and began looking for points and counterpoints in his studies. In 1845, he completed his masterpiece on the Pauline epistles, *Paulus der Apostel*.<sup>284</sup> Unfortunately, he approached most of his studies with presuppositions which produced misleading results. It is almost impossible for anyone to work without ever using a presupposition. However, care should always be used when doing so, and allowances should be made so that these do not have a distorting influence upon one's conclusions.

Ritschl, Strauss, and Baur have each had some influence on many of those who have studied theology. Their views on Scripture and how to interpret it have been used by a goodly number of theologians over the past century and a half.

#### 4.2.3.10 Neo-orthodoxy

Among conservative and orthodox Christians, be they Lutherans or Protestants, a term like neo-orthodoxy may sound appealing. Yet, we need to be aware that this does not mean a turning away from the newer and liberal approaches to Scripture and a return to the views to which orthodoxy holds. Neo-orthodoxy does not want to view or to teach Scripture as was done among orthodox Lutherans. It is a new orthodoxy; one that cannot be acquainted with the old.

Armin Schuetze, a Lutheran historian and theologian in the USA writes, "Neo-orthodoxy, either in its liberal or more conservative form, is the dominant trend in the theological schools of America and will inevitably take over leadership in the major denominations in America just as it has done previously in Europe."<sup>285</sup> To some extent the problems that the LCMS has experienced from the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century onward can be contributed to the influence of neo-orthodoxy upon it. Some of the Missouri Synod seminary professors might be considered to be disciples of Karl Barth (d. 1968) and proponents of neo-orthodoxy. Thus among the faculty of the LCMS seminary you have an on-going clash between the old, traditional Lutheran teachings and neo-orthodoxy. This is borne out by personal experience, having studied in an LCMS college and having a brother-in-law and friends who are currently serving in the LCMS and in conversing with pastors who have left the LCMS due to such conflicts, at times bringing their congregations with them into one of the more conservative Lutheran Church bodies in the USA.

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<sup>284</sup> Stephen Neill. pp. 19-29.

<sup>285</sup> A. Schuetze. "Neo-Orthodoxy—The 'New' Threat To Our Christian Heritage." Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly. Volume 60, Number 2, April 1963. p. 112.

Neo-orthodoxy developed as a reaction to the liberalism of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, which regarded a person as being basically good. The proponents of liberalism held that a person only became bad because of the influences of their environment — bad company, bad surroundings, bad habits, etc. The doctrine of original sin was denied. The Bible was no longer believed to be an infallible authority. Their teaching also eliminates the Bible as the means that God uses to reveal to people that which in and through themselves they could never get to know. The Bible thus was subjected to critical reason. Christ was rejected as the Son of God and the Redeemer of the sinful human race. The theory of evolution and evolutionary processes were readily accepted under liberalism. In reaction to this, neo-orthodoxy arose.

The father of neo-orthodoxy is Karl Barth. During the First World War as a young pastor who had been trained as a modernist, Barth discovered that he had little more than shallow human reasoning and conjecture to offer his parishioners. The idea of evolving to a better way of life in a war-torn and economically depressed world did not make much sense. Instead of progressing, things seemed to be retrogressing. Thus neo-orthodoxy was born. Since the time of its birth, other theologians have been associated with the movement. In Europe there were Emil Brunner (d. 1966) and Rudolf Bultmann (d. 1976).<sup>286</sup> In the USA were Reinhold Niebuhr (d. 1971) and Paul Tillich (d. 1965). The latter was a German Lutheran who came to the USA just before the beginning of World War II, became a Protestant and taught theology at a series of universities. There are many differences that exist between these five theologians, which we will not go into in this paper. Detailing these differences would be a paper in itself.

There are some commonalities in their theologies, however, that I will mention. First, they were opposed to theological liberalism, but they also opposed conservative orthodoxy. Second, neo-orthodoxy is more of a system of theology rather than theological doctrine. There are some central teachings, however, which are always present. Neo-orthodoxy is not at all like liberalism, which thought of the person as being basically good and of history as a continual upward progression. Neo-orthodoxy recognizes sin, although the individual theologians have differing views regarding the extent of an individual's sinfulness. Sin was thought to involve a person's self-centeredness. In regard to this, Brunner postulated that a decision was necessary on the part of the individual to make a decision of faith, leaving the self behind and letting the soul step out into the unknown. It considers God to be the "Wholly Other" who is separated from humankind by a great chasm. Among the neo-orthodox theologians there are differing opinions as to the extent to which God is revealed through nature and through Scripture. The Bible is not generally regarded as being God's Word, but through the working of the Holy Spirit it may become so for the adherent of neo-orthodoxy. Christ is regarded as God's perfect revelation of Himself. The historical Christ is not as important as the present Christ. Again, there are differing opinions among the neo-orthodox as to

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<sup>286</sup> As Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms are known as the three B's of music, Barth, Brunner, and Bultmann are often said to be the three B's of theology.

whether or not the virgin birth and the physical resurrection of Christ from the dead actually occurred.<sup>287</sup>

Bultmann held that in order to make an impact on the modern individual Scripture needed to be stripped of the so-called myths and legends which surrounded the truth. The process is known as demythologizing. Regarding this, the New Testament scholar, F.F. Bruce in the book *History, Criticism and Faith* says: "When the language has been reinterpreted and the gospel restated, the restatement turns out to resemble a Christianized version of Heidegger's existential analysis: the moment of revelation is not in the person or work of Jesus but in the existence of man today."<sup>288</sup> There is a paradigm shift in focus and emphasis, therefore, from God to the modern person. Theology shifts from being theocentric to being anthrocentric.

The neo-orthodox have problems with the doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture as traditionally held by the church. They do not regard the Bible as having been written by the inspiration of God. Thus, they cannot accept the Bible as the Word of God in an objective sense. However, they maintain, that under some circumstances, the Bible can become the Word of God when it lays hold of the individual. Tillich, especially, rejected the teaching that the Bible is the Word of God. He felt that this teaching was one of the greatest causes for misinterpreting the Bible. Nor did he regard the Bible as being divine revelation; rather it was merely a medium of revelation through which hidden truths are made known. Moreover, he taught that when a pastor preaches, the pastor is not proclaiming the Word of God, because, as far as Tillich was concerned, the pastor lacks the power to do so.<sup>289</sup>

What the adherents of neo-orthodoxy tried to do was make things relevant for the modern person. This needs to be done in preaching, teaching, and all forms of communication. If the speaker, or the author, mentions "justification," it is necessary that the hearer or the reader knows what justification means. This is especially true today when even among Christians words like "justification," "revelation," "God's Word," etc., are often taken to mean different things. But for the neo-orthodox this relevancy does not only mean that the communication is clear. It also "means adapting Scripture to the modern man's way of thinking, to the modern mentality." The account of Jesus' virgin birth has been made so relevant that some Lutherans, having been influenced by neo-orthodoxy, say that what it really means is that Jesus was a unique person who was not worldly in any way; He was purely and totally dedicated to God. His resurrection from the grave has been made relevant to the point that it no longer is a physical resurrection, which is beyond the comprehension of the neo-orthodox. Rather they see it as a mythical, spiritual, super-historical resurrection. Christ's descent into hell is disavowed as an actual event. Instead, it is labeled a myth that modern Christians confess in the Apostles' Creed, but not as a conviction of faith. Publicly proclaiming the words of the creed is not considered a profession of faith. Instead, it is

<sup>287</sup> Schuetze. "Neo-Orthodoxy—The 'New' Threat To Our Christian Heritage." pp. 117-120.

<sup>288</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, F.F. Bruce, R.T. France, Colin Brown. *History, Criticism & Faith*. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1977. p. 85.

<sup>289</sup> Schuetze. "Neo-Orthodoxy—The 'New' Threat To Our Christian Heritage." pp. 126-127.

something that they do merely to maintain a spirit of unity with the early Christians. Yes, as a result of neo-orthodoxy, even for some Lutherans, the Bible today has become nothing more than a book of myths among which one can find errors and contractions.<sup>290</sup>

Among Lutherans in the USA who have been influenced by neo-orthodoxy, a distinction is made between the Word of God and the Bible. Instead of equating the Bible with the Word of God as conservative or orthodox Lutherans do, these “moderate” and liberal Lutherans only go so far as to say that the Bible *contains* the Word of God. In other words, they do not regard all of Scripture as being God’s Word. The Bible, for them, becomes nothing more than an historic record indicating how God has attempted to reveal Himself to people. According to their position, the Bible does not reveal God or the things of God. Rather, God speaks His saving word through the experiences that His people have had. Scripture, then, does not emanate from God, but from the life and experiences of the religious community. The nature of Scripture, therefore, is not something divine that God has given to humankind, but something that was developed by people to speak about divine things. Consequently, because for them the Bible is nothing more than a human record, they feel that it should be critically read and studied. Neo-orthodoxy supposedly opposes liberalism yet practices radical criticism thereby reducing Scripture to nothing more than a human record of God’s revelation.<sup>291</sup>

Not all Lutherans in the USA accept neo-orthodoxy nor hold to its conclusions. The theologian and exegete Frederic Blume (d. 1974), who studied under Bruce Metzger, said, “Frankly, I find myself unable to see that this so-called ‘neo-orthodox’ position has departed at all from the basic tenets of the old unbelieving liberal position. Both put the Bible entirely into the realm and competency of man. Both carefully examined, compared, analyzed, sifted, and checked the ancient documents that are contained in our beloved Bible, the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments. Both the old and the new modernism have felt free to accept or reject, rearrange and reassign to a different period of time from the one implicit in any book or any portion of any book of the Bible whatsoever. Both have always rejected the authority of the Scripture in anything like a reasonable understanding of the term ‘authority.’ Both militantly deny the infallibility of Scripture. Both deny the intimate connection between the Old and the New Testaments that Jesus and the Apostles found to exist there, and of course both deny the fulfillment of prophecy in the sense in which the New Testament speaks of it. In fact, present-day liberals fall all over themselves in paying homage to the excellency of the work that was done by the negative destructive critics of the Bible of the past century.”<sup>292</sup>

#### 4.2.3.11 Summary and Critique of Post-Reformation Theological Views

Since the days of Luther the story of the Church can almost be written in terms of the manner in which the theologians from that day up to the present regarded Scripture and then either read or

<sup>290</sup> Schuetze. “Neo-Orthodoxy—The ‘New’ Threat To Our Christian Heritage.” p. 132-137.

<sup>291</sup> Schuetze. “Neo-Orthodoxy—The ‘New’ Threat To Our Christian Heritage.” pp. 128-130.

<sup>292</sup> 1961 WELS Proceedings. Milwaukee: WELS, 1961. p. 120.

misread it. In the days when orthodoxism reared its head and encroached on Orthodoxy, people did not read the Bible for its own sake; they read it in order to find passages that would support their particular contention of the moment. During the Age of Pietism all the emphasis was placed upon the religious personality of an individual. The all-important factor was how the individual thought, felt, and acted in their daily life. Little thought and attention was given to what had happened previously in the Church. There was a concern for the present and a perceived need for immediate change. The battle cry became “We want deeds, not creeds!” How a person lived was deemed much more important than what they believed. The study of doctrine was denounced as something that could result in cold formalism. The doctrinal position taken by their spiritual fathers was regarded to be “dead orthodoxy”. Dead orthodoxy is in itself a contradiction of terms, because true orthodoxy, that which God is really teaching us, can never be dead. The thing that the pietists wanted most of all was *edification*. Whatever is preached or taught they said, must have an immediate and a direct bearing upon the spiritual lives of the members. And they were mighty impatient about the “immediate” and the “direct.” They wanted it NOW. This does not mean to say that nothing that was produced during the Age of Pietism was good and lasting. Pietism did not produce any great dogmaticians; in fact, it didn’t even produce a system of dogmatics, because its interests were in other areas. However pietism did give the church a lively sense of missionary responsibilities, it fostered Christian education, and it stressed pastoral work with the individual. Many of the hymns that are sung in worship services today were written by men during the pietistic era. Moreover, the very form of the congregations in which we worship today (so-called “gathered churches”) was the form of church government that was advocated by these men of the Age of Pietism. One cannot condemn everything they did; but it should be noted that they took too narrow a view of what the Christian life means. They made the often-repeated human mistake of seeing everything in Church life from one narrow point of view. That point of view was that of the religious personality.

The Age of Rationalism followed on the heels of pietism. It too was a time in which all interest was placed on the human personality but now, it was not upon the religious personality, but upon the *enlightened personality*. Man sought to live by reason alone, to understand and explain all the questions of this world and our life in it, of time and eternity, of God and men. The answers to these and all other questions were sought through the use of man’s natural powers of reason and understanding. We could say that the men of the Age of Rationalism sought to solve all problems, answer all questions, and satisfy all inquiry without an appeal to faith of any kind, including the Christian faith. Where pietism had been impatient with much that it found in the Christian Church, rationalism now moved in to destroy the beliefs and teachings that previously had existed in the Church. There were many great philosophers during this era; many of them had even been members of the church before being consumed by rationalism when they exchanged their Bible-based faith for a belief-system based on their own reason. Whereas every member of a Christian church body had previously accepted the Bible as being true, accurate, and authoritative, there were those who began to question and doubt what it said. It was looked upon as merely human book. One of the most negative, destructive forces behind this was *source-criticism* and the Historical-Critical Method. Under the guise of deepest wisdom and highest scholarship, and in

response to the demands of the philosophies popular in those days, this approach now began to dominate the entire field of Biblical scholarship. Theologians denied the doctrine of the inspiration of the Scripture; the Bible was relegated to being a book of human origin, whereby it was violated, groped, hacked apart, and ripped to shreds as it underwent a literary criticism that left it completely unrecognizable to Bible-believing Christians. As a result of rationalism, many theologians can only accept what makes sense to them. The faith of the past, in which something was believed because the Bible said so and thus God said so, that faith ceased to exist for a vast majority of people. Faith and reason cannot exist side by side. They are opposites.

Blume states: “We can easily see that if we had asked the rationalistic interpreters of the Scripture what they meant when they said: ‘So says the Word of God,’ they would in some way have had to evade the question entirely because they didn’t sincerely believe that God had ever spoken to men in the first place, but that the Bible was nothing but man’s word to men put out in the guise of having in some way or other come from God. The Age of Rationalism had no Principles of Interpretation of Scripture because it really had no Scripture! The world in which we are living today, outside of our own confessional Lutheran church, is in matters of Biblical interpretation still strongly under the influence of the rationalistic approach to the Bible.”<sup>293</sup>

### **4.3 The Inspiration and the Inerrancy of the Bible**

Within Christianity, today, not everyone views the Bible through the same eyeglasses. Some see it as the wholly inspired and inerrant word of God. Others, on the other hand, through their eyeglasses of rationalism, doubt, and skepticism have decided that inspiration could not possibly have taken place in the way the church has previously and universally believed that it did. And if there was an inspiration, certainly it could not have involved a plenary inspiration let alone a verbal inspiration. If the Bible is the wholly and inerrant Word of God, then it must out of necessity also be error free. It must be inerrant because it is the Word of God Himself. It is what He has directly caused to be written. If, on the other hand, is not in its entirety the inspired Word of God, i.e., if it is merely the words that human beings have written, then it is neither inspired nor inerrant. Paul Althaus (1962:54) in his book *Die Theologie Martin Luthers* (1962) asked the question how these two departure points could be united. Althaus asserted that the Bible is the Word of God not only in its persuasive address through Law and Gospel in our hearts and our conscience but is also the Word of God in its total content.

Among those who claim membership in one of the church bodies of Christendom in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, two of the major doctrines upon which there is a lack of consensus are the doctrines of the inspiration and the inerrancy of Scripture. This had not always been the case. At any era in history prior to the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century one could look at the positions taken by Luther, Calvin, and the pope and find that all three were in agreement. Theologians from the Lutheran, Reformed, and Catholic churches could have written their position on these two doctrines and it

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<sup>293</sup> Frederic E. Blume. “What Do We Mean When We Say: So Says The Word Of God?” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*. Volume 56. Number 1. January 1959. pages 23-28.



would have been an equivalent statement of the position of the other two. Unfortunately, times have changed and this is no longer the case. Although it is not the purpose of this paper to present an in-depth, comparative study on the various views regarding these two doctrines, and doctrines related them, it would be good to review some of them.

In order to discuss these doctrines we must first deal with the matter of what is inspired and what is inerrant. Modern theologians, unlike their predecessors, have coined new terms and changed the meanings of older terms, perhaps to make them seem less polemic or to make them more acceptable to a broader spectrum of people. In this section we lay a foundation that shows some of the different ways various doctrines have been understood by members of Christian church bodies. We begin by looking at the Word of God (4.3.1), then we look at Inspiration (4.3.2), followed by Inerrancy (4.3.3) and we conclude the section with a look at Revelation (4.3.4). This is not a dogmatics textbook and our purpose is not to present an exhaustive study of these doctrines nor to present a thorough study of the differences between any two positions on any of these doctrines. This section serves merely to show the basic differences in these four doctrines.

### **4.3.1 The Word of God**

Theologians in the past would have taken it for granted that merely by using the term WORD OF GOD, everyone would be on the same page and have the same understanding. Today, there are a variety of views and opinions as to what the Word of God is.

Many in the Orthodox and the Pietist circles during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries used the triad of 'mirroring→ re-mirroring→ appropriation in faith' in developing various logical or sense-making approaches to Scripture. One of the ways was to express the triad in a grammatical sentence structure as 'subject→ predicate→ object' which was introduced in the 17<sup>th</sup> century by combining the influence of neo-Aristotelian ideas with the theology of Protestant Orthodoxy. In general the difference concerning the grammatical sentence structure between Old Protestant Orthodoxy and Pietism was basically 'who the subject is', 'what the initiating subject is' and 'from where does the subject of the process 'subject→ predicate→ object' start'. This view looks at the question: Is the Bible, which is the inerrant divine Word of God, the activating agency as in Orthodoxy? or is the divine Jesus built into the human heart the activating agency of the process as in Pietism? The first expression of the process is expressive of the Bible-believing 'the Word of God' as the revealing mirroring subject→ the re-mirroring in doctrinal statements of the real intention of God in his Word (predicate) → and the appropriation of the divine truth in the human person (object). In Pietism the emphasis is on the other side namely the divine Jesus in the human heart is the activating mirroring subject of God's Word →Jesus is the re-mirrored message (=content, predicate) of God's Word →through the appropriation of the verbally inspired Word(s) of God (object).

#### 4.3.1.1 The Word of God is the Son of God

Earlier in the history of the Christian Church there was an error known as Monophysitism. According to this error, it was believed that Scripture had only been written by humans. It was of human origin. The Bible was thought to be nothing more than a human book. These human scriptures were then transubstantiated into the divine Word of God. The Monophysites believed that the human scriptures were transubstantiated into Jesus Christ. That was an error that the church condemned. I do not think that this is what the people mean who say that they believe that the Word of God is the Son of God.

Some theologians, including some liberal Lutheran theologians who have been influenced by Neo-Orthodoxy, will turn to John 1:14 “the Word became flesh” and say that the Word of God is primarily and usually the Son of God. If they would have stopped there, most Lutherans would have agreed with them that the Word of God is the Son of God; at least in verses such as this. It is not the primary and usual use of the term, however. These theologians then logically progress to the position that the Bible should be referred to as the Word of God because it speaks to us about Christ who is the *real* Word of God. Some of them even go further to say that the Bible is the word of God only when it speaks about Christ, or when what it says is directly connected to our salvation in Christ. For them, the Bible is the Word of God only in a “derivative sense.” For them, to speak of the Bible as the Word of God is done so only in a figurative sense. They do not regard the words of the Bible as if God Himself were actually speaking in a literal sense.

Liberal Lutheran theologians defend their viewing Scripture in this way by saying that this was the position of Luther. Jaroslav Pelikan, a well renowned liberal Lutheran theologian once wrote that the Bible was the “Word of God” in a derivative sense for Luther (J. Pelikan, *Luther as Expositor*, St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1959). However, Luther did not regard the Bible as being the Word of God only in a “derivative sense.” To say that he did is simply not true. Modern scholarship has not been Luther’s best friend. Many of today’s scholars impose upon Luther their own subjective viewpoint, often originating from outside traditional Lutheran doctrine, so as to support their position or to use Luther as a club against those who do not. There are so many Luther quotations floating around that he can be quoted to support any position on almost any topic. To rely on what others, no matter how scholarly they may be or have been, attribute to Luther as having said is not always being true to Luther.

Emil Brunner, (*Revelation and Reason.*, p 280) says, “The Scriptures are the Word of God, because, and in so far as, they give us Christ.” Simply stated, the view of the critics is that Christ is the Word of God and since the Bible tells us about Christ, therefore we can also call the Bible the Word of God. When these men use the words, “The Bible is the Word of God,” they do not mean the same thing that orthodox Lutherans have always meant by them.<sup>294</sup> Rather, they follow the lead of Pietism, thereby believing that the Word of God is Jesus Christ. Thus, for them, only those

<sup>294</sup> Siegbert Becker. “The Historical-Critical Method of Bible Interpretation.” *Our Great Heritage*. Volume I. Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, p. 311.

portions of Scripture that directly speak about Christ are considered to be the Word of God. In other words, for them, there are portions of the Bible that are not the Word of God.

A variation on this position is held by some Protestants in the USA. According to their view, their faith must be in the living Christ and not in the dead words of a book. They maintain that “the resurrection of Christ is the cornerstone of the Christian faith.” Those words sound as if they are a clear confession of faith in the Savior. Every Christian would agree with those words. However, that is not what they mean to say. For them, there is a difference between Jesus and Christ. Jesus Christ is not one person, both divine and human at the same time, as Bible-believing Christians believe. For them, there is a difference between the “resurrection of Jesus” and the “resurrection of Christ”. Jesus was a human being, like us. Jesus is dead and stayed dead. He is still in the tomb in Jerusalem. He was a great man. He was able to take a diverse band of men and unite them together for a common cause. Among them, there was an *esprit de corps*, a sense of purpose, a happiness, and a unity. They thought as one, they felt as one, they acted as one. The Holy Spirit is not a person, but rather this attitude that was created by the presence of Jesus. As they gathered together in fellowship on that first Easter Sunday, they noticed that the old feeling of togetherness had returned. This spirit of joy and unity had risen from the dead, and whether you call it the risen Christ or the Holy Spirit makes no difference because it is the same thing, for them. A Christ, who is not the Christ of the Bible and therefore not the Christ of Christendom, but rather one that has been spun out of their human imagination has become the Word of God for them.<sup>295</sup>

#### 4.3.1.2 The Word of God Speaks About God

Another modern position on the Word of God is that the Bible is only the words that human beings have written; it is the mere word of humankind, nothing more, and nothing less. However, because it mentions God and talks about God, the Bible is considered to be the word of God, or more aptly put the word about God. This view has become popular among some liberal Lutherans. An example of this can be seen in the February 1961 issue of *The Cresset*, a theological journal published by Valparaiso University. Introducing the issue, an LCMS pastor states: The words of the Bible “are not God's words because God gives them to men. They are God's words because men give them to God. . . . Word by word, just as they stand, the words are God's because He has called them so.”<sup>296</sup>

#### 4.3.1.3 The Word of God Is His Revelatory Acts

Neo-Orthodoxy asserts that the words of God are the divine acts through which He makes Himself known to humankind. In the Old Testament, the greatest word or act was the Exodus. In the New Testament, it was Jesus' death on the cross.

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<sup>295</sup> Siegbert Becker. The Doctrine of the Word of God. Paper presented to the Nebraska District Convention of the WELS, Hoskins, Nebraska, July 12-13, 1966.

<sup>296</sup> The Cresset, Feb. 1961, XXIV, 4, p.6.

Those that adhered to Neo-orthodoxy following Barth in his “theology of crisis”, regarded God as being the “wholly other” — the “pure negation” — who must reveal Himself to man by an encounter. Citing Edward Carnell on the theology of Reinhold Niebuhr, John Meyer writes: “God’s revelation must be arresting, shocking, engaging, confronting, convicting.” He “must constantly intrude into our lives with a moment-by-moment revelation which cuts across our expectations, and which yet meets the depth of our inner man” (*The Theology of Reinhold Niebuhr*, by Ed. J. Carnell, 1951. p. 32).<sup>297</sup>

According to Neo-orthodoxy, the “word” of God is the mighty acts by which God makes himself known to his people. By these acts, God intervenes in the history of humankind. The greatest “word” of God in the Old Testament was the exodus from Egypt. According to this view, the children of Israel were really delivered from Egypt by God’s intervention in history. The Biblical account, for them, is not historical; it is not a factual record of what occurred. The plagues of Egypt, for example, can all be explained away as events that have a corresponding counterpart in nature. The bloody water is said to have been caused by red mud washing into the water system. The crossing of the Red Sea was nothing more than wandering through a swamp; Moses had learned the route on his previous travels. The Egyptians did not drown in the Red Sea; they stumbled into some quicksand and were lost. The manna in the wilderness was nothing more than a type of plant lice that is prevalent at a certain time of year. God’s intervention in the New Testament took place through the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.<sup>298</sup>

#### **4.3.1.4 The Word of God is God’s Word**

The Word of God is God’s Word. It is every word of Scripture.

God wants people to accept the Bible as His Word. The Lord twice warns: “if anyone is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels” (Mark 8:38 and Luke 9:26, NIV)

#### **4.3.1.5 Faith in Christ or Faith in the Word**

Neo-orthodox Christians and especially neo-orthodox Lutherans tell us that our faith must be in Christ and not in a book. And, in and of itself, that sounds good. No Christian will deny that our faith must be in Christ. He is the chief cornerstone on which we build our faith.

Yes, that is true. However, when we build on Jesus Christ as the chief cornerstone, we also build on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. Faith in Christ is always faith in the words and promises of God. The two simply cannot be separated. When the Apostle Paul described the faith of Abraham, he wrote, “Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good

<sup>297</sup> John P. Meyer. “Inspiration” Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly, Volume 48. p. 258.

<sup>298</sup> Becker. The Doctrine of the Word of God.

as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah’s womb was also dead.<sup>20</sup> Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God,<sup>21</sup> being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised” (Romans 4:19-21, NIV). Abraham’s faith was the certainty of his heart that God’s promise would be fulfilled. He had no doubt whatsoever. His faith was in the words and promise of God. The promises of God, which we accept by faith, are given to us in the words of the Bible. Anything that weakens the validity of those words and casts doubt upon their truth eventually will weaken and perhaps even destroy the confidence that we have in the promises of God upon which our hopes for salvation rest. The Bible indicates that the Word of God is not a person but actual words that are spoken or have been written. Scripture says that we are born again by the Word of God (1 Peter 1:23). Those who support another view could say that the Word of God means Jesus here. However, two verses later the inspired author tells us that it is not a person, it is words. We are told that this is the word that was preached to you (1 Peter 1:25). Paul writing to the Roman Christians tells us that faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God (Romans 10:17). To think that one could hear a person does not make any sense. The meaning is very clear that the Word of God is the very words that have been written by inspiration for our reading and hearing.

Anyone, therefore, who denies the truth of anything in the Scriptures, no matter what may be denied, is “biting the hand that feeds him”; such a person is attacking the very thing by which their faith is brought into existence. Such a person is undermining the very foundation on which their faith rests, for the Bible says that whoever does not believe the record that God gave of His Son makes God a liar (1 John 5:10). Jesus made faith in Him dependent upon faith in His Word. He told the Jews, “For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me.<sup>47</sup> But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?” (John 5:46-47, NKJV). Anyone, therefore, whoever denies the verbal inspiration, the inerrancy, and the infallibility of the Scriptures, has no real foundation left for their faith.

Paul tells us very plainly that it is impossible for a man to find Christ anywhere but in the word that he and the other apostles and the prophets had preached and which is written in the Holy Scriptures for our learning and salvation. He says, “the righteousness that is by faith says: ‘Do not say in your heart, “Who will ascend into heaven?”’ (that is, to bring Christ down)<sup>7</sup> or “Who will descend into the deep?”’ (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).<sup>8</sup> But what does it say? ‘The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,’ that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming:<sup>9</sup> That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:6-9, NIV). By believing in Scripture, the Word of God, one believes in Jesus Christ.

### 4.3.2 Inspiration

The doctrine of inspiration, like every other doctrine of the Christian faith, is not something that can be proved by logic nor can it be rationalized through the powers of human reason. As has been indicated earlier, faith and reason are not homogenous. They are two very distinct and different things, and quite frequently they are opposites and opposed to one another. Those who say that the Bible is not inspired in terms of God having breathed out the very words which the holy authors used will either completely reject the doctrine of inspiration, or they will dilute it saying only parts of the Bible were inspired; or they will redefine inspiration so that it means “motivation.” To support their position, they can and do cite any number of learned individuals and theologians who do not hesitate to utter their humanly-conceived views. Those who are Bible-believers will accept the doctrine of inspiration without reservation. The reason they believe that inspiration is a reality is because of the internal evidence within the Bible. The testimony they have to support their position is the testimony of God Himself as is stated in the verses of Scripture. They thus cite Scripture passages and Scripture references to support their belief.

It should be noted right from the start that the word inspiration occurs only once in the Bible — “All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17, NKJV). The term “verbal inspiration” is never occurs in the Bible. However that the concept is presented throughout the Bible is something that every Bible-believer knows.

I will not go into a discussion of why some people reject the doctrine of inspiration. Sadly, a growing number of people these days are joining their ranks. Doctrine is a matter of faith. If they choose not to believe it, that is something that they eventually will have to discuss with God, as will we all when we meet with Him on the Last Day to discuss our faith and life.

I will, however, present two current views held by those who acknowledge that inspiration was involved with the writing of the Bible. They either hold that the Bible is the wholly inspired Word of God or they hold that the individuals who wrote the Bible were “inspired” or motivated to write.

#### 4.3.2.1 The Two Positions on Inspiration

People today either accept inspiration or they do not. Among those who accept a concept of inspiration, there are two prominent views. For a lack of better names, I am using a title to summarize the positions. On the one hand, The Bible is the Inspired Word of God, on the other hand, The Inspired Writer wrote Scripture. Let’s look briefly at these two positions.

### **The Bible is the Inspired Word of God**

According to this position, all of Scripture, every word, is inspired by God. The Holy Scriptures are absolutely true because God gave the writers the very words that they wrote. This is called verbal inspiration. Because God is the author of all Scripture, none of the teachings of Scripture contradict one another. Only the sixty-six canonical books of the Bible (thirty nine in the Old Testament and twenty seven in the New Testament) are regarded as being the inspired Word of God.

When the Bible speaks of the Word of God it denotes what God says when He speaks to us in the words of the Bible. Primarily the Word of God is the message which, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, was spoken and preached by the apostles and prophets and which, under that same inspiration, was written down in this book, which we call the Word of God not in any derived or in any figurative sense but literally. This is the position of orthodox, conservative Lutherans to this day.

### **The Inspired Writer Wrote Scripture**

According to this position, Scripture is inspired in the same sense that a poet is inspired to write a poem, an artist is inspired to paint a scene, etc. The Scriptures were written by well intentioned individuals who believed in God. They wrote the things that they believed to be from God. However, they were affected by their cultural beliefs and various influences of the time in which they lived. Because the Scripture was written by humans, it can and does contain mistakes, errors, and contradictions. Because the Scripture was written by individuals who lived at various times, in diverse places, and under differing conditions the teachings of one part of Scripture sometimes contradict another part of Scripture. The traditions of the church and the testimony of modern-day Christians may also be just as “inspired” as the Scriptures.

There are people today who assume that the Holy Spirit gave the human writers license to insert some remarks of their own, even false statements, provided only that they limited such remarks to the field of human knowledge (or ignorance). But He kept a strict watch over them, so that they injected no spiritual error. All the passages of Scripture quoted on inspiration are understood with this qualification; and the verdict of Jesus that the “Scripture cannot be broken” is modified by the restriction: in matters pertaining to salvation. It is claimed that such a doctrine of inspiration could do no harm. God is speaking to us in the Bible by means of the extremely weak human language in words which do not come anywhere near the infinite truths of the divine concepts. Why should He not also speak to us through human mistakes? It is said that the Holy Spirit is able to create faith also by means of error. But does this justify the conclusion that the Holy Spirit creates faith through error? And even if we grant that He can perform this miracle, does it follow that He may subscribe to an error and make it a part of His own statement? Above all, where does Scripture

even remotely hint such a possibility?<sup>299</sup> If it is not in Scripture, it has to originate with a human being; it has to be a product of human reason.

#### 4.3.2.2 Verbal Inspiration

Verbal inspiration is not mechanical inspiration. The holy writers used their own minds and wrote in their own style. The Holy Spirit gave them the words to write. That does not mean the linguistic style would have to be the same throughout the Bible. The holy writers were not robots or marionettes. However, the Holy Spirit did give them the words to speak and to write. If they spoke Greek, He gave them the Greek words. If they spoke Hebrew, He gave them the Hebrew words. The same thing is true of style of the writing. If they were a fisherman with little academic education, they wrote in that style. If they had received a more formal education, they used that style. The doctrine of verbal inspiration does not mean that a particular doctrine can be said only in one certain way using one set of words. Verbal inspiration means only that whatever is said, no matter how it was said, is absolutely correct and inspired verbally by the Holy Spirit.

The human writers were real living personalities; each one had his own characteristics, physical and mental; each had his own training; each had his own peculiarity of diction, his own vocabulary and style. And when God called these men to give us His Word through them, He did not devitalize them, depersonalize them, or in any way change them. He took them just as they were and they spoke in the style and the language to which they were accustomed. The miracle of Pentecost demonstrated that God sometimes inspired men to speak in languages which they had never learned (Acts 2). It was God's words that were always written. Even if an individual had wanted to deliberately write something contrary to what God wanted him to write, God would, and did, cause His Word to be written. When necessary, men spoke the words of God against their will. For example, Balaam who sought to curse the children of Israel could only bless them (Numbers 24). Caiaphas had a totally different intention when he uttered the words "it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish" (John 11:50, NIV). God, however was speaking these words through him to announce the redemption of all mankind through Jesus Christ. When these select individuals wrote the books of the Bible, they themselves felt fully responsible for every word they penned and for the manner in which they expressed themselves (e.g., Paul, was troubled for a while whether he had not been a little too harsh and severe in his letter to the Corinthians, 2 Cor. 7:8). Although these men put the pen to the page, it was the Holy Spirit who used their entire personality to write what He wanted to write and in the way He wanted to write it.

Through the centuries debate has arisen as to whether or not this view was actually held by early Lutherans: was it first used by Lutherans during the Age of Orthodoxy, or it was first used by Lutherans during the Age of Pietism. For some theological scholars the dating of when doctrines first were verbalized has become an important issue, especially if they hold to an evolving, progressive view of religion. When one bears in mind what was happening in the Lutheran Church

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<sup>299</sup> John P. Meyer. "Inspiration" Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly. Volume 48. p. 256.



during each of these periods it becomes apparent why a particular doctrine, such as this one, was more clearly verbalized in one period rather than another. And we should bear in mind that just because a particular doctrine was not specifically verbalized in the way it is today, does not mean that believers were unaware of it during a previous period.

Was the doctrine of verbal inspiration formally verbalized during the Age of Pietism as Bengt Hägglund (1951:119) asserted in his often quoted work *Die heilige Schrift und ihre Deutung in der Theologie Johann Gerhards, Eine Untersuchung über das altlutherische Schriftverständnis?* Or was it merely restated by a few theologians of the time? We have already noted that Gerhard had tried to improve the spiritual level in the congregations prior to Spener. We have also seen that during the Age of Pietism, dogmatics was not on the front burner, improving the spiritual life of the people was the hot topic. Pietism (as we noted) did not produce any dogmaticians, nor did it produce a system of dogmatics. If it had done so, some of the doctrinal problems that existed would have been prevented.

Theologians have noted that verbal inspiration consists of three components *impulsus ad scribendum*, *suggestio rerum* and *suggestio verborum*. Johann Andreas Quenstedt, David Hollaz and Abraham Calov took up all three elements of verbal inspiration and formalized a statement of biblical inspiration (Reid 1962: 81ff). These three men, all of whom are generally regarded as belonging to the Age of Orthodoxy, were the great Lutheran dogmaticians of the past and are still quoted by Lutheran theologians today.

The precise manner as to how the Holy Spirit inspired the select writers to write the Word of God is a mystery for us. It is a mystery which we cannot solve; about which we, therefore, do not and cannot set up any theories; a mystery which Bible-believers in faith accept as being true. When the Lutheran Church analyzes the act of inspiration into the three component parts of *impulsus ad scribendum*, *suggestio rerum*, *suggestio verborum*, this is not an attempt to understand the mystery, nor is it a theory about inspiration: it is merely an attempt at summarizing the various statements which the Scriptures make about their own origin.

There are theologians, past and present, who view the three components of inspiration as three different ways of explaining inspiration rather than functioning together as a unit, as orthodox, conservative Lutherans believe. Let's look briefly at the three theories separately; then we will look at the three together as a unit.

### **Some Theories on Inspiration**

#### ***impulsus scribendi***

According to this theory of inspiration, the holy writers wrote what they did because of *impulsus scribendi*, that is, they were given the impulse to write what they wrote. We could probably compare it to turning on a light switch or jump-starting a car. The holy writers were ignited to write,

they were set into action. If one adheres to the present day concept that Scripture is the word of human beings, this theory would go along with the equating of “inspiration” with “motivation” concept. Something happened to the author, or in the author’s life, that moved him to write. The personal spiritual experience of the author was then carried over into what they wrote.

### ***suggestio rerum***

It appears to mean the suggesting of things about which to write, and there are those who accept that as a meaning for this expression. *Suggestio* actually is what is called a false cognate. It does not mean “suggest;” rather, it means “to give” or “to provide.” According to this theory, the holy writers received a list of topics upon which to write, or they received something like an outline upon which they expanded, level by level until they had a complete document. This theory makes sense to those who like to have everything, nice, neat, and organized in its proper pigeon-hole. Thus it fits well with those who like to find doctrines and proof-passages, *loci probanti*, for those doctrines.

### ***suggestio verborum***

This theory, like the one before it, contains the false cognate, *suggestio*. It looks like it means the suggestion of words, but it actually means “the giving of words” or “the providing of words.” According to this theory, the holy writers received the very words that they used to write. This theory is probably closest to the orthodox Lutheran doctrine of verbal inspiration. Because it deals with the words in Scripture, this theory is one that linguists and exegetes would prefer.

There is a variation on the theory that appears among liberal scholars which is *suggestio verbi*. The second Latin word changes from the plural to the singular. This variation was used as early as 1940 by M. Reu of the old Ohio Synod, a forerunner of the arch-liberal Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). It refers to the receiving of a particular word, or the proper word. According to this theory, the writer received certain words at certain points in their writing. For example, an author is writing and gets what is known as “writer’s block”, not knowing what to write, then suddenly gets the proper word and can continue. This view would hold that the Bible is a piece of human literature that every so often contains words that the writer was “inspired” or “moved” to use.

### ***impulsus scribendi, suggestio rerum, and suggestio verborum***

According to this view, the Bible is the wholly inspired and inerrant Word of God. There can be no question that the very words of the Bible are God’s words, who provided the *impulsus scribendi*, the *suggestio rerum*, and the *suggestio verborum*; however, these words will never be approached in isolation from the inspired holy men of God who wrote them or from the situation out of which they grew or to which they addressed themselves.<sup>300</sup> All three are a part of the inspiration process.

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<sup>300</sup> John P. Meyer. “Inspiration” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*. Volume 68. p. 110.

The Holy Spirit gave the select writers the exact words to write according to the individual character and personality of the author. He gave them the equivalent of an outline so that the words would be put in the correct order and explain the entire will and counsel of God. He gave them what they needed to carry the words and format to the papyri, skin, or parchment upon which they wrote.

Lutheran orthodoxy has consistently taught that in the process of inspiration the Holy Spirit supplied the holy writers with the *impulsus scribendi*, the *suggestio rerum*, and the *suggestio verborum*. The inspiration was not a mere *divine assistance* or *direction* (*assistentia*, *directio*, *gubernatio divina*), but the actual impartation of all the words (*suggestio verborum*) of which Holy Scripture consists.<sup>301</sup> It is currently the view held by the ELS, the WELS, and many within the LCMS. It is not generally accepted by the ELCA.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century many Lutherans were opposed to Neo-Lutheran, Neo-Protestant and Cultural Protestant ideas, especially regarding the Bible. They steadfastly continued the doctrines and notions of older Lutheranism; and especially the doctrinal notion that Luther's reformational activities and doings were propelled by his holding unabatedly to the total inerrancy of the authoritative words and texts of the Bible. The concept of verbal inspiration of 17<sup>th</sup> century Lutheran Orthodoxy, represented by Johann Andreas Quenstedt, David Hollaz, and Abraham Calov was vigorously taken up by Lutherans again in the later part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It should be noted that although the specific term "verbal inspiration" does not appear in the writings of Lutheran theologians prior to the era of Lutheran Orthodoxy, it does not mean that the concept was not believed and accepted as far back as the Reformation. A thorough study of Luther's writings, not those who wrote about what he said, will reveal this. Biblical inspiration and inerrancy is not the topic of this paper, nor does time and space permit a more detailed presentation.

In 1890 at Leipzig, Luther's statements concerning the nature and meaning of the Scriptures were compiled and published in a book by Walther Rohnert, *Was lehrt Luther von der Inspiration der Heiligen Schrift?* According to Rohnert, Luther's view, approach and use of the Scriptures, as well as his statements on inspiration in general, was that the biblical writers received both the impulse to write and the suggested content and suggested form (words) (i.e., verbal inspiration) of the message they had to write from the Holy Spirit. The Bible is therefore free from all kinds of deficiency or error, even with regard to the most insignificant details (Rohnert 1890: 10, 12).

CFW Walther, following in the footsteps of Baier, frequently used the latter's dogmatic compendium in his dogmatics classes at the seminary in St. Louis. Walther made copies of the compendium, now known as the Walther-Baier Compendium Theologiae Positivae, available to his students. It was used up to the 1950s in the LCMS seminaries. The Baier compendium is still used today in dogmatics classes at the WELS seminary. Franz Pieper an early Missouri Synod theologian and student of Walther, (Christliche Dogmatik 1, St Louis 1924) continued the

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<sup>301</sup> J. T. Mueller. Christian Dogmatics. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House. 1934, 1999. p. 102.

mirroring-hermeneutical line of Rohnert by regarding Luther as a representative of verbal inspiration. According to Luther, the Bible is the perfectly inerrant information which God dictated to its writers. Consequently, the Scriptures are perfect in all that is written therein, including all historical, geographical, or other details (Pieper 1924: 334-5). Adolf Hoenecke, the first dogmatician of the WELS, (Evangelisch-lutherische Dogmatik, Milwaukee, 1909) also believed this. Today, many orthodox, conservative Lutherans throughout the world continue to believe this.

### 4.3.3 Inerrancy

Once again, there are two positions on the inerrancy of the Scriptures, one taken by the Bible-believers, the other taken by the partial-Bible believers, the Bible-doubters, and the Bible-skeptics. We shall look briefly at each position.

#### The Bible has Errors

Carl Braaten, a liberal Lutheran theologian in the USA, in explaining inerrancy tells us that Luther believed that the things recorded in the Bible happened *exactly* the way in which they were written down. Today, he points out, it is impossible for anyone to assume the literal historicity of everything that has been written in Scripture. What the authors of the Bible have recorded is “not accepted as a literal transcript of the factual course of events.” Therefore it is necessary for scholars to take a critical approach. The text as it appears in the Bible is considered to be “veiling the truth.” The critic must peer behind the veil and try to reconstruct what actually took place so that the real history can be known.<sup>302</sup>

#### A False State of Inerrancy

Some liberal theologians in the LCMS have said that the Bible is inerrant, that is, it does not contain any errors. Yet they go on to say that an error is an intentional mistake that has been made in order to deceive. They hold that the mistakes in the Bible were either non-intentional or were not made to deceive the reader. Rather the mistakes are present in order to lead the reader into a deeper understanding of the truth. Thus, they say that the Bible, although it has mistakes, is still without error.

#### The Bible is Error-Free

There is a unity that is found throughout Scripture. Although it was written over the course of some 1600 years (1500 BC to 100 AD) using approximately forty different specially chosen individuals to write it, there really is but one author, God the Holy Spirit. Scripture is God’s own Word given in a special way to select individuals to record under the guidance and direction of God Himself. There is one theme: God’s plan of salvation for the fallen human race. From Genesis to Revelation, the

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<sup>302</sup> C. E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (eds). Christian Dogmatics. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984. Volume I, pp. 76-77.

entire Bible speaks of but one individual, Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the Son of man, the promised Savior. Because the holy writers wrote as they were “carried along” or moved by the Holy Spirit to use the very words that He breathed out to them, every possibility of error has been completely eliminated. The Second Person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ, tells us “The Scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35). Therefore the statements and doctrines of Scripture are not merely subjectively true, i.e., only true for the person who believes them to be true, but they are objectively true, i.e., they are true in themselves because they are the Word of God. Any doctrine that does not fully agree with the teachings of God’s Word is of necessity false, no matter how sincerely it is believed. Sincerity of faith does not prove the correctness of a doctrine of the truth of an individual’s religion.

“It would surely be much more fitting for us to take a humble view of our own knowledge and intelligence and conclude that when there seems to us to be a mistake in the words of Scripture, the fault may lie in our ignorance. Unbelievable as it may seem to us, it just may be possible that the Holy Spirit knew more two and three thousand years ago than even we know today in this modern, enlightened, and scientific age of ours. Remember that Luther said that we should give the Holy Spirit credit for being more learned than we are.”<sup>303</sup>

We know, of course, that translations are not verbally inspired in the sense that the Holy Spirit in a miraculous way gives to the translators the words that they are to use. But we should be careful that we here do not concede too much. The problem of the translations is also not as serious as it may seem to some at first. Our problem here is sometimes complicated by the fact that we here in America are so sure that everything worth reading has been written in English that we do not trouble ourselves to learn the language of other people. But if we know more than one language we would also know that it makes absolutely no difference whether one says, “God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son”, or “*Also hat Gott die Weltgeliebt dasz er seinen eingebornen Sohn gab*” or “*Porque tanto amó Dios al mundo, que dio a su Hijo unigénito.*” It means exactly the same thing in whatever language you say it, and if the original is inspired and reliable, then we can be sure also of what the translation says.

“If a mistake is made in the translations it can always be pointed out and corrected on the basis of the original. But if the original itself were nothing more than a fallible human record of what some men thought God wanted them to say, then we can correct translations until Doomsday and revise our Bibles every year and no improvements would bring us one step closer to the mind of God.”<sup>304</sup>

#### 4.3.4 Revelation

Among those who belong to Christian church bodies today, there is a difference of opinion on what constitutes the revelation of God. One side holds that God gradually and progressively reveals Himself and His will to people generation by generation and century by century so that people

<sup>303</sup> Becker. [The Verbal Inspiration of the Holy Scriptures.](#)

<sup>304</sup> Becker. [The Verbal Inspiration of the Holy Scriptures.](#)

today have a better theological knowledge than did their parents, who in turn had a better knowledge than did their parents, and so on so that we have a much better knowledge than did the people at the time of the Reformation, they had a much better knowledge than did the people at the time of Paul, who had a much better knowledge than did David, and so forth all the way back to Adam, who it would seem did not know much of anything compared with his descendants — although he is credited with naming all of the animals. The other side holds that God's revelation of Himself progresses in a different way. After the fall into sin, Adam and Eve learned about the Savior and had faith in Him even as do Christians today. We know more about Him because we are living after He accomplished the redemption and salvation of the human race. The prophets living at the end of the Old Testament knew more because a continual series of prophecies revealed an increasingly greater knowledge about Jesus Christ. I shall briefly discuss both views without entering into a point and counter point presentation.

#### **4.3.4.1 Progressive Revelation**

This view is based on the assumption that the earliest believers in the Old Testament were basically primitive in their religious beliefs. The lives of these early believers reflected a much lower social and moral standard than is commonly found in much of the world today. Through the centuries and millennia as their knowledge of God grew, the level of the believers' religious beliefs and their social and moral standards began to increase. The critics use references to the polygamous life styles of such leaders as Abraham, Jacob, David, and Solomon. They cite the wars that the Hebrews fought under Joshua to conquer the Promised Land as being ruthless and to the point of being genocidal. They feel that the imprecatory Psalms, such as Psalm 69 and Psalm 109, which call for God to use His divine wrath when dealing with an enemy, certainly could not have been prayed by a believer the Savior-God. Thus they conclude that God must have gradually revealed Himself to the Children of Israel over the course of time, progressively allowing them to know Him better. And in turn, the religious life and moral and social standards progressively improved. According to this position, then, Paul, because he was so much more advanced could not possibly have written with the same point of view as did the author of Genesis. This position is held even by some Lutherans. Even prior to World War II, theologians belonging to the church bodies which would become the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America were supporting and promoting this teaching.<sup>305</sup>

We shall now look at the other view of Revelation.

#### **4.3.4.2 The Revelation of God**

God reveals Himself and His will to us in two ways — in nature and in Scripture. Nature is an incomplete revelation of God. It shows us that there is an almighty Creator, who at least brought that first, tiny speck of matter into being, but whom Bible-believers credit with the creation of all things. That these things are still in existence today shows us His love. That there is a renewal in

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<sup>305</sup> George O.Lillegard. Progressive Revelation. A paper. n.d.

nature, a passing of seasons, a regular time of planting and harvest, etc., indicates that He can and does preserve His creation. However, nature does not reveal much more than this about God to us. The second way in which God reveals Himself is in His own Word, Scripture, which tells us more about Him and His plan of salvation. Bible-believers accept the Scripture-based fact that it is through the Bible that a person is brought to faith, and the Bible strengthens and increases the faith of the individual.

God does reveal Himself progressively through the years of history, but in a totally different way than we presented in the previous subsection (4.3.4.1). "Luther and all truly orthodox theologians recognize and testify that the Old Testament reveals Christ, and that the whole Christian doctrine is taught in it."<sup>306</sup> Through the centuries, as the appointed time for the Savior's birth came closer, the continued announcements through the prophets made Jesus clearer and clearer to the eye of the believer, who sees by faith. Just as a person who is traveling and looks ahead to see some magnificent site in the distance will note that at first it is far off and may even be shrouded in mist and haze and difficult to see, but they know it is there. As they draw closer the view gradually sharpens. It comes more and more into focus. The image is more recognizable. Drawing still closer, the view continues to improve, until, finally the traveler arrives at the destination. Then, everything is clear and visible. The same thing happened in the Old Testament. The prophecies revealed more and more about the promised Savior, so that the people could not only know that He was coming, and why He was coming, but even the manner in which He would enter this world of ours, and how He would suffer and die. Adam and Eve, after the fall and before they were evicted from the Garden of Eden, knew the promise of the Savior and looked forward to His coming as did the people in the days of Malachi (the last Old Testament prophet), as well as did old righteous Simeon and the prophetess Anna, both of whom waited in the Temple in Jerusalem for Jesus' birth and entry into the human race.

God revealed Himself to Adam and Eve. They had as complete a knowledge of God and His will for the salvation of the world as Christians do today. In fact, we can say that Adam and the other patriarchs to whom God revealed Himself actually had a better and more intimate knowledge of God than we do today because we do not have that personal, direct contact that they had. Our knowledge of God comes only from our study of the Bible. They actually conversed with God. We speak with Him in prayer, yes, but we must await His response; we do not hear a voice from heaven, like a public address announcement, giving us a response. Their faith and the faith of every Christian is exactly the same, based on the inspired, inerrant word of our faithful God.

We proceed now to review some of the major theological and philosophical influences on Bible-believing Christians. The presentation will concentrate on the Lutheran church, especially Lutherans in the USA because the influences of the past had their effects, good and bad, on the immigrants who traveled to the Americas, some of whom formed the church body currently known as the Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

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<sup>306</sup> Lillegard. Progressive Revelation.

#### 4.4 *Modern Views, Approaches and Ways of Using the Bible*

Coming out of the Age of Enlightenment and proceeding to the present day, there have been, in particular, five “-isms” that have had a growing impact upon religion and thus on people’s theological views. These are: humanism, materialism, rationalism, secularism, and syncretism. To these, a sixth can be added, secular-humanism. All six continue to influence and affect the church today, especially in the USA. We shall look at them briefly in alphabetical order. The first of these is humanism. **Humanism** really encompasses all of the other -isms. Simply put, humanism exalts humankind and elevates it above God. According to this influence, it is the created and not the Creator that is most important. It is the person, and not God, who reigns supreme. It is the person, not God, who establishes the standards for what is right and what is wrong. It is the person, not God, who controls the future and what will happen to the individual. The second influential force is materialism. **Materialism**, viewed in connection with religion, refers to the inclination of an individual to be more concerned with physical than with spiritual values. It is an undue emphasis on money and earthly possessions. The person, their possessions, and how that person obtained these “treasures” becomes the most important thing. God doesn’t even enter the picture. Our third impacting force is rationalism. **Rationalism**, as we have just seen, was one of the influential philosophies that came out of the Age of Enlightenment. Opinions differ as to exactly what rationalism was and is. The Oxford dictionary tells us that rationalism is “the practice or principle of basing opinions and actions on reason and knowledge rather than on religious belief or emotional response.”<sup>307</sup> *Webster’s New World Dictionary* defines rationalism thus: “the principle or practice of accepting reason as the only authority in determining one’s opinions or course of action...in theology, the doctrine that rejects revelation and the supernatural, and makes reason the sole source of knowledge.”<sup>308</sup> Rationalism, therefore, can be summed up as the use of reason as opposed to faith in determining doctrine. **Secularism**, the fourth influential force, is in reality a composite of the three previous influences. Whenever an individual turns from God and focuses attention on themselves, their possessions and their reason, then, the only plausible result is that their life will become increasingly worldly. It will be secular. It will be increasingly concerned more with the things that are temporal and of the present earthly life than it will with matters related to religion, sacred things, or the divine. Roland Ehlke notes: “Of all the dangers facing modern man, [secularism] is perhaps most unique to our age.... [it] was not widespread in Bible times.”<sup>309</sup> During the final quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century a hybrid developed which was a combination of humanism and secularism. Continuing alphabetically through our list, the fifth influential force is known as **Secular-Humanism** and it is gaining ground, especially among those who prefer to classify themselves as having “no religion”. It utilizes reason and scientific inquiry while treating matters of ethics and justice in a way that demonstrates compassion and equality. It rejects revealed knowledge and theistic morality. Yet it does not necessarily reject faith. Free inquiry and the use of the scientific method are important in gaining wisdom. In certain parts of the world, those who

<sup>307</sup> [http://www.askoxford.com/concise\\_oed/rationalism?view=uk](http://www.askoxford.com/concise_oed/rationalism?view=uk)

<sup>308</sup> David B. Guralnik, ed. *Webster’s New World Dictionary*. Cleveland, Ohio: World Publishing Company, 1970.

<sup>309</sup> Roland Cap Ehlke. *The Christian in the World*. A Paper Presented to the Evangelical Lutheran Sunday School Teachers’ Institute of Milwaukee, November 12, 1978.



adhere to secular-humanism find themselves in conflict with fundamentalists, especially regarding the separation of church and state. Fundamentalists regard the secular-humanists as a threat to religion. The secular-humanists consider the fundamentalists to be regressive, superstitious, and narrow-minded in their views and arrogant for stating them.<sup>310</sup> The sixth influential force is syncretism. **Syncretism** is the attempt to unite dissimilar and irreconcilable beliefs for the sake of religious unity. An example of this is the Baha'i religion, which seeks to form a new religion by combining teachings and ideas from all religions. This is syncretistic. Another example is the modern ecumenical movement which attempts to unite all of the Christian denominations together. Syncretism is not new. Examples of it can be found already in the Old Testament. All of these can influence, and indeed have influenced many present-day Bible interpreters.

Current interpretations of the Bible continue to follow a process developed during the 18<sup>th</sup> century within theological circles that was detailed by J.J. Rambach in his **Institutiones hermeneuticae sacrae** of 1723 as a threesome grammatical-historical process of the involvement of three dispositions — **subtilitas intelligendi** (understanding), **subtilitas explicandi** (explication) and **subtilitas applicandi** (application) (Gadamer 1975:291). As far as we know this is one of the first books that explicitly expressed the interpretational-hermeneutical triad of 'understanding → explanation → application' as three refined (subtilitas) dispositions or capacities of the human mind. This threesome of 'understanding → explanation → application' as the bridging process towards texts, theories or human activities or deeds has been alternately or variously embraced in the Modern era by either rationality or historicity or ethical-existentiality to name but a few.

Within modern day interpretation, there often is a shift from what the author says to me to an interpretation of what the words *mean* to me. What can cause that shift will depend on how the interpreter regards Scripture and for what it is used. Is it God's Word, or is it the words of humans? Is it verbally inspired, or has it been motivated? Etc.

Present day Bible students — be they pastors, professors, theologians, students, or laypersons — tend to follow one of a variety of highways to attain their interpretation of a Biblical text. These methods are not new to the present day. They have already been in use for centuries. We will not be able to look at all of them. In this section we will review four of the more commonly used current methods as follows: The Grammatical-Historical Method (4.4.1), The Historical-Critical Method (4.4.2), The Ethical Vox Viva View, Approach and Use of the Bible (4.4.4), and The Syntactical-Theological Exegesis Method (4.4.5). In (4.4.3) there will be a comparison of The Grammatical-Historical Method with The Historical-Critical Method. These two methods dominate the interpretation done by both Lutherans and Protestants of all degrees — conservative, "moderate" and liberal for quite some time. The first method accepts the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture. The second method redefines the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture to make it acceptable. The third method has been primarily used by some less than conservative members of the Reformed church bodies, and perhaps by some liberal Lutherans. It completely rejects the

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<sup>310</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Secular\\_humanism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Secular_humanism)

inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture. The fourth method tends to accept the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture. The method that an individual prefers and the way that others regard these methods will depend on their personal approach to the Bible and what they personally believe the Bible is. No one is going to use all these approaches simultaneously, although there probably have been some who have used all of them during the course of their lifetime. Most people, based on their own personal belief system, will tend to prefer one and not the others.

#### 4.4.1 The Grammatical-Historical Method

According to this method, in order to understand what God is saying, it is necessary to study the meaning of the words as they are ordinarily used in the Bible. When we know what the words mean, we know what God is saying to us, and this we can and do accept as God's truth. The historical is that the Bible presents a true account of what was said and done. Also accepted is that the divinely chosen authors actually wrote what is written on the pages of Scripture, and that the people mentioned in the Bible actually lived and did the things they are described as having done.

In 1788, the German theologian and exegete Karl A.G. Keil wrote a Latin treatise on historical interpretation. This was followed in 1810 by a textbook on New Testament hermeneutics in German. In both he described this method of interpretation. Ever since, exegetes have generally adopted his term, the "Grammatico-Historical Method", as being descriptive of their own approach to exegesis. The Grammatico-Historical Method has as its aim determining the sense of the words of the text required by the laws of grammar and the facts of history. Perhaps the name may be somewhat misleading because usually reference is made to the *grammatical* — the arrangement of words and construction of sentences. This was not what Keil had in mind, however. When he coined the phrase that has been used as the name for this method, he had in mind the Greek word *gramma*, and thus, his use of the term *grammatico* means the simple, direct, plain, ordinary, and literal sense of the phrases, clauses, and sentences. The "*historical*" sense implied in the name refers to the exegete or interpreter giving careful consideration to the time and the circumstances in which the author wrote. It is the specific meaning which an author's words require when the historical context and background are taken into account. The primary purpose of this method is to ascertain the *usus loquendi*, or the specific usage of words as they have been employed by an individual writer and/or as they have been prevalently used in a Biblical sense during particular era of time. According to the Grammatical-Historical Method, the words and sentences in a particular pericope, or portion of Scripture, "can have only one signification in one and the same connection."<sup>311</sup>

The Grammatical-Historical Method is a method that Lutherans have used for centuries, dating back to the time of Luther himself. In Luther's commentary on Genesis, he repeatedly emphasizes that the divinely inspired author, Moses is actually writing the history of the creation and the fall. In

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<sup>311</sup> Kaiser. pp. 87-88.

commenting on Genesis 3:14, Luther states: “I adhere simply to the historical and literal meaning, which is in harmony with the text. In accordance with this meaning, the serpent remains a serpent, but one dominated by Satan; the woman remains a woman; Adam remains Adam....”<sup>312</sup> He accepted Scripture as true — a true history, and truly the Word of God. Commenting on Luther’s method of interpreting Scripture, the Lutheran theologian Siegbert Becker says, “Luther says that everywhere in Scripture we should cling to the “simple, natural meaning of the words” as that meaning is determined by the rules of grammar and the habits of speech, which he says God has created. If we do not do that, he says, there will be no doctrine about which anything could be settled and proved for certain (cf. WA 18, 701).”<sup>313</sup>

The Grammatical-Historical Method is sometimes referred to as the “literal” method of interpreting Scripture. It is a method that was used by Luther and Melanchthon, as well as a countless host of other Bible scholars who lived before and after them. This method of interpretation relies heavily on the basic principle that Scripture is the verbally inspired and inerrant Word of God. All Bible scholars, up to the time of the rise of the critical school of interpretation, accepted the Bible as such even when they could not agree on the meaning of a section. The Bible was, without doubt or question, the very Word of God. This is the preferred method of interpretation by orthodox or conservative Lutherans, many of whom have been trained using exegesis as Bengel used it at Wuerttemberg years ago. On the other hand, interpreters that do not accept the Bible as the Word of God are either not going to use this method, or will have grave reservations about the findings made through its use. This is not the method of choice for those who are guided by human reason.

Let’s now take a closer look at the Historical-Critical Method.

#### **4.4.2 The Historical-Critical Method**

Christians up to the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century viewed the Scripture as supernatural. Up until this time when a Christian read the Bible wearing the glasses of Christian faith as expressed within God’s Holy Word, this reader had the understanding that there is a God. He understood that this God did not merely create the world and the human race and then step back to observe what would happen to it as time passed. No, the reader knew God as the Creator of all things, who after the fall into sin by Adam and Eve, rescued the fallen human race by sending His only Son as its Redeemer and Savior.

During the past two centuries, there have been various types of criticism that have been popular in the realm of academia. The strongest early criticism was directed mainly against things in the Bible that modern people as a result of science and technology during the Industrial Age could no longer believe. It was a struggle between the orthodox beliefs and what human reason said could and could not be true. People no longer accepted the divine character of Scripture. The Bible was

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<sup>312</sup> Martin Luther. Luther’s Works, Volume 1: Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 1-5. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, p. 185.

<sup>313</sup> Becker. “The Historical-Critical Method of Bible Interpretation.” p. 275.

placed on the same level with works of literature, and thereafter it was read and studied as such. The doctrines of the inspiration and the inerrancy of Scripture were questioned and doubted by some, and outrightly denied by others. As a result many types of biblical criticism arose which are still being used today, also by some Lutherans in various parts of the world.

In the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the historical-critical method became so widely known that it became almost universally accepted not as *an* approach, but as *the* approach. Almost all professors at secular colleges and universities and the majority of professors at theological colleges, universities, and seminaries have been influenced by it and shaped their theological views accordingly. It has become so popular in recent years that many “scholars” regard it as the only acceptable path to follow. Because so many “scholars” and educators have adopted this method, the vast majority of theological writing reflects this view. Students find that the majority, if not all, of the currently recommended theological books have been produced by authors who belong to this camp. This has impacted scholarship to the point where other views may not even be considered, let alone tolerated. When Harvey McArthur was writing his book, *In Search of the Historical Jesus*, he clearly admits that “he deliberately omitted all items from the extreme right” (that is the conservative, orthodox position) “which continues to reject the methods of historiography which have emerged in the last two centuries (p. 185).” When Hans Bartsch edited *Kerygma and Myth*, a series of essays discussing the teachings of Rudolf Bultmann (d. 1976), he claimed that he was approaching the matter objectively without taking sides “except to the extent that he excluded from his book all essays that took the position that it is not necessary to demythologize the New Testament.”<sup>314</sup>

Although this avenue of approach appears scholarly and its goal may appear to be admirable, it should be noted that not every Christian accepts and adheres to it. It may be interesting to study, and even trace the course it follows in interpreting a portion of Scripture. But it should be noted that those who do not accept and follow the historical-critical avenue of approach really are no more fixed in their views and theological positions than are those on the other side that do.

Prior to World War I, just about all historical criticism could be described as source criticism. In this approach, the biblical record is studied with the purpose of determining what source material had been used in the preparation and composition of the books of the Bible to put them in their present form. It was felt that the authors were scholars who wrote the books of the Bible much as any modern professional would write a paper today — doing extensive research and then writing their results, ideas, and conclusions so that their colleagues and others might benefit from their work.

#### 4.4.2.1 Astruc, Graf-Wellhausen

Source criticism began in the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century when a French Roman Catholic doctor of medicine, Jean Astruc, studied the Old Testament and conjectured that Moses must have used sources when he composed the book of Genesis. The basis for this theory is that in the original Hebrew

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<sup>314</sup> Becker. “The Historical-Critical Method of Bible Interpretation.” pp. 272f.

different words are used for God in various places. Rather than looking at the names and seeing them as describing different characteristics, attributes, and qualities of the same God, Astruc theorized that there must have been at least two different authors — one describing God as Jehovah and the other as Elohim. Next, he noticed that there were what he regarded as unnecessary repetitions. Noah was told by God to make the ark 300 cubits long. And, Noah built the ark 300 cubits long. Instead of viewing this as a divine command and the obedient response of a faithful servant of the Lord, Astruc theorized that accounts from at least two different documents were merged together. These ideas of Astruc were picked up by others and applied to the entire Pentateuch. Their conclusion was that Moses could not have written it, and consequently that Jesus and others were mistaken when they referred to the Mosaic authorship in the New Testament. As the years passed, these theories continued to be developed. Letters were assigned to the various portions of the Pentateuch that the various non-Mosaic authors were supposed to have written — J to the portions referring to Jehovah, E to the portions referring to Elohim, D referring basically to the book of Deuteronomy, and P to the portions referring to the Levites, the life and work of the priests, and the religious activities of Israel. Sometime after the Babylonian Captivity, these documents were supposedly combined and assembled by a series of editors, or redactors, who are named simply R<sup>1</sup>, R<sup>2</sup>, etc., and came to exist in their present form. Many were involved in working on these theories, but two of the most prominent in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were the liberal scholars K. H. Graf (d. 1869) and of Julius Wellhausen (d. 1918). Wellhausen picked up where Graf left off. The result was what has come to be known as the Graf-Wellhausen theory from which developed the Documentary Hypothesis.

There are several varieties of the historical-critical method that can be encountered in modern theology. All the forms, however, either outrightly deny or at least to some extent limit the supernatural in the Bible. For example, verbal inspiration is questioned, doubted, or rejected. Miracles are denied, eradicated with some sort of explanation, or merely considered to be unimportant. The accounts of God's providential care and protection as well as His plan of salvation are completely rejected, doubted, or regarded as unimportant. This has happened because as scholars became more and more knowledgeable regarding the things of this world, they applied the same principles, the same "scientific" approaches to God's Holy Word. They now viewed Scripture not with eyes of faith but through the glasses of unbelieving skepticism and put it through the same sort of doubting examination one would use as if purchasing a cow, a piece of real estate, or a famous work of art.

The conservative Lutheran theologian, David Kuske writes: "There is no question that the historical-critical method of interpretation is the prevailing method of Bible interpretation in most of the religious circles of our day. It should now be added that never before in the history of the church has Satan undermined both God's Word and the truth it teaches so quickly in the hearts of so many as he has with this method of interpretation. Not only has the radical method of Bultmann spread through Catholicism, Protestantism and Lutheranism in Europe, but it has also made deep inroads in all three branches of Christianity in the USA. The "moderate" position has infected and

divided the Missouri Synod, and it has its adherents in the other large Lutheran church bodies and such churches as the Southern Baptists also.”<sup>315</sup>

From rationalism’s denial of the supernatural came form, source, and redaction criticism, which searched the Scriptures, not to know Christ, as Jesus encouraged us to do in John 5:39, but to determine whether or not the Scriptures could be true and real according to human reason and logic.

In the modern use of the Historical-Critical Method, the key word has become *critical* much more so than the word *historical*, although the historical aspect is also emphasized, and yet not in the traditional sense of the word historical. Adherents to the Historical-Critical Method are not necessarily critical of the Bible as such. But they do view the content of the Bible through magnifying lenses, scrutinizing and not accepting anything at face value; critically examining what has been written. Everyone who uses the historical-critical method believes, to a greater or lesser degree, that the Bible is a book that was written by authors in a specific historical situation and consequently, they study Scripture in great detail, putting it under a microscope, so to speak, to determine whether what it says is genuine and factual or not. The liberal Lutheran theologian Edgar Krentz stated that there was a tremendous impact on biblical interpretation in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, one which he compared to a theological revolution. “The Scriptures were, so to speak, secularized. The biblical books became historical documents to be studied and questioned like any other ancient sources. The Bible was no longer the criterion for the writing of history, rather history had become the criterion for understanding the Bible....The history it reported was no longer assumed to be everywhere correct.”<sup>316</sup> Reason had determined that what the Bible says is not always correct; at times it is even wrong.

The word *historical* here should not be interpreted in its literal sense, or the sense that Luther and others understood it. In that sense, historical meant that the Bible contains a real, true, and accurate history, and that the people mentioned in Scripture actually lived and did the things that it says they did. That is not the case here. As it is employed by those who follow the Historical-Critical Method, *historical* has a completely different meaning.

Late in the 19<sup>th</sup> century at German universities history was thought of in a two-fold sense and a distinction began to be made between the actual facts, which is referred to as *Historie*, and the interpretation of what those facts meant, or how they are interpreted, which is referred to as *Geschichte*. This is a distinction that needs to be made in any study of history. For example, if we are talking about World War II we can list among the actual facts, i.e., *Historie*, 1) the war was being fought between 1939 and 1945; 2) there were two opposing forces — the axis powers and the allied powers; 3) the war was fought on land, in the air, and on the sea; 4) the allied forces won. As one studies the history of World War II, they need to make a distinction between the

<sup>315</sup> Kuske. “An Analysis Of Three Approaches Of The Historical-Critical Method Of Interpretation: Radical (Bultmann), Moderate (Uniting Lutherans) And Conservative (Boer)”. p. 121.

<sup>316</sup> Becker. “The Historical-Critical Method of Bible Interpretation.” p. 277.

actual facts (*Historie*) and how those facts have been interpreted by others (*Geschichte*) — news reporters who were with the troops, news reporters who merely sat in an office and compiled the information they received from others in order to compose news stories, the scholarly research of historians of the period, the writings of scholars and interested persons who interpolated their views and opinions along with the information received from others, etc. An example of this might be the reasons given dealing with the cause, the *why*, an assortment of *what if* scenarios, etc. — Why did the Japanese attack the US fleet at Pearl Harbor instead of the Russian fleet at Vladivostok? What if the Germans had won the battle of Stalingrad? All things being equal, was Montgomery or Rommel a better general on the African front? Would the war have ended sooner if both Britain and Germany had used rockets? In answers to questions like these, historians often disagree because the answers are really judgments that scholars have made based on the facts. And, at times, this involves pure speculation.

Rationalist Bible interpreters, aware that secular history was being studied in this two-fold way, decided to employ the same technique on the study of the Bible. The history and the persons in the Bible were no longer accepted because the Bible tells us about them. Everything in Scripture needed to be thoroughly examined under the critical eye of the rationalist theologian. Because they denied the supernatural, many things, such as the miracles and prophecies, were immediately rejected. As theologians began to increasingly disavow the doctrines of the inspiration and the inerrancy of the Bible, more and more of Scripture came to be regarded as the word of man instead of being the Word of God as it previously had been believed to be. Thus in the Historical-Critical Method, *historical* has much less to do with the content of the Bible and much more to do with the manner in which Scripture was produced. The authors of Scripture are viewed as human beings who in their writing reflect the opinions and perspectives of the particular time in history in which they were writing. An example of this can be seen in a statement by the liberal Lutheran theologian A.C. Piepkorn, “The documents of the sacred scriptures reflect the scientific and historical information of their times.”<sup>317</sup> For him, the Scriptures are not the inspired Word of God; rather they are the views and opinions of individuals who reflect the situation of the time in which they lived, much as Charles Dickens wrote of London in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. If Scripture is regarded as nothing more than the writings of ordinary, “man on the street” individuals merely reflecting the historical realities of a certain period in time, then it will come under scrutiny like any other human writing.

That is exactly what the rationalistic theologians have done. Scripture has become nothing more than a literary work, a text book of religious ideas and history. For the rationalist, the question is: are those ideas and history accurate, or are they merely the subjective views and opinions of an individual or a group? In using rationalistic literary criticism to determine the nature of the Scriptures, the Historical-Critical Method subjects divine revelation to human scientific investigation. By doing this, not Scripture itself but rather literary criticism becomes the determining factor: “1) as to what is *Historie* and what is *Geschichte* (radical camp); or, 2) as to what is divine

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<sup>317</sup> Becker. “The Historical-Critical Method of Bible Interpretation.” p. 276.

and what is conditioned by the ‘ancient worldview’ (moderate camp); or, 3) as to how the inspiring Spirit associated himself with the conscious or unconscious processes of the human agents who wrote the Scriptures (conservative camp). This extra-scriptural authority concerning the nature of the Scriptures allows the literary critic to: 1) take portions of Scripture which Scripture itself presents as *Historie* and treat them as existential *Geschichte* (radical camp); or, 2) take portions of divine Scripture and treat them as historically conditioned statements (moderate camp); or, 3) define Scripture as a combination of divine truth which is always absolute and of human truth which is always relative (conservative camp).<sup>318</sup> The result of this approach in interpreting the Bible is that everything is viewed subjectively from the perspective of the “critical” interpreter. Hence, the clarity, the historicity, the revelatory nature, the unity, the inerrancy and the authority of Scripture all depend upon the particular subjective interpretation given by the individual “scholar” using this method.

For example, German theologian Gerhard von Rad (d. 1971), a scholar of the Old Testament, concluded “the Old Testament writers profess to be relating history” when, in fact, “they are setting out a theology which bears very little relation to what actually happened.”<sup>319</sup> He was not alone, rather he is but a more recent example of those who have viewed Scripture through the lenses of criticism. For the practitioner of the Historical-Critical Method, history has a new and different meaning.

As we proceed into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the current world-view of Holy Writ denies the supernatural of the Bible, either completely or in part. Even a substantial number of those who refer to themselves as Christians have subscribed to this view. Up until well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this had not been the case. This change in perception has come about as a result of a method of interpretation known as the Historical-Critical Method, which has become “the most commonly accepted form of Bible interpretation in Christendom today.”<sup>320</sup>

The Historical-Critical Method is another influential humanistic manner employed to view and interpret God’s Holy Word. This method of interpretation employs the use of rationalistic literary criticism not only to assist in “understanding the meaning of the words of Scripture” but it also uses this type of criticism “to determine how the Scriptures came into being or what the nature of the Scriptures is.” While it employs the modern triad of the interpretational-hermeneutical approach of the Bible, namely ‘understanding → explanation → application’, when it is mixed with humanism, modernism, and rationalism, the results it mines from its studies seldom support Scripture. More often than not, it casts doubt on many of the doctrines of the church and even goes so far as to reject and deny what the Bible says. The Historical-Critical Method is found in some of the

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<sup>318</sup> Kuske. “An Analysis Of Three Approaches Of The Historical-Critical Method Of Interpretation: Radical (Bultmann), Moderate (Uniting Lutherans) And Conservative (Boer)”. p. 83.

<sup>319</sup> Wenham. p. 23.

<sup>320</sup> Kuske. Biblical Interpretation, p. 37.



Lutheran church bodies and among some of the conservative Reformed or Protestant church bodies.<sup>321</sup> Its effect on Lutheran church bodies in the USA will be mentioned later.

#### 4.4.2.2 The Types of Criticism in the Historical-Critical Method

Throughout its evolutionary history, the Historical-Critical Method has reached out from the criticism first offered by Astruc, Graf, Wellhausen and others. Gordon Wenham in *History, Criticism and Faith*, states: “The most unwavering believer in biblical inspiration requires the techniques of criticism to interpret the Bible.” Among Christians, however, there is a difference in the approach toward Scripture and the degree to which the criticism is carried out. Within the Historical-Critical Method, the Biblical criticism can be divided into six branches: textual criticism, literary or source criticism, form criticism, tradition criticism, redaction criticism, and historical criticism. Although it is possible to view these as individual disciplines, normally they overlap and are commingled.<sup>322</sup> We shall look at each of these six types of criticism.

#### Textual Criticism

Textual criticism involves studying and evaluating the various manuscripts in an attempt to determine what was originally written.<sup>323</sup> Prior to the invention by Gutenberg in the middle of the 15<sup>th</sup> century there was no printing press. Hence all copies prior to this had to be made by hand, sometimes individually — a person copying letter by letter from a previous copy to the one that was being made — and most often in groups — a person reading from one copy and a group of individuals writing what they heard. Through the years copies of copies were reproduced by hand. Over the course of time with a series of copies being made, variations could and did occur. Because there are variations, an examination, comparison, and evaluation of these copies would seem logical. Within the ancient manuscripts there are some variations, or copying errors, for certain verses. None of the variations as set forth in the critical apparatus of the most commonly used copies of the original, the (Hebrew text) Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia and the (Greek text) Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament, present anything that would drastically change what the Bible says. None of the variations affect the doctrines of the Christian church. Most of these variations involve nothing more than going from the singular to the plural or vice versa often brought about by the addition or omission of a single letter. Moreover, through the centuries, some of these copies have been better preserved and hence are in better condition than others. One has to determine if one, old, dirty document actually predates another, or if one was just better preserved than the other. This is textual criticism.

Among the so-called “moderate” Lutherans in the USA today, the use of biblical criticism is commonly justified with the explanation that they merely are doing what the founding fathers of the Lutheran church bodies in the USA did at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. That, however, is not entirely

<sup>321</sup> Kuske. “An Analysis Of Three Approaches Of The Historical-Critical Method Of Interpretation: Radical (Bultmann), Moderate (Uniting Lutherans) And Conservative (Boer)”. p. 83.

<sup>322</sup> Wenham. p. 34.

<sup>323</sup> Wenham. p. 34.

accurate, and has proved to be deceptive and even dangerous to the doctrinal positions within what were the more conservative Lutheran church bodies in the USA. Textual criticism does not judge the truth and the facts of Scripture. It does not judge the authorship and the writing of the individuals chosen by the Holy Spirit to pen Scripture. Its sole purpose is to examine, compare, and evaluate how carefully and accurately the various existing copies of the Biblical texts were made. This manner of doing textual criticism is not the same as that employed by those who follow the historical-critical method, in which, the authorship and the dating of much of the biblical literature was questioned, and the traditional understanding of the great doctrinal truths and ethical principles of the Scriptures often have been rejected.

Prior to World War II, Theodore Engelder, a Missouri Synod seminary professor, in the *Concordia Theological Monthly* wrote: "There is a vast difference between textual criticism and the so-called 'higher-criticism,' which applies arbitrary and subjective standards to various portions of the Bible and denies the fact of inspiration as far as those portions are concerned (X, 1, p. 65)." In the mid 1970's, within the Missouri Synod the position had shifted. Alfred Fuerbringer in *Faithful to Our Calling* wrote that "there is no sharp dividing line" between "form criticism, redaction criticism and other aspects of historical-critical methodology," on the one hand, and textual criticism on the other.<sup>324</sup> In the span of one generation there were those within the LCMS who had chosen to follow a different path in the way they viewed the Bible and their interpretation of it.

### ***Formgeschichte* or Form Criticism**

Form criticism deals with the particular form or genre that has been used. Prose and poetry are different genres, for example. Through studying this, the "scholar" hopes to determine something about the nature of the work and its background, or its setting in life, *Sitz im Leben*.<sup>325</sup>

The study of the oral tradition is referred to as form criticism or *Formgeschichte*. Literally it means the history of the form. It is the first of the stages in rationalistic literary criticism. This method has been applied to both the Old and the New Testaments.

A leading pioneer in the approach known as form criticism was Hermann Gunkel (d. 1932). His primary interest was identifying the various "types of genres of Biblical literature" that developed as a result of what is known as "oral tradition," i.e., the verbal passing down of history from one generation to the next in a time before written records existed. Also important for Gunkel was the *Sitz im Leben*, i.e., the situation in life related to the event or account, be it "a cult, the state, or community," that had an influence or effect upon the account.<sup>326</sup>

In the case of the Gospels, the critic has to decide if something originated in Israel during of Jesus' life. A determination has to be made as to whether or not the story concurs with the Jewish culture

<sup>324</sup> Becker. "The Historical-Critical Method of Bible Interpretation." pp. 284-285.

<sup>325</sup> Wenham. pp. 39-40.

<sup>326</sup> Kaiser. p. 64.

and history of the day. On the basis of this, a decision is made as to whether or not the story has any veracity. If the study concludes that the story does not conflict with the Jewish culture and history of that day, the critic has an account of a *Sitz im Leben* from Israel during the first half of the first century AD. The critic knows that the story could have happened, but there is no certainty that it did happen.

Disciples of Gunkel include Sigmund Mowinckel (d. 1965) who applied it to the Psalms; George E. Mendenhall (famed archaeologist at the University of Michigan) who applied it to the covenant treaties that occur in the Old Testament; and Karl Ludwig Schmidt (d. 1956), Martin Dibelius (d. 1947), and Rudolf Bultmann (d. 1976) who all applied it to their studies of the New Testament.<sup>327</sup>

Scholars who use and have used the method known as form criticism believe that stories in the gospels can be categorized according to several different types of literature. There is no apparent agreement as to how this classification should be done. The German scholar Dibelius (d. 1947) was one of the first to apply Form Criticism to the Gospels in the New Testament. He is credited with devising six different types of form criticism. Those six types are: 1) the story of Jesus' passion; 2) the paradigms, short stories about Jesus illustrating a teaching or a maxim of Jesus that occurs at the conclusion of the story; 3) the tales, the accounts of Jesus' miracles; 4) the legends, stories about people who were associated with Jesus; 5) the sayings, collections of longer and more detailed teachings of Jesus; and 6) the myths, stories that deal with the divinity of Jesus, for example, His virgin birth, His transfiguration, His resurrection, and His ascension.<sup>328</sup>

Form Criticism contends that the first Christians over a period of some thirty to fifty years (30-80 AD), or maybe even a century, orally repeated stories about various events from Jesus' life as well as portions of His teachings. These were not written down. They merely passed on from one person to other individuals or groups of individuals. Their purpose was not to preserve historic fact and accurately describe in detail what had happened. They merely wanted to share their viewpoint of faith. For them, Jesus was a type of "Super Hero" who they wanted to share with others. Thus in the course of time, some details were enhanced, others diminished, and still others omitted as the legend continued to grow. The early Christians may even have added to or changed the account so as to reflect a perspective and an emphasis that was prevalent at the time.<sup>329</sup>

According to this approach, then, what the Bible says did not really happen. Practitioners of Form Criticism tell us that what is written in the Gospels is not something for which the apostles were present; they could not have seen it with their own eyes or heard it with their own ears. Therefore what we have today is not an actual eyewitness account. The Scriptures cannot be understood in a literal sense. They prefer to think of these things as stories that were passed around by word of mouth. As it was passed from region to region, it was adapted to make it relevant to the community. Passing from Galilee to Judea via Samaria or Perea, and vice versa, these stories

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<sup>327</sup> Kaiser. pp. 64-65.

<sup>328</sup> Becker. p. 291.

<sup>329</sup> Schuetze. "Neo-Orthodoxy—The 'New' Threat To Our Christian Heritage." p. 130.

were acclimated according to the particular culture of the area. Each local storyteller interpreted the story in their own way and put their own theological spin on it as they told it. For the form critic, Scripture is nothing more than a series of records that have been molded according to the views and opinions of the human who shaped and developed them. The form critic must, therefore, strip all the embellishments and separate fact from fiction. As the process continued, an earlier version of the story or form was encountered. The critic continued researching in order to determine how the form was originally used. "The original use of the form, the *Sitz im Leben*, might have been as part of a sermon," or it could have been something used in the liturgy, or it could have been something that was used while teaching. Thus they believed they could discover the original use of the form. As they approached the synoptic gospels, the literary critics identified two main categories, one being the sayings and the other being the narratives. The sayings were subdivided in various ways, however two very popular subdivisions were the *apophthegmata* (i.e. a saying of Jesus that is connected to a short story that) and the *logia* (i.e. a saying of Jesus that lacks any accompanying story or event). The narratives were also subdivided into two groups, the miracle stories and the legends. A legend is a story that may or may not be historically based yet it has some value in that it instructs the reader about a truth. They believe that the Scriptural account of Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection is an example of a story or legend that was formulated and then recorded as having been true. The stories of the miracles provided some form of instruction in an entertaining way.<sup>330</sup>

Form criticism is the type of biblical criticism that is most popular today. This type of criticism began as a result of studies done on the Old Testament. While conceding that the events recorded in the Old Testament might contain a kernel of historical truth, scholars determined that these are really nothing more than accounts of community experience that have been passed on from one generation of believer to the next. The same type of results was produced when the New Testament was studied. Particularly in regard to what is written in the Gospels, it was felt that these are nothing more than a collection of stories and legends which the first Christians told. These were then passed on from generation to generation by word of mouth perhaps as parents today tell their children the fairy tales that originated with the Brothers Grimm or with Hans Christian Andersen.

There is a strong similarity between source criticism and form criticism. Source criticism looks for previously existing written sources. It is unable to do this, however, because no copies of these source documents have ever been found and thus can not be examined and studied. Form criticism seeks to find, track, and examine the oral accounts which were passed along. Kaiser and Kummel (*Exegetical Method*) tell us that from the beginning of their investigative research the form critic assumes that even if it is impossible to determine with certainty what a particular oral tradition was, the researcher can still proceed with certainty that this oral tradition "took shape in the believing community (p. 43)."<sup>331</sup>

<sup>330</sup> Kuske. "An Analysis Of Three Approaches Of The Historical-Critical Method Of Interpretation: Radical (Bultmann), Moderate (Uniting Lutherans) And Conservative (Boer)". p. 86.

<sup>331</sup> Becker. "The Historical-Critical Method of Bible Interpretation." p. 289.

Form criticism operates with the general principle that one cannot use the four Gospels as a primary source for information about the life and work of Jesus Christ. Many of them feel that the Gospels have been altered to such an extreme that they cannot provide reliable information. Harald Riesenfeld and Birger Gerhardsson, two Scandinavian scholars, hold that “the original gradation was already in fixed form by the time that Paul wrote his epistles and that the community exercised rather strict control over the tradition.” And some of the more “moderate” critics believe that “one can show by the historical-critical method that the synoptic gospels contain a considerable amount of eyewitness material.” Just about all form critics agree that the primary value of the Gospels is that they provide information regarding the beliefs of the early Christian church.<sup>332</sup>

The form critics are universally agreed that, at least to some extent, there has been a modification to original tradition. They only differ in the degree to which this modification has taken place. The German theologian Guenther Bornkamm, in his book *Jesus of Nazareth*, tells us: “The critical exegete and the historian is therefore obliged, in questions concerning the history of tradition, to speak often of ‘authentic’ or ‘inauthentic’ words of Jesus and thus to distinguish words of the historical Jesus from ‘creations of the church.’”<sup>333</sup> In the Autumn 1963 issue of *Dialog* in an article entitled *Scripture, Tradition and the Traditions*, “moderate” Missouri Synod theologian Robert Schultz tells us that it is “not possible for us to think — as Christians for many generations could assume — that the New Testament gives us the very words of Jesus and the apostles. We cannot even assume that large sections of the New Testament were given their present formulation by the apostles.”<sup>334</sup> While they acknowledge the presence of Jesus and attribute words and actions to this Jesus, they deny that this Jesus was and is, at the same time, true God and true man, the promised Savior; moreover they reject the accounts of what Jesus did and said as being genuine.

The practitioner of the historical-critical method does not accept the Bible as the wholly inspired and inerrant Word of God in the same way as an orthodox Bible-believer does. These two doctrines — Biblical inspiration and Biblical inerrancy — are closely linked. A person either accepts these and believes the Bible to be true and authoritative, or they do not. If one has doubts, concerns, or misgivings about either of these two doctrines, such a person really is not a Bible-believer. They may be a Bible-doubter. They may be a partial Bible-believer. They may be a Bible-denier. However, they are not really a Bible-believer. The historical-critical method no matter which form it takes, by its very nature, has to deny the orthodox doctrines of the inspiration and the inerrancy of Scripture. Conservative theologian Robert Preus, former president of Concordia Seminary in Fort Wayne, Indiana, (a seminary in the Missouri Synod) once said, “I have never found a Lutheran who has even tried to harmonize our Confessional high view of Scripture with the form-critical method (Quoted by Louis Praamsma, “Authority and Interpretation of Confessional

<sup>332</sup> Becker. “The Historical-Critical Method of Bible Interpretation.” p. 290.

<sup>333</sup> Guenther Bornkamm. *Jesus of Nazareth*. New York: Harper, p. 20.

<sup>334</sup> Robert Schultz. “Scripture, Tradition and the Traditions” *Dialog*. Autumn 1963, p. 277.

Standards,” in Kistemaker. *Interpreting God’s Word Today*. p. 218.)<sup>335</sup> That was more than thirty years ago. Sadly, he could not say the same thing today about his own Missouri Synod.

Becker points out that “Whenever men have given up the doctrine of biblical inerrancy, they have eventually come to realize and admit that if the premise is once accepted, the doctrine of verbal inspiration simply cannot be maintained for long.”<sup>336</sup> Biblical inerrancy and Biblical inspiration go hand in hand. They are closely linked; they are knit together into a whole.

Leigh Jordahl, a liberal Lutheran theologian in what was the LCA (Lutheran Church of America), wrote: “The classical Lutheran doctrine of verbal inspiration, as so vigorously articulated by Franz Pieper and Missouri’s entire tradition, is utterly antithetical to the historical-critical method. Outside of Missouri I know of no theologian who even tries to hold both views (Editorial: “Old Missouri is Gone.” *Dialog*. XIII. Spring, 1974).”<sup>337</sup> In other words, Missouri theologians just a few decades ago were straddling the fence, trying to say the Bible is inspired and unerring while at the same time trying to use the historical-critical method – speaking out of both sides of their mouth. Many do not fervently adhere to the doctrine of verbal inspiration as did their theological fathers.

When the more liberal theologians of the Missouri Synod first tried to introduce the historical-critical method into the LCMS, they encountered stiff opposition from those who did not want to forsake the doctrine of Biblical inerrancy. To persuade others to go along with their way of thinking, the liberal theologians had to redefine the meaning of inerrancy. Up to that point, the entire Missouri Synod had asserted that there were absolutely no errors in the Bible whatsoever. The new meaning of inerrancy came to mean that errors could exist in the Bible. But in this light, errors took on a new meaning. An error now meant “a mistake that was made intentionally in order to deceive.” These scholars went on to claim that the mistakes which the holy writers made were not intentional, or even if they were done on purpose, they were not made with the intent of deceiving people but of glorifying God.

Having changed the LCMS view on inerrancy, the liberal theologians proceeded to tackle the doctrine of inspiration. Previously, it had been believed without a single reservation that inspiration was an act by the Holy Spirit in which the holy writers were given the very thoughts that they expressed and the very words with which they expressed them. Retooled and re-fabricated, the new doctrine of inspiration, currently accepted and promulgated by most of the LCMS, states that inspiration is “the breath of God working in and through the Scripture” and “the inspiration of the written word pertains to the effective power of the Scriptures to bring men and women to salvation through the Gospel (*Faithful to Our Calling*, p. 37).” Accepting these new doctrines of the LCMS relegates the Bible to nothing more than an “inspiring” book that touches the hearts of its reader and motivates them to live better lives. True, the Bible is a book that inspires and motivates, but for the orthodox it is far more; it is the Word of God.

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<sup>335</sup> Becker. “The Historical-Critical Method of Bible Interpretation.” p. 305.

<sup>336</sup> Becker. “The Historical-Critical Method of Bible Interpretation.” p. 305.

<sup>337</sup> Becker. “The Historical-Critical Method of Bible Interpretation.” p. 306.

## The “Forms” of Form Criticism

For the form critic, these various types or forms of literature represent the various stages in the evolutionary development of the Gospel. Bultmann refers to them as “layers” which compose the Gospels. In *Jesus and the Word*, he writes, “Critical investigation shows that the whole tradition about Jesus which appears in the three synoptic Gospels is composed of a series of layers which can on the whole be clearly distinguished, although the separation at some points is difficult and doubtful (p. 12).” These layers represent the various stages in which the early church gradually developed a picture of Jesus. In those days, it was believed that the religion, customs, etc., differed among the peoples living in various parts of Israel and the surrounding areas — Galilean Jews were different than Judean Jews, Jews were different than proselytes, Jews were different than Samaritans, Jews were also different than the non-Jewish people who lived in the outlying areas, etc. — consequently there was a difference in the stories that developed about Jesus. The place in which and the conditions under which these stories developed are referred to as *Sitz im Leben* or place in life. Once the form critic is able to determine the *Sitz im Leben* of a story, they are able to determine how this story originated and how factual it may or may not be. Kaiser and Kummel refer to the importance of knowing the class of people because this would influence the particular spin that was put on a story reflecting special interests and seeking to gain some particular benefit. For example, the feeding of the 5000 is considered by some form critics to refer to the celebration of the Lord’s Supper with the purpose of showing that Jesus could distribute his body to thousands of people scattered throughout the Roman Empire. Spivey and Smith conclude that “the miracle may be a post resurrection story,” and therefore “the historical critic is justified in questioning the historical probability of this miraculous feeding even apart from considerations of whether the event could have happened (p. 194ff).”<sup>338</sup>

The conclusions drawn by the earlier form critics are now being scrutinized by modern form critics. The result is that some of the earlier findings are becoming more and more questionable as they are compared to later discoveries. Davies tells us that earlier critics thought that Judaism in Israel was radically different from the life and culture of Jews living outside of Israel. Today, however, it has become apparent that these differences were “grossly exaggerated” (p. 26). Some years ago, C.H. Dodd concluded that the speeches of Jesus bore elements foreign to the places in which they supposedly were spoken. Consequently, he felt that these could not be considered to be historical. (p. 83). Regarding form criticism have become critical of the conclusions of past critics. N.A. Dahl says, “in spite of the very fruitful beginnings of form criticism ... the study of form has not yielded objective criteria for separating older from later material to the degree expected (p. 131).”<sup>339</sup>

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<sup>338</sup> Becker. “The Historical-Critical Method of Bible Interpretation.” p. 292.

<sup>339</sup> Becker. “The Historical-Critical Method of Bible Interpretation.” p. 293.

### **Quellengeschichte or Source Criticism**

Although source criticism was used first by Astruc, Graf, Wellhausen, and others; and although it was the predominant type of criticism prior to World War I, it is actually the second stage of rationalistic literary criticism.

Source criticism involves determining what, if any, literary sources may have been used by the biblical writer.<sup>340</sup> The holy and inspired writers of Scripture did make reference to other writings. For example, Moses referred to the Psalmist when he wrote the Pentateuch. Paul referred to the Greek poets in one of his epistles. Source criticism could be done in a proper manner to indicate that these quotations are valid and true. That is far different from the source criticism that follows in the footsteps of Astruc, Graf, Wellhausen, and others who developed the JEDP theory and theories like this based on the particular words and content within various books, which seek to discredit rather than credit. Often overlooked in a field of study like source criticism is the fact that when multiple accounts exist, one of them may have been written chronologically and another thematically. Rather than accept this in faith, as Bible-believers have done for centuries, human reason took over the hearts and minds of these individuals resulting in a theory of sources. The created supplanted the Creator. The thoughts and words of a human being supreme to the Word of God.

The literary critics, after their success in secular literature, turned to Scripture and applied the same techniques. It was assumed that Scripture began as a series of stories passed on from community to community and passed on from generation to generation. This was the oral tradition with which the form critic dealt. Then sometime later, the word-of-mouth stories were gradually transferred into written form. This became the domain of the source critic.

Liberal scholars have put on their source criticism eyeglasses and poured through the pages of the New Testament. While the Pauline epistles have also passed under their watchful eye, the most scrutiny has been focused on the four Gospels, and especially the three Synoptic Gospels — Matthew, Mark, and Luke — because of the similarities between them. They believed that some time between the years 60 and 120 AD, the transference from oral to written form took place for the Synoptic Gospels. A problem developed, however, as to how these independent pericopes or accounts could be so similar in wording and content and yet be very different in content and in the order in which the events took place. This problem became known as “the Synoptic Problem.” To solve the problem, various sources were “discovered”, thereby leading to the theory that various written documents were predecessors to the Gospels. These scholars have concluded that Mark had to be the first of the gospels to be written, and it probably was based on some sort of predecessor documentation, which they named *Ur-Markus*. According to the theory, this same source document was also a predecessor to the Gospels of both Matthew and Luke, thus explaining how the three Gospels have similarities. There is also another source document named

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<sup>340</sup> Wenham. pp. 35-39.



Q which is supposedly a second source for Matthew and Luke; thereby explaining the similarities that these two have in common but which makes them different from Mark. Q is an abbreviation for the German word *Quelle*, which means source. So when these scholars say that the source is Q, they are actually saying that the source is the source. Because Matthew has information that is found neither in Mark nor in Luke, they theorize that there must be an additional source document which they have named M. And because Luke has information that is found neither in Matthew nor in Mark, they theorize that there must be an additional source document which they have named L. Just as there was a development and evolution that supposedly took place during the oral tradition stage, so also during the written stage there was an evolution of the text. “This means that the interpreter may now have to reckon with a preservation (written stage) of an interpretation (the oral stage), or an interpretation of a transformation, or the transformation of a creation, etc.”<sup>341</sup>

Although not everyone can concur with the conclusions drawn by the so-called moderates and liberal scholars who postulate these theories, almost everyone has to admire the zeal and dedication that they put into their efforts — the long, arduous hours, the months and years of in-depth study — to fulfill their task and accomplish their aim, whether it be a conscious or an unconscious effort to discredit the Bible. Would that all biblical and theological scholarship were that zealous and dedicated to uphold the Bible as the inerrant, inspired Word!

Source criticism denies the verbal inspiration of Scripture and rejects it as the inerrant Word of God. Following a course set by earlier rationalism, it also discounts the possibility of the miracles. Moreover, it seeks to discredit any specific prophecy. The second half of Isaiah, for example, which speaks about the Babylonian Captivity is considered to have been written by someone other than the prophet Isaiah because it speaks about something that occurred in the century following the prophet’s death. Scholars regard this as a benefit of the historical-critical method because they no longer have to deal with the concept that the entire book was written at the same time, i.e., before something happened. Following what began with Darwin’s theory of evolution (1859), biblical critics devised a theory that faith and religious life among the early Jews in Israel also evolved. By piecing together the various source documents and rearranging them, scholars could see a continual and progressive development in the faith and life of the people of Israel. C.H. Dodd concluded “when once we have got the documents in their true chronological order the broad rhythms of the history stand out firm and clear (*The Authority of the Bible*, p.261)”. Two centuries after Astruc first postulated his theory source criticism had failed to produce any firm results upon which scholars could agree. An increasing number of scholars began to regard source criticism as futile, feeling that there was little, if anything, to be gained by continuing to pursue it. W.D. Davies in his book *Invitation to the New Testament* referred to the source documents J,E,D,P,H,S,Q,M,L, etc. as “shadowy anonymities” (1966, p. 121). “No one exactly knew what those documents contained, and no one knew by whom or when they were written....two hundred years after Astruc they still remained ‘conjectures’ or ‘guesses.’”<sup>342</sup>

<sup>341</sup> Kuske, David. “An Analysis Of Three Approaches Of The Historical-Critical Method Of Interpretation: Radical (Bultmann), Moderate (Uniting Lutherans) And Conservative (Boer)”. p. 86.

<sup>342</sup> Becker. “The Historical-Critical Method of Bible Interpretation.” p. 288.

### ***Redaktionsgeschichte* or Redaction Criticism**

Redaction criticism views the final written account as it exists in the Bible as being a compilation of information that was assembled, edited, and pieced together through a redaction or editing process. Using redaction criticism, the scholar tries to determine what sources the redactor used, what was added, what was omitted, and the particular bias that the redactor imposed upon the written account.<sup>343</sup> What exists in the Bible, redaction critics feel, was only what was of interest and only served the purposes of the authors in the past. The accounts themselves, it is believed, have been altered and modified to express the views and opinions of a certain group at a certain time in history. Once again, the doctrines of the inspiration and the inerrancy of Scripture come into play. Only those who would deny these orthodox doctrines can approach Scripture in a way that would regard it as anything else other than the wholly inspired and inerrant Word of God.

This is the third stage through which the “critics” would have us believe that the synoptic Gospels passed. This stage of the development supposedly occurred between 80–200 AD. Redaction criticism is interested in the theological motivations that were involved in “deciding what was to be included, how it was to be arranged, and what shape the material would take.”<sup>344</sup> Because the final written account of each of the evangelists is set forth in an orderly manner with a discernible general plan or theme, the conclusion has been made that apparently someone served as an editor or redactor to join together the isolated fragments of the oral tradition and the haphazardly written sources. To make each gospel account flow, the redactor not only arranged the parts of the source materials but also was involved with “adding or omitting, interpreting or reinterpreting, emphasizing or deemphasizing” the content. The redactors have also been given credit for “setting the scene”, so to speak or establishing the temporal, geographical, etc. settings which occur in the text. Consequently, “if the redactor did take something from the written source, the interpreter today is faced with the distinct possibility that he may be reading an addition (redaction) to an interpretation (written stage) of a transformation (oral stage), or a deemphasizing of a transformation of a creation and so on.”<sup>345</sup>

Bultmannian disciples Günther Bornkamm of Heidelberg, Hans Conzelmann of Göttingen, and Willi Marxsen are included among the scholars who have been involved with redaction criticism.<sup>346</sup> “Liberal theologians, such as Willi Marxsen, see the resurrection of Jesus as a theological interpretation rather than a historical event. Jesus, the source of life, becomes alive in the minds of those who believe in him. So, a general resurrection in some future day is but a theological

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<sup>343</sup> Wenham. p. 41.

<sup>344</sup> Walter C Kaiser. p. 65.

<sup>345</sup> Kuske, David. “An Analysis Of Three Approaches Of The Historical-Critical Method Of Interpretation: Radical (Bultmann), Moderate (Uniting Lutherans) And Conservative (Boer)”. p. 87.

<sup>346</sup> Kaiser. p. 65.

statement, a belief in a life-giving God.”<sup>347</sup> There is a similarity in the way both Bultmann and Marxsen interpret Scripture.

### ***Religionsgeschichte* Or The Influence Of Various Religious Philosophies**

As each of the gospels supposedly passed through these three stages of development during the first two centuries AD, the sources were influenced by various religious philosophies. The study of this influence by these religious philosophies is referred to as *Religionsgeschichte*. In this study, the emphasis is to identify what had been incorporated from the religious environment of the period and to show how it was changed into biblical thought. So, if something was discovered that reflects a Hellenistic or Jewish thought, for example, it may *a priori* be eliminated as historical and thus not something that specifically pertains to Jesus. By following this procedure, the interpreter supposedly can identify what is unique and distinctive in the religious thoughts of Jesus as we have them in the gospel accounts.<sup>348</sup>

Those who ardently support this type of literary criticism refer to it as being “scientific” and “scholarly.” This is the position wholeheartedly endorsed by liberal Lutherans in the USA. Those who want to seek “the middle ground” or “straddle the fence” and not “rock the boat” attempt to find some merit and value within the historical-critical method, while not completely embracing all of its tenets. These people tend to refer to it as being “not inherently incompatible with a believing study of the Bible.” This is the position adhered to by the so-called “moderate” Lutherans in the USA. Those of us who believe and accept the Bible note that this form of literary criticism starts with a human presupposition, proceeds through its stages with a human perspective, and results with a human conclusion. This theory begins with a totally false view of how the Bible came into being. It also places the human interpreter above the Bible as the arbiter of what Scripture says and means. The created is placed above the Creator. This all comes about because every one of the historical critical types of criticism — oral, source, redaction and religious criticism — are rooted in rationalism which denies the supernatural.<sup>349</sup> The orthodox, conservative Lutherans in the USA neither embrace the Historical-Critical Method nor accept the findings of its many facets.

### **Tradition Criticism**

Tradition criticism involves itself with how the account was passed on from generation to generation before it came to have its final written form.<sup>350</sup> It could be likened to the old parlor game in which a group of people are seated at a table and one person whispers a saying, a poem, or a short narration in the ear of the first person in the group. That person, in turn, whispers it in the ear

<sup>347</sup> “Lectionary Bible Studies and Sermons” **Pumpkin Cottage Ministry Resources**. [www.lectionarystudies.com](http://www.lectionarystudies.com). <http://www.lectionarystudies.com/sunday6ce.html>

<sup>348</sup> Kuske, David. “An Analysis Of Three Approaches Of The Historical-Critical Method Of Interpretation: Radical (Bultmann), Moderate (Uniting Lutherans) And Conservative (Boer)”. p. 87.

<sup>349</sup> Kuske, David. “An Analysis Of Three Approaches Of The Historical-Critical Method Of Interpretation: Radical (Bultmann), Moderate (Uniting Lutherans) And Conservative (Boer)”. p. 87.

<sup>350</sup> Wenham. pp. 40-41.

of the next person, and so on, until the message has been passed around the entire group. At times, there are only minor changes. Other times, however, the final message has been radically changed from the first. Using this approach, scholars seek to determine if the final written message has deviated from the original. The results are highly subjective speculation reflecting presuppositions and positions held by the scholar. This type of criticism would, at best, have to question and, at worst, totally deny the orthodox doctrine that God breathed every word into the minds of the divinely appointed authors of Scripture.

### **Historical Criticism**

Historical criticism can involve a variety of disciplines. Three very prominent are: 1) the dating of a document, “when was it written?”; 2) the veracity of the information, “is it telling the truth?”; 3) the historical accuracy of the account, “did the event actually happen? Did it occur exactly as it is recorded in Scripture?”<sup>351</sup> The need for this type of study arose from the fact that the original autographs, or hand-written manuscripts, no longer exist. Many were destroyed when the library at Alexandria burned prior to the birth of Christ. Only copies exist today. The oldest Old Testament manuscripts are from the post-exilic inter-testamental period.

### **Application and Analysis of the Historical Critical Method in the USA**

Paul Tillich tended to think of this approach as nothing more than historical research, separating the possible from the impossible, the probable from the improbable. To do this it is necessary to study not only the Bible, but any other related material. Then, like a crime scene investigator, one pours through the evidence to determine if what the Bible says is true or not. In an article entitled “Event and Interpretation in the Old Testament”, Martin Woudstra writes, “the historical method by its own admission cannot accept at face value the biblical contentions concerning past events as being true and subject to no contradiction or doubt (p. 70).”<sup>352</sup>

The moderates in the Missouri Synod certainly would not want to be thought of as being critical toward Scripture or “finding fault with the Bible,” yet by their very use of the historical-critical method they are, in fact, claiming the right to judge the Scriptures. And, if even after all their careful scrutinizing, they conclude that the Bible is true and they accept what it says “because they have demonstrated to their own satisfaction that it is true, the method would still be unworthy of the Christian, who says with Samuel, ‘Speak Lord, for your servant is listening’ (1 Samuel 3:9).”<sup>353</sup>

It would seem to be an impossibility for anyone who claims to accept the historical-critical method to accept everything written in Scripture as being true. Moderates trying to bridge the gap between the liberal and conservative approaches to biblical interpretation make a distinction between the historical and the theological sides of Scripture. The Missouri Synod theologian Paul Bretscher

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<sup>351</sup> Wenham. pp. 42-45.

<sup>352</sup> Becker. “The Historical-Critical Method of Bible Interpretation.” p. 278.

<sup>353</sup> Becker. “The Historical-Critical Method of Bible Interpretation.” p. 278.

refers to the theological as that part of Scripture that is from God and the historical as the part of Scripture from human beings. The historical part treats the authorship, the historicity, and the factuality of the people and events in the Bible. In *After the Purifying*, he says “It is not appropriate, therefore to approach such questions,” namely what he considers the human side, “by appealing to the Bible’s inspiration and authority. We must rather summon the soundest reasoning of which we are capable, based on a careful gathering and examination of the literary evidence (p. 87).”<sup>354</sup>

Unlike the moderates, the more radical of the critical scholars have a more liberal position and leap at the opportunity to judge anything and everything in Scripture without the slightest hesitation. They regard themselves as being more intelligent and more highly-educated than any previous generation. The obvious result is their conclusion that they know more about what is in Scripture than did the original authors. Bultmann spoke of how far modern mankind has advanced as a result of science and technology, indeed so far advanced that it would be impossible for anyone to seriously have the New Testament view of the world. “Now that the forces and laws of nature have been discovered, we can no longer believe in spirits, whether good or evil.” With views such as this gaining acceptance in theological circles, it was not long before the apostles were regarded as gullible intellectuals with all of the common misconceptions of their day. Even Jesus was placed on this level. CH Dodd, in *The Authority of the Bible*, writes: “Jesus, as he is represented, shared the views of his contemporaries regarding the authorship of the books of the Old Testament, or the phenomena of ‘demon possession’ — views which we could not accept without violence to our sense of truth (p 237).”<sup>355</sup>

Those who espouse the historical-critical method readily admit that it is a method of doubt. It is an approach based on probabilities — what is more probable? What is less probable? Paul Tillich said that the historian could never attain complete certainty using the historical-critical method; they could, however, reach a degree of high probability. He held that that the ideal of any historical research is to attain a high degree of probability. But he had to admit that in many cases doing so was impossible.

Among those that use this approach there is no sense of complete agreement. In many cases there is only confusion when one compares the findings of one scholar against another. One may, after diligent research, conclude that something is highly probable. Another, however, with equally due diligence concludes that the very same thing is highly unlikely.<sup>356</sup> Often the findings of one scholar gain prominence and acceptance due to the respect others have for the individual. It does not really matter what this person’s findings might be — the Red Sea was nothing more than a marsh, for example, —but because others respect and admire this person so much, this person’s findings are passed on to others, and thus become widely spread and generally accepted. Why not postulate something like the moon is nothing more than a big wheel of cheese? Many children throughout the world actually believe this today, even though it has been more than thirty years

<sup>354</sup> Becker. “The Historical-Critical Method of Bible Interpretation.” p. 278.

<sup>355</sup> Becker. “The Historical-Critical Method of Bible Interpretation.” p. 279.

<sup>356</sup> Becker. “The Historical-Critical Method of Bible Interpretation.” pp. 279-280.

since Neil Armstrong and other astronauts walked on the moon. But history will tell us that as recently as when our parents or grandparents were children, this was widely believed in the United States.

The diversity of conclusions that the practitioners of the historical-critical method obtain may be enlightening. I will cite two examples. The first has to do with Jesus' trial before the Sanhedrin. Some have concluded that the trial could not have taken place because if it had, it would have been contrary to Jewish law and no Jewish court would have violated its own law. Other scholars, such as Ethelbert Stauffer (*Jesus and His Story*), conclude that the trial clearly followed and was consistent with the Jewish law of the day. Thus, based on what is known about Jewish law the account in the Gospels must be reliable. He does not accept it because it is written in the Bible, but because his own diligent research has convinced him that this is what one could logically expect to be a reality. Others, like N.A. Dahl tell us that our knowledge of that history is "extremely limited." Whether or not the Sanhedrin actually had the power to pronounce the death penalty is an open question that has yet to be resolved. Still others contend, along with Spivey and Smith (*Anatomy of the New Testament*), that no record exists in which any Jewish court ever condemned someone claiming to be the Messiah. The account of Jesus' trial therefore was "perhaps" nothing more than an anti-Semitic story devised by the early church. The views and opinions of all four of these are self-admittedly merely conjecture characterized by probability. Yet when these opinions, conjectured findings, theories, and conclusions are publicly expressed in lectures or through the media it is as if it were "a pronouncement from above" or a decree issued by the Vatican; these are widely accepted as if they were true and accurate.<sup>357</sup>

A second example has to do with the authorship of John's Gospel. Even well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century it was generally accepted by all of the critical scholars that the fourth gospel could not have been written in the first century by the Apostle John. In 1920, a portion of a manuscript for John's Gospel was discovered, which experts said was written early in the second century. Consequently there was a shift of opinion among the critical scholars to an earlier date for the writing. In 1926, Rudolf Bultmann in his *Jesus and the Word*, concluded that the John's Gospel was not a reliable source for Jesus' teachings and therefore did not refer to the fourth gospel. C.H. Dodd in 1958, said that it was not at all impossible that John's Gospel contained "personal reminiscences" although he heavily discounted the evidence pointing to this (*The Authority of the Bible*, p. 88). In 1962, Reginald Fuller wrote that there was a possibility that the fourth Gospel was written much earlier than the commonly accepted date (*The New Testament in Current Study*, p. 131). In 1957, William Albright in *From Stone Age to Christianity* concluded that John was the last of the Gospels to be written. Yet after the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered, Albright concluded that John was the earliest of the Gospels to be written and that the words attributed to Jesus were actually spoken by him (Sandmel, *We Jews and Jesus*, p 105.) Harvey McArthur concluded that there is probably more actual history in John's Gospel than previously acknowledged, but one still had to be cautious in determining what actually was historical. In 1941, Emil Brunner stated that of all the

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<sup>357</sup> Becker. "The Historical-Critical Method of Bible Interpretation." pp. 280-281.

work that biblical criticism had done, the most important result was that the accounts of Jesus' teachings in the Synoptic Gospels differed from the account in John's Gospel, and consequently the gospel of John should be eliminated from consideration as a source when studying the literal record of Jesus' teachings and miracles (*Revelation and Reason*, p. 288).<sup>358</sup>

In examples such as these, one cannot help but notice that through the years there is a backing and forthing of position in concert with the ebb and flow of theological thought. What one of the leaders of this movement considered to be "the most important result" of using the historical-critical method is seriously questioned and doubted by others. It is strange; therefore, that there are those who would still claim that such an approach would actually help one better understand the Bible. With an approach that attains such tentative conclusions of such diverse positions on the same issue, one wonders how such an approach would expect others to regard its answers as being competent and credible. As the historical-critical theologians positionalize their views, their diverse positions are hardly in agreement; they are not lined up in a straight line; they do not even form a circle, but rather they are scattered in every direction. Yet apparently such vacillation of opinion is commonly acceptable by theologians today. Some, such as Edgar Krentz, even regard them as being self-correcting. Others, such as Brunner, feel that it does not matter how strong the criticism or how little of the Gospel actually remains, there will always be a sufficient remnant of the Gospel to cling to in faith.<sup>359</sup> On this, as on other issues, there is a lack of complete agreement. Some might concur; others definitely would not.

One thing is common among those who utilize the historical-critical method: the scholar is always elevated, admittedly or not, to a position above Scripture in which the scholar judges the veracity and the factuality of the Bible. This is apparently no problem for the critic because the majority of them have a very limited concept of God, if they believe in God at all, and almost all of them doubt or even deny that Scripture is the Word of God.

Such critics tend to regard themselves as being neutral and unbiased. The faculty of Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri, a seminary of the LCMS, is among those that believe this. In *Faithful to Our Calling*, they declared that "in and of itself the so-called 'historical-critical' methodology is neutral (p. 41)." What they want to imply is that they approach their study of the Bible without prejudice. Paul Tillich in his *Systematic Theology* writes: "The historical method asks how trustworthy the records are in every particular case, how dependent they are on older sources, how much they might have been influenced by the credulity of the period, how well confirmed they are by other independent sources, in what styles they are written and for what purpose they are used in the whole context (vol. II, p. 103f)." They claim that they can study an historic account in the Bible objectively, i.e., without preconceived ideas as to whether it is right or wrong, whether it is fact or fiction. One has to ask how this method can be neutral when its very existence depends on the assumption that truth and error in Scripture can be separated through historical research. When one performs a task assuming, even before the task is begun, that a

<sup>358</sup> Becker. "The Historical-Critical Method of Bible Interpretation." pp. 281-283.

<sup>359</sup> Becker. "The Historical-Critical Method of Bible Interpretation." p. 283.

problem exists, that is not a neutral approach. It is not an objective approach. It is a subjective approach. Their very methodology has the purpose of finding error and discrediting events, miracles, and prophecies. In reality, what is this but a positional approach used by those who cannot accept the Bible as the wholly inspired and inerrant Word of God and who seek to discredit all or part of Scripture through human ideas, conjectures, and doubts? Moreover, by placing the Bible on the same level as other works of literature, a negative judgment has already been made. The doctrine that the Bible is the Word of God and not of human origin is denied. In reality when the critic says that they are approaching Scripture in a neutral way, what the critic actually means to say is that the Bible and science are treated equally. Whenever there is a difference between what Scripture says and what the natural scientist or a scientific historian has to say, then the word of Scripture is weighed in a neutral way against the word of the scientist. Even this, however, is not always practiced. The authors of Scripture are considered to be primitive and poorly educated by today's standards. In the eyes of the critic it is like comparing a kindergarten student (age 5) with someone who has earned a PhD. Even if one could give the benefit of the doubt to the method and say that it was completely neutral, any Bible-believing Christian who used it would still be evidencing doubts regarding the inspiration and the inerrancy of Scripture. Some years ago, when the LCMS was still an orthodox Lutheran church body, Theodore Engelder wrote in his book *Scripture Cannot be Broken*: "God's Word commands us to 'bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ' (2 Corinthians 10:5) and to accept Scripture, every statement of Scripture, as God's truth, as authoritative and binding. Carnal reason, however, refuses to do this. It claims supreme authority for its own judgments. It assumes the right to criticize and to correct Scripture (p. 47)."<sup>360</sup> The critic is doing just that, following carnal reason.

Dr. Siegbert Becker in his article "*The Historical-Critical Method of Bible Interpretation*" states, "To a Bible-believing Christian... neutrality of the kind claimed for the historical-critical method is a sin. No man, and above all, no believing child of God has a right to be neutral between God's wisdom and man's wisdom. With Dr. Martin Luther we will confess that God has more wisdom in his little finger than all the learned scholars in the world and all the devils in hell."<sup>361</sup> Because of the way it denies the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture and relies totally on subjective analysis based on human reason, liberals and moderates may choose to use the Historical-Critical Method. However, Bible-believing Christians really cannot use that method without compromising their belief in God and His Holy Word. Once again it is a matter of a Bible-based faith versus human reason.

#### **4.4.3 Some Differences Between the Grammatical-Historical Method and the Historical-Critical Method**

Because the majority of theologians and theological scholars today do not readily accept the findings of the Grammatical-Historical Method preferring instead to use the Historical-Critical Method, perhaps it would be good to compare the two, basing my comments and observation on discussions previously presented.

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<sup>360</sup> Becker. "The Historical-Critical Method of Bible Interpretation." pp. 296-299.

<sup>361</sup> Becker. "The Historical-Critical Method of Bible Interpretation." p. 299.



## **Compatibility between the HCM and Biblical Doctrine**

Among Lutherans in the USA, those who deny the inerrancy of Scripture also generally accept the Historical-Critical Method of interpreting Scripture. Those who believe in the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible also reject the Historical-Critical Method. One cannot accept the doctrines of the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture and at the same time accept the Historical-Critical Method. The two produce results that contradict either the method of interpretation or the Scripture-based doctrines. The use of the historical-critical method is incompatible with orthodox confessional Lutheranism. In fact, the Historical-Critical Method actually destroys confidence in all of the doctrines of Scripture by destroying the foundation on which Christian faith is built.

## **The Function of the Interpreter**

In the Grammatical-Historical Method, the function of the Bible interpreter is to carefully study the meaning of the words and the grammar of the biblical text in order to determine what the original author meant by them. The first thing that the interpreter will do is to understand what a given passage of Scripture means. That being done, the interpreter will apply the truth taught in that passage to his hearers. At no time does the interpreter have a right to pass any kind of judgment on Scripture or to change its message. The interpreter simply reports what a given passage of Scripture says. Only the facts are reported. The findings are objective. The interpreter does not have a right to add anything to Scripture or to subtract anything from it. Jesus specifically warns against adding or subtracting when he speaks about “Jots and Tittles”. In this method Scripture rules over the beliefs of the church.

In the Historical-Critical Method, the interpreter subjects Scripture to a human judgment. The Scripture is studied not only to determine what the author meant, but also to determine whether or not that passage is acceptable to and acceptable for the church today. Using this method, the theologians pass judgment on Scripture, rather than being judged by Scripture. The ideas and opinions of the modern theologian, no matter how humbly presented, are regarded as having more value than what has been written in the Bible.

## **View and Opinion of the Bible**

Those who use the Grammatical-Historical Method consider the Bible as a unique book. It is considered to be the only book given by inspiration of God. It is the Word of God. It contains no errors. It cannot be placed on the same level with works of literature written by human beings because no matter how motivated they may be as a result of having read the Bible, no matter how accurate they may be in setting forth the teaching of Scripture, they are not writing as a result of inspiration; they are writing as a result of motivation. Thus, the Bible cannot be judged using the same critical standards that are used to judge the reliability of merely human works of literature.

One using the Historical-Critical Method applies the same standards of reliability and believability which are used to judge any other work of literature or history to judge the Bible. In actual practice, these critics are very subjective in their evaluations. Most of the time, other historical sources are given greater credence than the Bible. If there is any discrepancy or disagreement between what is written in an Egyptian or Mesopotamian document and what is written in the Bible, the critic will almost always believe the non-Judeo-Christian source rather than the Bible.<sup>362</sup>

### **The Origin of the Bible**

The Bible tells us that “holy men of God spoke *as they were* moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21; NKJV). That God inspired certain select individuals to write the very words of Scripture is accepted — without reservation, doubt or question — by those who use the Grammatical-Historical Method. They believe that the Bible testifies about and indicates its origin with internal evidence. Because of statements in the Bible concerning its authorship for example — that Moses wrote the Pentateuch, David wrote most of the psalms, and Paul wrote the epistles attributed to him — interpreters using the Grammatical-Historical Method believe the testimony of Scripture rather than the theories devised through scholarship.

On the other hand, those using the Historical-Critical Method reject the statements in the Bible about its authorship. Using their reason and theories, they prefer to believe that the books of the Bible were gradually assembled by editors who used the sources produced by many writers over the course of many centuries, as we have shown earlier. Therefore, they believe that Scripture was written by countless unknown authors who lived at a much later period of time than did Moses, David, Paul, and the other writers who are identified in the Scriptures.

### **The Unity of Scripture**

Those who use the Grammatical-Historical Method believe that Scripture is a unity because all Scripture ultimately comes from one author, the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Triune Godhead. Scripture cannot and does not contradict itself. Therefore, all passages of Scripture must be interpreted so that they agree with each other; they cannot be interpreted in a way that would make them contradict each other. Although God continued to reveal more details about his plan of salvation as the centuries passed, it is obvious that from Genesis to Revelation the Bible teaches only one theology and that is the Gospel of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

Those using the Historical-Critical Method, on the other hand, believe that there are many different and contradictory theologies in Scripture. Furthermore, they believe that religion evolved over time. Therefore, the religion of early Israel was very different from the religion at the end of the Old Testament era. Building on this theory, they then derive the teaching that Jesus, who lived during the first third of the 1<sup>st</sup> century, had a different theology than did the Apostle Paul, who did most of

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<sup>362</sup> John F. Brug. [Why the Historical-Critical Method of Interpreting Scripture is Incompatible with Confessional Lutheranism](#). Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. Mequon, WI., n.d. p. 1.

his work a quarter century or more after Jesus' crucifixion. Because of this concept of evolving theology, the adherent to the Historical-Critical Method expounds the idea that the theology of both Jesus and Paul was also different from the theology found in the Christian church during the 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> century when they believe that the books of the New Testament were produced. Because they derive so many different theologies from the Bible, it is difficult to choose which ones to believe. Thus they can theorize that the concept of the forgiveness of sins through Jesus' death on the cross was foreign to the Christian church until late in Paul's ministry (about 60 AD).

### **The Use of Historical and Archeological Information**

Historical and archeological information is used by the Grammatical-Historical Method in order to better understand the text. For example, the knowledge of political conditions in the Persian Empire, which has been ascertained through archaeological findings and historical evidence, helps theologians using this method understand why the Persian kings followed the policies that are described in the books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther in the Bible.

The practitioner of the Historical-Critical Method may use interpretations of archeological discoveries and historical sources to reject certain statements of the Bible. If archeologists claim that there was no city at Jericho or Ai at the time of Joshua, the critic may assume that the city never existed and therefore rejects the biblical accounts of the destruction of those cities. (A closer examination of the remains of Jericho has revealed that the city did, in fact, exist — the author has personally seen them. The ruins there are from the time of Joshua. That archeologists were unable to locate the site of Ai probably means that they are looking for the ruins in the wrong place. Sometimes archeological ruins are on the next hill, or tel, down the road, or where the river used to run).

### **The Reliability of Scripture**

Those who use the Grammatical-Historical Method determine whether a passage is literally true or if it is figurative or symbolical by examining the context of the passage and comparing it to what Scripture says in other places. They regard Genesis as being a factual historical book. They hold this position because of the internal evidence within Scripture itself. When the Bible says something it is taken to be the truth. For example, in Genesis Adam and Eve are described as being real people. This is corroborated in the New Testament (Luke 3, Romans 5). The Gospels describe Jesus' miracles as acts that He really performed for real people. His parables are described as stories that He told to illustrate a point. The book of Revelation specifically says that it uses symbols to describe real things. The dragon in Revelation 12 is not a reptile but a symbol of Satan. The context of Genesis indicates that we should understand the six days of creation as real days, consisting of an evening and a morning, not long epochs. The context of Revelation indicates that we should understand the 1000 years of Revelation 20 as a symbolic term for the whole New Testament era. Anyone who does not accept the Grammatical-Historical Method will

not accept these examples, most likely because they are looking at them through eyeglasses of human reason instead of the eyeglasses of Bible-based faith.

The Historical-Critical Method makes use of outside sources and human reason to judge which parts of the Bible are historically true. Heavy emphasis is placed on the findings of science and modern opinion. If science says that human beings evolved from a lower life form over millions of years, even billions of years, the critic concludes that the creation account of Genesis cannot possibly be true and rejects it. If the historians cannot find a record of the census issued by Caesar Augustus that Luke mentions in connection with the birth of Jesus, the critics conclude that obviously there was no census and reject it as an invention of the writer of Luke's gospel.

### **Commands of Scripture that Apply to the Present Day**

In order to determine which commands of Scripture apply to the present, which apply to all people in general and which apply to the present-day Christian, those following the Grammatical-Historical Method use the context of Scripture. For example, in the Old Testament certain commands and requirements were given pertaining to the worship life of the people. These were the ceremonial laws. However, the New Testament clearly tells us that Christ is the fulfillment of the law. In this regard, we are told in Colossians 2 and in Hebrews that the Old Testament laws pertaining to the Sabbath and to sacrifices no longer apply to us. Consequently, we do not make them binding on the church.

In order to determine which commands of Scripture apply to the present, those following the Historical-Critical Method uses outside sources and a human judgment, which is often guided by the winds of popular opinion. For example, if modern social science accepts homosexuality and proclaims that those who practice it are simply living an "alternate life-style," those who follow the Historical-Critical Method reject Paul's warning against homosexuality and all other forms of sexual immorality in Romans 1 as being old-fashioned and irrelevant. They find it inconceivable that anyone in the present day and age could possibly still believe such things as Paul sets forth, for God loves all people regardless of their sexual activities (if there truly is a God.) Those who adhere to what Paul said are regarded as being "arrogant and naïve." If, in loving spiritual concern for their fellow human being, someone cites Paul, the critic may consider his statements to be "incendiary and divisive" or even "offensive."

### **Miracles and Prophecies in the Bible**

Those who use the Grammatical-Historical Method have no problem whatsoever in accepting the accounts of the miracles and prophecies in the Bible as they are written. They believe that these miracles and prophecies are real acts, which display God's power. They ask, why could Almighty God not cause His prophet to see into the future and accurately predict what would happen hundreds, even thousands of years in the future? Why could Jesus Christ, who is true God and thus possesses all divine power and might, not perform the miracles attributed to him?

Those who use the Historical-Critical Method deny the supernatural. Thus they regard all miracles and prophecy as being impossible, no matter who does it. Therefore any biblical accounts of miracles simply cannot be true. The eye-witness testimony concerning the plagues in Egypt clearly is being seen through culturally affected views and has been altered through the ages to fit the understanding of a simple audience. Therefore, it concludes that these are nothing more than a series of myths and fables because miracles do not happen. The eye-witness testimony about the miracles of Jesus is nothing but a series fabrications of the early Christian church to glorify Christ and turn him into a super-hero, because miracles do not happen. Therefore, the accounts which describe these events must have been written much later than the alleged events. Because Daniel lived in the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. it would be impossible, according to the practitioner of the Historical-Critical Method, for him to have described in Daniel chapter 11 events that occurred in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C., centuries after his death. They feel that this part of Daniel had to have been written sometime after these events in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. actually happened.

Brug tells us “If critical scholars of the Bible believed in the reality of miracles and prophecy, and if they accepted the permanent relevance of God’s moral law, there would be no Historical-Critical Method. This method was invented to condone unbelief.”<sup>363</sup>

These few examples show some of the principle differences between the Grammatical-Historical Method and the Historical-Critical Method of interpreting the Bible.

We now turn to an approach that considers the Bible to be a “living voice.”

#### **4.4.4 The Ethical Vox Viva View, Approach and Use of the Bible**

Neo- or Cultural Protestantism created an avenue of views, approaches and uses of the Bible which were taken and absorbed by the philosophy and the societal mindsets of the day. In the case of Ritschl, Christian faith is verified within the ambience of human experience on the basis of its relevance to a human being’s personal and daily life and ethics. Ritschl turned polemically against “the theology of the facts” of Old Protestantism which he viewed as a “materialistic and naturalistic theory of knowledge” that purports to have as the basis of Christian faith and revelation a metaphysical and a supernatural knowledge of God. Christianity, for him, belonged to the sphere of the human person and the human spirit (*Geist*) (Ritschl 1889: 6,11). Jesus of Nazareth himself, according to Ritschl, was, in surpassing fashion, the bearer of grace as well as of lord over the world. He is the archetypal image of the humanity which is to be united in the Kingdom of God. His vocation was simply to reveal the God who is love. In so far as he exercises this vocation upon us, or in so far as we experience and evaluate his historical existence as an action revealing God, he is himself God (Barth 1972: 661). As human beings we obtain justification, that is we obtain the realization of our own purpose of life in no other way but through Jesus in his Church; and thus in

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<sup>363</sup> Brug. [Why the Historical-Critical Method of Interpreting Scripture is Incompatible with Confessional Lutheranism](#). p. 2.

this sense we have God in Christ (Barth 1972:661). We notice the difference in the definitions of “revelation” and “justification” as they are used here from the more traditional definitions used by the church and orthodox Lutherans.<sup>364</sup>

Ritschl was a ferocious opponent of Pietism and Mysticism; a fractionally milder opponent of Roman Catholicism and every form of Anabaptist faith by virtue of the fact that they think they know of a Christianity, and perhaps indeed of a more perfect Christianity, besides that provided by the consciousness and realization in the moral sphere of the fact that we are all children of God (Barth 1972:658).<sup>365</sup>

Faithful to his method of theology, Ritschl rejected the concept of biblical inspiration claiming that the origin of the Scriptures cannot be understood on the basis of some kind of supernatural divine inspiration. The Bible is a document of ‘the general process of the human spirit’ and the authority of the message of the Bible comes to the fore in an ongoing actualization of an existentially meaningful event in a human being. While Ritschl’s theological approach does not include the sphere of physical-organic nature and knowledge, the approach is directed to the sphere of personhood, the human spirit and experience. According to Ritschl, the message of the New Testament contains an oral proclamation of events which deeply permeates and touches the human life. Thus, the New Testament is a creative source for preaching in the Church as well as ‘a creative source for positive theology’ that delves into the human spirit and experience (Ritschl 1889: 9, 20).<sup>366</sup>

The principles of the semi-Bible-believing approach of Ritschl were adopted into modern Lutheran Bible research and interpretation. The Neo-Protestants not only opposed the notion of verbal inspiration, promoted by the heirs of older Lutheran orthodoxy and Old Protestantism, they totally rejected the whole idea of biblical inspiration. The Bible is regarded as the latent word of God which through the actual oral proclamation to human beings in their present situation in a worthwhile way is the proper word of God, the **vox viva** or the living word. Interpreters who follow this approach seek to understand the text as if they were actually present when it was first spoken, particularly the parables and teachings of Jesus. They seek to hear the message of the text as if they were among the original hearers who heard the message being spoken directly to them.

#### 4.4.5 The Syntactical-Theological Exegesis Method

According to the Syntactical-Theological Exegesis method, interpretation is derived through an exegesis of the text. There are two key elements in the exegetical process. The first deals with the syntax that is used in the passage. When one examines how the words are put together so as to

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<sup>364</sup> Brug. Why the Historical-Critical Method of Interpreting Scripture is Incompatible with Confessional Lutheranism. p. 2.

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<sup>366</sup> Brug. Why the Historical-Critical Method of Interpreting Scripture is Incompatible with Confessional Lutheranism. p. 2.

form phrases, clauses, and sentences, one gains an insight into the pattern of meaning that emanates from a particular author. The practitioner of this method follows the assumption that every word is affected, at least to some degree, by 1) its grammatical function within the phrase, clause, or sentence and 2) the context, that is, “the words, phrases, clauses, sentences and paragraphs that surround it.” It is felt that the interpreter can successfully begin to make a distinction between “the main assertions and the supporting assertions of the text” only after there is an understanding of the grammatical function of this portion of the text. To achieve this, syntactical analysis operates systematically using three parts “a) the concept, b) the proposition, and c) the paragraph.” After one notes the exact way in which these three are organized and arranged, one has sufficient information to apply a particular text within a sermon or in a Bible lesson. The second key element deals with theological exegesis. In this, one imports related doctrine and theological truth from various places in Scripture. In other words, one makes use of related Bible passages and accounts. In this, the interpreter uses Scripture to interpret Scripture. The person uses Biblical theology to gain a better understanding of the verse or passage.<sup>367</sup> The interpretation derived, of course, will thus depend on how the interpreter views Scripture. In the case of one who truly is a Bible-believer, the result will be an objective interpretation of the wholly inspired and inerrant Word of God, much as in the Grammatical-Historical method. If the interpreter is a partial-Bible-believer or a Bible-denier, then, of course, the result will be very subjective, much as is achieved through the use of the Historical-Critical method.

We now look at the word *evangelical*. Who or what is an *evangelical*? This will be discussed in the next section.

#### **4.5 *Evangelical, Evangelicals, and evangelical***

The word *evangelical* does not always mean the same thing. The most basic meaning of the word *evangelical*, according to the Oxford dictionary, is “the teaching of the gospel.” This is the primary use of the word in most dictionaries. When used in a name such as Evangelical Lutheran Synod, Wisconsin Lutheran Synod, or St. John Evangelical Lutheran Church, *evangelical* means that this body teaches the gospel – the message that Jesus Christ is the Redeemer and Savior of the human race from sin, death, and the power of the devil. A second use of the word *evangelical*, again, according to the Oxford dictionary, is “relating to a tradition within Protestant Christianity emphasizing Biblical authority and personal conversion.” These two definitions while being similar are not synonymous. This second usage is widely used throughout the world as indicating the Protestant or Reformed church bodies. For example, in parts of Latin America, among the non-Catholic Christians — the Baptists, the Episcopalians, the Methodists, the Pentecostals, the Presbyterians, and so forth — are all grouped together and referred to as Evangelicals. It is like a collective noun. Lutherans normally are not included in this group even though they are non-Catholic and stress Biblical authority. The word *evangelical* has yet a third meaning. It is an adjective that can apply to anything. The third meaning, according to the Oxford dictionary, is:

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<sup>367</sup> Walter C. Kaiser. pp. 88-90.

“fervent in advocating something.” An example of this was heard in the news coverage of the funeral of Saudi Arabian King Fahd, in which the CNN commentator referred to “the evangelical spread of Islamic policy during the reign of King Fahd.” In this third usage, there is not necessarily any reference whatsoever to the gospel or to Christianity.

The third meaning will not be used in this paper. The first meaning, the adjective that means “teaching the gospel” will not be expanded upon other than to say that when used in the name of a Lutheran church body it is an indication that this particular group does in fact teach the gospel, and in most cases it is the primary emphasis and reason for the existence of this group. In this section we will expand upon the second definition, the collective noun indicating non-Catholic Christians who are members of the Reformed or Protestant church bodies. We will see that within this group, there is yet another group that calls itself Evangelicals. As we look briefly at modern-day Protestantism in the USA we will speak of the three groups Fundamentalists (4.5.3), Evangelicals (4.5.4), and Pentecostals (4.5.5). All three of these are sometimes collectively referred to as Evangelicals. In the first two sections, I shall discuss the three-fold division of the Evangelicals in the USA (4.5.1) and present information on the roots of the Fundamentalist Movement (4.5.2) from which the Fundamentalist and Evangelical groups emerged.

#### **4.5.1 The Three-fold Division of Evangelicals in the USA**

In the USA, the modern-day Reformed church bodies can be divided into three groups that should be mentioned before we continue. One of these groups is known as Evangelicals, another is the Fundamentalists. They are not one and the same — their particular perspectives of Scripture and their parental upbringing, their current demographic position within the socio-economic-political strata, and also their differing political views keep them from being the same. The third group, the Pentecostals are a charismatic group that is somewhat aligned with the Evangelicals.

Normally, Lutherans in the United States of America are not Pentecostal. On a world-wide basis sometimes Lutherans are grouped with the Evangelicals (in the broadest sense of the word) because they preach the Gospel. They are also grouped together with the Catholics because of similarities in their worship practices. Because of various differences in purpose, organization, doctrine and practice, Lutherans usually are not grouped with either the Fundamentalists or the Evangelicals in the USA. There are similarities that exist in all three — Lutheran, Fundamentalist, and Evangelical. And Lutherans do participate with members of the Fundamentalists and the Evangelicals in a variety of social and political activities. As we look at both the Fundamentalists and the Evangelicals we will note that there are some differences between them, some differences are so far apart that getting the two together is like trying to mix oil and water.

#### **4.5.2 The Roots of Fundamentalists and Evangelicals**

Currently in the USA, the word *evangelical* can be used either as an adjective or as a collective noun. When used as a collective noun, it usually refers to a group of people from the Protestant or



Reformed church bodies. Today, it is not uncommon to hear about *evangelicals* or the Evangelical Movement. Sometimes, though not often, the members of this group are compared with their spiritual cousins, the *fundamentalists*. Both groups regard themselves as being descendants of a religious movement in the USA during the first third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century known as the Fundamentalist Movement. It was, in fact, during this time, 1909-1930, that the term “Fundamentalist” was coined.

In the early 17<sup>th</sup> century there was a protest in Holland against the five points of Calvinism, which were previously discussed. This protest was called the Remonstrant Movement. A leader in this movement was Jacob Arminius (d. 1609) who had been appointed to defend the position of Calvin. In the process, however, he found what he considered to be errors in the theological views of Calvin. After Arminius died, his followers, at a meeting at Gouda in 1610, drew up The Five Articles of Remonstrance which were in opposition to Calvin’s five points. The Calvinists responded by holding the Synod of Dort (1618-19) which produced the Canons of Dort. These are commonly known as the Five Points (T-U-L-I-P) of Calvinism. As a result, Holland remained Calvinistic; but the teachings of Arminius spread to England, and from there via the Methodists came into the United States in the 1780s. Today in the USA the evangelicals and fundamentalists are more often Arminian than they are Calvinistic.<sup>368</sup>

The Five Articles of Remonstrance, which we know as **Arminianism**, assert:

- “1. *Conditional Predestination*: God desires to save those who by the grace of the Holy Spirit believe in Jesus and persevere to the end. This is a predestination in view of faith, a doctrinal deviation that deeply affected some midwestern United States Lutherans in the 1870s.
2. *Unlimited Atonement*: Christ died for all
3. *Co-operation in Conversion*: Man has a free will to choose or to reject Christ, thus this is a denial of total depravity and the introduction of synergism into God’s plan of salvation. In this Arminians are following the thought of Zwingli who taught that in regeneration and conversion people are not merely passive but also active. He could think this way because he held that original sin was only a lack of something good, but not total depravity.
4. *Possibility of Resistance to God’s Grace*
5. *Possibility of Falling from Grace*: A believer may totally and finally fall.”

The Remonstrants, the followers of Arminius, strongly criticized Calvinism. In so doing, however, the pendulum swung from one extreme to the other. It swung from election and reprobation to free will; it swung from God’s will and pleasure to man’s co-operation in conversion, and faith as a moving cause in election.<sup>369</sup>

### 4.5.3 Fundamentalists

The **fundamentalists** are conservative evangelical Protestant or Reformed Christians, who united in a reaction to the modern departures from Biblical teachings. At the Niagara Bible Conference in

<sup>368</sup> Vallesky. *Evangelical Lutheranism and Today’s Evangelicals and Fundamentalists*, p. 7f.

<sup>369</sup> E. Arnold Sitz. “Calvinism: Its Essence and Its Menacing Impact upon American Lutheran Doctrine and Practice,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*. Volume 44. Number 1. January 1947. p 20.

1895 the adherents to this movement actively affirmed a core set of six Christian beliefs. This set of core beliefs was a “line drawn in the sand,” so to speak, by conservative members of the Reformed churches in the USA as they battled against the rise of rationalism, higher biblical criticism, and liberalism within Protestant denominations. They rejected the documentary hypothesis — the theory held by higher biblical criticism that the Pentateuch was composed and shaped by many people over centuries. They rejected Darwin’s contradictions of Scripture, especially his theory of evolution. Their six core beliefs are:

1. the inerrancy of the Scriptures
2. the deity of Christ
3. the virgin birth
4. the substitutionary atonement of Christ
5. Christ’s physical resurrection
6. Christ’s bodily return.<sup>370</sup>

In the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, transformations within society in the USA produced changes in lifestyles and resulted in a variety of new problems including increased crime, poverty, and problems between workers and employers. The result was the development of what is known as the “social Gospel.” A leader in seeking social change was the Reverend Walter Rauschenbusch (d. 1918), a Baptist preacher from New York, who taught that the church’s function and purpose was to change society. To do this, he wanted to reconstruct the social environment. For this to happen, he felt that the church needed to have a drastic shift in its emphasis. Rauschenbusch said that the church needed to change its focus “from the individual sinner to the disturbed society, from the means of grace to a legislative program, from the heavenly goal to the building of a heaven for the poor on this earth, from creeds and convictions to deeds and demonstrations.” The fundamentalists could not, and did not, concur.<sup>371</sup>

Modern fundamentalists have been active in the pro-life movement, which opposes abortion, human cloning, physician-assisted suicide, and embryonic stem cell research. Many have spoken out and protested against political measures intended to legalize same-sex marriage or to relax laws prohibiting sodomy. Fundamentalists have been very outspoken against communism, the United Nations, and the ecumenical movement (in particular they oppose the National Council of Churches and the World Council of Churches), all of which for the most part they consider to be “Satanically-inspired” notions of false unity. Within the fundamentalist community, there is a large segment whose approach to politics is based on some form of a theory involving an international conspiracy that they believe will culminate in a one world government under the Antichrist. Fundamentalists are critical of evangelicals whom they feel have a lack of concern for doctrinal purity and a lack of discernment in their ecumenical endeavors in which they co-operatively work with other Christians of differing doctrinal views. They are opposed to the Pentecostals, who tend to emphasize religious experiences and charismatic gifts, as being lax in doctrine, and who openly fellowship with anyone who claims to share their gifts and experiences.

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<sup>370</sup> Vallesky. [Evangelical Lutheranism and Today’s Evangelicals and Fundamentalists](#). p. 4.

<sup>371</sup> Vallesky. [Evangelical Lutheranism and Today’s Evangelicals and Fundamentalists](#). p. 4.

#### 4.5.4 Evangelicals

The **evangelicals** in the USA today are the product of Reformed Orthodoxy that has been strongly influenced by pietism. Followers of this movement have been involved in temperance, abolition, and interdenominational activities. Among their teachings, they stress the positions of *sola scriptura* and *sola fide*, (Scripture alone and faith alone) as was stressed in the Reformation. They also emphasize the historicity of the miracles of Jesus and the virgin birth, the crucifixion, the resurrection, and the Second Coming of Christ, although among evangelicals there are a variety of understandings regarding the end times and eschatology. There are four common characteristics of the modern-day evangelicals:

1. emphasis on the conversion experience, also called *being saved*, *new birth* or *born again* after John 3:3. Thus Evangelicals, at times, refer to themselves as *born-again Christians*.
2. the Bible is the primary source of religious authority, as God's revelation to man.
3. encourage evangelism, the act of sharing one's beliefs to convince others to convert to faith in Jesus Christ — in organized missionary work or by personal evangelism.
4. a central focus on Christ's redeeming work on the cross as the means for salvation and the forgiveness of sins.

In his paper on Fundamentalists and Evangelicals in the USA, David Vallesky refers to a composite picture of the modern, neo-evangelicals taken from two Reformed theologians Millard Erickson and Bernard Ramm. It can be said that evangelicals:

- are less sharply separatistic than the fundamentalists, insisting that one should stay in a liberal denomination and fight for the truth rather than leave;
- require no uniform position on eschatology. One does not need to have a specific stance on the teaching of the millennia;
- allow divergence on the exact nature of inerrancy. One group says that inerrancy means all statements of Scripture without exception are without error while another maintains Scripture is inerrant only in matters of faith and practice of the faith;
- do not disassociate themselves from those who look upon the teaching of theistic evolution as a valid option and compromise between the account of creation and science, in particular, the theory of evolution;
- place strong emphasis upon sound scholarship;
- advocate increased emphasis on the church's social responsibility.

Evangelicals consider their positions to be a return to, rather than a departure from, the original character of the Fundamentalist Movement.<sup>372</sup>

Among other things, evangelicals have been involved with programs for literacy training, inner-city relief and food banks, adoption agencies, marriage counseling and spousal abuse mediation, day-care centers for children, and counsel and care for unwed mothers. At the same time, some of them have advocated abortion and liberalizing the legal definitions of "family", "marriage", or "civil union" so as to permit same-sex unions.

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<sup>372</sup> Vallesky. Evangelical Lutheranism and Today's Evangelicals and Fundamentalists. p. 15.

### 4.5.5 Pentecostals

A third group within the Protestant churches in America is the **Pentecostals**. Pentecostalism is similar to the Charismatic movement, but developed earlier and separated from the mainstream church. Charismatic Christians, at least in the early days of the movement, tended to remain in their respective denominations. Today, they are more ecumenical. From a theological perspective, most Pentecostals are similar to the Evangelicals in that they emphasize the reliability of the Bible and the need for a conversion to faith in Jesus. For the most part, they also accept the doctrine of Biblical inerrancy. Unlike the Fundamentalists, Pentecostals place more emphasis on personal spiritual experience and, in most cases, permit women to serve in the ministry. Pentecostals place special emphasis on the gifts and work of the Holy Spirit. Speaking in tongues, also known as *glossolalia*, is the normative proof that a person has been baptized with the Holy Spirit. Some major Pentecostal churches go so far as to say that anyone who does not speak in tongues has not received the blessing that they call “The Baptism of the Holy Spirit.” This claim is unique to the Pentecostals and it is one of the few consistent differences from Charismatic theology.

In the following section, we shall take an overview of four different views, approaches, and ways of using the Bible that currently are being employed by some of the Lutheran church bodies, especially in the USA.

## 4.6 *Modern Views, Approaches, and Ways of Using the Bible in Lutheran Church Bodies in the USA*

The Lutherans who migrated to America founded dozens of Lutheran church bodies or synods because they were divided from each other by differences of doctrine, language, style of worship, and church government. Each group of Lutheran brought with it the particular theological influences of its original country. Once here, these groups were strongly influenced by their particular leader. The theological position of each leader was formed as a result of his studies at a European university. Thus we find the influences of Orthodoxy, Pietism, and Rationalism to varying degrees in each leader. The results were Lutherans who strongly adhered to what the Bible said on the one hand, and Lutherans who were more compromising in their position and thus willing to open the door to the acceptance of the newer scientific ideas and theological views. This has continued down to the present among Lutherans in the USA. There are orthodox, conservative Lutherans who still adhere strongly to the Bible positions set forth during and immediately following the Reformation. There are the so-called “moderates”, who try to adhere to the position of the orthodox, conservative Lutherans, and yet have opened the door to the findings of Rationalism and Neo-Orthodoxy and partially accept these ideas. Thirdly, there are the liberals who, although they still use the Bible, do not use it in the same way that either the orthodox, conservative Lutherans or the “moderate” Lutherans do. The liberals, guided more by reason than Bible-based faith, have, for the most part, whole-heartedly accepted the ideas of Rationalism, the Higher-Critical Method, and Neo-Orthodoxy. We shall now look at three theological approaches that are common among the so-called “moderate” and liberal Lutherans in the USA. These views are: The

Existential Demythologizing Approach (4.6.1), The Gospel Reductionism Approach (4.6.2), and The Divine-Human Mystery Approach (4.6.3). At the end of the section, there will be An Evaluation of These Three Approaches of Liberal and “Moderate” Lutherans (4.6.4) from the perspective of the orthodox, conservative Lutherans.

#### 4.6.1 The Existential Demythologizing Approach

As a result of the rationalistic criticism during the last half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, most theologians had doubts about every book of the Bible. In the 1920’s a Lutheran pastor and theologian rose to the fore to “rescue Christianity.” His name was Rudolph Bultmann (1884-1976).<sup>373</sup> He was the son of an Evangelical Lutheran pastor and the grandson of a missionary to Africa. His mother’s father was a pastor who adhered to pietism. The “family’s gradual move toward Protestant liberalism—especially on the part of his father—would prove to have a significant impact on this young theologian-to-be.”<sup>374</sup> According to the theory, the Bible commonly used “myths” to teach important truths. It was using “stories” and picture-language to communicate ideas rather than present historic truths or anything real. Bultmann felt that he had to “demythologize the New Testament so that the Christian Gospel might be separated from its mythological trappings ....Bultmann wanted, with (Karl) Barth, to proclaim the saving act of God in Christ, yet without providing unnecessary stumbling blocks to the modern listener.”<sup>375</sup> It seems that by using his existential demythologizing approach Bultmann sought to walk the middle ground and then sit astride a fence seeking to please everyone. He wanted Christians to be able to continue to have the New Testament as the “Word of God”, yet, at the same time, to be able to maintain the “scientific” insights which came through rationalistic literary criticism.<sup>376</sup>

Scholars will argue that Bultmann’s existentialism was based on the cross of Christ, which he viewed not only as an historical event but also as an existential event. According to Bultmann, Christian faith did not exist until there was a kerygma, i.e., a proclamation of “Jesus Christ, the Crucified and Risen One, to be God’s eschatological act of salvation.” Humankind is reconciled to God through an existential crisis. The catalyst which creates this crisis occurs as Christ’s life and death is proclaimed in the kerygma. In seeking and developing the kerygma of Christianity, Bultmann examined the mythical stories from the Greeks, apocalyptic Judaism, Astral Worship, and Gnosticism, among others. When he finally had his kerygma, he noted that it had three limitations: 1) the meaning of redemption found in the Cross is not apparent to everyone; 2) it did not entail a permanent change, but is a continual, life-long process; and 3) the kerygma is constantly changing because there are always new and different people who will hear it.<sup>377</sup>

<sup>373</sup> Kuske. Biblical Interpretation. p. 181.

<sup>374</sup> Matt McLaughlin and Rob Smid. “Rudolf Karl Bultmann (1884-1976)”.

[http://people.bu.edu/wwildman/WeirdWildWeb/courses/mwt/dictionary/mwt\\_themes\\_760\\_bultmann.htm#Rudolf%20Karl%20Bultmann%20\(1884-1976\)](http://people.bu.edu/wwildman/WeirdWildWeb/courses/mwt/dictionary/mwt_themes_760_bultmann.htm#Rudolf%20Karl%20Bultmann%20(1884-1976)). 1999.

<sup>375</sup> Josh Reeves. “Rudolf Bultmann and Demythologization”.

[http://people.bu.edu/wwildman/WeirdWildWeb/courses/mwt/dictionary/mwt\\_themes\\_760\\_bultmann.htm](http://people.bu.edu/wwildman/WeirdWildWeb/courses/mwt/dictionary/mwt_themes_760_bultmann.htm). 2005.

<sup>376</sup> Kuske. Biblical Interpretation. p. 181.

<sup>377</sup> Reeves. [http://people.bu.edu/wwildman/WeirdWildWeb/courses/mwt/dictionary/mwt\\_themes\\_760\\_bultmann.htm](http://people.bu.edu/wwildman/WeirdWildWeb/courses/mwt/dictionary/mwt_themes_760_bultmann.htm).

“Bultmann concluded that God’s dealings with Israel were terminated; thus the Old Testament with its specific history is no longer a revelation from God to us. The only things in the Old Testament relevant to us are general moral demands rooted not in divine revelation as such, but rather in a human relationship. Thus the offense of Old Testament specificity means that we must abandon the Old Testament. The Old Testament, in Bultmann’s hands, becomes ahistorical and valuable only as a pedagogical tool as it is *reactualized* in the life of each individual who hears it entirely apart from anything said to Israel. It now has a present history and a present address to the contemporary individual — but totally apart from anything ever said in Israel’s history. “Bultmann has acknowledged the specificity of the Old Testament and in the process has had to yield its normative authority for the Church. The Old Testament functions only as a propaedeutic to the gospel. Even then, the gospel is transformed into an existential, eschatological, nonhistorical, individualistic framework.”<sup>378</sup> Bultmann, thus, turned to the New Testament.

In a 1941 lecture entitled, “New Testament and Mythology” Bultmann introduced the concept of demythologizing the New Testament. The result was a ferocious debate within Germany. The rest of the world was not involved in the heated discussions. It was the publishing of *Kerygma and Mythos* in 1948 that made Bultmann known to the theological realm in the United States of America. Demythologizing became the center of controversy on both sides of the Atlantic. The debate became so intense that heresy trials were held in both Germany and the USA condemning those who adhered to Bultmann’s ideas.<sup>379</sup>

Examples of Bultmann’s existential demythologizing include, but are not limited to the following: “Bultmann rejects any supernatural account of Adam’s original sin, and instead locates sin in the human refusal to accept the gift of authentic existence (Bultmann 1984, 29). Likewise, living life “according to the Spirit” does not refer to any supernatural influence, but describes “a genuine human life” that lives out “of what is invisible and non-disposable and, therefore, surrender[s] all self-contrived security” (Bultmann 1984, 17). The judgment of God to which Scripture refers “is not a cosmic event that is still to happen but is the fact that Jesus has come into the world and issued the call to faith” (Bultmann 1984, 19). And the significance of Jesus is not to be found in his supposed placating of a wrathful God but in the fact that through him “our authentic life becomes a possibility in fact for us only when we are freed from ourselves” (Bultmann 1984, 30).<sup>380</sup>

Bultmann’s approach grew in popularity as theologians in the USA became more and more familiar with it. Many church leaders adopted it including prominent theologians of the Roman Catholic, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), and Reformed church bodies. What Bultmann did in his new approach to Biblical interpretation was to go beyond merely interpreting the words of Scripture; he extended it to “an understanding of the whole human existence.” He dismissed as idle curiosity what Scripture had to say because he felt that it was directed to an unknown group of ancient hearers who lived long ago in an unscientific world. To make God’s

<sup>378</sup> Walter C. Kaiser. p. 38f.

<sup>379</sup> Reeves. [http://people.bu.edu/wwildman/WeirdWildWeb/courses/mwt/dictionary/mwt\\_themes\\_760\\_bultmann.htm](http://people.bu.edu/wwildman/WeirdWildWeb/courses/mwt/dictionary/mwt_themes_760_bultmann.htm).

<sup>380</sup> Reeves. [http://people.bu.edu/wwildman/WeirdWildWeb/courses/mwt/dictionary/mwt\\_themes\\_760\\_bultmann.htm](http://people.bu.edu/wwildman/WeirdWildWeb/courses/mwt/dictionary/mwt_themes_760_bultmann.htm).

Word relevant for modern people, he felt it had to be interpreted in terms of human existence. To do this, he had to determine where within the strata of New Testament material did a certain passage or pericope belong. Does it describe a fact? Or is it something that was developed by being passed down orally from a previous generation; did it come from literary resources; or was it the result of a redaction process. After he identified what kind of material he had before him, he could go about interpreting it from his perspective of existential demythologizing. In so doing, he hoped to determine whether the passage described something that actually happened, or was merely something that had been proclaimed within the early church. This proclamation, which is an interpretation of human existence, is what Bultmann calls the “kerygma.” An example of the kerygma would be an explanation that the miracle of Jesus stilling the storm — recorded in Mark 4 — only means that people can find peace in the midst of the storms of life which are around us every day. For Bultmann and his followers, the miracle never happened.<sup>381</sup>

The kerygma really is nothing more than the allegorical method in modern trappings. The problem with interpreting God’s Word in this way is that the interpreter bypasses and ignores what the words of the Bible say objectively and instead, he subjectively determines what he thinks they should mean. Bultmann did not consider this subjectivity to be a weakness. On the contrary, he regarded it to be the real strength of his approach.<sup>382</sup> Bultmann and others in his wake had no qualms about elevating their own powers of reason above the Bible and exalting their own wisdom and intelligence to a level higher than that of God’s.

For Bultmann, kerygma was more. It was a special and unique kind of mythical language in which “God meets man in the form of words.” That language could not involve a literal interpretation of the Scriptures or speak of the supernatural. These, Bultmann regarded as stumbling blocks (*skandalon*) which would prevent an unbeliever from becoming a believer. The people of Biblical times lived in a world of myths and fears. These had to be removed; there had to be a demythologizing of Holy Writ, Bultmann taught. The result was the message that was proclaimed, the kerygma. God comes to an individual through the kerygma, and challenges the person to make a decision. That decision necessitates a complete change in one’s attitude and way of life.<sup>383</sup> The kerygma became the source of faith.<sup>384</sup>

Another term associated with Bultmann is “Wholly Other.” Bultmann reasoned that if man was not able to grasp God, that is, if God eluded the grasp, or was beyond the comprehension, of the liberal theologians, it was only because God was not “there” in the first place so that humankind could grasp Him. In other words, Bultmann reckoned that God is not a given entity that could be objectified through human propositions. No, for Bultmann, God is something else, He is “Wholly

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<sup>381</sup> Kuske. Biblical Interpretation. pp. 181-183.

<sup>382</sup> Kuske. Biblical Interpretation. p. 183.

<sup>383</sup> Kuske. Biblical Interpretation. p. 184.

<sup>384</sup> Reeves. [http://people.bu.edu/wildman/WeirdWildWeb/courses/mwt/dictionary/mwt\\_themes\\_760\\_bultmann.htm](http://people.bu.edu/wildman/WeirdWildWeb/courses/mwt/dictionary/mwt_themes_760_bultmann.htm).

Other.” Thus, he felt that he maintained an appropriate distance between God and human understanding.<sup>385</sup>

Among the disciples of Bultmann, are E. Fuchs, G. Ebeling, and E. Kaesemann all of whom are considered to be leading spokespersons of existential demythologizing.<sup>386</sup> Another of these, Martin Noth in 1952 in **The “Re-presentation” of the Old Testament in Proclamation** went beyond the particularism of the Bible as set forth by Bultmann and others. Noth sought to make the Bible “kerygmatically” relevant. In doing so, the sermon took on “a sacramental character in which the historical event, whether it happened or not (unfortunately this school usually says it did not), is actualized once again just as the Roman mass re-actualizes the great sacrifice of Christ. Thus instead of the *sola Scriptura* principle, we have a living tradition of re-interpretation which stands on a par with or even supersedes the written form of Scripture. This re-presentation has a liberating power and it sets the message free from the boundaries of the text as written. Inspiration, then, is shifted from the Scriptures to the work of interpreters and proclaimers.”<sup>387</sup>

Theologians who use this hermeneutical method to interpret the Scriptures may vary in their opinions regarding what is historical; they all agree, however, that “all sincere searching for facts about Jesus and the resulting propositions ought not to be ignored.” They feel that one should not entirely ignore the historical Jesus lest one have faith only in the early Christian Church. All are agreed that it is a difficult process to establish the facts about Jesus because of the abundance of strata of biblical material.<sup>388</sup>

The existential demythologizing approach developed by Bultmann won a place in the hearts of the liberal Lutheran church bodies in the USA, among them the Ohio Synod founded in 1818, the Iowa Synod founded in 1854, the Buffalo Synod founded in 1845, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELC) founded in 1917. The ELC, as we have previously seen, were the descendents of the original Norwegian Synod. These synods became part of the old American Lutheran Church (TALC). They later merged with other liberal Lutherans to form the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). None of these other synods should be confused with the ELS (Evangelical Lutheran Synod).

#### 4.6.2 The Gospel Reductionism Approach

The historical-critical method spawned another offspring; this one is known as Gospel Reductionism. This method of interpretation gained followers among some of the members of the Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod (LCMS), the same synod that was founded by CFW Walther. The Missouri Synod as a whole, being more conservative than the liberal ELCA, regarded Bultmann’s approach as being too radical. Some Missouri Synod theologians felt that some of the

<sup>385</sup> Reeves. [http://people.bu.edu/wwildman/WeirdWildWeb/courses/mwt/dictionary/mwt\\_themes\\_760\\_bultmann.htm](http://people.bu.edu/wwildman/WeirdWildWeb/courses/mwt/dictionary/mwt_themes_760_bultmann.htm).

<sup>386</sup> Kuske. Biblical Interpretation. p. 191.

<sup>387</sup> Kaiser. pp. 39-40.

<sup>388</sup> Kuske. Biblical Interpretation. pp. 190-191.



aspects of the historical critical method could be used, while at the same time incorporating some Lutheran doctrine. This approach can be summarized by saying the Bible *contains* the Word of God. This was an extreme change from conservative Lutheranism, which has always believed that the Bible *is* the Word of God. This approach, which was adopted by some members of the Missouri Synod, looked at Scripture and concluded the part that directly presented the Gospel message was divine. All the rest, they concluded, was human, and this pertained especially to the parts that dealt with history.

The majority of the Missouri Synod theologians who were the first ones to teach this approach at their synod's seminaries and colleges eventually left the LCMS and joined the ELCA. Their students, however, for the most part, remained within the LCMS and today are its leaders and professors.

Opposition to the dissidents was loud and clear. As the influence of this approach began to increase in the late 1960's and early 1970's, the leadership of the LCMS failed to discipline those who had strayed from the path that had been followed for more than a century. A scant minority of Missouri Synod pastors, theologians, college and seminary students, this writer included, left the LCMS for confessional reasons and joined the more doctrinally conservative Wisconsin Synod (WELS).

In 1972, the president of the LCMS, Jacob Preus, asked for and received a report from a fact-finding committee. As a result, he concluded: "While the principal doctrines of the Christian faith in most instances still appear to be upheld, the stage has been set for more erosion of the very fundamentals .... Not only does this method of Biblical interpretation introduce the principle of uncertainty into Christian faith and theology, but its underlying assumptions about the nature of Holy Scripture and its authority are so foreign to the Bible, classical Christianity, and the Lutheran Confessions that we must regard it as a false doctrine of Holy Scripture."<sup>389</sup>

Gospel reductionism accepted the conclusions of rationalistic literary criticism. An example of this is the concept that the Synoptic Gospels — Matthew, Mark, and Luke — developed over the course of time in three different stages 1) oral tradition (30-80 AD), followed by 2) written accounts (60-120 AD), which was then developed further through 3) the work of redactors or editors (80-160 AD). While they will perhaps concede that the Holy Spirit was active and influenced this entire process, their concept of inspiration holds that the Christian community was inspired rather than "holy men of God spoke *as they were* moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21, NKJV).<sup>390</sup> Rather than holding to the doctrine of verbal inspiration, in which the Holy Spirit divinely inspired every word that was written in the original language by His chosen author, Gospel Reductionism teaches that the recording of events that took place during the life of Jesus was a human process that developed during the three different stages. These human accounts were infused with divine truth

<sup>389</sup> Kuske. Biblical Interpretation. P. 196.

<sup>390</sup> The Holy Bible: The New King James Version. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982, 1996.

by the Holy Spirit. This process has thus rendered the Gospels to be both a human and divine account at the same time.

The human side of Scripture is regarded as fair game for the rationalist to investigate. The divine side, on the other hand, is thought to be something that only an individual in whom the Holy Spirit has worked saving faith can investigate and understand. The human part can contain approximations, inaccuracies, and even contradictions because it is not considered to be totally accurate. Its importance lies in the fact that it is an historical record that has been compiled by the early church. Thus, although, precautions are taken, the accuracy of the biblical account has now been placed in the hands of “scholars” who will determine whether or not a verse or biblical event is true. In doing this, “both the unity and the inerrancy of Scripture are called into question.... The unity of the bible is reduced to those passages that speak about God’s judgment and mercy. The inerrancy of the bible is changed in meaning so that it no longer applies to what Scripture says but what it accomplishes. Inspiration, the gospel reductionist says, means that God sees to it that his Word does what he intends it to do, namely, to bring people to faith. Only in this sense and only in the fulfillment of this function is the Bible spoken of as being inerrant, in perfect agreement, and wholly reliable. Note that the inerrancy of Scripture is really being equated with what is normally referred to as its efficacy.”<sup>391</sup>

The gospel reductionist uses the same principles to interpret the Bible, and in particular the New Testament, that a “scholar” in the field of literature uses to examine and interpret any other literary work. Thus just as the “scholar” of literature will strive to interpret the meaning of the white whale in Melville’s *Moby Dick* and the donkeys in Dickens’s *David Copperfield*, the gospel reductionist approaches the Scriptures and seeks to examine it. The literary and historical contexts are examined. Added to these are the techniques at the hands of the gospel reductionist — source analysis, form history, and redaction history, etc. Various Christian presuppositions are employed by the gospel reductionist assuming that as a result the church will benefit from great blessings. Among these presuppositions we find: the centrality of the gospel in the Scripture, the distinction between “Law and Promise,” and the necessary prerequisite of faith which is necessary to understand the Promise and receive it. This faith, they hold comes to people as a gift of the Spirit. Yet despite all these presuppositions notably absent is any mention of verbal inspiration. Undoubtedly they dropped this Christian presupposition for a number of reasons: first because they feel that it is not compatible with rationalistic literary criticism nor with its denial of the supernatural; a second reason is that it is unnecessary because “scholars” have “proved” that the Bible contains “contradictions”.<sup>392</sup>

“Subject matter, doctrine, applications and pre-understandings must not control interpretation. The meaning, which according to grammatical principles should be assigned to any word of Scripture,

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<sup>391</sup> Kuske. Biblical Interpretation. pp. 197-198.

<sup>392</sup> Kuske. Biblical Interpretation, p. 200.

is not to be rejected then on account of reasons derived from things or previously conceived opinions; for in this way, interpretation would become uncertain.”<sup>393</sup>

The gospel reductionist thinks that the church benefits from their study and work. They reason that the Holy Spirit was able to work allegorical interpretation, and just as the Holy Spirit could work through the four-fold senses of the exegetes during the medieval period, so the Holy Spirit can also work through both the Historical-Grammatical and the Historical-Critical methods today. Apparently the gospel reductionist thinks that the way the church interprets Scripture must constantly change in order to remain relevant to the ever changing settings of the church. Thus if you have two different methods of interpretation occurring at the same time, these methods can actually compliment one another. When the church becomes aware of the weaknesses of one method, in a constantly changing world of interpretation, the church can adapt its methodology of interpretation, abandoning or modifying its approach to remain relevant to new situations and insights. As a result, “the interpreter must treat the human record as a theological view of the world, of history, and of man that is expressed in terms derived from the ancient culture from which it has emerged.”<sup>394</sup>

Despite the fact that the interpreter encounters problems when dealing with the human side of the biblical account, when the gospel reductionist properly interprets the divine side true doctrine is revealed. Thus the interpreter studies the New Testament expecting to encounter exclusively either the law or the gospel. If the interpreter concludes that the Bible is historically factual, this person is not being true to gospel reductionism. Such a person is said to actually be leading people away from Christ because they are accepting God’s Word on the basis of what is historically verifiable rather than solely through faith.<sup>395</sup>

That Scripture is rejected “as God’s revealed and inerrant Word except for its gospel content has disastrous results. It is an attempt to ride the fence between skepticism and confidence in the reliability of the Bible. Scripture warns us, and history proves, that any attempt to balance skepticism and confidence in regard to God’s Word will slowly but surely tip in favor of skepticism.”<sup>396</sup>

In gospel reductionism, the gospels are reckoned to be nothing more than composites of varying conflicting traditions of what Jesus meant to the first Christians. A goodly share of Jesus’ teachings and miracles are regarded as something that has been adapted or even stories that have been contrived about what He taught and did. To understand these, the modern interpreter does not objectively interpret the “writer’s intent” as to whether something is historical or if it is figurative; rather the modern interpreter subjectively determines this according to their own personal judgment. As a result, there are some who view Jesus’ words and miracles as if they are “possibly

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<sup>393</sup> Walter C. Kaiser. p. 27.

<sup>394</sup> Kuske. Biblical Interpretation. pp. 200-201.

<sup>395</sup> Kuske. Biblical Interpretation. p. 201.

<sup>396</sup> Kuske. Biblical Interpretation. pp. 201-202.

historical, but not necessarily so.” On the other side, there are those who think that “few, if any” of the accounts recorded in the gospels are actually historical. They do not deny that they could be. “They do not deny the supernatural.” Thus these things could have happened. These “scholars” however, “just do not think that they did.” The gospel reductionist is not bothered by this obvious contradiction. The two sides can exist side by side in the same camp agreeing to disagree. This is actually beneficial for the church, according to the gospel reductionist. More important is determining what the miracles and the parables actually mean. Thus it does not really matter if Jesus fed 5000, 1000, or even just 5 individuals. It does not matter if it took place 2000 years ago or even 1000 years ago. These things are not important to the gospel reductionist. What is important is the message that God provides for the bodily needs of mankind because He loves us.

### 4.6.3 The Divine-Human Mystery Approach

As the name tends to indicate, this approach is based on the mystery of the union of the two natures in Christ. Some consider it to be a more conservative view of infallibility and inspiration than is found in the other modern versions of the historical critical approach. It also tries to avoid complete surrender to the views of rationalistic literary criticism. A leading proponent of this approach is well-known Dutch Reformed theologian and writer Harry Boer. According to this theory, just as the mystery of the union of the two natures in Christ is beyond comprehension by human reason and must be received solely by faith, so also the “mystery” of the human and the divine in the nature of the Scriptures is beyond all human understanding and must be accepted by faith. As one grapples with these topics, reason is unable to resolve the issues and solve the problems that arise in human minds. Faith, on the other hand, is capable of leaping over “all the inadequacies of human expression and all the literary, cultural, numerical, or geographical disparities, gaps, inconsistencies, clashing data, contradictory phenomena and discrepancies” that reason finds in Scripture. Faith permits these vicissitudes, which are human in nature, to coexist with the inspiration of all of Scripture by the Holy Spirit which is divine in nature, without making any attempt to contrive some sort of harmonization to satisfy human reason.<sup>397</sup>

Boer does not exclude rationalistic literary criticism from the study of Scripture. He includes both higher criticism and lower criticism or textual criticism in his study, feeling that both are neutral toward the Bible. We can say that he equates both types of criticism in his interpretation of the Bible. In Boer’s analysis of textual criticism, he sees it as a science that uses methods which are rational and systematic. Therefore it places the person who uses this approach “above the divine revelation given in Scripture as its analyst and critic.” However, his analysis is faulty in at least two points. The first is that he fails to give sufficient emphasis to something that he himself notes, namely that judgments that result from textual criticism are much more objective than judgments that come from higher criticism. This he considers a “functional” difference, rather than a “formal” difference. Textual criticism actually has a considerable amount of objective data taken from more than 5000 witnesses to the New Testament text in papyri, uncials, minuscules, lectionaries, as well

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<sup>397</sup> Kuske, David. “An Analysis Of Three Approaches Of The Historical-Critical Method Of Interpretation: Radical (Bultmann), Moderate (Uniting Lutherans) And Conservative (Boer)”. p. 103.

as in the translations and in quotations by the church fathers. Higher criticism, on the other hand, uses data that is based almost entirely on subjective conclusions. He should have stressed this more. During the past century there was a textual theory based on “intrinsic probability.” This theory was based on such subjective concoctions as recensions and genealogical families of texts. These families of texts had varying degrees of reliability. One supposedly was the most reliable, another family consisted of a very loose text, and yet a third was regarded as being a late text which was corrupt in parts. This subjective theory, however, slowly evaporated as the objective facts shined upon them.

The second problem with Boer’s method of interpretation is that although he regards higher criticism with textual criticism as neutral and uses both as if they were the same thing; they are not. Textual criticism concerns itself with how certain pericopes and verses were read differently during the first two centuries AD in various areas of the Christian church. On the other hand, higher criticism concerns itself with both the origin and the interpretation of the Scriptures. Yes, there have been rationalistic textual critics who have sought to harmonize the objective facts of textual criticism with their personal subjective views of the nature of Scripture. However, as was already pointed out, their theory disintegrated like a sand castle and subsequently has been discredited. Of course, there will always be Bible skeptics who will again and again seek to approach Scripture using these “critical” approaches.

The main point in Boer’s approach is that both textual criticism and higher criticism remind Christians that Scripture is a human product and at the same time a divine product; his main point is not to prove that textual criticism and higher criticism are equal or even similar. Achieving the conclusion that the Bible is both divine and human, Boer feels that the historical-critical method and its form of literary criticism have provided a valuable service for the Christian church. From Boer’s perspective, the church was overemphasizing the divine nature of Scripture and as a result, the human nature of Scripture was being lost. Through the use of higher criticism, which developed and emphasized the inconsistencies, gaps, clashing data, and contradictions, attention was drawn to the human side of Scripture. According to Boer, higher criticism has helped Christians realize that the “Bible is not only *the Book* among the many books, but also *a book* among the many books”.<sup>398</sup> Thus as merely “a book among the many books,” the Bible, in Boer’s mind, is no more than any other literary work. It belongs right there on the library shelves with all the literary classics and the paperback novels one can purchase at a newsstand. It is simply “a book among the many books,” nothing more, nothing less. Professor David Kuske says that Boer “welcomes this realization of the Bible’s ‘incarnation in a book’ as an antidote to ‘fundamentalism’s’ tendency to view as suspicious and even heretical any stress that the Bible is a human book as well as being divine.”<sup>399</sup>

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<sup>398</sup> Harry Boer. The Bible and Higher Criticism. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1981, p 13.

<sup>399</sup> Kuske. “An Analysis Of Three Approaches Of The Historical-Critical Method Of Interpretation: Radical (Bultmann), Moderate (Uniting Lutherans) And Conservative (Boer)”. p. 104.

Citing examples of differences in the Gospel accounts such as the words of John the Baptist regarding Jesus being mightier than he, the healing of the blind man when Jesus was both leaving and entering Jericho, the request of James and John made in person or through their mother to Jesus, Boer would have his followers believe that the Bible is as fully and truly a human book even as Jesus was completely and truly a human being. Such examples, Boer feels, reveal Scripture as a blending of the divine and the human. And he comes to the conclusion that because he cannot fathom these seemingly irreconcilable situations that the Bible has contradictions and therefore cannot be said to be infallible or inerrant. Boer feels that a fundamentalist, a Bible believing Christian, will minimize any apparent contradictions or will try to reconcile any difficulties by harmonizing such passages.<sup>400</sup> For Boer the situation is much simpler, just realize that the Scripture is union of the human with the divine. Even as Boer could not accept Scripture as the wholly inspired and inerrant Word of God, so he had trouble understanding the two natures of Christ. It was unfathomable for him to conceive of the human nature of Christ as having access to the divine attributes of God which He possessed according to His divine nature. Thus Boer could say, yes, as God Jesus was omniscient, however as man Jesus' knowledge was limited. Moreover, Boer feels that Jesus repeatedly accommodated Himself to beliefs which were believed

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<sup>400</sup> Professor Kuske presents the position of Bible-believing Christians in the following list which deals with these "problems":

1. A distinction must be made between a difficulty (something which requires more than a passing glance to grasp fully) and a contradiction (something which is said to be true and not to be true about the same person in the same place at the same time).

2. Verbal inspiration does not always mean the writers quoted verbatim every time they recorded what a person had said. Sometimes one writer quotes word for word and another summarizes the substance of what was said. This is a difference, but it is not a contradiction.

3. The order of recording does not always reflect the order in which things transpired. Matthew tends to give the accounts of miracles by grouping several together. Luke tends to tell about the miracles in the historical order in which they happened. This is a difference, but it is not a contradiction.

4. The failure to mention a detail by one of the synoptics does not mean he denies it or is ignorant of that detail. When one writer omits a detail that another includes, this is a difference, but it is not a contradiction.

5. Different emphases do not mean that each writer had a different theology.

6. For the sake of brevity a writer may simply present the substance of an event, as Matthew often does, while the actual details of the account are provided by another writer. This is a difference, but it is not a contradiction.

7. Some of the difficulties are due to our ignorance or lack of information of all the facts. For instance, it was thought that Luke's historical references were sometimes in error, but the more that has been learned about the Roman rule the more this supposition has been proven to be incorrect.

8. If we suggest a possible solution to a difference, it is not done as a prop for our faith. Rather, it helps show that the difference is due mainly to our lack of information. It also may be done to show that the unbeliever's contention that this *must* be a contradiction is not true.

9. Jesus often repeated the same words and thoughts while teaching different audiences (sometimes crowds and sometimes disciples) at different times (such as in the Galilean ministry and the Perea ministry). Often these same words and thoughts took a slightly different form because of the different occasion. These really are not differences because the accounts are referring to different occasions, not giving an account of the same occasion.

10. The synoptic accounts are very similar because the accounts are true, the common outline is the outline of Jesus' life, and those who were eyewitnesses carefully followed the words of the apostles (That they were witnesses we are told in [Luke 1:2](#) and [2 Peter 1:15](#)).

11. The accounts are different because the writers had more material than they could possibly record, each was writing with a different purpose and selected accordingly, and each had a different writing style.

These are not strong-armed attempts to wrestle Scripture into a preconceived mold, but these are simply the facts which demonstrate themselves again and again when one studies each of the synoptics separately and then in harmony with the others. — Kuske. *Biblical Interpretation*. pp. 219-221.

and accepted at that time,<sup>401</sup> but which the rationalists and their spiritual descendants no longer can accept. For example, that Moses is the inspired author of the first five books of the Bible and that the prophet Isaiah is the inspired author of the entire Old Testament book that bears his name. Furthermore it seems that Boer could not fathom and accept the inspiration of Scripture as being the Word that God gave to His chosen writers. He felt that Scripture was produced by people who, although they believed in God and sought to present a divine message, were nevertheless human beings subjected to limitations and outside influences. The task for Boer was to determine not how inspiration does away with the human aspect, but makes use of the human quality of the writer.<sup>402</sup> He feels that there is a gap between the way the original reader read and understood the text with the way that a modern reader understands it after more than nineteen centuries.<sup>403</sup> If the Bible and the fact that Jesus was and is true God and true man at one and the same time was that difficult for Boer, and others, to understand, he, and they, might have been better served in reading *The Two Natures in Christ* by the Lutheran dogmatician Martin Chemnitz, which clearly sets forth the hypostatic union and the communication of attributes between the divine and the human.

Boer does not like the term “infallible.” He feels that the term is too absolute to describe the Scriptures. He would prefer more relative terms such as “reliable” and “trustworthy.” If the Christian community feels compelled to use the “infallible,” Boer would prefer that it be defined as being “reliable” and “trustworthy” rather than being “inerrant.” This term, Boer feels, should apply only to the abiding truths that Jesus spoke and not be used for anything else. That the rationalist could find disparities in Scripture that necessitated the use of artificial harmonizations or sundry assumptions to explain them, Boer regards as a contrived “escape from embarrassment.” It is inconceivable for him to think of the Bible as “a book in which literary, historical, geographical, numerical, or other disparities do not and cannot exist”.<sup>404</sup> By excluding the parts of Scripture with which Boer feels the reader has a problem, the Christian is able to put the infallibility of Scripture in its proper place; regarding it as an article of faith that one can believe but is not able to prove. This he feels will relieve the Christian mind of a great deal of tension whenever a difficulty surfaces.<sup>405</sup>

Boer argues that the literal inerrancy of the Bible is a human deduction from the doctrine of inspiration; and he concludes that the doctrine of literal inerrancy sets the scene “for an exegesis that is basically an exercise in the reading of the Bible in terms of the received tradition” to the exclusion of any serious examination of the depth of its history, poetry, prophecy, or any study of the Bible’s relationship to the environment in which the writers grew up and received their

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<sup>401</sup> Boer. p 95.

<sup>402</sup> Boer. p 77.

<sup>403</sup> Kuske. “An Analysis Of Three Approaches Of The Historical-Critical Method Of Interpretation: Radical (Bultmann), Moderate (Uniting Lutherans) And Conservative (Boer)”. p. 104.

<sup>404</sup> Boer. p 86.

<sup>405</sup> Kuske. “An Analysis Of Three Approaches Of The Historical-Critical Method Of Interpretation: Radical (Bultmann), Moderate (Uniting Lutherans) And Conservative (Boer)”. p. 106.

religious, cultural, historical mindset.<sup>406</sup> According to Boer, the literal inerrancy of Scripture is something that has been deduced from the doctrine of inspiration by human scholars.<sup>407</sup>

Boer, in order to avoid sterile exegesis, appeals to Christians to “give full weight to the doctrine of creation and its implication for God’s activity in history and in nature”.<sup>408</sup> There is an intertwining of the spiritual and the natural. Thus, although after the fall into sin, the world became imperfect, God did not abandon what had been created. Instead, God “revived it, healed it, and make it serviceable again.” Thus Boer sees the redemptive activity of God taking place within the context of creation; and so there is a link connecting the redemptive work of God in the spiritual and the creative work of God in the natural. Boer finds a similar connection with the work of the Holy Spirit inspiring the writing of Scripture. Here Boer sees a constant intertwining of the spiritual with the natural and the historical. He finds a distinctly human element evident everywhere in Scripture.<sup>409</sup> Because the “critical” interpreter such as Boer can find the spiritual intertwined with both the natural and the historical, he concludes: “There is therefore nothing that is obvious, self-evident, easily definable or analyzable about the primary work of the Holy Spirit”.<sup>410</sup> It is for this reason that the divine work of the Holy Spirit is concealed in human vessels. Consequently, the perfect work of the Holy Spirit is reflected in the “brokenness and imperfection” of the lives of men.<sup>411</sup>

For Boer, whenever there is a conjunction of the divine and the human a mystery exists. To deal with this mystery, Boer suggests that Christians not become all wrapped-up in the doctrine of inspiration and that they deal more with the concept of faith in Christ. Much can be said in favor of Boer’s advice to not be so preoccupied and bogged down with the passages of Scripture that are not readily understandable that one loses sight of the message that we are saved through faith in Christ Jesus and His redemptive work. Still, Boer’s doctrines of Christology and what he teaches concerning the Bible leave much to be desired. And from the perspective of a Bible-believing Christian they are seriously flawed and completely incorrect.

Regarding Christology, Boer has a problem because he fails to make a proper distinction between the humanity of Christ and his humiliation. In other words, he incorrectly and mistakenly tries to equate the incarnation of Christ, that is, His taking on human form and becoming a human being, with the exinanition of Christ, or our Savior’s choosing not to make use of all His divine attributes at all times. Boer errs when he asserts that Jesus did not know everything because he was human. There were times when Jesus appeared not to know everything. However, this was not due to the fact that Jesus was human. No, at times Jesus did not know everything because in His state of humiliation, or exinanition, there were times when He did not fully use the divine attribute of omniscience which was communicated to his human nature in His incarnation. Jesus knew all

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<sup>406</sup> Boer. pp. 100-101.

<sup>407</sup> Kuske. Biblical Interpretation. p. 217.

<sup>408</sup> Boer. p. 101.

<sup>409</sup> Boer. p. 104.

<sup>410</sup> Boer. p. 106.

<sup>411</sup> Kuske. “An Analysis Of Three Approaches Of The Historical-Critical Method Of Interpretation: Radical (Bultmann), Moderate (Uniting Lutherans) And Conservative (Boer)”. p. 107.



things (“we can see that you know all things and that you do not even need to have anyone ask you questions. This makes us believe that you came from God” John 16:30, NIV) and at the same time Jesus did not know all things (“No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father” Mark 13:32, NIV). For us who are Bible-believing Christians, this is a psychological mystery. It is not a contradiction, however. That there were some things that Jesus did not know was not because He was a man. He is and always will be not only true God but also true man, even though that is difficult, yes even impossible for some people to believe. In His exalted state, Jesus continues to possess His human nature in personal union with the divine nature that He has always possessed.

If we were to say, as Boer does, that Jesus did not know all things because Jesus was a man would mean that Jesus does not know all things also in His state of exaltation. No, it was part of His state of humiliation, not His incarnation, that Jesus did not always fully use His omniscience. Moreover, the exinanition of Jesus does not mean, as Boer suggests, that Jesus ever used or even accommodated Himself to the “existing beliefs” of the time, which were erroneous. Jesus was and is the truth (John 14:6) and, without exception, He bore witness to the truth (“for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me” John 18:37, NIV). When Jesus identified Moses as the author of the Pentateuch and the Prophet Isaiah as the author of the book that bears his name (John 5:46, Matthew 15:7), Jesus was not merely expressing Himself in terms of the “common belief” in those days about the authorship of these books. Not even for a single moment was Jesus’ human nature ever separated from His divine nature. As true God, Jesus knew who the holy writers were whom the Holy Spirit had used. As the God-man Jesus never deviated from that which is the absolute truth. To do so, would be to deny Himself. The Christology that Boer sets forth is not one that is drawn out of Scripture. Rather, it springs forth from human reason. It comes to life from the mind of a human being, not Almighty God.

Boer has a similar problem with the doctrine of Scripture. He tries so hard to make the Scriptures appear to be of both divine and human origin that he places an improper emphasis on the human involvement in recording the Scriptures. As with his teaching of Christology the doctrine of Scripture that Boer sets forth does not flow from Scripture but instead it comes from human reason. To say, as Boer does, that the so-called “discrepancies” in Scripture compel us to view the Word of God as a piece of literature that has been produced through stages during a course of one or more centuries; to say, as Boer does, that inspiration does not deprive Scripture from being subject to “human vicissitudes”; to say, as Boer does, that the Bible is not only the Book among books but a book among books; does not do justice to the fact that God, speaking to His prophet, says, “I have put **my words** in your mouth” (Jeremiah 1:9, NIV) and completely ignores what Paul confesses in 1 Corinthians 2:13, “We speak, **not** in words taught us **by human wisdom** **but** in words taught **by the Spirit**, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words” (NIV).

God does not explain to us the mystery of the process of inspiration in Scripture. However, when King David, who was the inspired author of many of the Psalms, declares, “The Spirit of the Lord

spoke through me; his word was on my tongue” (2 Samuel 23:2, NIV), and when the psalmist describes his tongue as “the pen of a skillful writer” (Psalm 45:1), these holy men of God are not asserting that the divine work of the Holy Spirit was “hidden by the weakness and brokenness of their human words” as Boer asserts. The process of inspiration was unique. This process did not result in an imperfect work that is “an intertwining of the spiritual which is absolute and the natural and the historical which is relative” as Boer theorizes. Nor is Scripture “an embodiment of the absolute truth of divine reality that is presented in the garb of the relative truth of the human record” as Boer postulates. These kinds of descriptions of Scripture do not agree with what we are told in 2 Timothy 3:16: “All Scripture is God-breathed” (NIV) or with 2 Peter 1:19–21, which tells us: “We have the word of the prophets made more certain ... No prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (NIV).

In addition, Boer’s view of Scripture implies that our LORD does not assure us infallibly of *all* things that are in Scripture. Infallibility is restricted by Boer to only those things that are in the area of divine certitude. When restrictions such as this are placed on Scripture, the reader cannot be certain whether or not a particular passage belongs to such divine certitude.

Boer further undermines the doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture when he states that we dare not make Scripture what we want it to be rather than the way the writer’s contemporaries were expected to read these writings. If he is speaking about distorting Scripture, Boer’s warning would be valid. However, Boer is implying that the people in the early Christian church spoke less exactly than what we expect today. To make the assumption that those people spoke with less exactitude than we do today is unfounded. For the early Christians, facts were facts just as they are for us today and people in those days rounded their numbers and used figures of speech just as we do today.

That Boer considers the historical-critical method as a useful tool for the Christian and beneficial for the church also is based on the assumption that higher criticism is a technical exercise which is neutral in the hands of a true believer. Kuske is correct when he says that “the literary criticism of the historical-critical method is thoroughly rationalistic.” Literary criticism is an unbelieving approach that cannot be divorced from the historical-critical method because it is an essential or integral component of the unbelieving spirit with which the negative critic perceives the nature of Scripture and how Scripture came into being.<sup>412</sup>

In summary we can say that Boer’s “conservative” position, which views Scripture as being infallible and yet at the same time fallible and also postulates that Scripture is inerrant and yet at the same time errant, creates a contradiction which he tries to explain away by saying that Scripture at one and the same time is both divine and human. His approach is based on an erroneous view of both Christology and the doctrine of Scripture. Attempting to turn the inspiration

<sup>412</sup> Kuske. “An Analysis Of Three Approaches Of The Historical-Critical Method Of Interpretation: Radical (Bultmann), Moderate (Uniting Lutherans) And Conservative (Boer)”. p. 111.

of Scripture into a mystery of faith, which remains undisturbed by the “disparities” that a believer encounters in Scripture, fails. It does so for the same reason that the approaches of Bultmann and the Uniting Lutherans do. It elevates an individual, at least in part, above Scripture as its analyst and critic. “The subjectivity this approach lets loose in the interpretation of Scripture can in time only wreak havoc with God’s Word.”<sup>413</sup>

Boer is not alone in his approach. Joining with Boer are some Lutherans and a growing number of conservative evangelicals who seek to uphold the concept of the inerrancy of Scripture and yet at the same time want to incorporate and involve some “scholarly” view like Boer’s about how the Scripture came to be. They regard the historical-critical tools that are used in attacking the inerrancy of Scripture as not being totally destructive. These people would have us believe that if these rationalistic tools were used properly, they would be beneficial to the church in some way. Sadly, those who desire to uphold inerrancy are not fully cognizant of the fact that when they seemingly make only a slight concession they are in actuality conceding the position that they so earnestly want to maintain.<sup>414</sup>

#### **4.6.4 An Evaluation of These Three Approaches of Liberal and “Moderate” Lutherans**

We have just seen three variations of the historical critical method. All three of these versions exist today and all three have had differing degrees of influence on some bodies of the Lutheran church as well as the Reformed church bodies. These views are not universally accepted and embraced by all Lutheran church bodies. In fact, some Lutheran church bodies unequivocally reject the theology and hermeneutical approaches of rationalism.

Who would dare to jump up in a classroom and offer: “What the professor really means to say is ....” And thereby provide a lengthy subjective opinion and analysis of a professor’s lecture? Yet, is this not what people do when they offer their interpretation of what God says? I am not talking here about a professor asking a particular student to explain a portion of a lecture or to make a presentation in the student’s own language to show that the material has been grasped. What I am talking about is someone making a subsequent presentation in which what the professor said has now been interpreted, reworked, and then stated in a totally different form. Yet, this is exactly what modern “scholastic” interpreters are doing.

There is a fourth approach currently used by Lutherans in the USA. It is not, by far, the most widely accepted approach, nor do those who use it receive praise and acclaim from others for using it. In fact, when it is used some people, including eminent and respected university professors, refer to its adherents as “arrogant and naïve.” When the proponents of this approach set forth their conclusions, they are labeled “positionalistic statements.” They are deemed to be

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<sup>413</sup> Kuske. “An Analysis Of Three Approaches Of The Historical-Critical Method Of Interpretation: Radical (Bultmann), Moderate (Uniting Lutherans) And Conservative (Boer)”. p. 111.

<sup>414</sup> Kuske. Biblical Interpretation. p. 224.

“obstinate” for their Bible-based beliefs. Their existence is ignored, even denied by many in academia because they do not compromise their personal beliefs to be in accord with others who have adopted totally foreign and unacceptable beliefs, even though the beliefs of others may seem to make perfect logical sense, seem reasonable, be the result of much scholarship, and be adhered to by a vast majority. This small group of Lutherans in the USA, and elsewhere in the world, that use the fourth approach are the orthodox, confessional Lutherans.

Orthodox Lutherans can agree with Bultmann on at least one point, it is impossible to study a text without any presuppositions. The presuppositions, which orthodox Lutherans have about the Bible, involve what they believe is the Bible’s nature (in all of its 66 individual books). For them, the Bible is the inspired Word of God that He has given to humankind. This can be said of every single word in the Bible. Regarding the message of the Bible, God speaks to humankind in the Bible using two basic words. One word condemns humankind because of the sin; this is the law. The second word acquits humankind because of the atoning, redemptive work of Jesus our Savior; this is the gospel. For anyone who approaches Scripture without these basic presuppositions, the Bible remains a closed book; it is hidden behind a thick veil or curtain and is thus beyond all human understanding. It is only in Christ and through Christ that an individual can even begin to understand God’s love for humankind. Paul Wendland in an article entitled “*Will the Real Historical-Grammatical Method Please Stand Up?*” points out these presuppositions “are not drawn from our own reason or understanding or tradition or community. They are simply restatements of what the [Holy] Spirit himself says in the Sacred Scriptures. No claim to have the mind of Christ that divorces the Spirit from what the Spirit plainly says can be considered valid.”<sup>415</sup>

In modern theological circles, theologians are no longer approaching Scripture as the theologians of the past had done. Today’s theologian drags along excess baggage and commitments that influence their opinion of Scripture and what they are anticipating to find in their study of Scripture or in a portion of Scripture. One might compare the way Scripture is approached to a person going to an optician and selecting a pair of sunglasses. Each pair that the person tries on is going to affect their view — polarized lenses or non-polarized; photo-grey or colored lenses; light tint, medium tint, or dark tint; green, blue, orange; etc. The lenses that are finally selected will affect what a person sees. For example, my wife wears green polarized lenses; I wear orange polarized lenses. At times, as we are driving we will comment on the color of a car or a house. Because of the lenses that we are wearing, we each see the color differently — sometimes a different shade or hue, and at other times a completely different color. The lenses through which we see things affect how we see things and what we see.

The lenses through which modern theologians view Scripture are not drawn from Scripture as they had been in centuries past. The modern lenses that the modern theologian uses are based on theories and paradigms that human reason has constructed. It is fairly easy to see the ideological biases that some theologians have — non-gender, feminism, liberation theology, existentialism,

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<sup>415</sup> Paul O. Wendland. “Will the Real Historical-Grammatical Method Please Stand Up?” Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly. Volume 102. Number 3. Summer 2005. p. 213.

etc., — as they impose their particular view points on the manner in which they read Scripture. The result, of course, is that they come up with a whole new way of seeing and interpreting Scripture than have theologians of the past centuries.

Some modern theologians claim that in order to gain the real meaning of Scripture they are viewing it in the light of the particular cultural and demographic setting of the day or using “objective” facts of history. If done properly, there is nothing wrong with this. However, it is not always done as simply and clearly as it sounds. Often a distinction is made between the “facts” of history and what scholars make of those facts; in other words, between the data and the interpretation of that data. There is a difference between how the orthodox Lutheran theologian does this and how a “moderate” theologian and a liberal theologian does it. The orthodox theologian makes a very clear distinction between what is Biblical and what is not; between biblical history, which has been written by special individuals whom the Holy Spirit has selected and inspired, and extra-biblical histories, which have been written by individuals who, although they may be devout and motivated by what the Bible says, have not been so selected and inspired by the Holy Spirit. One can illustrate this to some degree, although less than perfectly, by moving it into a secular setting, in which nothing has been inspired by the Holy Spirit. We could say that the orthodox would use original documents (constitutions, treaties, etc), the so-called “moderates” would use history text books and historical novels, and the liberals (revisionist historians) would base their historical view on historical novels and “made-for-TV” movies. As I said, it is a less than perfect example. It does, however, show the movement away from the original by the “moderates” and the liberals. For the orthodox theologian, the principle of *sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone) is sufficient; nothing more is necessary. The interpretations, views and theories of others are not necessary. Scripture interprets itself; it needs no human help.

When historians work with data from the ancient world, they are often very selective in the data they decide to use. Consequently historians have produced different and often conflicting results. Paul Wendland gives us the example of the Apostle Paul. Who was Paul? One scholar says that Paul spoke Greek and was a Roman citizen. In light of this, he studies the epistles through the “lenses” of the ancient stoics. This scholar’s findings will be very different from another scholar who sees Paul as “a self-confessed ‘Hebrew of Hebrews.’” This second scholar will study the epistles comparing them with other Jewish writings of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD. Which approach to studying the epistles is better? “Who knows for certain what ancient texts Paul had access to?”<sup>416</sup>

When evaluating the approaches to Scripture and its uses by those in the moderate and liberal camps, the orthodox, conservative Lutheran finds them sadly wanting. They denigrate the value of God’s Holy Word. They elevate the views and opinions of sinful humans to be on a par with, or even superior to, what God has said. Even though such a stance may not be popular, or even generally accepted by others, the orthodox, conservative Lutheran, like Joshua in the Old Testament (Joshua 24:15), feels compelled to take a stand based on faith rather than reason.

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<sup>416</sup> Paul Wendland. “Will the Real Historical-Grammatical Method Please Stand Up?” pp. 214-215.

#### **4.7 The Differences Regarding the Doctrines of the Church and the Ministry among Lutheran Church Bodies in the USA**

In the realm of all the religions of the world, Christianity is really a minority religion. Although it has the largest membership of all world religions, only 33% of the people in the world today profess to be Christians.<sup>417</sup> Within Christendom, Lutherans are minority group; some lists of Christian churches in the world do not even include Lutherans. In the USA, all the Lutheran church bodies together comprise only 6% of the population.<sup>418</sup> Thus within the world of religion, Lutheranism is but a tiny speck. All the Lutheran church bodies together are far from being a dominant and imposing force. There are approximately 9.5 million Lutherans in the USA. Of these, about 50% belong to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), about 25% belong to the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS), about 4% belong to the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod,<sup>419</sup> about 0.2% belong to the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS), and the remainder are divided among 17 other distinct and independent Lutheran church bodies. The larger of these smaller Lutheran church bodies include: The Apostolic Lutheran Church of America, The Church of the Lutheran Brethren of America, The AELC (The Authentic Evangelical Lutheran Church), The Prot stant Conference, and the CLC (The Church of the Lutheran Confession).

One might think that all the Lutherans would have the same theology and doctrinal positions because they are such a small church body and so distinct from other churches in Christendom. We need to note, however, that there is as much difference between the Lutheran synods as there is between Anglicans and the Dutch Reformed churches. Each of the Lutheran church bodies in the USA is distinct and different. They are not alike in doctrinal views, their views of church government, their views of inter-synodical relationships, their views of relationships with those who belong to other church bodies, and, in respect to this paper, they are not in agreement on the doctrines of the church and the ministry.

The ELS and its sister synod the WELS, with which it is in doctrinal fellowship, are a minority comprising less than 5% of all the people who claim affiliation with the Lutheran church bodies in the USA. However, the doctrinal stands of these two Lutheran churches are just as important to their members as are any doctrinal statements made by another church body. Therefore, we should take note of the different views the three major Lutheran bodies in the USA — ELCA, LCMS, WELS/ELS — have regarding the doctrine of the church and the ministry. Time, resources, and the growing length of this study prevent us from doing a thorough comparison of all the Lutheran church bodies throughout the world.

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<sup>417</sup> <http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0904108.html>

<sup>418</sup> [http://www.adherents.com/largecom/com\\_luth.html](http://www.adherents.com/largecom/com_luth.html)

<sup>419</sup> <http://www.LCMS.org/pages/internal.asp?NavID=73>

The differences between the Lutheran church bodies in the USA regarding the doctrine of the church and the ministry go all the way back to their origins, in many instances going back to their European roots. In most cases it will depend on the theological positions of the immigrants who founded the particular synod, where they lived, where they studied, and most importantly the “positionalistic” theological views of their professors when they were studying at their respective universities. Some studied under liberals and remained liberals. Others studied under liberals and turned conservative. In other cases, various influences foreign and domestic, theological and worldly have shaped their theological positions.

In this section we discuss these three very different Lutheran church bodies. We look first at the ELCA (4.7.1) then the LCMS (4.7.2) and finally the WELS (4.7.3).

### 4.7.1 The ELCA

The first group that we consider is the ELCA. It is the largest and most liberal branch of Lutheranism in the USA. It officially came into existence in 1988 following a large merger between the **Lutheran Church in America (LCA)**, **The American Lutheran Church (TALC)** and the **Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches (AELC)**.<sup>420</sup> However, it has ancestral roots going back more than a century before its formation. Some of its ancestral roots are among the first Lutherans in the USA who were present already at the time of the American Revolutionary War (1775-1783). The **LCA** came into being in 1962 as a result of a merger of the following Lutheran church bodies: the Augustana Lutheran Church (1860), the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church, which was formerly known as the Suomi Synod (1890), and the American Evangelical Lutheran Church (1894), and the United Lutheran Church in America (1918), which was itself the result of a merger of three synods [the General Synod (1820), the General Council (1866), and the United Synod of the South (1862)]<sup>421</sup>. The **TALC** was formed as a result of a series of mergers in 1960, when the American Lutheran Church (ALC), the United Evangelical Lutheran Church (UELC), and The Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELC) joined together. In 1963, The Lutheran Free Church, which had broken away from the United Norwegian Lutheran Church in 1897, joined the ALC. The ALC, which is distinguished from the larger body, TALC, by the absence of the capital T, also was the result of a merger. In 1930 the Joint Synod of Ohio (1818), the Iowa Synod (1854)<sup>422</sup> joined with the Buffalo Synod (1845) to form the ALC.<sup>423</sup> The United Evangelical Lutheran Church was formerly known as the United Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church (1896). The Evangelical Lutheran Church resulted from the split of the Norwegian Lutherans that produced the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America (1917) and the body about which this paper is written, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS). The ELS was not part of the merger. The Norwegian Lutheran Church of America had been formed as a result of the merger of the Hauge Synod (1876), what was left of

<sup>420</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evangelical\\_Lutheran\\_Church\\_in\\_America](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evangelical_Lutheran_Church_in_America)

<sup>421</sup> Carl S. Schomberg. *The Doctrine of Church and Ministry: The Scriptural Basis for the WELS Practice and its Uniqueness from the Practices of Other Lutheran Church Bodies*. A Paper delivered at a Pastoral Conference, May 2-4, 1984, p. 6.

<sup>422</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American\\_Lutheran\\_Church](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Lutheran_Church)

<sup>423</sup> <http://www.LCMS.org/ca/www/cyclopedia/02/display.asp?t1=b&word=BUFFALOSYNOD>

the old Norwegian Synod (1853) and the United Norwegian Lutheran Church (1890). In 1946, the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America changed its name to the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the name which it had at the time of the 1960 merger to form **TALC**.<sup>424</sup> The **AELC** was formed in 1976 following a split within the LCMS. The members of the AELC left the LCMS over matters of doctrine and practice including the following issues: biblical literacy, academic freedom and ecumenism.<sup>425</sup>

The ELCA was formed as a result of mergers of many Lutheran church bodies. Whenever there is a merger some sort of compromise is involved. And it certainly was in the case of the ELCA. The confessional position of the LCA was so weakened by merger that it had the weakest confessional position of all of the Lutheran church bodies in the USA. In an effort not to offend anyone, the doctrinal stance was so watered down that basically any position was acceptable. The TALC was slightly stronger in its doctrinal positions yet it failed to insist upon agreement in terms and phraseology among its member components regarding a common faith as being more important than focusing on doctrinal differences. As a result, human influences greatly shaped the perspective of Scripture and Scriptural matters. The historical critical method was widely accepted and approved. By-products of the use of the historical critical method such as existentialism, neo-orthodoxy and the social gospel were common. The result was what has been referred to as Neo-Lutheranism.<sup>426</sup> The AELC welcomed the “progressive” ideas of theologians who regarded the LCMS as too biblical and too restrictive. They adhered to the ideas of existential demythologizing and gospel reductionism. Consequently no church body joined the ELCA with a strong desire to conform to the single literal interpretation of the Bible, as Luther did, nor to conform to the body of Lutheran doctrine as set forth in the Book of Concord. These things were regarded as being “out of date” and “irrelevant” for people living in a modern, scientific age.

The ELCA clings to the historical-critical method and teaches some form of it in their colleges and seminaries. They seek to interpret Scripture in its social context. They do practice infant baptism. They practice “open communion” and permit all baptized persons to receive the Lord’s Supper.

Similar to the ideas espoused by Grabau, they believe that there is one visible church which is divided into 64 dioceses, which the ELCA calls “synods” thereby using the term differently than do other Lutherans in the USA. Each diocese is governed by a bishop and a council. Presiding over the entire church body is a bishop, who is elected to a term of six years. Within the church structure there are various programs and ministries such as: “missions, outdoor ministries, campus ministries, social ministries, and education.” The ELCA holds that everyone who is baptized is a minister of the Church. Of these, some are called to positions of church leadership and service; these are referred to as the “rostered ministry,” clergy. After a man or woman, regardless of their sexual persuasion, has been trained and certified by the local diocese, they are “set aside, but not above” the other members through ordination or commissioning/consecration. The ELCA currently

<sup>424</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American\\_Lutheran\\_Church](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Lutheran_Church)

<sup>425</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evangelical\\_Lutheran\\_Church\\_in\\_America](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evangelical_Lutheran_Church_in_America)

<sup>426</sup> Schomberg. pp. 4-7.



has four types of “rostered ministry”: Pastor, Deaconess, Associate in Ministry, and Diaconal minister.<sup>427</sup> Although members of the clergy in the ELCA use the Bible and preach and teach the Gospel, concerns for social matters are heavily emphasized.<sup>428</sup>

In dealing with the component members who would eventually compose ELCA, doctrinal discussions already during the second quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century revealed that while the same subscription to the Lutheran Confessions was claimed and the same words were used in discussing matters of faith, the future members of ELCA viewed and understood these in a different way. Influencing this shift away from the historical position was an ever-increasing knowledge and implementation of European theology and theologians such as Bultmann, Kierkegaard, and Hardt, to name only a few.

#### 4.7.2 The LCMS

The second group that we look at is the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (1847). The official position on the doctrine of the church that the LCMS has adopted is almost exactly the same as that of the WELS and the ELS. The church consists only of believers. The church therefore is invisible. The church can be identified by its marks — the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments (baptism and the Lord’s Supper). No one who is not a believer can be a part of the church. The Church Militant occurs in this world as the believers are engaged in a daily spiritual struggle (the sinful nature or “the Old Adam” vs. “the New Man” or the Christian within the believer). The Church Triumphant occurs in heaven where all Christians will fully partake in the victory that Christ Jesus has won for us. The work and purpose of the Church is to make disciples of all nations. The Church does this through the preaching and teaching of the Gospel. This is known as the ministry of the Church.<sup>429</sup> Up to this point, there is nothing wrong with what the LCMS publicly states and proclaims. The problem arises, however, when they insist that the local congregation is the only legitimate form of the Christian Church. This then brings about the difference in the doctrine of the ministry. The LCMS holds that only the pastor of a local congregation is involved in the ministry. Many of those who have left the LCMS and joined the ELS through the colloquy process have brought these two views with them and this has affected the current situation in the ELS. These two narrow and restrictive views of the church and the ministry create a marked difference between the LCMS view and the view held by the more conservative WELS.

Two much greater problems which separate the LCMS from the more conservative WELS and the ELS are 1) its lenient and permissive position on the doctrine of fellowship — prayer fellowship, altar fellowship, pulpit fellowship, and church fellowship, and 2) its failure to exercise church discipline against those who stray from the accepted doctrinal positions and err in practice. It was the matter of church fellowship that finally destroyed the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical

<sup>427</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evangelical\\_Lutheran\\_Church\\_in\\_America](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evangelical_Lutheran_Church_in_America)

<sup>428</sup> Schomberg, pp. 4-7.

<sup>429</sup> <http://www.LCMS.org/ca/www/cyclopedia/02/display.asp?t1=C&t2=h>

Conference of North America. In the 1930's, some members of the LCMS fell under the influences of the more liberal Ohio Synod. This caused concern within the Synodical Conference as there was a noted shift in the doctrinal statements made by LCMS theologians. The generation that followed participated in the split in which some 100,000 members left the LCMS to form the AELC. Not all who had differing doctrinal ideas departed, however. The inability of the LCMS to exercise church discipline on those who strayed in doctrine and practice has enabled a situation to develop that continues to this day in which liberal, moderate, and conservative theologians work and function together, agreeing to disagree, and ignoring any differences.

Within the LCMS, there are those such as Robert Preus, who believe that for the Lutheran church “a definite and permanent doctrinal position is based on Scripture.” Up to this point, all conservative, orthodox Lutherans would agree. However Preus amplifies this to say that it is “based on Scripture as interpreted by the Lutheran Confessions and in harmony with the Confessions, the ancient creeds, the church fathers, and Luther.”<sup>430</sup> This is why there is such a difference of opinion among many Lutherans today. This is, in part, why the conservative WELS and the ELS are not in complete doctrinal agreement with the LCMS. And with many former LCMS pastors now part of the ELS, for confessional reasons, it explains why there is a lack of agreement on how to define the church and the ministry. Doctrine is not based on the Lutheran Confessions, the ancient creeds, the church fathers, or Luther. It is based on Scripture. Nor is doctrine based on the way anything or anyone else interprets Scripture. The humans involved with producing these writings and creeds, yes, even Luther, were but mere mortal beings. They are the created. For Bible-believing Christians, the created never was, is, or can be greater than the Creator. The Bible is the Word of God, the Creator. It is the source and norm for all doctrine and practice. Everything else is an interpretation of it, not the other way around. That may sound “naïve and arrogant” to the reader, but it is the official position of orthodox Lutherans.

### 4.7.3 The WELS

The third and final Lutheran position that we shall look at is the one professed and adhered to by the orthodox, conservative Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. The WELS was founded in 1850 by congregations located in and near Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Some of its first pastors were trained at the LCMS seminary in St. Louis studying under C.F.W. Walther. Since 1863 the WELS has operated an educational program to prepare pastors and teachers to serve its member congregations and to serve as missionaries both in the USA and in other countries of the world. It was a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America until the group disbanded in 1963. The WELS is a member of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference composed of orthodox Lutheran church bodies located throughout the world.

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<sup>430</sup> Preus. The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism, A Study of Theological Prolegomena, p. 30.

The WELS adopted the following theses in 1960 in its dealings with the LCMS within the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America. The positions set forth in these theses continue to stand and clearly state the WELS position.

### **Theses on Doctrine of the Church, 1960**

#### **Theses on the Relation of Synod and Local Congregation to the Holy Christian Church**

*In the discussion of the doctrine of the Church, specifically the relation of synod and local congregation, it is helpful and essential to distinguish between The NATURE AND ESSENCE of these respective bodies on the one hand and their ORGANIZATIONAL FORM AND FUNCTION on the other.*

1. *The Church, according to its inner nature and essence, is the total number of all those whom God recognizes as His dear children by faith in Christ Jesus... (Supporting Scripture passages, which are quite lengthy, follow throughout the theses.)*
2. *Any group of professing Christians gathered in Christ's name... can rightly be called "Church" because of the Christians in it. Therefore also a so called local congregation gathered about Word and Sacrament is rightly called "Church" only because of the Christians in it... The outward organizational form of a congregation is of human arrangement and may vary widely as it did even in the Apostolic Church...*
3. *When it is said that a synod is "Church" this is said with reference to its inner nature and essence, namely insofar as it constitutes a communion of true believers. When it is said that a synod or conference is a "human arrangement" this is properly said with reference to its outward organizational form which is determined and defined by the congregations that have constituted this body...*
4. *When the formal origin of synods as we know them is kept in mind there will be no room for a situation where a synod invades and overrules a congregation in its exercise of Christian discipline. When a synod goes beyond the functions that have been assigned to it by the constituting congregations it oversteps its call and becomes a busybody in other men's matters...*
5. *If we remember that a synod is "Church" with reference to its inner nature and essence, we will not doubt that when a synod faithfully and conscientiously fulfills its assigned functions (whether it be the training of pastors and teachers, in promoting the work of missions, or in the area of doctrinal discipline, the supervision of doctrine and practice), its actions are completely valid and have divine authority. For they are functions for which, as "Church", it is fully competent and qualified...*

### **Theses on Doctrine of the Ministry, 1960**

#### **Theses on the Ministry of the Keys and the Public Ministry**

1. *The Ministry of the Keys, which is the ministry of the Word, has been committed to the Holy Christian Church therefore to each Christian man, woman, and child. Christians are to be personally active in this ministry in every possible way which is not in violation of God's Will and Ordinance... (Supporting quotations from Scripture follow, here and throughout.)*
2. *It is God's Will and Ordinance that Christians provide for the public administration of the Keys. This is achieved through the calling of qualified individuals who are thus placed in charge of the public administration of Word and Sacraments and perform this task in behalf of their fellow Christians (von Gemeinschafts wegen). Such service is referred to as the Public Ministry; and its duties are to be exercised only by those who are properly called to it by the Church. This Public Ministry is God-ordained and not a product of historical development... (Article 14 of the Augsburg Confession. "Of Ecclesiastical Usages," is quoted here in addition to Scripture.)*
3. *The office of the Public Ministry is not limited to any divinely fixed form as such, for example the outward form of the "Pfarramt" or pastoral office. In Christian liberty, as circumstances*

*require and the Lord supplies diversity of gifts, operations and ministries... The Church may separate the various functions of the Public Ministry of the Word and apportion them to whatever number of qualified persons it may choose to call. It is essential that each call thus extended shall specify the area of responsibility and the type of duty thereby assigned, and that each laborer abide by the terms of his call.<sup>431</sup>*

The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS) regard themselves as sister synods. They are in doctrinal agreement. Both are conservative, orthodox Lutheran church bodies in the USA.

Carl Schomberg correctly states, “We in the Wisconsin Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod are not any more intelligent than our Lutheran neighbors. We do not approach the study of God’s Word with any greater sincerity of heart and faith than our Lutheran neighbors do. We are not any more adept at quoting the Holy Scriptures than other Lutherans. Physically we certainly are not stronger than our Lutheran neighbors. We are a minority. We walk in the same land. We breathe the same air. But we are different. We are different, because the Lord in His grace has allowed us to be different. And we must never forget that.”<sup>432</sup>

#### **4.8 The Relationship of the Bible and the Doctrines of the Church and the Ministry**

Truth and error are very important to the Church. It is very important to make a distinction between truth and error. This is especially true when it comes to matters of doctrine. Doctrines are the teachings that are presented to us in the Bible for our learning, growth, and use within the church (2 Timothy 3:16).

Our Redeemer impresses upon us the importance of holding to His Word and not wavering from it. “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” (John 8:31-32, NIV). “Blessed rather are those who hear the Word of God and obey it.” (Luke 11:28, NIV). The Scriptures contain everything that we need to know for our salvation. “Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But 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 20:31-32, NIV). Therefore, Jesus wants us to teach all these things to others — “teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:20, NIV). He does not want us to change anything. He does not want us to omit anything. He does not want us to add anything. He wants us to teach His Word, all of it, to everyone. “If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book” (Revelation 22:18-19, NIV).

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<sup>431</sup> Schomberg. pp. 8-9.

<sup>432</sup> Schomberg. p. 10.

It is obvious, then, that all of Scripture is important. It is also obvious that all who believe in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior cling firmly to what His Word says. In other words, it is obvious that a Christian should adhere to the doctrines of the Bible. Those that do are part of the family of God. Those that do are brothers and sisters in the faith. However, how do we know what someone else believes? After all, faith is a very personal thing. That is obvious from the way we state our faith — “I believe . . . .” So how can we know what someone else believes?

The answer is by their confession of faith. Their confessional statements set forth what they believe. Often this is a verbal profession of faith. When it comes to larger groups of people, however, it is not only what their leaders verbally state, but also the written documents that the group, church body, or denomination publishes. These confessional writings are developed within the group and adopted by the group as a whole. They are not the position of just one individual.

Sometimes these confessional statements are very clear and precise. Sometimes they are rather weak and general. For example, there is a big difference between stating “I believe in god” and “I believe in the Triune God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” The former is too general. It is not precise enough in identifying who or what is the object of faith. Scripture makes it very clear who God is. It is not some nebulous concept. It is not some all-inclusive deity. It is not a case of “one size fits all.” The Lord Himself tells us, “I am the Lord; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols” (Isaiah 42:8, NIV). Our Savior tells us that we should “Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only” (Matthew 4:10, NIV). Most of us would not be comfortable, therefore, in saying that we share a common faith with someone who merely believes in a god. Thus, the profession of faith and the written confessions become very important in not only stating what is believed, but also in helping others to identify this person or this group of persons as a fellow believer.

These confessional statements are important. They are important because they indicate that we believe, teach, and confess the very same thing that the Bible states. It is not that our confessional statements are more important than the Bible. They should never be regarded as such. They are a reiteration of what the Scriptures clearly teach.

In determining the confessional position of a church body on a particular matter of doctrine, therefore, what the Bible says becomes all-important. Throughout the history of God’s people, doctrine has never been a matter of public opinion. There is no instance in Scripture where the Lord puts the matter into the hands of the people and gives them the right and the authority to determine what the doctrine should be. It is not a matter of choosing what to believe. It is not a democratic process. What we should believe is in the Bible. God defines our doctrine in His Word. He states it, clearly and precisely, in language that even a little child can understand.

Because it is so very important, let me reiterate what I have said elsewhere. Christ is the head of His body, the church, thus His Word must ever remain the ultimate and final authority for all matters within the church. In establishing what is believed, taught, and confessed, therefore, the

Bible becomes the “guiding guide,” or as the early dogmaticians referred to it, the *norma Normans*. It stands on its own merits. It needs no other authority. The Word of God directs us in determining what we are to believe. The Holy Scriptures are the *principium doctrinae*, the beginning and the source of our doctrine. From what we learn in the Bible, then, we set forth our statement of faith, our confessional writings, so that it is clear for us, for those who follow us in the generations to come, and for others to know exactly what we believe. These confessional writings do not supercede or replace the Scriptures. To permit this would be to elevate the word of humans to the same level as the Word of God. The Confessional statements are important, but not more important than the Bible. The Confessional writings are a “generation removed” so to speak from the Scriptures. They are a guide for our teaching, yes. However, they are a guide that has been guided by the Scriptures. The Lutheran dogmaticians refer to the confessional writings as *norma normata*, a “guided guide.” They guide us, but in being developed and written, they were guided by the Word of God to state their position. They must always be viewed in the light of what Scripture says.

The Christian Church has entered its second millennia. During the years there have been many faithful church leaders, some reverently referred to as “the Church Fathers” who have recorded their professions of faith as well as their insights and positions on various doctrines and practices within the church. Much of what they say is good and valuable information. To read their writings is like sitting at the feet of a great scholar, or sitting in the classroom of a brilliant professor, and partaking of the vast wisdom being shared. It is enriching. It is edifying. However, no matter how devout the individual was, no matter how insightful, no matter whom that leader was, it is still just one individual commenting. What a leader says reflects that leader’s own position, even though in the centuries that followed there may have been many that agreed with what was stated. And even if the entire church were to endorse this position, it would still be the position of a human being. It is the word of a human, not God. Thus at very best, this word would be a “guided guide,” these writings would be *norma normata*. What the Bible says would always have to take precedence because it is more important, more authoritative. It is God’s very own word. That is why in this study, I am examining the words and passages of Holy Writ rather than the writings of the early believers, learned and honored though they may be.

The different theological positions taken by the orthodox or conservatives, the so-called “moderates” and the liberals all arise from the way in which the Bible is approached, viewed and used. As viewed through different lenses, the Bible is seen differently by those belonging to one of three theological positions. Because within the Lutheran church bodies, as they exist in the world today, one can find Christians belonging to one, but not all three, of these theological positions, there is a lack of unity in teaching, and often in practice. Each of these three groups has its own particular theological positions, even as do the Catholics, the Baptists, the Anglicans, the Dutch Reformed, etc.

Why? The basic reason once again goes back to faith and reason. That has much to do with how one views Scripture or the Bible. If one views the Bible as God’s wholly inspired and inerrant word,

one is also going to regard it as being authoritative and having the final say in determining doctrine and practice. In this case, nothing is superior to the Bible, and anything else is inferior; nothing more is necessary, although it may be an interesting read. If, on the other hand, one has doubts and reservations about what the Bible is, then obviously they are not going to have the same belief system. If one's belief system flows out of human reason, which tells this person that the Bible is only a religious book that contains the Word of God, or that it serves as a guidebook setting forth rules for life and describing how to live a more holy and even a "perfect" life in this world, that person cannot in any way bring themselves to agree with the other person. This second person can find in Scripture a mixture of divine and human insights. The first person, on the other hand, will only find the divine. The first person believes that God reveals Himself in two ways — partially in nature and fully in the Bible.

God reveals Himself in nature. Scripture testifies to this when it says: "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands" (Psalm 19:1, NIV). Hence, God reveals Himself to people in the birds, the trees, the rivers, etc. Even the human body testifies to the existence of a Creator. The natural knowledge that people have about God tells us that there is an all-powerful Creator, but it does not tell us anything more about Him. It tells us nothing about His plan of Salvation for the human race. It tells us nothing about the atoning and redemptive work of Jesus Christ. It tells us nothing about the sanctifying work of the Third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit.

The second way in which God reveals Himself is in the Bible, which does not simply show Him acting in some event of history. Rather Scripture tells us everything that we need to know in order to be eternally saved. Of course, if a person views the Bible as anything less than the wholly inspired and inerrant Word of God, they are not going to be able to bring themselves to agree with the first person. Consequently, the second person is going to continually seek to find out how and where God has revealed Himself and what has been revealed. It all depends on which road one takes; the road of faith based on what the Bible says or the broad highway that reason has constructed.

The Lutheran doctrinal writings of the Reformation and Post-Reformation developed from an intense and thorough study of Scripture. These interpretations of Scripture contained both theses and antitheses. This was done with the express purpose of setting forth as clearly as possible what Scripture teaches and at the same time denying positions which are contrary to what Scripture teaches. They were written to deal with the errors of the Reformation Era. These were not new doctrinal errors that confronted the church at that time; they were old errors that had plagued the early Christians and merely appeared in different forms at the time of the Reformation. Many of these same errors confront the church today, although they may be camouflaged with different names.

While the Lutheran Confessions clearly formulated Lutheran doctrine, they are merely an interpretation of Scripture. They are, in some respects, like a pastor's sermon, which sets forth an

interpretation of what Scripture says. These symbolic works, however, are merely an interpretation, nothing more. They are words written by men. These confessional writings are not the Word of God, nor are they equal to or on a par with the Word of God.

In the years that have passed since the Reformation, an unhealthy tendency has developed among some members of the Lutheran church to elevate these words written by human beings from centuries past to a position where they are at least equal to the Word of God. Some have even gone to the extreme of resorting to these doctrinal formulations composed by human beings as being “the first line of defense against false teachings.” The Lutheran Confessions, in their opinion, are the final “authority for settling any and all doctrinal controversies” rather than dealing with doctrinal matters on the basis of Scripture first. The result of this has been a “gradual neglect of a continual, intensive study of the Scriptures.” Kuske correctly says, “Doctrinal formulations are misused when they become a ready-made theology that is used as a substitute for a careful study of Scripture.”<sup>433</sup>

Therein lies the reason why there are, for us, major differences on two doctrines between the views of the orthodox, conservative Lutherans and the views of those who tend toward a more “moderate” position. These are major differences in the USA. To many outsiders these may be regarded as a minor, even trivial matter. How one views, regards, and uses the Bible is a matter of utmost importance to us who are orthodox, conservative Lutherans. For us, the Bible **IS** the Word of God. The very inspired and inerrant words of the Bible are the means through which God reveals His holy will to us, and all people. For us the Bible is authoritative. It is not just a piece of literature. For us the Bible, God’s Word, is the source and norm for all doctrine and practice.

The reason that there are two different views regarding the doctrines of the church and the ministry within the orthodox, conservative Lutherans and the so-called “moderate” Lutherans in the USA today is because the orthodox, conservative Lutherans following the theological leadership of men such as Adolf Hoenecke, August Pieper, and John P. Meyer have continued to regard the Bible as the wholly inspired and inerrant Word of God which is the final authority in doctrine and practice. The Lutheran Confessions, the writings of Luther, the writings of other theologians are regarded as works of human beings even though they may clearly set forth the orthodox, conservative view. Because they are human and not divine works, these never can be equal to or superior to the Word of God. The orthodox, conservative Lutheran will turn first to Scripture and then consult the writings of human beings, if necessary, for an additional understanding of the times and the practice — e.g., Egyptian burial preparations, the customs of the ancient Persians, storms on the Sea of Galilee, information on the drachma, etc. The so-called “moderates”, on the other hand, although they still read and use the Bible, have been influenced by the Erlangen Theology to rely heavily on what Luther said. They turn repeatedly to Luther and the Confessions primarily for their positions on doctrine and practice. They have been influenced by the views of Löhe on the church and the ministry. They have also at least to some degree, been influenced by

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<sup>433</sup> Kuske. Biblical Interpretation. p. 154f.



the ideas set forth in the Historical-Critical Method, Neo-Orthodoxy, and Gospel Reductionism. Some of these people today have reservations about the inspiration and the inerrancy of Scripture. Usually these reservations are not obvious, but because of the theological education that they have received — in many cases promoting theistic evolution, doubts concerning certain prophecies, misgivings about certain miracles and even a rejection of some of them (the Virgin Birth of Jesus occurred because Joseph was motivated by the Holy Spirit to have sex with his wife, Mary, and thus father a child) — the influence is present and contributes to their theological views.

Hence, if one side believes that Scripture is God's Word and is the source and norm for doctrine and the other side believes that Scripture is acceptable but the words of human beings can be superior, two different positions on the same doctrine are not only a possibility, they are a reality. This is what currently exists among the orthodox, conservative Lutherans and the so-called "moderate" Lutherans in the USA.

Throughout this paper, I have commented on the various views of the church and ministry held by certain individuals, developed during certain theological movements, or held by various church bodies. Using the orthodox, conservative approach I shall now present the Bible-based doctrines of the church and the ministry in the next two chapters. This can and should be done without having to rely on outside sources, commentaries, and the writings of other scholars. While what they say can be completely in agreement with what Scripture states, their views are, as this author's premise states, a secondary and even a tertiary source which can in no way be placed on an equal level with nor elevated above the Holy Word of God. *Sola Scriptura* (the Scriptures, the Bible, alone) was one of the cornerstones of the Reformation. It is key to the position of orthodox, conservative Lutherans. It is key to the personal beliefs of this author. To have to rely on commentaries and the writings of others to develop a position, let alone a doctrine, is to fall into the same trap the citation theologians who are using the same approach set forth by Walther in his *Kirche und Amt* have fallen. To say that these would be necessary to develop a position would be to concede that citation theology is correct and the only approach to use. It would be counter to the very thesis that this author is setting forth. The commentaries that are cited in the following sections are listed for the reader's further research and edification to show that others have come to the same conclusions as has this author. The majority of these are from non-Lutheran sources.

## Chapter

# 5 The Biblical doctrine (nature) of the Church

## 5.1 Introduction

The controversy regarding the Church and the Ministry within the Lutheran Church in the USA is basically due not to a disagreement on theological approaches but rather it is due to a confusion of terms. The terms “church” and “congregation” have often been used interchangeably, causing some to mistakenly believe that these are always one and the same. In addition, there has been a commingling of the terms “ministry” and “minister”. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, these words have been used interchangeably. As a result, these words often are mistakenly thought to be synonymous. The reliance on statements made by church leaders in the past pertaining to a particular situation of their day has contributed to the confusion of these terms.

To clarify the situation, it would be good to examine these terms as they have been used in the Scriptures, which the Lutheran Church and most other Christian Churches accept as the final and highest authority in matters of doctrine and practice. Christians formulate doctrine and compose their official statements of belief from the Scripture, God’s wholly inspired and inerrant Word.

In determining the confessional position of a church body on a particular matter of doctrine, therefore, what the Bible says becomes all-important, at least from the standpoint of confessional Lutheranism. Throughout the history of God’s people, doctrine has never been a matter of public opinion. There is no instance in Scripture where the Lord puts the matter into the hands of the people. He gives them neither the right nor the authority to determine what the doctrine should be. Nowhere in the Scriptures does God give His people the freedom to choose whether or not to accept what is stated in His Word. It is not a matter of choosing what to believe. It is not a democratic process. What we should believe is in the Bible. God defines our doctrine in His Word. He states it, clearly and precisely, in language that even a little child can understand.

Christ is the head of His body, the church, thus His Word must ever remain the ultimate and final authority for all matters within the church. In establishing what is believed, taught, and confessed, therefore, the Bible becomes the “guiding guide,” or as the early Lutheran dogmaticians referred to it, the *norma normans*. It stands on its own merits. It needs no other authority. The Word of God directs us in determining what we are to believe. The Holy Scriptures are the *principium doctrinae*, the beginning and the source of our doctrine. From what we learn in the Bible, then, we set forth our statement of faith, our confessional writings, so that it is clear for us, for those who follow us in the generations to come, and for others. Our Lutheran confessional writings delineate exactly what we as Lutheran Christians believe. These confessional writings do not supercede or replace the Scriptures. To permit this would be to elevate the word of humans to the same level as the Word of God. The Lutheran Confessional statements are important, but not more important than the

Bible. These Confessional writings are a “generation removed” so to speak from the Scriptures. They are a guide for our teaching, yes. However, they are a guide that has been guided by the Scriptures. The Lutheran dogmatists refer to the confessional writings as *norma normata*, a “guided guide.” They guide us, but in being developed and written, they were guided by the Word of God. They must always be viewed in the light of what Scripture says.<sup>434 435 436 437</sup>

The Christian Church has entered another millennia. Through the years there have been many faithful church leaders, some reverently referred to as “the Church Fathers,” who have recorded their professions of faith as well as their insights and positions on various doctrines and practices within the church. Much of what they say is good and valuable. To read their writings is like sitting at the feet of a great scholar, or sitting in the classroom of a brilliant professor, and partaking of the vast wisdom being shared. It is enriching. It is edifying. However, no matter how devout the individual was, no matter how insightful, no matter whom that leader was, it is still just one individual commenting. What a theologian says reflects their own personal position, even though in the centuries that followed there may have been many that agreed with what was stated. And even if the entire church were to endorse this position, it would still only be the position of a human being. It is the word of a created being, a human, and not the Word of God, the Creator. Thus at very best, this statement would be a “guided guide,” these writings would be *norma normata*. What the Bible says would always have to take precedence because it is more important, more authoritative. It is not the word of any human being. It is God’s very own inspired Word.

## 5.2 *The Kingdom of God*

When in God’s Word we read about “the Kingdom of God”, are we reading about the Church? The expression “the Kingdom of God” occurs frequently in the Bible. Many have sought to define this kingdom according to their particular belief system. Some have thought it to be a mystical kingdom.<sup>438</sup> Others have seen it allegorically picturing goodness and happiness. Among these we can include the Jehovah’s Witnesses and members of other cults. Still others picture it as some sort of earthly realm in which the people of God participate. Those who hold to this view 1) look for the continuing reign of the people of Israel much as it existed in the Old Testament. This can be further subdivided into those who look for a Theocratic kingdom in which God is king, on the one hand; and those who look for the equivalent of a Zionist state, be it in Israel, or in other parts of the world, on the other hand. For example there is a sizeable group that holds to this belief and has established a “kingdom” in Peru. 2) There are those who look upon the Kingdom of God as the church ruling supreme over every other nation and power that exists upon the earth. I have found

<sup>434</sup> Philip Schaff and David Schley Schaff, “The Swiss Reformation”, Chapter VI, Section 57, The Helvetic Confessions of Faith,.

<sup>435</sup> F. P. Moller, *Words of Light and Life*, volume 1, “Understanding the Greatest of Truths.” Section 3.6 “Church and the Formation of Dogma.” Pretoria: Van Schaik Religious Books, 1998.

<sup>436</sup> Armin W. Schuetze, “The *Satis Est* In Article VII Of The Augsburg Confession” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Volume 83, Number 1, Winter 1986, p. 27.

<sup>437</sup> Siegbert W. Becker, “The Lord’s Supper: Consecration And Moment” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Volume 83, Number 1, Winter 1986, p. 83.

<sup>438</sup> <http://www.adishakti.org/>

this concept expressed by some members of the Roman Catholic Church in Latin America. 3) Still others look upon it as an earthly kingdom of believers over which Christ will rule prior to the end of time.<sup>439</sup> We could continue to cite the various views that exist due to the differences in doctrinal stands on church polity, the relationship between church and state, and concepts of kingdom. That would be beyond the scope of this paper, however.

Good theology is predicated upon good exegesis. One cannot equate the Kingdom of God in English with other divine kingdoms mentioned in the Bible merely because the English language uses or suggests a similarity. In discussing the expression the Kingdom of God, we must examine the passages of Scripture that speak about it. We must read the verses that use the expression “βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ”. And we must make a distinction between these verses and those which speak about the Kingdom of heaven “βασιλεία τῶν οὐραανῶν”. Elsewhere, we read about the Kingdom of Christ Jesus, who is God, but separate terminology is used. For example: the Kingdom of the Son, “βασιλεία τοῦ υἱοῦ” (Colossians 1:13, NIV), and about the Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ “βασιλεία τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν καὶ σωτῆρος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ” (2 Peter 1:11, NIV); the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ “ἡ βασιλείαν . . . τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν καὶ τοῦ Χριστοῦ αὐτοῦ” (Revelation 11:15, NIV). These kingdoms are totally different from earthly kingdoms or the kingdoms of the world “βασιλεία τοῦ κόσμου”. All of these are completely different than the throne of the beast and his kingdom “τὸν θρόνον τοῦ θηρίου . . . ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ αὐτοῦ” (Revelation 16:10, NIV). We must realize that God the Holy Ghost, who inspired the writing of the Bible, gave His authors the precise words that they used (2 Peter 1:20-21; 2 Timothy 3:16; 1 Corinthians 2:13-14).<sup>440 441 442</sup>

The Jews commonly thought of the Kingdom of God as being a political, earthly realm such as the Israelites had enjoyed during the time of King David, and to a somewhat lesser extent under his son, Solomon. Even following His resurrection from the dead, Jesus’ disciples continued to think of the Kingdom of God as a political realm, the kingdom of Israel. “He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. On one occasion, while he was eating with them, . . . they asked him, ‘Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?’” (Acts 1:3-6, NIV) Jesus answered their question by telling His disciples to remain in Jerusalem where they would receive the Holy Ghost within a matter of days, and that then they would be going out into all the world to bear witness to Him (Acts 1:8). They were to do the work of the Church as Jesus set it forth in the great commission (Matthew 28:19-20).<sup>443</sup> They were to make disciples by teaching and baptizing. The apostles were to proclaim the kingdom of God (Luke 9:2, 60).<sup>444</sup>

<sup>439</sup> <http://www.gnmagazine.org/issues/gn18/understandkingdom.htm>

<sup>440</sup> Simon J. Kistemaker. *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of Peter, and Jude*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, p. 271.

<sup>441</sup> Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, Jr. *The New American Commentary, Volume 34. 1, 2 Timothy, Titus*. Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, p. 234ff.

<sup>442</sup> Lawrence O. Richards. *The Teacher’s Commentary*. Wheaton, IL: Scripture Press Publications, Inc., pp. 839-845.

<sup>443</sup> Barclay Moon Newman and Philip C. Stine. *A Handbook On The Gospel Of Matthew*. New York: United Bible Societies. Matthew 28:19-20.

<sup>444</sup> John Nolland. *Word Biblical Commentary 35B Luke 9:21-18:34*. Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002, p. 542.

Our Savior often referred to the Kingdom of God. It was a topic of His teaching and preaching (Luke 4:43; 8:10; 9:11). Jesus taught that the Kingdom of God would come with power before some of His hearers died (Mark 9:1). He spoke of it in parables such as the growing seed (Mark 4:26-29), the mustard seed (Mark 4:30-32; Luke 13:18-19), and the yeast (Luke 13:20-21). The Kingdom of God should be sought and should be the most important thing in one's life (Matthew 6:33). He spoke of it as being near (Mark 1:15), as something for which the believers were waiting (Mark 15:43), and as something that has come to His hearers (Matthew 12:28). He describes it as something that people can enter into (Matthew 19:24; 21:31; Mark 9:47), and as something that can be taken away from people (Matthew 21:43).<sup>445</sup> He pointed out that only dedicated believers are fit for service in the Kingdom of God (Luke 9:62).<sup>446 447</sup> And the kingdom must be received as a child would receive it, i.e. with a child-like faith (Mark 10:14-15).<sup>448</sup>

Our Lord did not consider the Kingdom of God to be an earthly, physical realm. "Jesus said, 'My kingdom is not of this world'" (John 18:36, NIV). "Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, 'The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, "Here it is," or "There it is," because the kingdom of God is within you'" (Luke 17:20-21, NIV). On another occasion, our Savior pointed out that only believers, Christians, can enter the Kingdom of God. "Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit" (John 3:5, NIV). True, in the Old Testament we read concerning the Hebrews that God chose them to be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex. 19:6, NIV). The Apostle Peter quotes this verse in speaking about Christians in 1 Peter 2:9-10 "you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy" (NIV).

Certainly each believer in the Old Testament had a personal relationship with God. They were associated with Him through faith. They believed that God would fulfill the promise He had made in the Garden of Eden to send a Savior (Genesis 3:15) who would redeem the human race and restore sinners to the family of God.<sup>449 450</sup> This was true of the Hebrews who believed. It was also true of believers such as Naaman and Ruth, who were Gentiles and not Hebrews by birth. They enjoyed the many blessings of God's benevolent reign during their earthly lives as they were awaiting entry into heaven. They, because of their faith, are currently enjoying much greater blessings with our LORD in His eternal kingdom.

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<sup>445</sup> Craig Blomberg, *The New American Commentary* (volume 22) Matthew. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992, 2001, p. 324.

<sup>446</sup> John Nolland, p. 543.

<sup>447</sup> Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997, Lk 9:62.

<sup>448</sup> Craig A Evans. Word Biblical Commentary: volume 34B, Mark 8:27-16:20. Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002, p. 93.

<sup>449</sup> Werner Herman Franzmann. Bible History Commentary: Old Testament. Milwaukee, WI: Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, p. 45.

<sup>450</sup> Jamieson, Gn 3:15.

God, in His grace and mercy, has called every Christian to saving faith through the proclamation of the Gospel message. Through the faith which God the Holy Ghost has created in the hearts of these believers, they have become members of God's family, His Church, (Galatians 3:26; 6:10; 1 Peter 4:17).<sup>451 452 453</sup> Those of us who believe in Jesus Christ as our Savior and God are citizens of His Kingdom in heaven (Philippians 3:20).<sup>454</sup> It is what we and all Christians shall inherit (Matthew 25:34; 1 Corinthians 15:50; Galatians 5:19-21).<sup>455 456 457</sup>

Confessional Lutherans prefer not to place the emphasis on the persons but rather on the King. The Kingdom of God, for us, therefore, is the actual exercise of the kingly rule of God. The church is not a building, an organization, or a political entity. The church is people, as we shall see in this chapter. The Christian Church is the body of Christ; it is those who believe in Jesus Christ.

Nor do we equate the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven, although we as Christians shall be eternally in heaven with God and all our fellow believers. Some have regarded the "kingdom of heaven" as a millennial reign of Christ here on earth. However, we do not accept this interpretation because Christ's kingdom is not a political kingdom (Luke 17:20-21; John 18:36; Colossians 1:12-14; Romans 14:17).<sup>458 459 460 461 462 463</sup> Nor do we identify the expression "the kingdom of heaven" with the church. The church, as we shall see, is invisible; it consists only of believers. When our Redeemer speaks about the "kingdom of heaven" in His parables, He uses pictures that include both the righteous and the wicked, both believers and unbelievers (the hypocrites who are present in gatherings with the believers), for example the good and the bad fish in the parable of the dragnet (Mark 13:47-50). We believe, teach, and confess that the expression the "kingdom of heaven" as Jesus uses it in His parables is the sphere of gospel activity or the proclamation of the gospel. It is God's activity during this time of grace (2

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<sup>451</sup> Timothy George. The New American Commentary (volume 30) *Galatians*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001, p. 271.

<sup>452</sup> Martin Luther. Commentary on Galatians. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., Ga 6:10.

<sup>453</sup> Simon J. Kistemaker and William Hendriksen, New Testament Commentary: volume 16: Exposition of the Epistles of Peter and the Epistle of Jude. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, p. 180.

<sup>454</sup> Kenneth S. Wuest. Wuest's Word Studies from the Greek New Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997, Php 3:20.

<sup>455</sup> Donald A Hagner. Word Biblical Commentary volume 33B: *Matthew 14-28*. Dallas: Word, Incorporated, p. 743.

<sup>456</sup> Jamieson, 1 Co 15:50.

<sup>457</sup> Martin Luther. Commentary on Galatians. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., Ga 5:19-21.

<sup>458</sup> D. A. Carson, New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition. 4th ed. Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA: Inter-Varsity Press, Lk 17:20.

<sup>459</sup> William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel According to John. Volume 2, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, p. 408.

<sup>460</sup> William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, New Testament Commentary: Exposition of Colossians and Philemon. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, p. 57.

<sup>461</sup> Robert G. Bratcher and Eugene Albert Nida, A Handbook on Paul's Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon. New York: United Bible Societies, Col 1:9 -14.

<sup>462</sup> Barclay Moon Newman and Eugene Albert Nida, A Handbook on Paul's Letter to the Romans. New York : United Bible Societies, Ro 14:17.

<sup>463</sup> William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, New Testament Commentary: Exposition of Paul's Epistle to the Romans. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, p. 464.

Corinthians 6:1-2)<sup>464</sup> <sup>465</sup> in which He calls sinners to faith and salvation through the means of grace, the gospel in Word and Sacrament.

When the gospel is proclaimed, there are many people who are present. However, not everyone who is present really hears and believes the message. For some, it goes in one ear and out the other, so to speak. Not everyone in a visible Christian congregation or assembly is really a Christian. In Christian assemblies and congregations there will be, as we learn from the Scriptures, both believers and hypocrites present.

Some people go through all of the outward motions of worship or congregational membership, however their hearts are elsewhere (Matthew 15:7-8). Some are Sunday morning Christians. They give a show of piety for one hour a week, and then live the rest of the week as if they had never heard of their Savior's forgiveness or His will for their lives. Some like to be associated with "good" Christian people. It makes them look good. It is good for their reputations. It is good for business and "networking." Others give the impression of being servants of Christ, but secretly remain slaves to sin and Satan. Their pet sins rule in their hearts and dominate their lives. Their repentance is hollow. Their Christianity is a sham. We cannot recognize who the hypocrites are in this life. The Lord knows those who are His, however (2 Timothy 2:19). He cannot be mocked (Galatians 6:7). On Judgment Day, every hypocrite will be exposed. The angels will separate the openly unbelievers and the hypocrites from the believers. These will be cast into hell where they will be punished and tormented eternally (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43). Although many today deny the existence of hell, it is a reality. God will punish all believers forever in hell (John 3:16-18, 36; 2 Thessalonians 1:8-10; Mark 9:43-48).<sup>466</sup> <sup>467</sup> <sup>468</sup> On the other hand, we as Christians will enjoy eternity in heaven with our God and Lord.

The Christian Church and the Kingdom of God are not one and the same. This is obvious from the Second Petition of the Lord's Prayer in which we pray: "Thy Kingdom Come" (Matthew 6:10, NIV) and in Luke 17:21, Jesus tells us: "the kingdom of God is within you" (NIV). If the Kingdom of God is to come to us, and if the Kingdom of God is within us as Christians, then we ourselves cannot be this Kingdom.

Regarding those who have become members of the church, those who believe in Jesus Christ, our God says, "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people" (2 Corinthians 6:16, NIV). Our Savior says, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him" (John 14:23, NIV).

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<sup>464</sup> Ralph P. Martin, Word Biblical Commentary : 2 Corinthians. Dallas: Word, Incorporated, p. 164.

<sup>465</sup> J. P. Meyer, Ministers of Christ: A Commentary on the Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians. Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House. 2 Corinthians 6:1-2.

<sup>466</sup> Martin Luther, Luther's Works, Vol. 22: Sermons on the Gospel of St. John: Chapters 1-4. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, p. 350ff.

<sup>467</sup> William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, New Testament Commentary: Exposition of I-II Thessalonians. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, p. 160.

<sup>468</sup> Wuest, Mk 9:43-48.

Dwelling within the hearts of His people, God is active. He governs, rules, guides and leads them. The Apostle Paul tells us, “those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God” (Romans 8:14, NIV). We believe that the Kingdom of God is within Christians, and therefore is the activity of God in the hearts of believers, by which He governs and rules them by His Spirit. On the other hand, the “Church alone is called the body of Christ, which Christ renews [Christ is its Head, and] sanctifies and governs by His Spirit, as Paul testifies, Eph. 1, 22ff”<sup>469 470</sup>

Nor do we equate faith in Jesus Christ with the Kingdom of God, although both are within us as Christians. Although God works faith in the heart of each believer — creating, strengthening, and preserving it — God does not do the believing for an individual believer. The Christian does the believing. Faith is a spiritual act by an individual in which this person trusts in the atoning and redeeming merits of Christ Jesus. The Kingdom of God within us is an activity of God, by which the Almighty rules in the hearts of His believers. However, these two things are never separate; wherever one exists, the other also exists — “You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ” (Galatians 3:26-27, NIV) and “those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God” (Romans 8:14, NIV). Neither one of the two separately, nor both together, are the Church. The Church is people. The Church is the total number of those people who have faith in their hearts and are led by the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of God.<sup>471 472</sup>

In reading Scripture, some may be inclined to equate the Kingdom of God with the Church, and this is understandable considering the various hermeneutical approaches taken by various religious bodies and the differing belief systems of the diverse groups. Within confessional Lutheranism, we tend to make a distinction between the two, as I have pointed out. When we speak of the Kingdom of God, we speak of His reigning activity within the hearts of believers. We believe that the Second Person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ, is both true-God and true-man at one and the same time. Christ has a three-fold office — that of prophet, priest, and king. As our King, Jesus reigns, but not over an earthly realm. His kingship is eternal and His kingdom is far greater than that of any earthly ruler. We believe, teach, and confess that He rules over three kingdoms — the kingdom of power, the kingdom of grace, and the kingdom of glory.

His kingdom of power is not limited by any geographical boundaries or regions, but rather extends through all creation, and extends over all created beings both visible and invisible. All power has been given to Him in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18). The Heavenly Father has placed all things under Christ’s feet (Ephesians 1:22; 1 Corinthians 15:25). There is nothing in all creation that is not subject to Christ our LORD (Hebrews 2:8). He upholds and sustains all things by the word of His power (Hebrews 1:3). He controls the forces of nature and the destiny of nations. Not

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<sup>469</sup> Concordia Triglot. “Apology of the Augsburg Confession” Article IV §5, p. 227

<sup>470</sup> Andrew T. Lincoln, Word Biblical Commentary: Ephesians. Dallas: Word, Incorporated, pp. 5, 65ff.

<sup>471</sup> Martin Luther, Luther’s Works, Vol. 26: Lectures on Galatians, 1535, Chapters 1-4. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, pp. 351-353.

<sup>472</sup> Hendriksen and Kistemaker, New Testament Commentary: Exposition of Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, pp. 255-258.



a single sparrow falls to the ground from the air without His will. He knows each hair on the head of every individual. Both good and evil are subject to Him (Psalm 110; Philippians 2:9-11). He is truly the LORD of lords and the King of kings (Revelation 17:14).<sup>473 474 475 476 477 478 479 480 481 482 483</sup>

The second of our LORD's kingdoms is His kingdom of grace. This kingdom does not extend over all creatures. It does not even encompass all people, but only over those who through the preaching of the Gospel (Mark 1:14-15) have been born again (John 3:3,5). Only true believers are citizens in this kingdom of our LORD (Ephesians 2:19). This is a kingdom that is not established by war and bloodshed, but rather by the proclamation of the truth, God's Word (John 17:17). It is not governed by man-made laws, ordinances, and statutes, but rather it is governed by God's Word (John 18:37). This kingdom has endured despite persecution, heresies, schisms, and ridicule from the so-called intellectuals of this world. It will continue until the end of time; not even the gates of hell will prevail against it (Psalm 2:1-9; 46:4-5; Matthew 16:18).<sup>484 485 486 487 488 489 490 491 492 493 494 495</sup>

We refer to it as the kingdom of grace because it is the promise and the offer of divine grace that wins individuals and makes them part of this kingdom. It is the acceptance of this grace by faith that makes people citizens of this kingdom. It is the appreciation of this grace that makes individuals render willing obedience to Christ, our King. The essence of this kingdom, therefore, is

<sup>473</sup> William Barclay, The Daily Study Bible, The Gospel of Matthew: Volume 2. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, p.378.

<sup>474</sup> Robert G. Bratcher and Eugene Albert Nida, A Handbook on Paul's Letter to the Ephesians. New York: United Bible Societies, Eph 1:22.

<sup>475</sup> Simon J. Kistemaker and William Hendriksen, New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, pp. 553f.

<sup>476</sup> Ray C. Stedman, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series: Hebrews. Downers Grove, Ill., U.S.A.: InterVarsity Press, Heb 2:5-9.

<sup>477</sup> Martin Luther, Luther's Works, Vol. 29: Lectures on Titus, Philemon, and Hebrews. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, pp. 125-129.

<sup>478</sup> William L. Lane, Word Biblical Commentary : Hebrews 1-8. Dallas: Word, Incorporated, pp. 12-16.

<sup>479</sup> Carson, Ps 110.

<sup>480</sup> John F. Brug, Psalms volume II. Milwaukee, WI: Wisconsin: Northwestern Publishing House, Ps 110.

<sup>481</sup> Richard R. Melick, The New American Commentary: Philippians, Colossians, Philemon. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, pp. 105-106.

<sup>482</sup> David E. Aune, Word Biblical Commentary: Revelation 17-22. Dallas: Word, Incorporated, pp. 952-956.

<sup>483</sup> Wilbert R. Gawrisch, "The Twentieth Century Crucifixion Of Christ", Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly, Volume 68, July 1971, Number 3, p. 181.

<sup>484</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, The Bible Exposition Commentary. Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, Mark 1:14-22.

<sup>485</sup> William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel According to Mark. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, pp. 54-57.

<sup>486</sup> Jamieson, Jn 3:3-5.

<sup>487</sup> Luther, Luther's Works, Vol. 22 : Sermons on the Gospel of St. John: Chapters 1-4. pp. 277-286.

<sup>488</sup> Carson, Eph 2:19.

<sup>489</sup> George R. Beasley-Murray, Word Biblical Commentary: John. Dallas: Word, Incorporated, p. 300.

<sup>490</sup> Hendriksen and Kistemaker, New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel According to John. pp. 409-410.

<sup>491</sup> Peter C. Craigie, Word Biblical Commentary: Psalms 1-50. Dallas: Word, Incorporated, pp. 63-69.

<sup>492</sup> John F. Brug, Psalms volume I. Milwaukee, WI: Wisconsin: Northwestern Publishing House, Ps 2.

<sup>493</sup> Craigie, p.344.

<sup>494</sup> Hagner, pp. 469-472.

<sup>495</sup> Robert Preus, Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly, Volume 55, October 1958, Number 4, "The Doctrine of Election as Taught by the Seventeenth Century Lutheran Dogmaticians". pp. 228-260.

not some outward, external form or organization such as a local congregation, or a synod, or a denomination, or any other visible assembly of this world. Rather, this kingdom is within the believers (Luke 17:20-21). It is Christ's rule in the hearts of Christians throughout the world and throughout time. For the individual believer, this kingdom consists of a personal relationship to Christ Jesus established by faith, which trusts in the grace of our Savior and moves the individual to render grateful service in joyful response for everything that Christ has done for us. This kingdom, therefore, comes to people when the heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and lead a godly life. This kingdom, therefore, includes all those whom Christ gathers by the preaching of the Gospel, who acknowledge Him as their King, and who are governed by His Spirit. Those who believe in Christ as their LORD and Savior, and who serve Him in joy and gladness are members of the kingdom of grace.

The third kingdom is the kingdom of glory. The kingdom of glory is not found on earth, but rather in heaven where Christ shall have all glory eternally (Luke 24:26; 2 Timothy 4:18; John 17:24). It is there in heaven where Christ shall reign over all of us who have been faithful unto death and received the crown of life (Revelation 2:10), glory and honor (Philippians 3:21; Romans 8:18). We believe, teach, and confess that the souls of believers enter into the kingdom of glory at the time of their death (Luke 23:43). On the last day, at the end of time, their bodies and souls shall be reunited (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17), and then they will enter into the kingdom that has been prepared for them (Matthew 25:34; Romans 8:29-30). There in heaven we, and all believers, shall reign with Christ our King forever and ever (Revelation 22:5).<sup>496 497 498 499 500 501 502 503 504 505 506 507 508 509 510 511 512 513 514</sup>

<sup>496</sup> Werner Herman Franzmann, Bible History Commentary: New Testament, Milwaukee, WI: WELS Board for Parish Education, p. 703.

<sup>497</sup> Robert H. Stein, The New American Commentary: Luke, Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, p. 612.

<sup>498</sup> William D. Mounce, Word Biblical Commentary: Pastoral Epistles, Dallas: Word, Incorporated, p. 598.

<sup>499</sup> Beasley-Murray, p. 304.

<sup>500</sup> Jamieson, Rev 2:10; 22:5.

<sup>501</sup> Aune, pp. 165-167.

<sup>502</sup> Wuest, pp. 101-104.

<sup>503</sup> Mounce, p. 183.

<sup>504</sup> Stein, p. 593.

<sup>505</sup> Nolland, pp. 1152-1153.

<sup>506</sup> F. F. Bruce, Word Biblical Commentary: 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Dallas: Word, Incorporated, p. 100.

<sup>507</sup> Hagner, p. 743.

<sup>508</sup> William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, New Testament Commentary : Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew, Grand Rapids : Baker Book House, pp. 887-892.

<sup>509</sup> Carson, Ro 8:29-30.

<sup>510</sup> Aune, p. 1181.

<sup>511</sup> Simon J. Kistemaker and William Hendriksen, New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Book of Revelation, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, p. 583.

<sup>512</sup> Wilbert R. Gawrisch, "The Biblical Account Of Creation And Modern Theology"

Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly, Volume 59, July, 1962, Number 3, p. 179.

<sup>513</sup> Carl Lawrenz, "The Ascending Savior's Message To The Church And To Its Ministry" Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly, Volume 70, July, 1973, Number 3, p. 148.

<sup>514</sup> Hendriksen and Kistemaker, Simon J., New Testament Commentary: Exposition of Colossians and Philemon, p. 91.

These three kingdoms are not separate and distinct. Rather there is a close relationship between them. Christ rules the kingdom of power for the benefit of His kingdom of grace (Ephesians 1:20-23). He reigns and exercises His lordship and power over all things in the interest of those who comprise His spiritual body. The kingdom of grace serves the kingdom of glory. Our Savior's purpose in building His Church in this world is not merely to establish some sort of ecclesiastical organization that deals with the temporal interests of its members or of society in general. Yes, Christians are "the salt of the earth" (Matthew 5:13, NIV) and as such not only are good citizens, but also in Christian love will deal with others out of compassion and with mercy. However, the primary purpose of the kingdom of grace is to proclaim the Gospel message, to make disciples of all nations, to teach the things that Christ has taught (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:47-48; Acts 1:8). "God our Savior, ... wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:3-4, NIV). He does not want any to perish (2 Peter 3:9). We serve our King by proclaiming the message that He has given us to share with the world.

There is a close relationship between the kingdoms of grace and glory and the Christian Church. We refer to the church in this world as the church militant, because it struggles and fights against sin and temptation. Every day, there is a continual battle going on within the Christian between the sinful nature, the Old Adam, and the New Man, the new life that has been generated within the Christian by virtue of having been brought to faith (Romans 7:15-25; 6:2-23). We refer to the church in heaven as the church triumphant because all the troubles and problems of this world are behind; only the glory and majesty that Christ Jesus has gained for us through His redemptive work belong to every Christian (Revelation 21:4). In heaven, believers fully experience the joys and benefits of Christ's triumphant victory over sin, death, and the power of the devil.<sup>515 516 517 518</sup>  
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Confessional Lutherans regard the redemptive work of Christ as being of the utmost importance. The key doctrine of confessional Lutheranism is that the human race has been justified (that is, declared not guilty) through faith alone in Christ Jesus by the grace of God. This key doctrine is the basis for all our other doctrines. Our doctrine of the Church and our doctrine of the ministry find their basis in our doctrine of justification by faith alone through grace alone.

### **5.3 The Biblical doctrine of the Church**

Among people of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the word "Church" in English, and other languages as well, does not seem to have a single identifiable meaning. It seems to have at least three primary meanings. First, the word "church" can mean the worship services in which a believer sings

<sup>515</sup> Luther, Martin, Luther's Works, Vol. 25: Lectures on Romans. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, pp. 50-55; 63-65.

<sup>516</sup> Robert H. Mounce, The New American Commentary: Romans. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, pp. 148-158.

<sup>517</sup> James D. G. Dunn, Word Biblical Commentary: Romans 1-8. Dallas: Word, Incorporated, pp. 307-357.

<sup>518</sup> Kistemaker and Hendriksen, New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Book of Revelation, p. 557.

<sup>519</sup> Aune, p. 1124.

hymns, offers prayers, and hears the Word of God read and proclaimed. Second, the word “church” can mean the place to which you go to worship, the building in which you gather with others to worship. And third, the word “church” can mean an organization of people, a corporation with leaders and workers, property, and programs. Almost a century ago, Professor August Pieper used the following sentence to illustrate this same point: “Today the church in Corinth had church in its church and elected a churchman.”<sup>520</sup> Although there is nothing incorrect in this sentence, the multiple uses of the word “church” can be confusing because of its different meanings. The word “church” in our every day language has such a diversity of meanings that it can, and has, led to confusion in the discussion of the doctrine of the Church. Those who use the quotations and references of earlier Lutherans in their discussion of the doctrine of the Church would do well to clearly explain the usage of the terms and not take them out of context. Had this been the practice in the past, there would be no problem in understanding and agreeing on the doctrine of the Church among Lutherans in the USA today.

The Cincinnati Case, previously mentioned, involved interaction between pastors, congregations, and synods. The good that resulted from this situation is that it gave rise to a study of the doctrine of the Church within the Lutheran synodical bodies in the USA. The prime question in the study was “Can church discipline be carried out on a level other than the local congregation?” This was expanded to the following: “What is the relationship of the congregation to the synod?” No one within Lutheranism in the USA ever contended the fact that the local congregation is autonomous and that a group of congregations, be it a district, synod, or any other grouping, could not countermand a decision made within the local congregation, as Dr. Walther had emphasized.<sup>521</sup> Closely tied to this was the issue of whether or not synodical officials could, in fact, exercise, church discipline among the member congregations of the synod. Therein enters the tie with the doctrine of the ministry, as to whether or not synodical officials are actually participating in the ministry and thus these officials together with the group of believers that they represent have the power and the authority not only to suspend from fellowship, but also to excommunicate. We will deal more extensively with the doctrine of the ministry later in this chapter.

In the debate over what constitutes the church, some have sided with Francis Pieper, who held the very limited and narrow view that the local congregation was instituted by God. Other groupings of Christians could exist, he taught, but these exist merely for expediency in carrying out the work of the church, for example, an area Lutheran High School Association, a mission board, etc. These he regarded as merely human institutions.<sup>522</sup> Others have disagreed with such a restricted definition of the Church and prefer to have it refer to the communion of saints because the Church consists only of believers and thus is invisible. Among those who took this position was the sainted

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<sup>520</sup> August Pieper, “Concerning The Doctrine Of The Church And Of Its Ministry, With Special Reference To The Synod And Its Discipline” *Theologische Quartalschrift*, October 1929, trans. Prof. H. J. Vogel. *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*. Volume 59. Number 2. Spring, 1962, p. 87.

<sup>521</sup> A. Pieper, “Concerning The Doctrine Of The Church And Of Its Ministry, With Special Reference To The Synod And Its Discipline” p. 82.

<sup>522</sup> Franz Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Volume III, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, p. 421.

Pastor Adolph M. Harstad.<sup>523</sup> The Church, thus, can exist elsewhere, not just in the local congregation.

Are those who have followed the writings of Francis Pieper and others who hold the restricted view of the church correct? Or is this position too limited? Does Scripture teach and permit a broader use of the term “church” than just the local congregation? To better understand the term “church” in a theological sense, we need to look at how the word is used in the Bible. The New Testament was originally written in Greek. The Greek work for Church is “ἐκκλησία.” It occurs more than one hundred and ten times in the New Testament.

### **5.3.1 The Bible Teaches that the ἑκκλησία is the Communion of Saints, The Holy Christian Church**

ἡ ἑκκλησία is used to indicate an assembly or a gathering of people. It is never used to refer to a gathering of animals or things. The word is a composition of two Greek words, καλέω, which means “to call” and ἐκ, which means “out of.” The word ἑκκλησία, therefore, means “called out of”. The expression originally referred to those who were called out of their houses by a herald summoning them to attend a meeting. Those summoned by the herald are referred to as the “ἐκκληῖται.” Sometimes the purpose for this summoning of the people was for a town meeting. At other times it was used for summoning crowds to react to something. In Acts 19 (verses 39 and 41), it is used to refer to the angry mob that rioted against Paul in Ephesus. In every situation, however, the word ἑκκλησία refers to the calling of people out of something to gather them together so that they may participate in some activity.

In the same way that the Greek citizens were called out of their houses to gather together, the Holy Ghost calls believers out of the world to gather together as an assembly of believers. This calling is a spiritual calling. It is not merely an invitation. It is a calling that results in faith. Christians have been called out of the world dark with sin and unbelief and have been summoned into the gathering together of believers. They have heard the Gospel message, have received the gift of faith, (Romans 10:17; Ephesians 2:8-9) and thus been called out from the unbelievers in the world to be part of the body of believers, the church. They have been called by the Gospel through the working of the Holy Ghost who has summoned them from darkness to light (1 Peter 2:9); from sin and damnation to life and salvation. “We ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14, NIV). The group of believers is the church, “ἡ ἑκκλησία”.

In the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, ἑκκλησία occurs roughly one hundred times. Almost always it is a translation of the Hebrew word, קָהָל, which means an assembly or convocation of people. This can be a secular gathering or a religious gathering. When

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<sup>523</sup> Adolph M. Harstad. A Conference Paper delivered to the ELS General Pastoral Conference in 1972.

ἑκκλησία is used in conjunction with κύριου, however, there can be no doubt that it is referring to a gathering of those who believe in the LORD. It is referring to a religious gathering or congregation.

When Stephen addressed the Sanhedrin (Acts 7), he used ἑκκλησία (verse 38) to refer to the entire body of Israelites who followed Moses during the Exodus. This was no small number of people. The census taken in the desert of Sinai indicates that the total number of men able to serve in Israel's army was 603,550 (Numbers 1:46). With that many soldiers, the entire population of the Israel was very likely more than 2,000,000.

The word συναγωγή is also used in the New Testament to describe gatherings of people, or congregations, such as those who assembled to hear Paul and Barnabas in Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:43). συναγωγή is the word used to refer to the local congregations of people around God's Word (Acts 9:2) as was the case in Damascus. συναγωγή is also used to refer to places of worship such as we have in Matthew 4:23, "Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people." (NIV) We also find this usage in Luke 4:14-44 and elsewhere. This usage still exists today to refer to the local gatherings of Jewish people in their synagogues. Unlike the Temple in Jerusalem, to which Jewish men traveled and gathered for worship and sacrifices, the synagogue was more of a place within the community for gathering to hear and study the Word.

In the New Testament, ἑκκλησία is used to refer to the gathering of Christians for worship. For example, in 1 Corinthians 11:18, we read "I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you." (NIV) The context indicates that the Apostle Paul is speaking about the gathering together of the Christians in Corinth to celebrate the Lord's Supper. They are coming out of the world to gather together as a congregation to worship. This is the meaning of the word ἑκκλησία. It is the most basic meaning of term church, those who have been called out of the world of sin and unbelief to gather together around God's Word and Sacraments.

### 5.3.2 The ἑκκλησία Is Built on the Rock, Matthew 16:16-18

The first time the term ἑκκλησία is used in the New Testament, it is spoken by our Lord in Matthew 16 after Peter has correctly identified Jesus as "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (verse 16, NIV). In response, <sup>17</sup> Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. <sup>18</sup> And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it" (verses 17-18, NIV). <sup>18</sup> καὶ γὰρ δέ σοι λέγω ὅτι σὺ εἶ Πέτρος, καὶ ἐπὶ ταύτη τῇ/ πέτρα ὀικοδομήσω μου τὴν ἑκκλησίαν καὶ πύλαι ἄδου οὐ κατισχύσουσιν αὐτῆς.

Just what does our Savior mean when He says, μου τὴν ἑκκλησίαν "My church"? When we understand how our LORD used the term, we will have a better insight into how His disciples used the term ἑκκλησία in the New Testament.

Earlier in the sixteenth chapter of Matthew, the Pharisees and Sadducees had tested Jesus and demanded that He give them a sign from heaven. No matter what Jesus said or did, the Pharisees and Sadducees refused to believe in Jesus and rejected Him as the Promised Savior. Jesus took His disciples and journeyed to the region of Caesarea Philippi. Our LORD continued to teach His disciples as they traveled. Then, as if giving them an examination, He asked, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” (Matthew 16:13, NIV). Then, He asked, “But what about you?” “Who do you say I am?” (Matthew 16:15, NIV). Speaking for the group, Peter expressed the unanimous opinion of all the disciples when he said about Jesus, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” (Matthew 16:16, NIV).

Peter’s response was not some diplomatic or political statement that he could have explained away and weaseled out of on a later occasion. Nor was it some weak phrasing of words spoken to satisfy the desires of those who heard him. It was a bold, clear, and straightforward statement of faith. It expressed the conviction of his belief, and the belief of his fellow disciples as well. What he said was a confession of faith that revealed Christ’s real identity — Jesus is true man; Jesus is true God; Jesus is the Christ, the Promised Savior, the Messiah. This was Peter’s confession of faith. This is what Peter and the other disciples believed, taught, and confessed.<sup>524</sup>

Peter had grown in his faith. He had progressed in his theological understanding. He was still impetuous and rough-cut. As with all the disciples, Peter needed more training and more spiritual growth. This, however, would not be something that Peter could provide for himself. Nor was it something that he could obtain from any other individual. Jesus says, “this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven” (verse 17, NIV). Such insight, such knowledge, such growth is a gift of God. It is the result of the working of the Holy Ghost within an individual.

In verse 18, Jesus uses the personal pronoun “I” *ἐγώ* to draw attention to Himself as the speaker. In Greek, the personal pronoun is used in conjunction with the verb only when special emphasis is placed on the person of the speaker. The true meaning of Jesus’ words is this: “And **I**, the Son of the living God, as you have just confessed, also say to you, **You** are Peter, and on this rock **I** will build my Church.”

Jesus is using a play on words here. He uses two Greek words that are very similar in appearance and sound; however, these words are very distinct in their meanings. First, our LORD gives Simon a new name, a nickname. Jesus uses the word *Πέτρος*, which is a masculine form. *Πέτρος* means a boulder or a large rock. It is the name for Peter. In English “Stony” or “Rocky” would be used. The second word that Jesus uses is *πέτρα*. It is a feminine form. *πέτρα* refers to the solid bedrock that builders seek when they are constructing buildings so that they will have a firm and solid foundation. Jesus is the builder. He says, “I will build my church” (verse 18, NIV).<sup>525 526 527 528</sup> The

<sup>524</sup> Hagner, p. 468.

<sup>525</sup> Franzmann, *Bible History Commentary: New Testament*. pp. 628; 1029-1031; 1046-1047.

<sup>526</sup> A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*. Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Mt 16:18.

possessive pronoun “my” tells us that the church belongs to Him. He constructs His church. Scripture sometimes refers to the church as a house or household — “God’s household, which is the church of the living God” (1 Timothy 3:15, NIV) — or a temple or spiritual dwelling — “Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit” (Ephesians 2:19-22, NIV).<sup>529</sup>

To arrive at the meaning for ἑκκλησία we need to have a clear understanding of what is the πέτρα, the firm foundation, upon which Jesus builds His church. Because Jesus, in fact, uses two different words for “rock” it is clear that our LORD wants to distinguish between the person of Peter, Πέτρος, and the πέτρα upon which He builds His church. Jesus does not say, I will build **My** church upon you, Peter. What a weak, unstable foundation that would have been. Peter was a sinful human being. We need only recall how Jesus had to rebuke Peter for permitting Satan to use him in tempting Christ not to continue with the work that He had been sent to do (Matthew 16:21-23). We remember how Peter drew his sword in a foolish effort to defend our Redeemer when He was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane (John 18:10). We think of his shameful denial of Jesus, not once, but three times (Matthew 26:69ff). We are mindful of how he flip-flopped on the matter of eating with Gentiles, causing him to be rebuked by Paul (Galatians 2:11ff). No, Jesus could not, and did not construct His church on Peter. Jesus did not construct His Church on the person or teachings of any mere human.

One of the first things that Lutheran seminarians are taught in their hermeneutics courses is the principle that Scripture interprets Scripture. We are taught that while commentaries and theological journals are interesting reading and contain many fine articles, they are merely interpretations of the Scripture. They are merely the ideas of human beings. They are not, by any means, on a par with God’s own Word. We are taught to let God’s Word interpret itself.

In Peter’s first epistle, we see how he understood the words of our Savior. He reminds the Christians to whom he is writing that they are living stones that are being used to construct the church, the spiritual house that our Lord is building. “As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house” (1 Peter 2:4-5, NIV).<sup>530</sup> In these verses, the apostle speaks of both Jesus and those who believe in Him as “living stones”. He uses the Greek word λίθος for stone. His readers recognized several Old Testament prophecies that refer to Christ as the rock or the stone which God has chosen to be the foundation or the cornerstone of the Church. For example: “See, I

<sup>527</sup> Wuest, p. 71.

<sup>528</sup> August Pieper, “Luther’s Doctrine Of Church And Ministry” Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly, Volume 60, April, 1963, Number 2, pp. 81-109.

<sup>529</sup> William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, New Testament Commentary: Exposition of Ephesians. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, pp. 141-146.

<sup>530</sup> J. Ramsey Michaels, Word Biblical Commentary: 1 Peter. Dallas: Word, Incorporated, pp. 97-102.



lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation” (Isaiah 28:16, NIV). And, “The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone” (Psalm 118:22, NIV).

Paul writing to the Christians in Corinth about the foundation upon which the Church is built also identifies Christ as the Church’s one foundation — “no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 3:11, NIV). The rock upon which the Church is built, therefore, is not one of the apostles, not one of the leaders among the believers, but Christ Jesus Himself.<sup>531</sup>

Christ builds His Church by calling individuals out of the dark world of sin and damnation into His marvelous light. He adds them one by one to His church. He does this in the same way that a master builder selects and uses one stone after another to construct a building. The ἑκκλησία of Christ is the gathering or assembling together of those who have the same attitude toward him, the same God-given faith that the Apostle Peter manifested when he confessed “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God”.

Our LORD points out that His Church is indestructible. He says, “on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it”. The powers of hell will fail in their attempts to destroy the Church. Because of the unshakable foundation upon which the Church is built — Jesus Christ — the Church is invincible. Each and every stone that our Redeemer sets into the walls of this mighty fortress is bound to Him by the same firm tie that bound Peter to Him; that bond is faith.

Faith is such a strong and uniting bond that by it Christ and those who believe in Him actually become one. As such, Jesus empowers His ἑκκλησία to act in His name. Jesus gives Peter, as the representative of all of the disciples, the Keys to the Kingdom of Heaven. What he will bind on earth will be bound in heaven. What he will loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. These Keys, of course, are the power to forgive and retain sins. Our Savior says, “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” (Matthew 16:19, NIV). On two separate occasions after this (Matthew 18:18 and John 20:22-23), Jesus made it perfectly clear that the Keys were not given to Peter alone, but were given to all the disciples. Therefore, when the Church forgives or retains sins, it is in reality Christ Himself who is doing this, for He and His believers are one.<sup>532 533</sup>

These verses from Matthew 16 are very important in our understanding of the term ἑκκλησία. It is the Savior’s name for the entire body of those who are joined to Him by faith. Faith is the distinguishing characteristic or mark of the ἑκκλησία, faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and the Savior of the world.

<sup>531</sup> Paul Ellingworth and Howard Hatton, A Handbook on Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. New York: United Bible Societies, 1 Co 3:11.

<sup>532</sup> Beasley-Murray, pp. 380-384.

<sup>533</sup> Robertson, A.T., Word Pictures in the New Testament. Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Jn 20:22-23.

### 5.3.3 The ἑκκλησία is A Gathering of Believers, Matthew 18:15-20

In Matthew 18, Jesus speaks of the lengths to which His disciples should go in attempting to win back an erring fellow believer. He reminds them that a shepherd who has a hundred sheep will leave the ninety-nine to go and find the one sheep that has strayed away from the rest of the flock. Jesus shows that the same thing happens in His Church.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd. He loves each and every one of His sheep. He does not want to see even one of them perish. If any of His sheep should stray from the fold, the other members of the flock are to be just as concerned about the one that has strayed as Jesus Himself is. Christians are to make every effort to rescue a brother in the faith who has erred. The one most directly involved will be the first to make this effort. If he is unsuccessful, he will seek one or two others to join him in these efforts. If their earnest and conscientious efforts prove to be fruitless, they should not give up as if it were pointless to continue. They should go one step further. They should involve the church. Jesus says, “If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector” (verse 17, NIV).<sup>17</sup> ἂν δὲ παρακούσῃ αὐτῶν, εἰπέ τῇ ἑκκλησίᾳ ἂν δε; και; τῆς ἑκκλησίας παρακούσῃ, ἔστω σοι ὡσπερ ὁ ἔθνικὸς καὶ ὁ τελώνης.

There are those who have pointed to this verse as a proof text that the church, ἑκκλησία can only be the local congregation. If it were something other than the local congregation, how would it be possible to tell all believers, they argue. They reason that if their neighbor sins against them and refuses to listen, why should they travel from continent to continent to tell “the church” — all believers? That, they say would be impractical. And thus they conclude that the church can only be the local congregation. But is that necessarily so?

What does our Savior mean when He says “to the church” τῇ ἑκκλησίᾳ?. Is our LORD using the term in these verses in a different sense than He did in Matthew 16? Does it refer to only a local congregation? Does it mean all those who are the members of a visible organization — the members of Calvary congregation on County Highway D, or of Trinity congregation on Main Street? — all those who profess faith in Jesus Christ, even though, as we know, there may be hypocrites among them? If ἑκκλησία here in Matthew 18 means such a visible organization consisting of true believers and hypocrites, then the sense is very much different from what we have in Matthew 16.<sup>534 535</sup>

When Luther translated this verse, he used Gemeinde to convey the meaning of ἑκκλησία. Because Gemeinde indicates congregation, it immediately suggests to us today that it must be a local group of professing Christians, hence a local congregation.<sup>536</sup>

<sup>534</sup> Blomberg, pp. 278-281.

<sup>535</sup> Hagner, pp. 531-534.

<sup>536</sup> Luther, Luther's Works, Vol. 39: Church and Ministry I, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, p. 39.

It is true, Gemeinde can indicate a congregation. If we limit our understanding to this single definition, we will arrive at the narrow, restrictive view that many have held during the past decades, namely that the church is the local congregation. However, Gemeinde can and does refer to larger gatherings and assemblies. When one uses the methodology of translators and brings not simply a word for word meaning, but a thought for thought meaning, we see that more than the local congregation is meant. The church is the communion of saints not just in one place but everywhere that the Gospel is proclaimed in its truth and purity and the sacraments are administered; and this is the case not just for one particular moment in time, but throughout the history of believers from the time of Adam until the end of time. The Christians within the local congregation by virtue of their faith are part of the whole; they are part of the church as Scripture uses the term.

Luther tended to regard the ἑκκλησία as a gathering of people rather than a particular congregation within a building. A generation or two ago, German immigrants in the USA spoke of the community (*Gemeinde*) of Berlin, of Stuttgart, of Frankfurt, etc. Gemeinde can thus have a larger connotation than those people who have gathered in one particular building. It refers to the community of believers.

Luther avoided the word Kirche because he wanted to stress that the church, ἑκκλησία, is a gathering of believers. The church is not a building of wood, brick, or stone. The church is people. Holy Christendom might be a better translation for Gemeinde as Luther used it rather than congregation. It is important for us to note that when our LORD spoke the words of these verses, there was no Ortsgemeinde or local congregation as we today think of it. There were, however, groups of Christians to which our Redeemer could and did refer. Whether we call these groups of congregations, synods, districts, or any other name really does not matter. In these verses, our Lord is telling His disciples to leave no stone unturned in seeking the salvation of the erring brother. When a person sins and is unrepentant, those with whom he has his spiritual relationship should be informed. This may be a local congregation, in the modern sense of the word. It may also be a larger or smaller grouping.

With this in mind, we can say, when all other previous attempts have failed to make an erring brother conscious of his sin and lead him to repentance, “tell it to the church”, involve holy Christendom, involve the brotherhood of believers. This will not be the entire *Una Sancta*, all the believers of Christendom. That would be impractical and impossible. But it will involve those members who come into immediate consideration, those who are directly involved because the offending brother had enjoyed their fellowship. He has been one of their group. So, “tell it to the church” means “inform those who are Christ’s ἑκκλησία here in this place. Their combined testimony is to be used to convince the erring brother of his sin and lead him to repentance. This is the last hope for the eternal well-being of this erring soul. After the ἑκκλησία there is no one else who will be concerned about this impenitent person’s spiritual condition. The members of our Savior’s ἑκκλησία will be concerned even as our Redeemer is concerned.

Nothing is said here about the kind of fellowship, or gathering of believers that is involved. Most of the time it will be the sinner's home congregation. It may, however, be some other grouping of believers. It may be a conference of pastors or teachers in the church's school system. It may be an association of Christians involved in operating a religious secondary school or involved in some work of Christian charity or welfare work. It may be a synod or a church body. Which group it is that will be called upon to deal with an erring brother depends entirely upon the circumstances. We will speak more about this later.

If the combined testimony of the body of believers is to no avail, then the believers can no longer consider the impenitent sinner to be a member of the group. "Treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector," Jesus says (verse 17, NIV). Each and every disciple of our Lord will deal with the impenitent sinner as an unbeliever. They will withhold the assurance of the forgiveness of sins from him. On the other hand, if the sinner acknowledges his sin, they will comfort him with the knowledge of the Savior's full pardon and forgiveness, for Christ has given each and every one of them personally the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. Every Christian possesses the power to forgive or to retain sins by virtue of his union in faith with Christ. Jesus assures us: "I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (verse 18, NIV). The actions of the Christians, therefore, are as valid and certain in heaven as if Jesus Himself were dealing with the sinner Himself.

Christians, of course, will seek the aid and guidance of Christ, the Church's Head, in the matter of administering the keys. They will take the matter to Him in prayer, praying not only individually, but also jointly. They will bring their petitions regarding the administration of the Gospel to the Father's throne of grace in a joint, united plea in complete confidence that their prayers will be heard. Because Jesus adds, "where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them" (verse 20, NIV).

When are Christians gathered together in Jesus' Name? On this occasion, our Savior is not referring to the gathering of believers to participate in fellowship activities. Although this too is an important part of our life of faith, it is not what our Redeemer is referring to in this verse. From the context, we see that Jesus is referring to a gathering together of believers in the interest of the Ministry of the Keys. Jesus' name here refers to Jesus' revelation of Himself in the Gospel as the Savior of the world. We are reminded, for example, of how God proclaimed His name to Moses on Mount Sinai, revealing Himself as the God of all mercy and grace, who, at the same time, however, will call to strict account all who despise His word of pardon and forgiveness (Deuteronomy 34:6-7). When Christ's people come together, then, to be strengthened by His Gospel in Word and Sacrament, or when they come together to join forces in order to bring that Word of life more effectively to others, they are gathered together in His name, and they have the Savior's promise that He will be in their midst. He Himself will bless their efforts in the interest of His Kingdom.

Therein we have an answer to the question that inevitably will arise, How can a person locate the ἑκκλησία? How is it possible to “tell it to the church?” According to our Lord Himself, His Church, the ἑκκλησία, is found where two, three, or more people are gathered together in His Name. Wherever the Gospel is in use, Christ is present, and that is where His Church is present.

Matthew 16 shows us that faith in Jesus Christ as the promised Savior from sin is the distinguishing characteristic or mark of those who belong to His ἑκκλησία. Faith, however, is a matter of the heart. Faith cannot be seen with human eyes. “The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7, NIV). Only the LORD God, therefore, “knows those who are his” (2 Timothy 2:19, NIV). Because it consists only of believers who have a faith that we cannot see, the church is said to be invisible.

The Lutheran Church believes, teaches, and confesses that the Third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Ghost, creates and sustains faith only through the Means of Grace, the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. Therefore, believers, Christians, are found only where the Means of Grace are in use. From God’s promise that His Word will not return to Him void (Isaiah 55:11), we can be certain that wherever the Gospel is proclaimed and the Sacraments are administered as they were instituted by our LORD believers in Christ are surely present. This is where His ἑκκλησία is. Therefore, we speak of the Means of Grace as the marks of the Church.

However, this does not mean that His ἑκκλησία becomes visible through the use of the Means of Grace. Nor should we speak of the marks of the Church as the visible side of the Christ’s ἑκκλησία. Hypocrites also use the marks — they are present for worship, they hear the Word, they receive the sacrament — but hypocrites are never part of Christ’s ἑκκλησία.

That the ἑκκλησία exists is an article of faith. Nevertheless it makes its presence known in this world. It is not something imaginary. It is not some sort of abstract philosophical concept. It is a reality. It truly does exist. A person can appeal to the ἑκκλησία. The ἑκκλησία may admonish. The ἑκκλησία administers the Keys.

Wherever the Means of Grace are in use we have a manifestation of Christ’s Church, an outward sign of its presence. However, we will never be able to establish its boundaries. We can never identify this or that person as a member of the ἑκκλησία beyond all doubt. As was stated previously, we cannot look at any individual and see the presence or the absence of faith. Hypocrites, who by their confession and life give the outward appearance of genuine Christian faith, will deceive us. Christian love, of course, requires that we accept a person’s profession of faith at face value unless their life shows us that their words are insincere.

“Tell it to the Church” thus means in practical terms, tell it to the assembly of believers, the *Una Sancta*, as it is manifest or discernible through the use of the Means of Grace.

If Jesus were speaking about a local congregation in the sense of a visible, organized group of professing Christians, would not some word of explanation have been necessary for the disciples? Would ἡ ἐκκλησία not self-evidently have meant the same thing for the disciples here in Matthew 18 as it did when Jesus spoke of it in Matthew 16 — the assembly of those who believe in Him? As I have indicated, there was no local congregation, as we know it, in existence at the time when Jesus spoke these words. Two thousand years ago, the disciples certainly had no concept of church organization and polity as we know it today.

It is important to note that Jesus places no limitations, no restrictions, no boundaries on the term ἡ ἐκκλησία. “Tell it to the Church” plainly and simply means, tell it to the believers, whatever the group may be that comes into consideration and in whatever practical way they can be reached.

Usually this group of believers will be the local congregation with whom the impenitent sinner is outwardly associated. Normally they will be the first ones to whom an appeal for help in regaining the sinner will be directed. However, there may be other gatherings of believers entirely apart from the organized local congregation — mission societies, day school or high school associations, welfare agencies, mission boards, synods, federations of synods, etc. No single specific form of organization is prescribed for doing the Lord’s work. Of course, no group will work in competition with another. Brotherly love and good order will be observed. One group will not undertake work or interfere with work that another group such as the local congregation is already doing.

We can find no indication that the local congregation, in the sense we speak of it today was divinely instituted in these verses (Matthew 18) or anywhere else in the Bible. On the other hand, we do find assemblies of Christians which we could compare to our modern synods, conferences, mission societies, and any other name that may be given to Christians who are gathered for the furthering of God’s Kingdom here on earth. All these gatherings of Christians are creations of God the Holy Ghost. In this sense, we can say that these gatherings have been instituted by God. For by working faith within the believers present, the Holy Ghost has made them members of the spiritual body of Christ. God Himself then has thus instituted His church. And His church consists of every group of Christians that have been gathered in His name to do His work, whether it be a local congregation, a synod, or whatever name it may be given.<sup>537</sup>

We see, then, that Matthew 18 does not contain any indication that Christians are bound to a particular form of gathering together, or that one form is more God-pleasing than another. But we are told that when Christians come together in Jesus’ name, either to be nourished by His Gospel or to promote the proclamation of the Gospel, our Savior is present, even if they number only two or three. Here His ἡ ἐκκλησία is in evidence through its worship or its work.

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<sup>537</sup> M. Lehninger. “The Development Of The Doctrinal Position Of The Wisconsin Synod During The Century Of Its History” Quartalschrift Theological Quarterly Volume 47 April, 1950 Number 2, p. 103.

### 5.3.4 ἑκκλησία As Used in the Book of Acts

Prior to His ascension into heaven, Jesus instructed His disciples to remain in Jerusalem until they had been baptized with the Holy Ghost (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4-5). Our LORD's ἑκκλησία was in Jerusalem. This is where the group of believers was gathered. We are told that this group consisted of about 120 (Acts 1:15). On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Ghost was outpoured upon the apostles who proclaimed the Gospel message to the large crowd of people who had gathered in Jerusalem for the final day of the festival of Succoth. A large number of people believed the message and were baptized, thereby increasing the number of believers by about 3000 on that one day (Acts 2:41). That our LORD's church was here is evident from the fact that these believers "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (Acts 2:42). The number of faithful continued to increase. Within a relatively short time, there were approximately 5000 men (not counting women and children) among those who believed (Acts 4:4).<sup>538 539</sup>

This group of believers in Jerusalem is designated by the term ἑκκλησία. In Acts 8, we are told that "a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem" (verse 1).<sup>540</sup>

Because of this persecution, all except the apostles scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. In this scattering, this Diaspora, the believers spread the Gospel message wherever they went. This was followed by a time of peace. Both the King James Version and the New King James Version tell us that the **churches** in Judea, Samaria, and Galilee were edified. Both versions use the plural form of church. The Nestle Greek text, on the other hand, uses the singular form for church, ἑκκλησία. Thus, the Greek original text says: *Then the **church** throughout all of Judea, Samaria, and Galilee had peace* (Acts 9:31).<sup>541</sup> The use of the singular shows us that all of the believers in these three regions are considered to be one group of believers, not three or more. They are Christ's ἑκκλησία. However, there is a variant reading to this text that uses the plural form, although Biblical scholars do not regard this as coming from the better of the manuscripts.

We do find the use of the plural in Acts 15:41, where we read that Paul traveled through Syria and Cilicia strengthening the **churches**, ἑκκλησίας. In Acts 16:5, the congregations that Paul had started in Galatia during his first missionary journey are referred to using the plural, **the churches** and thus referring to a number of congregations.

Generally speaking, however, the singular form, **the church**, is the predominant usage that is found in the New Testament. It is used to refer to the believing community in Jerusalem, as we

<sup>538</sup> John B. Polhill, *The New American Commentary: Acts*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, p. 118-122; 140.

<sup>539</sup> Simon J. Kistemaker and William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, p. 148.

<sup>540</sup> Kistemaker and Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles*. pp. 286-289.

<sup>541</sup> Aland, Barbara; Aland, Kurt; Black, Matthew; Martini, Carlo M.; Metzger, Bruce M.; Wikgren, Allen: *The Greek New Testament*. 4th ed. Federal Republic of Germany: United Bible Societies, p. 347.

have seen. The singular is used in reference to the Christians at Antioch in Syria (e.g., 11:26; 13:1), at Caesarea (18:22), and at Ephesus (20:17). In Acts 14:23 we are told that Paul and Barnabas appointed elders in each church. Hence, the plural is referenced, although the singular form is used.

Acts 20:28 is unique in that it gives us both an interesting and insightful view. “Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood” (NIV). The expression “all the flock” is a translation of the Greek παντὶ τῷ ποιμνίῳ. We compare this with “the church of God” translated from τὴν ἑκκλησίαν τοῦ Θεοῦ. A variant has τοῦ κυρίου, which means “of the Lord.” In this verse, the individual flock over which the Holy Ghost has made one an overseer is contrasted with the entire church, ἑκκλησία. It is not just one particular congregation, of course, that has been purchased and redeemed with the precious blood of Christ. Rather it is the whole church, the entire community of believers. Each bishop, ἐπισκόπος, as he shepherds the individual flock, that specific part of the ἑκκλησία that has been entrusted to his care, is in reality serving the entire church. He is shepherding, feeding, tending, nurturing, caring for Christ’s ἑκκλησία, Christ’s church.<sup>542</sup>

The one ἑκκλησία does not divide and become many ἑκκλησίαι, as if it were some form of amoeba. No, it continues to be one church, one ἑκκλησία, even though it can be found to exist in more than one physical location. In the same way, when we speak of the church as it exists during any given epoch of history — early Christendom, the Middle Ages, the Reformation era, the Renaissance, the Industrial Age, the period of the technological revolution, etc.— we have only one church; not many churches. Every group of people, then, no matter where they are located in the world, no matter during which period of time they live and are gathered together, as long as they are Christian believers gathered around the Gospel in Word and Sacrament, these people are the church, the one ἑκκλησία of Christ. It does not matter if the singular or the plural form is used to refer to their group. They are part of the universal church, the Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints. They are part of the *Una Sancta*.

The ἑκκλησία is universal. It is a spiritual realm that knows no geographical or political boundaries. “The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is within you.” (Luke 17:20-21, NIV). The Church consists of Christians from every demographic category throughout the world. “You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, or all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Galatians 3:26-29, NIV). Believers are found throughout the world. In the eternal glory of heaven, believers will sing praises to Christ, our King. “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from

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<sup>542</sup> Polhill, p. 426f.



every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth” (Revelation 5:9-10, NIV). This universal assembly of believers will be a vast multitude, which no human could count: “I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: ‘Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb’” (Revelation 7:9-10, NIV).<sup>543 544 545</sup>

“There is one body and one Spirit” (Ephesians 4:4, NIV), not many bodies. Christ only has one body. The ἑκκλησία consists of every believer, no matter what their gender, age, sex, nationality, political persuasion, or personal wealth. These many believers form only one group, one community, one body, the Church, “so in Christ we who are many form one body” (Romans 12:5, NIV). Our Redeemer illustrates the fact that His Church is one in this way, He says, “there shall be one flock and one shepherd” (John 10:16, NIV). The Shepherd, of course, is Jesus Himself. The one flock is His ἐκκλησία, His body.<sup>546 547 548</sup>

When we translate ἑκκλησία as both congregation and church, misunderstandings can easily arise. The term congregation, for which Luther used the German word Gemeinde, would be an acceptable translation except that the modern usage of the word “congregation” tends to favor a designation for a local group of believers and thus distinguishes them from the entire body of believers. We might use the word “assembly” or “gathering” as a translation; however, these words also can easily be misunderstood and applied to only the local group of believers.

As was pointed out in our discussion of Matthew 18:17, the ἑκκλησία manifests its presence through the use of the Means of Grace irregardless of the location or the size of the group. Consequently any local gathering of professing Christians who have gathered around God’s Holy Word are also referred to as ἑκκλησία, congregations, or churches. We need to clearly understand, however, that they are the church solely because of the believers who are present. Unbelievers may be outwardly associated with Christians, present in their gatherings, participate in their worship services, and the like, but unbelievers are no more a part of the ἑκκλησία than smudges on a window are part of a window or mud is part of a car that has driven over a muddy road. We can correctly define a congregation as a gathering of Christians who congregate around the Word and Sacraments in a particular place. Such a definition correctly excludes hypocrites from the ἑκκλησία even though they may outwardly associate with the believers in the use of the Means of Grace.<sup>549</sup>

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<sup>543</sup> Nolland, pp. 851-854.

<sup>544</sup> Luther, Luther’s Works, Vol. 26: Lectures on Galatians, 1535, Chapters 1-4, pp. 351-353.

<sup>545</sup> Aune, pp. 359-362.

<sup>546</sup> Lincoln, pp. 237-240.

<sup>547</sup> Dunn, pp. 722-724.

<sup>548</sup> Beasley-Murray, p. 171.

<sup>549</sup> Hagner, p. 531.

### 5.3.5 ἑκκλησία As Used in the Epistles

The Apostle Paul uses both the singular and the plural form in his epistles. In Galatians 1:13, he says that he “persecuted the church of God”, using the singular. A few verses later, however, he uses the plural when he says that he was “unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ.” In his use of the plural form, he is placing the individual congregations side by side. These individual congregations are often given the name of the city or the region in which they are located. For example, he writes to or speaks about “the church which is at Cenchrea” (Romans 16:1); “the church of God which is at Corinth” (1 Corinthians 1:2); “the churches of Galatia” (1 Corinthians 16:1); “the churches of Asia” (1 Corinthians 16:19); and “the churches of Macedonia” (2 Corinthians 8:1).

Even the smallest groups of believers, those who gather for worship in the home of one of the believers, is called an ἑκκλησία. For example: “Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas and all the saints with them” (Romans 16:5, NIV); “Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their house” (1 Corinthians 16:19, NIV); “Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house” (Colossians 4:15, NIV); “to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier and to the church that meets in your home” (Philemon. 2, NIV). Jesus has promised that He is present whenever and wherever two or three persons come together in His Name (Matthew 28:20). Because even this small group of believers in Christ has gathered together and the Means of Grace are used, they are Christ’s Church, His ἑκκλησία.<sup>550 551</sup>

In all the Epistles without exception, the inspired author writes to Christians, believers, saints, never to the wicked. This, however, is questioned by some. They point to such passages as 1 Corinthians 15:12 — “But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?” (NIV) and conclude that the apostle is speaking to a congregation that consists of both believers and heretics. In reality, these were thoughtless people who had been confused by the outspoken pagan philosophers in their community. However, they had not been firmly established in their denial of the resurrection and unbelief.<sup>552 553</sup> Some point to Galatians 1:6 — “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel” (NIV) and Galatians 5:4 — “You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace” (NIV) — and conclude that this epistle, too, was written not only to believers but to unbelievers as well. Although this may appear to be the case, such a conclusion can only be reached as a result of faulty exegesis. Throughout the entire epistle, the apostle addresses these same people and in the very last verse, he refers to them as “brothers”. The term

<sup>550</sup> Hagner, pp. 888-889.

<sup>551</sup> Hendriksen and Kistemaker, New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew, p. 702.

<sup>552</sup> Martin Luther, Luther’s Works, Vol. 28: 1 Corinthians 7, 1 Corinthians 15, Lectures on 1 Timothy. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, pp. 93-99.

<sup>553</sup> Kistemaker and Hendriksen, New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians. p. 539.

“brothers” indicates a spiritual relationship between the apostle and his readers.<sup>554</sup> In Galatians 4:19-20, he refers to them as “my dear children” for whom he struggles as in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in them. He desires to be with them and to change the tone of his message so that they will properly understand it.<sup>555</sup> Moreover, in Galatians 3:26–29; 4:6–9a, 28, 31 he speaks of them as “children of God.”<sup>556</sup> These obviously were Christians, fellow believers with the Apostle Paul. He would not have written in these terms if these people had lacked faith. We should remember that in this epistle, the apostle is dealing with abstract doctrine in opposition to false doctrine and abstract theory. Some of what he writes, therefore, is meant to convey the consequences of following abstract theory and is not intended to be absolute and unconditional. There is no question of the existence of hypocrites, gross sinners, errorists, and even heretics within the congregations of the apostolic age, even as they exist in our congregations today. The epistles, themselves, however, were addressed to the faithful, to the saints, to the believers.

The Church of Christ, the *Una Sancta*, is comprised of all those in every epoch of history and in all places who believe in Him as their Lord and Savior from sin. The Church began with Adam and Eve. It has spread over the whole earth as believers have taken their faith with them as they moved about, sharing it with their new neighbors and friends. Some of the Church's members are still in this world, others are already in heaven (Hebrews 12:22-23). For the believers at this or that place here on earth or eternally in heaven the *Una Sancta* is present.

The Apostle Paul shows this in the salutations that he uses in his Epistles to the Corinthians. They are addressed as “the church of God in Corinth” (1 Corinthians 1:2 and 2 Corinthians 1:1). This does not mean merely “the Corinthian congregation”. Rather it means “the Church as it exists in Corinth”, or “the Church as it is manifested in Corinth”. Because the Gospel is preached and proclaimed in Corinth, and the Sacraments are administered as Christ instituted them, the apostle is certain that the Church exists in Corinth. There are believers who are present. These believers are part of the *Una Sancta*, the Holy Christian Church.<sup>557</sup>

In these two epistles to the Christians in Corinth, we have a practical example of how to handle a case of church discipline. The congregation was tolerating a scandalous case of incest in its midst. Paul admonished the congregation to deal with the matter. In his second letter, because the man guilty of this flagrant and open sin had repented, Paul urged the congregation to forgive this man and share with him the comforting Gospel message lest he despair.

It is important that we note that 2 Corinthians is not addressed only to the believers in Corinth, but rather to all the believers in the Greek province of Achaia — “To the church of God in Corinth, together with all the saints throughout Achaia” (2 Corinthians 1:1, NIV). We know that there was a congregation at Cenchrea (Romans 16:1). There was also a group of believers in Athens (Acts 17:34). Paul's

<sup>554</sup> Richard N. Longenecker, Word Biblical Commentary: Galatians. Dallas: Word, Incorporated, pp. 14-15; 228.

<sup>555</sup> Longenecker, pp. 194-197.

<sup>556</sup> Longenecker, pp. 151-159; 173-181; 216-219.

<sup>557</sup> Kistemaker, and Hendriksen, New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians, pp. 34-35.

frequent references to the Christians of this area, using the name of the province, suggest that there were believers in other cities and villages of Achaia also. The case of excommunication concerned not only the congregation in Corinth. The offender had grieved all of them, at least in part, Paul says (2 Corinthians 2:5). All to whom 2 Corinthians is addressed, namely, the saints of the entire province of Achaia, are, therefore, also to forgive this man.<sup>558 559</sup>

The salutations of both letters to the Corinthians contain the modifying genitive found so frequently with ἑκκλησία, namely, τοῦ Θεοῦ. The ἑκκλησία is called “the church of God.” τοῦ Θεοῦ is also used with the plural, “the churches of God” (1 Corinthians 11:16). Even when this modifier is not specifically added, it is implied whenever ἑκκλησία refers to the Church. The force of this genitive is brought out clearly in Acts 20:28, “the church of God, which he bought with his own blood”. What a tremendous price He paid for it! It belongs to Him by right of purchase. He gathers together those who are His, those whom He has purchased with His holy, precious blood. This is the assembly, the gathering, of His people. He is at work in the midst of them.<sup>560 561</sup>

In Matthew 16 we heard Jesus speak of this assembly as His Church. Those of us who belong to it are His people. We are His Church. The modifying genitive, the Church of God, is an exact equivalent. In Romans 16:16 we find an even closer parallel. Here Paul writes “All the churches of Christ”. This does not merely mean those churches that are Christian as opposed to those that are not. It implies the very same thought that we find in Acts 20:28. They are gatherings of Christ’s holy people because He has purchased them with His own blood.

It is this redemptive work of our Savior that makes the members of His Church, and thus His Church itself, holy. “Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless” (Ephesians 5:25-27, NIV). His all-atoning sacrifice for humankind on Calvary’s cross has sanctified us. It has cleansed us of our guilt and sin thereby making us holy. Because of what our Redeemer did for us on Good Friday, we are “sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours” (1 Corinthians 1:2, NIV).<sup>562 563 564</sup>

At times the apostle uses the expression “in Christ” to convey the same meaning. In Galatians 1:22, he speaks of “the churches of Judea that are in Christ”. God works in and through His Son in carrying out His eternal plan for His Church. In 1 Thessalonians 2:14 we have both terms used jointly, “God’s churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus”. The living stones that He places one by one into His holy Temple have been elected, redeemed, called, justified, and sanctified by God. The

<sup>558</sup> Martin, pp. 1-3; 36.

<sup>559</sup> David E. Garland, 2 Corinthians. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, p. 117.

<sup>560</sup> Polhill, pp. 426-427.

<sup>561</sup> Charles F. Pfeiffer and Everett Falconer Harrison, The Wycliffe Bible Commentary: New Testament. Ac 20:28.

<sup>562</sup> Robertson, Eph 5:25-27.

<sup>563</sup> Lincoln, pp. 373-377.

<sup>564</sup> Jamieson, 1 Co 1:2.

various manifestations of the Church in this or that place are, therefore, simply called “churches of the saints” (1 Corinthians 14:33). Our Lord has clothed them with the garments of salvation and covered them with the robe of righteousness which is ours through His atoning work on Calvary’s cross.<sup>565</sup>  
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We heard Paul equate the ἑκκλησία with the saints in his salutation to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 1:2 and 2 Corinthians 1:1). Sometimes, therefore, Paul does not use the word ἑκκλησία. He merely addresses himself to the saints, as in his salutation to the Christians in Ephesus “To the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 1:1). The inspired apostle regards the saints, the faithful believers in Christ Jesus, as being the Church, the ἑκκλησία.<sup>568 569</sup>

In his letter to the Christians in Ephesus, we have a reference to the words of our Lord in Matthew 16 “on this rock I will build my church” (verse 18, NIV). Expanding on this, the apostle explains that the Gentiles who believe in Jesus Christ are full participants in the promises of God and equally share His blessings even as do those believers who are the physical descendants of Abraham. No longer are these Gentiles foreigners or aliens, outsiders or strangers. Rather through God’s mercy and Christ’s atoning work they are “fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household” (Ephesians 2:19, NIV). Like living stones, the believers are being joined together into a spiritual house (1 Peter 2:5) that is “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone” (Ephesians 2:20, NIV). In Christ Jesus “the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord” (Ephesians 2:21, NIV). They, and all Christians, “are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit” (Ephesians 2:22, NIV). They belong to the ἑκκλησία. They are the communion of saints, the fellowship of believers, the elect of God on the earth. The ἑκκλησία, the Church, is the spiritual body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22-23).<sup>570 571 572</sup>

What a glorious, blessed fellowship this is! Fellow believers united together in one body to serve the Lord. Christ our Lord joined to us providing a living fellowship with the Triune God. Christ Jesus is the head of the body, His Church (Colossians 1:18). The believers, the saints, are His members, the parts of His body (1 Corinthians 12:27). Our Lord emphasized this blessed communion between Himself and the members of His body in the Upper Room in His discourse with His disciples on the night in which He was betrayed. In John 14, He says, “If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him” (verse 23, NIV). Again, He illustrates it with the words, “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5,

<sup>565</sup> Longenecker, p. 41.

<sup>566</sup> Bruce, pp. 45-46.

<sup>567</sup> Kistemaker and Hendriksen, New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians, pp. 511-514.

<sup>568</sup> Lincoln, pp. 5-6.

<sup>569</sup> Wuest, pp. 15-21.

<sup>570</sup> Wuest, pp. 78-79.

<sup>571</sup> Lincoln, pp. 150-165.

<sup>572</sup> Michaels, pp. 99-102.

NIV). Elsewhere the illustration of the marriage relationship is used to show this; Christ being the groom and the Church His bride (see John 3:29; Ephesians 5:22-32; Revelation 21:9).<sup>573 574 575 576 577</sup>

As we have previously stated, the Church consists only of believers. Only those who believe in Jesus Christ as the Lord and Savior from sin and death can be, and are members of the Church. As human beings we cannot look into the heart of another human being and see the existence or the absence of faith. Only God, who does not look at people the same way that we do, can do that (1 Samuel 16:7). The Lord knows those that are His (2 Timothy 2:19), we do not. Even though we have not seen it with our eyes, we are firmly convinced that the Church does exist. The splendor, the glory, even the existence of the Church, the body of believers, continues to be for us a matter of faith. A faith that is firmly grounded in the wholly inspired, inerrant, and infallible Word of God.<sup>578 579 580 581 582</sup>

The Church, then, is not something that we can see. The Church, because it is composed solely of believers whom we cannot visibly identify and distinguish from the hypocrites, is invisible. Just as Christ, the Head of the Church is invisible, so also His Church is invisible. The Church is invisible just as the faith by which sinners are born into the Church when they are born again of water and of the Spirit is invisible. The Church comes into being through the coming of the Kingdom of God when “our Heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word, and lead a godly life here in time and hereafter in eternity” (Luther’s Explanation to the Second Petition of the Lord’s Prayer).<sup>583</sup>

Our Lord Jesus tells us in Luke 17:20, “The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation” (NIV). As human beings, we cannot see and observe the gracious working of the Holy Ghost within the hearts of people as He creates faith within their hearts and then strengthens and preserves them in the true and saving faith through the Means of Grace. Jesus explained to Nicodemus, “The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit” (John 3:8, NIV).<sup>584 585 586</sup>

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<sup>573</sup> Peter T. O'Brien, Word Biblical Commentary: Colossians-Philemon. Dallas: Word, Incorporated, pp. 48-50.

<sup>574</sup> Pfeiffer, 1 Co 12:27.

<sup>575</sup> Beasley-Murray, pp. 52; 259-260; 273.

<sup>576</sup> Lincoln, pp. 367-394.

<sup>577</sup> Aune, pp. 1150-1151.

<sup>578</sup> Ralph W. Klein, Word Biblical Commentary: 1 Samuel. Dallas: Word, Incorporated, pp. 160-162.

<sup>579</sup> Robert D. Bergen, 1, 2 Samuel. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, p. 178.

<sup>580</sup> Mounce, pp. 528-529.

<sup>581</sup> Wuest, p. 137f.

<sup>582</sup> Lea, p. 217.

<sup>583</sup> Concordia Triglot. “The Small Catechism.” III. The Lord’s Prayer. p. 547.

<sup>584</sup> Nolland, pp. 851-852.

<sup>585</sup> Beasley-Murray, p. 49.

<sup>586</sup> Luther, Luther’s Works, Vol. 22 : Sermons on the Gospel of St. John: Chapters 1-4. pp. 292-302.

The presence of the Church has been deceptive to humankind. The prophet Elijah thought that he was all alone, the only believer alive in Israel; the only person who had not bowed their knees to Baal. Yet our gracious Lord assured him that there were still 7000 faithful believers in the country (1 Kings. 18:9-18).<sup>587</sup>

#### **5.4 The Visible Church Is an Outward Manifestation of the Church**

Even though no human is able to point to another individual and say with all certainty “Truly, this person is a member of Christ’s Holy Church,” nevertheless it is possible to notice the presence of the Church. The use of the Means of Grace is a clear indication of the presence of the Church. The unity of the Church, that invisible, spiritual unity for which Christ prayed in His High Priestly Prayer on the night before He gave His life so that we might live eternally, also produces outward, visible effects that make it evident to the world that the Father sent Jesus to be the Savior of the world and that He loves those who believe in Jesus even as He loves the Son Himself (John 17:20-23).<sup>588 589</sup>

Through the profession of their Christian faith the presence of the Church also becomes evident. Their faith expresses itself in confession. “For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved” (Romans 10:10, NIV). Confession, or the profession of faith, is not an infallible indicator of the attitude of a man’s heart, of course, because there is always the possibility that the person speaking may be a hypocrite who is merely speaking from his mouth and not from his heart.<sup>590 591</sup>

Through the use of the Means of Grace, the Gospel in Word and Sacrament, and, through the profession of faith as it is evident in the words and lives of the individual believers the presence of Christ’s Church, the ἑκκλησία, is evident. It is evident today in our communities even as the ἑκκλησία was evident in the ἑκκλησίαι that existed in Jerusalem, Antioch, Corinth, Ephesus, Thesalonica, Galatia, and elsewhere in the New Testament.

Jesus tells the faithful: “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples” (John 8:31, NIV). And again our Savior says: “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it.” (Luke 11:28, NIV). Because Christians are God’s children, they want to worship God. They want to study God’s Word. They want to proclaim the Gospel to others. And they want to do these things with other Christians. They want to confess the same faith which their fellow-believers confess. They want to encourage these fellow Christians and to receive admonition and encouragement from them. They want to partake of the Lord’s Supper together to receive the assurance of the forgiveness of their sins and to express their unity in Christ. They want to pool their talents and

<sup>587</sup> Simon J. DeVries, Word Biblical Commentary: 1 Kings, Dallas: Word, Incorporated, pp. 217-222.

<sup>588</sup> Beasley-Murray, pp. 302-303.

<sup>589</sup> Hendriksen and Kistemaker. New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel According to John, pp. 363-365.

<sup>590</sup> Dunn, p. 609.

<sup>591</sup> Wuest, Ro 10:10.

their offerings so that they can work together in joint ventures of Christian education and evangelism. They want to pray for each other. They want to enjoy the company of fellow Christians. For all these reasons Christians join together in visible assemblies in which they can most easily participate as often as possible. They heed the instruction given to them through God's Holy Word: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God" (Colossians 3:16, NIV).<sup>592 593 594 595 596 597</sup>

We have become accustomed to speaking about the entire group that has gathered around God's Word and Sacraments as being the visible church. We make a clear distinction between the visible church, which consists of people that we can see, and the invisible church, which is the Communion of Saints and is composed solely of believers. Our dogmaticians make a distinction between the visible and the invisible church. They speak of the visible church as the *ecclesia late dicta*, in the broad sense, and of the invisible Church as the *ecclesia stricte dicta*, in the narrow sense. Such a distinction is found in God's Holy Word. Although Scripture never uses the adjectives "visible" and "invisible" in conjunction with the ἑκκλησία. Scripture does speak of the ἑκκλησία when referring to an outward, visible assembly of professing Christians.<sup>598 599 600</sup>

For example, in 3 John 10, we are told about a man named Diotrephes, who had a proud spirit. He loved to be first and wanted nothing to do with John or his coworkers in the Lord. Moreover, any member of the congregation who accepted them was put out of the church by Diotrephes. In other words, he excommunicated them. Of course, this was a flagrant abuse of the Ministry of the Keys. Although Diotrephes could prevent people in his community from participating in the local congregation, he could not cast them out of the Holy Christian Church, the *Una Sancta*. The congregation, the visible group is called the church, but only because of the true believers in it; not because of its location, composition, or form.<sup>601 602 603</sup>

<sup>592</sup> Martin Luther, Luther's Works, Vol. 23: Sermons on the Gospel of St. John: Chapters 6-8. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, pp. 392-394.

<sup>593</sup> Beasley-Murray, p. 133.

<sup>594</sup> Nolland, p. 648.

<sup>595</sup> Hendriksen and Kistemaker, New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, p. 625.

<sup>596</sup> O'Brien, pp. 206-210.

<sup>597</sup> Wiersbe, Col 3:16.

<sup>598</sup> Carl Lawrenz, "The Wisconsin Synod's Theses on the Church and Ministry"; Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly, Volume 67, April 1970, Number 2, p. 125.

<sup>599</sup> Heinrich Vogel, "The Doctrine of the Church and Ministry"; Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly, Volume 73, January 1976, Number 1, p. 9.

<sup>600</sup> Carl Lawrenz, "The Scriptural Truths of the Church and Its Ministry"; Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly, Volume 82, Summer 1985, Number 3, p. 172.

<sup>601</sup> Wuest, p. 222.

<sup>602</sup> Stephen S. Smalley, Word Biblical Commentary: 1, 2, 3 John. Dallas: Word, Incorporated, pp. 357-358.

<sup>603</sup> John P. Meyer, "Synod and Congregation"; Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly, Volume 61, October 1960, Number 4, p. 261.



Such a use of terms is referred to as a synecdoche. It is a figure of speech in which the whole receives its name because of a smaller part within it. The entire group is referred to as the “church” because of that part of it which is actually Christ’s Church. Even though the entire group is referred to as the church, it is very important for us to remember that the unbelievers and hypocrites who are joined together with the true Christians in the outward organization, in this case the local congregation, are by no means a part of the Body of Christ. All hypocrites lack faith in Jesus Christ, and as such cannot be a part of His Holy Church, His ἑκκλησία.

We should also take note of the fact that in the outward manifestations of the Church, the *Una Sancta*, in this world there are many weaknesses, blemishes, and faults that are apparent. The Church is composed of sinners, redeemed sinners who cling in faith to Christ and His promises of forgiveness, life, and salvation, yet nevertheless sinners. As such, they are not perfect. They sin every day (1 John 1:8-10). They do not do the good that they want to do but rather the evil that they do not want to do (Romans 7:18-20). So in this world we do not yet see the perfect holiness, beauty, and glory of the Church. And as there are imperfections and weaknesses within the individual members, these are also apparent within the group as a whole.<sup>604 605 606 607 608</sup>

For example, in the letters directed by our Lord to the seven churches in Asia Minor in Revelation 2 and 3, five of the churches are described as having some deficiency. Jesus admonishes each of these congregations to repent. He does this because their sinful weakness could thoroughly undermine and destroy their faith and result in their rejection by the Lord Himself.

Again, we have an example of synecdoche. These congregations are called “churches”. They are referred to as a church in spite of the fact that there were many hypocrites and wicked persons among the members. In the congregations at Pergamum and at Thyatira, those who held the faith-destroying doctrines of Balaam and of the Nicolaitans were permitted to be part of the group and their false teachings were tolerated. There was no discipline carried out against these errorists. They should have been removed from the congregation until they renounced their false doctrine. The congregation in Sardis consisted of many hypocrites. Our Savior tells them, “I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead” (Revelation 3:1, NIV). He was truly saddened at what had happened to the church in this city. Yet even in the midst of all this error a faithful remnant remained. This small group of faithful Christians had not soiled their clothes with the spiritual filth that surrounded them. They had washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb trusting in Him completely for their full forgiveness and redemption. And Jesus promises that this small group of believers wearing their white robes will walk with Him in heavenly glory. These faithful Christians are admonished to strengthen those whose faith, though not yet dead, was on the verge of dying.

<sup>604</sup> Robertson, 1 Jn 1:8-10.

<sup>605</sup> Smalley, pp. 28-41.

<sup>606</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 30: The Catholic Epistles*. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, pp. 228-233.

<sup>607</sup> Dunn, pp. 390-391.

<sup>608</sup> Carson, Ro 7:18-20.

It is because of these believers that a congregation like Sardis is called a “church.” In other words, the presence of the hypocrites is ignored, just as we ignore the chaff when we call a truckload of wheat that is being hauled from the harvest field a load of wheat even though it is a mixture of chaff and grain. Or the nets full of fish, which have been caught on the lakes or the open seas, are said to hold a catch of fish even though they may contain other things besides the fish themselves.

The entire group of those who profess to be Christians is not called the ἑκκλησία, or the church, because it has a particular form of organization. No, rather it is so called because of the believers who are present, even though their identity is invisible to the human eye, and the marks of the Church, the Means of Grace, are being used. The believers possess the Keys to the Kingdom of Heaven. Although hypocrites may participate outwardly in administering them, they do so without any divine right. Only God knows, however, who these hypocrites are. Unless He exposes them, as He exposed Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11), or unless they expose themselves by a manifestly un-Christian life (and then they are no longer hypocrites), the Church must bear with their presence as a part of its cross in this world.

The Apostle Peter does not use the word ἑκκλησία in his epistles, although, as we heard, he does use Old Testament terminology in his first epistle when he speaks about Christ’s Church. For example, he refers to it as “a spiritual house” (2:5, NIV), “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people” (2:9, NIV), and “the people of God” (2:10, NIV).<sup>609 610 611</sup>

The Church grows through the Means of Grace. “Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ” (Romans 10:17, NIV). Because the Church is the body of the faithful, the Church can only exist where God’s Word is taught and proclaimed. God’s Word is all-important. It is the precious food that our souls need to grow and survive in this sin-filled world. It is the means that our Lord has given us to extend His Church into the far reaches of the earth. “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:15-16, NIV). Again in His instructions to do the work that He has called every believer to do, He says: “go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19-20, NIV). Only through the regular use of the Means of Grace does the individual Christian grow spiritually. Only through the proclamation of God’s Word does His Church grow from place to place.<sup>612 613 614 615 616 617</sup>

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<sup>609</sup> Michaels, pp. 99-113.

<sup>610</sup> Kistemaker and Hendriksen, New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Epistles of Peter and the Epistle of Jude, pp. 85-94.

<sup>611</sup> Wiersbe, 1 Pe 2:5, 9, 10.

<sup>612</sup> Dunn, p. 623.

<sup>613</sup> Wuest, p. 180.

<sup>614</sup> Evans, p. 548.

<sup>615</sup> Hendriksen and Kistemaker, New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel According to Mark, p. 689.

<sup>616</sup> Hagner, p. 886-889.

The thought that God has prescribed certain forms of church organization for His mature New Testament sons and daughters is utterly foreign to the entire spirit of the New Testament. God does not prescribe to His New Testament children what they are to eat or drink nor when they are to worship (Co. 2:16-17). Neither does He decree that they must organize congregations or synods according to a certain pattern, such as that, for example, which is so familiar to us in our American church life. The Gospel creates its own forms. Rather than prescribe forms, God has given His New Testament Church the freedom to establish whatever forms are necessary. Even as we can find various forms of worship within the New Testament, we find various forms in which the church exists. We can find evidence of small groups gathered together in house-churches. We can find evidence of a congregation within a city, and groups of congregations in regions. Thus we can describe the church as either a local congregation, a church in a district, state, or province, the church of an entire realm, or a church body subscribing to a certain confessional position.<sup>618 619 620</sup>

It is God the Holy Ghost who calls individuals to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and then gathers the individual believers together through the proclamation of the Gospel. The New Testament has examples of congregations being concerned about one another, about their consulting together, and their working together in a spirit of cooperation. For example, as soon as the congregation at Jerusalem learned that there were believers in Antioch, it at once established contact with them by sending Barnabas to encourage and exhort them (Acts 11:22). Again, when the Church at Antioch was troubled by the Judaizers from Jerusalem, the congregation sent a delegation to Jerusalem with Paul and Barnabas so that they could have a joint study of the question. They had a common problem. They consulted with one another. Then having reached an agreement, took joint action.<sup>621 622</sup>

At times, the Apostle Paul found it necessary to admonish the members in one group not to act independently of others elsewhere. When the Corinthians displayed an independent spirit, Paul wrote, "Did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached?" (1 Corinthians 14:36, NIV). He had to remind the Ephesians of the special unity that the Holy Spirit had created and he encourages them to preserve it (Ephesians 4:3). Each Christian is part of the body of Christ. The Holy Ghost gathers the believers together in a spirit of unity. Christian believers seek out other Christians. It is not the will nor the intent of Almighty God that Christians be isolated, or that they not associate with others who share their faith. As each believer is joined to Christ in faith, so he is also tied to every other believer. "We have fellowship with one another" (1 John 1:7, NIV). Through faith in Christ, each believer becomes an adopted child of God, a member of

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<sup>617</sup> Hendriksen and Kistemaker, New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew. p. 998-1003.

<sup>618</sup> O'Brien, p. 138-141.

<sup>619</sup> Hendriksen and Kistemaker, New Testament Commentary: Exposition of Colossians and Philemon. p. 123-124.

<sup>620</sup> Wuest, pp. 209-210.

<sup>621</sup> William J. Larkin, D. Stuart Briscoe, Haddon W. Robinson, The IVP New Testament Commentary Acts. Downers, Ill., USA: InterVarsity Press, Ac 11:22-24.

<sup>622</sup> Kistemaker and Hendriksen, New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles. pp. 420-421.

the Heavenly Father's household (Galatians 3:26). In the Epistle to the Hebrews, the inspired author admonishes some who were isolating themselves not to forsake the assembling of themselves together (Hebrews 10:25).<sup>623 624 625 626 627 628 629 630 631</sup>

When visible churches teach the Word of God in its truth and purity, without adding to it or subtracting from it, we refer to them as "orthodox churches," that is, churches which teach the unadulterated Word of God. When visible churches do not teach the Word of God in its truth and purity, but incorporate false teaching together with it, we refer to them as "heterodox churches," that is, churches which teach differently than God's Word teaches. Although we cannot agree with this mixture of teaching the Word of God and the concepts of man, nevertheless, because of the presence of believers we refer even to such a group with false teaching as a "church". If the gospel which presents Christ's death as the way to salvation is still being taught in a heterodox church, there will still be believers present within it, because the gospel has the power to bring people to faith in spite of the error that is present along side of it.

Nevertheless, the false teaching which is tolerated in a heterodox church is always dangerous to faith of its individual members. Christians have a duty to separate themselves from such error in order to protect themselves from it and to warn others against it. Thus such separation is always done in Christian love; out of concern for the spiritual welfare of the souls of the individual members within the erring body.

The biblical doctrine of the church pulls us in two different but complementary directions: we are eager to work together with fellow Christians, but we must avoid working with those who teach and tolerate error. This introduces another important doctrine, the doctrine of church fellowship. In brief, Church fellowship is every joint expression, manifestation, and demonstration of the common faith in which Christians on the basis of their confession find themselves to be united with one another. By its very nature, this doctrine deals with the relationships between members within the visible church. The fellowship that each believer has with God through faith in Jesus Christ is the result of the work of the Third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Ghost. It is not the purpose of this paper to deal with church fellowship. Suffice it to say that it was the next doctrine to be discussed by the Synodical Conference of Lutheran Churches in the USA when the ELS and the WELS withdrew their membership because of a lack of doctrinal agreement with the LCMS.

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<sup>623</sup> Kistemaker and Hendriksen, New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians, pp. 515-518.

<sup>624</sup> Lincoln, p. 235-237.

<sup>625</sup> Hendriksen and Kistemaker, New Testament Commentary: Exposition of Ephesians, pp. 182-185.

<sup>626</sup> Smalley, pp. 23-26.

<sup>627</sup> Kistemaker and Hendriksen, New Testament Commentary: Exposition of James and the Epistles of John, pp. 243-244.

<sup>628</sup> Longenecker, p. 151-154.

<sup>629</sup> Wuest, p. 111.

<sup>630</sup> William L. Lane, Word Biblical Commentary: Hebrews 9-13, Dallas: Word, Incorporated, pp. 289-290.

<sup>631</sup> Stedman, Heb 10:25.

## 5.5 *The Form in Which Christians Work Together is An Adiaphora*

We do not find anywhere in the New Testament any sort of directive indicating the *form* in which Christians are to work together. They are to exercise their spiritual priesthood. They are to use the Word and the Sacraments for their mutual edification. They are to maintain the public ministry in their midst. They are to pool their efforts in bringing the Gospel into all the world. They are to administer the Keys which have been entrusted to them, an authority which each of them possesses in equal measure. But we do not find any form or method for carrying on these activities.

In Christian liberty, Christians have the freedom to establish whatever organizational structures they may need in order to carry on their work. They are to be guided solely by their sanctified Christian wisdom, testing everything, holding on to that which is good, and avoiding all forms of evil (1 Thessalonians 5:21-22). Christians have been called to be free and therefore they should serve one another in this spirit of Christian love (Galatians 5:13). Whatever Christians decide to do, they should always do it decently and in order (1 Corinthians 14:40). "All things are yours," they are told (1 Corinthians 3:21). All things may not be expedient, however. All things are permissible. However, not all things are beneficial (1 Corinthians 6:12). The Lord leaves it to the faithful as His free, full-grown sons and daughters to search out the most effective means and forms for doing the work that He has given His Church to do with the ability and gifts that He provides.<sup>632 633 634 635 636 637 638 639</sup>

Obviously, certain activities will fall into the province of the local congregation, the basic and most immediate group into which the Holy Ghost gathers Christians. The congregation administers the Keys in their most comprehensive form, preaching the Word, administering the Sacraments, instructing the young, strengthening the weak, admonishing the erring, reaching out to the unchurched, and ministering to the sick and the dying. For Gospel work which the congregation does not or can not undertake for whatever reason — size, cost, distance, whatever the reason — Christians may join together to form synods, federations of synods, or associations either of congregations or of individuals to accomplish the work together.

In all such forms or organizational structures, the Holy Ghost is actively gathering believers together to carry out the holy task that the Savior has entrusted to them, namely, to preach the Gospel to every creature. In all such groupings, no matter what their form, believers are

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<sup>632</sup> Bruce, p. 125-127.

<sup>633</sup> Hendriksen and Kistemaker, New Testament Commentary: Exposition of I-II Thessalonians. pp. 139-140.

<sup>634</sup> Longenecker, p. 238-241.

<sup>635</sup> William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, New Testament Commentary: Exposition of Galatians. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, pp. 209-212.

<sup>636</sup> Luther, Luther's Works, Vol. 28: 1 Corinthians 7, 1 Corinthians 15, Lectures on 1 Timothy. p. 55.

<sup>637</sup> Kistemaker and Hendriksen, New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians. pp. 121-123; 192-194; 517-519.

<sup>638</sup> Ellingworth, 1 Co 3:21; 6:12.

<sup>639</sup> Robertson, 1 Co 6:12.

responding to the will of their Lord that they should not forsake the assembling of themselves together. Because Christians are gathered together through the Gospel and in its interest in all of these assemblies, they are assured of Christ's presence and blessing in accord with His promise, "Where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them" (Matthew 18:20, NIV).<sup>640 641 642</sup>

This is the picture, then, that the New Testament gives us of Christ's Holy Church. It is the ἑκκλησία of Christ. It possesses the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. It administers them by Christ's authority and in accord with His will. It is at one and the same time both heavenly and earthly, both spiritual and corporeal, both eternal and temporal. It is one Church, the Holy Christian Church, the ἑκκλησία of Christ. It is the flock of Christ, the Good Shepherd, who says, "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand" (John 10:27-28).<sup>643 644</sup>

In looking at the writings of Luther and other Lutheran dogmaticians we see that the Church refers to all of Christendom and not just one particular congregation. In his Small Catechism of 1529 Luther stresses that the Holy Ghost "calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith."<sup>645</sup> Within this Church the Holy Ghost does His gracious work of daily and richly forgiving all sins to me and all believers in Christ so that on the last day we will rise to eternal life. In his Large Catechism, written the same year, Luther equates the two terms "the Holy Christian Church" with "the communion of saints." He regarded them as being one and the same; both terms are identical.<sup>646</sup> He explained that the word *Kirche* (church) indicates a common assembly. In German, he said it ought to be called "*eine christliche Gemeinde oder Sammlung*," a Christian assembly or association of believers, or better yet and more clearly it should be called holy Christendom, "*eine heilige Christenheit*."<sup>647</sup>

The other Lutheran confessional, or symbolic, writings deal with the doctrine of the Church in like manner. They indicate that the church as it is visible in this world is a mixture of both believers and hypocrites. They confirm that this is not the true Church, however, because of the presence of the hypocrites. The true Church is the Holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the assembly of all believers. It is, as Luther defined it, all of holy Christendom.

Can the church be comprised of a number of congregations that are united together, for example, a synod? From our study of Scripture, we would have to answer yes. The word "synod" does not

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<sup>640</sup> Hagner, p. 533-534.

<sup>641</sup> Barclay Moon Newman and Philip C. Stine, *A Handbook on the Gospel of Matthew*. New York: United Bible Societies, Mt 18:20.

<sup>642</sup> Hendriksen and Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew*. p. 702f.

<sup>643</sup> Beasley-Murray, p. 174.

<sup>644</sup> Hendriksen and Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel According to John*. pp. 122-123.

<sup>645</sup> *Concordia Triglot*. "The Small Catechism." II. The Creed. The Third Article p. 545.

<sup>646</sup> *Concordia Triglot*. "The Large Catechism." The Creed. Article III p. 689f.

<sup>647</sup> *Concordia Triglot*. "The Large Catechism." The Creed. Article III p. 691.

mean anything different than the Greek word ἑκκλησία. The word synod is also from the Greek. σύνοδος means a coming together, a gathering, a meeting, or the coming together of a multitude. It is a term that is used almost exclusively of the church. The Latin equivalent is *concilium*. It is a word of similar meaning and of the same application to church gatherings and those gathered there. Neither word refers to a local congregation. A synod is a gathering together of believers either of the congregations within a given state or province, within a given country, or within a given part of the world. Theoretically, it could even be an association of and gatherings of the entire church on earth. The form that a synod must have is nowhere stated in Scripture. The synod that met in Jerusalem (Acts 15) consisted of several of the apostles, pastors like James, and of a number of laymen from the congregation in Jerusalem and delegates representing the congregation in Antioch. Although this group only met once, it was the church because of the believers present engaged in the work of the LORD. Today, congregations within the USA have banded together to form synods in which they do the work that our LORD has given His church to do. The synod, thus, is the ἑκκλησία.

Local congregations are not able to do all of the work of the church independently. They thus join together to better serve the LORD. They are compelled by the Holy Ghost to join together with their fellow believers (Ephesians 4 and 1 Corinthians 12) for the perfecting of Christ's holy body. Although this joining together can be described as being human in form, it is not human in its essence.<sup>648 649 650 651</sup>

Because the synod is the church, an assembly of believers, it has received the Gospel and the Keys from our Savior. The synod, as church, has the God-given responsibility to preach and teach the Gospel and make disciples of all nations, even as does the local congregation. The synod, as church, has the God-given responsibility to proclaim the Law which convicts us of our sins, and to proclaim the message of absolution that assures us that all our sins have been forgiven for Jesus' sake, even as does the local congregation. The synod, as church, has the God-given responsibility to unlock the gates of heaven for the penitent and to lock the gates of heaven for the impenitent sinner, even as does the local congregation. Because the synod is church, it cannot tolerate false doctrine and error in its midst any more than can the local congregation. When error exists, the errorist must be reprovved, rebuked, and corrected (1 Timothy 5:20; 2 Timothy 3:16; 4:2; Titus 1:13; 2:15). If the errorist refuses to be corrected, it will be necessary to expel this person from the body of believers, be it the local congregation, an association, or a synod (1 Corinthians 5:13; Romans 16:17f; Titus 3:10). It needs to be understood, of course, that synodical discipline be in accord with the Word of God; that is, that it be done decently and in order (1 Corinthians 14:33,40) and that it not interfere with the discipline being done within the local congregation. Thus, what was said earlier in the discussion of "tell it to the church" in reference to the verses from Matthew 18 applies, namely, the church is whatever group of believers with which the offending member is associated

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<sup>648</sup> Lincoln, pp. 234-315.

<sup>649</sup> Bratcher, Eph 4.

<sup>650</sup> Jamieson, 1 Co 12.

<sup>651</sup> Ellingworth, 1 Co 12.

— the local congregation, an association of members representing area congregations, a district, a synod, etc. All of these are the church because they are an assembly of believers gathered to do our LORD's work.<sup>652 653 654 655 656 657 658 659</sup>

After the death of C.F.W. Walther, Franz Pieper and others within the LCMS began to teach that the local congregation is a divinely instituted organization, but that a synod was only a human arrangement.<sup>660</sup> They did not deny that a synod was church, but said that it was church in some other sense than the local congregation because the former was a human arrangement and the latter existed by divine institution.<sup>661</sup> Later Theodore Graebner went so far as to say that synods or other larger unions and organizations were not church in any sense of the word.<sup>662</sup> These ideas and teachings were to have a tremendous influence and impact on a goodly number of pastors within the ELS who received their seminary training at the LCMS seminary in St. Louis, Missouri, USA. In addition, as problems began to arise within the LCMS toward the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, a number of pastors left LCMS and were colloquized into the ELS. This false doctrine not only led to a misunderstanding of the scriptural principles of church fellowship, but also to great difficulty in carrying out doctrinal discipline on a synodical level.<sup>663</sup> One LCMS pastor, A.T. Kretzmann, observed that if the LCMS had followed its doctrinal position to the letter, namely that the church only exists as a formally organized local congregation that is served by a pastor, these local congregations could not have delegated the work of the church to mission boards and other groups.<sup>664</sup>

In August 1973, Professor B.W. Teigen of the ELS' Bethany Lutheran Seminary in Mankato, Minnesota, after years of study stated: "It appears that Scripture has no hesitancy in applying the term church to what might be termed a regional church or even a synod".<sup>665</sup>

Professor Teigen was correct. When we search the Scriptures, we do not find a single verse that would indicate that the local congregation has been instituted by God, nor that He has specified

<sup>652</sup> Mounce, pp. 312-314; 397-400; 432-434; 454; 572-574.

<sup>653</sup> William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Pastoral Epistles. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, pp. 182; 354-355.

<sup>654</sup> Luther, Luther's Works, Vol. 29: Lectures on Titus, Philemon, and Hebrews. pp. 68-69.

<sup>655</sup> Kistemaker and Hendriksen, New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians. pp. 172-173; 510-519.

<sup>656</sup> Dunn, p. 902-904

<sup>657</sup> Hendriksen and Kistemaker, New Testament Commentary: Exposition of Paul's Epistle to the Romans. pp. 509-511

<sup>658</sup> Daniel C. Arichea and Howard Hatton, A Handbook on Paul's Letters to Timothy and to Titus. New York: United Bible Societies, Tit 3:10.

<sup>659</sup> Robertson, 1 Co 14:33, 40.

<sup>660</sup> Franz Pieper, Christian Dogmatics. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, vol III, pp. 420-422.

<sup>661</sup> August Pieper, "Concerning the Doctrine of the Church and of its Ministry, with Special Reference to the Synod and its Discipline.", p. 83.

<sup>662</sup> Kurt Marquart, Anatomy of an Explosion. Ft. Wayne: Concordia Theological Press, p. 54-55.

<sup>663</sup> J. P. Meyer, "Synod and Congregation." WLQ, October 1964, p. 256-257.

<sup>664</sup> Gerlach, p. 4.

<sup>665</sup> B. W. Teigen, The Church and Ministry. Paper written for the Evangelical Lutheran Synod: August 1973., p. 5.



any particular form in which His Church should exist and function. The only way to claim that such a teaching exists would be to read Holy Writ with preconceived ideas as to what the text says.

In our Bible study on the Church, we clearly see that the Church is the Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints. Although Luther and others used the German word Gemeinde when they described the Church, they were thinking of more than the limited concept of the local congregation. Gemeinde also means community or assembly. The Bible clearly teaches that the Church, ἑκκλησία, is the assembly of Christians around the Means of Grace, the Gospel in Word and Sacrament, which we refer to as the Marks of the Church. The Church receives its authority solely from the Word of God. Although the visible manifestations of believers can be a large or a small group, we must remember that the Church, ἑκκλησία, is invisible. It is a spiritual body without limit or boundary. We must reject, therefore, the idea supported by some that the local congregation is specifically instituted by God whereas other groupings of believers in Jesus' name are not the church. The Ministry of the Keys has been given to all Christians. All Christians have the responsibility to use the Keys as necessary. There is no indication anywhere in Scripture that the public ministry of the Keys has been given exclusively to the local congregation. It is within the local congregation, however, that the Keys will most frequently be used.

## **5.6 The ELS Agrees on a Statement Defining the Church**

In 1980, following a lengthy struggle and patient study, the ELS finally was able to reach an agreement on the wording of a statement that defines its official position on the doctrine of the Church. That official position reads as follows:

### **The Doctrine of the Church**

*I. Our Lord has created one church. Jesus refers to it as "my church." In speaking to Peter, He said, "And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18). All true believers in Christ belong to this one church (Ephesians 2:19-22).*

*We give expression to our faith in this church in the Apostles' Creed: "I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Holy Christian Church, the communion of saints."*

*II. This church is found where the Word of God is proclaimed and the Sacraments are rightly administered. It is through these means that the Holy Ghost builds this church. We have assurance that the Word will not return void but that it will accomplish that which God pleases. (cf. Isaiah 55:11.)*

**III.** *God has given to the church (believers) the authority to preach the Gospel and administer the Sacraments. This is known as the Office of the Keys. Believers have the authority to exercise the keys individually and collectively. (John 20:21-23 and I Peter 2:9)*

**IV.** *It is God's will "that Christians unite in order to preserve the means of grace pure and unadulterated, to use these means of grace for their own edification, to show the unity that exists among them, and to join hands in bringing the good news of salvation in Christ to others. Jeremiah 23:28; John 8:31-32; Acts 2:42; Psalm 133:1; Matthew 28:19-20," (ELS Catechism question 247, p. 146-47)*

*This normally is done through the external forms of the local congregation, synod and denomination. Although it is God's will that Christians gather for public worship, these external forms, as such, however, are not divinely instituted. "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation." (Luke 17:20) Luther correctly says, "there is not a single letter in holy Scripture saying that such a church (i.e. a 'physical, external Christendom'), where it is by itself, is instituted by God ... If they can show me that a single letter of Scripture speaks of it, I will recant my words." (LW 39, 70)*

*The local congregation is the primary grouping because this is where Christians live and where they can readily and practically carry out the commands of God on a regular basis.*

**V.** *The authority in the church is the Word of God. When the Word is spoken by an individual, a local congregation, synod, or denomination, it is as valid as if the Lord himself spoke it from heaven. "He that heareth you heareth me." (Luke 10:16)*

**VI.** *"As those who love God and want to remain true to His Word, we must see to it that we remain members of the true Church by sincere faith in Christ as our Savior; that we adhere to the congregation, synod, or denomination which teaches the Word of God in all its purity; that we do all in our power to maintain, promote, and extend God's Kingdom and work by prayer, personal service and financial support; and that we avoid all false churches and all other denominations that profess a religion which is false. II Cor. 13:5; II Cor. 12:15; Matt 7:15; 1 John 4: 1; Romans 16:17; II Cor. 6:14." (ELS Catechism Question 249, p. 147-148)*

*VII. So far as the relationship among the various external groupings is concerned, Christians will be governed by the law of love and will want to do things decently and in order. In external matters we uphold the autonomy of the local congregation; also the advisory capacity of synod to the congregations, as asserted in our synodical constitution. (Ch. 5, Par. 4) This is the practice of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod.*<sup>666</sup>

The ELS formally adopted this statement at its annual convention in June, 1980. Prior to this formal statement, the struggle was primarily an internal matter. Outside of an occasional passing reference to the ongoing debate within the ELS in a number of theological publications in the USA, it remained a private matter without commentary. The ELS in its publications — *The Lutheran Sentinel* and the *Lutheran Quarterly* — did not publish the views of one side or the other, thus choosing to remain neutral. It is only through research in the ELS synod archives of the past reports of the ELS Doctrine Committee and the personal papers of the late Professor Milton Otto, along with personal interviews with the men who were pastors or seminary students that one gains an understanding of what occurred.

This official position is based on Scripture. It expresses all of the facets of the church as I have presented them in this paper. There appear to be two minor weaknesses in this official statement. 1) In the first point, the wording could have been such as to state outrightly that the church is the communion of saints, rather than implying it through the use of the appositive as it is stated in the Apostles' Creed. It can be correctly understood by other Lutherans that the church is the communion of saints because the church is invisible and composed only of believers. However, this may not be completely clear to those who are not Lutherans, and it is doubtful that it is sufficiently clear those who are not Christians. 2) Points four and six appear to be based on questions taken from the ELS Catechism and point seven appears to be taken from the ELS Constitution. Because especially the Catechism but also the Constitution were written from a Scriptural basis, their usage is understandable in these instances. However, because this is the synod's official statement on the doctrine of the church, which will be read by those outside the ELS and outside of Lutheranism, it would have been better to state the Scriptural references directly. Over all, although the wording could have been different, the statement of the official position correctly sets forth the Scriptural doctrine of the church.

At the time that I began work on this thesis, twenty-eight men were still living who had been pastors or seminary students at the time when the debate was ongoing. I sent questionnaires to all twenty-eight men. Twenty-three questionnaires were returned. Six of these indicated that they were not completely satisfied with the position on the church that was officially adopted. Some felt it was too broad. Others felt that it was not broad enough. All of the respondents expressed the hope and desire that the official position on the ministry, when it is finally developed, presented, and formally adopted will be a more faithful statement of what we believe.

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<sup>666</sup> <http://www.evangelicallutheransynod.org/believe/els/church>

The doctrine of the church is important because the church has the right and authority to call people to serve on its behalf and in its name as ministers. This leads to the second doctrine with which the ELS has wrestled, the Doctrine of the Ministry.

## Chapter

# 6 The Biblical doctrine (nature) of the Ministry of the Church

## 6.1 Introduction

Prior to His ascension, the Lord Jesus gave His Church an assignment — to make disciples of all nations. He gave the Church the means to do this — baptism and teaching the things that He had taught them. He assured them that they would not have to do this task all alone. He assured them that He would be with them always (Matthew 28:19-20). He urged them to share the Gospel message with all people everywhere because “God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:3-4, NIV). It is this work of telling others the Good News of Jesus Christ that we call the “ministry”. The one who does this work is called a “minister”.

### 6.1 *The Problem Is Fueled By a Difference of Understanding When Using the Biblical Expressions in the Vernacular*

In English, the words “minister” and “ministry” seem simple enough. One word, “ministry” describes a function. The other word “minister” describes the person who performs or carries out that function. Seeking our Lord’s definition of these two words, we turn to the pages of Holy Writ. There are seventeen words prominently used in the Bible to refer to the ministry within the church. Four of these occur in the Old Testament referring to worship by the believers before the birth of our Savior. Within the New Testament we find that thirteen words are used to describe the worship life within the Christian Church.

There are two Hebrew words that mean to serve, or to minister — *avad* עָבַד, which refers to any kind of serving and sometimes refers to worship. The other word *sharat* שָׂרַת refers to service given to rulers or important people. It also refers to the serving that the Levites did for the Lord God. The word *aboda* עָבַדָּה describes the service that is performed. The fourth Hebrew word, *ebed* עֶבֶד refers to the person who performs this type of service. It refers to one who does a dedicated, faithful service. At times it is translated as “slave”. However, we must remember that the concept of slave did not mean the same thing in Biblical times as it does today. Isaiah uses this word to describe the work that Jesus would do. This word also describes one who is dedicated and devoted to serving the Lord God. It thus refers to one who serves the Lord in worship.

There are twenty four different Greek words used in the New Testament to describe the various types of workers, ministry, and the offices held by these workers. These can be condensed to fourteen basic groups of words having the same root. The Greek words used for the various offices and their approximate English equivalents include: *ἀπόστολος*, apostle; *εὐαγγελιστής*, evangelist; *ποιμήν*, shepherd or pastor; *διδάσκαλος*, teacher; *προφήτης*, prophet or preacher;

διάκονος, deacon; ἑπίκοπος, supervising pastor or bishop; πρεσβύτερος, elder; ὑπηρέτης, helper, assistant. The terms used for service or ministry include: δοῦλος, which indicates one who is obligated to serve his master; θεράπων, which is one who serves freely or volunteers to help perform a task; λατρεύω, which means to minister or serve performing religious duties; and λειτουργία, which refers to the temple service done by the priests and to doing various works of charity. λειτουργία really denotes an office in which a person ministers to a gathering of believers. Some use the term liturgist to refer to this office. Others refer to it as the work of the pastor.

That God has ordained the work of ministry is generally accepted by most Lutherans worldwide. Most Lutherans also agree with the statement regarding the institution of the ministry that was originally declared in the Augsburg Confession of 1530: “That we may obtain this faith, the Ministry of Teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted. For through the Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Ghost is given, who works faith ...”<sup>667</sup>

For the better part of a century there has been considerable disagreement and debate within the Lutheran Church in the USA regarding the significance of the terms “minister” and “ministry”. “Minister” has often been equated with the pastoral office, and the result has been the idea that only the pastor of a local congregation is involved in ministry. Those who are not serving as the pastor of a local congregation (for example, missionaries, seminary professors, and so forth) are thought not to be involved in the ministry. This has been a source of controversy.

Basically two different views have dominated the discussions. The one side holds: the local congregation is the only divinely instituted form of the church and that the pastoral ministry is the only divinely instituted form of the ministry. All other offices and forms of organization are human institutions, which are auxiliary to the divinely instituted forms. The most rigid version of this position would deny that the synod is church or that anyone other than a parish pastor is serving in the divinely instituted ministry. This view is held by many, but not all, of the members of the LCMS, and also by many of those who have broken away from the LCMS for confessional and other reasons and been received into membership in the ELS. Among those within the ELS who have been persuaded to accept this view have been the late Seminary Professor Milton Otto, the Reverends Walther Gullixson, Theodore Gullixson, Glenn Obenberger spelling and others.

The other side holds: that Christ established one ministry in His church, the gospel ministry, and that this one ministry may be exercised privately by any Christian and publicly by those who have been called by the LORD through His church to do so. The public ministry has been instituted by Christ, but the church is free to create various forms of public ministry according to current needs and circumstances. The form or forms into which the church organizes itself to carry out its work are not prescribed by Scripture, but are left open for the church to decide. This view is held predominantly within the WELS and shared by the majority of members within the ELS. Among

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<sup>667</sup> Concordia Triglot. “Augsburg Confession” Article V Of the Ministry. p. 45. The italics are in the original.

those holding to this view are members of the ELS Doctrinal Committee chaired by the Reverend Gaylin Schmeling.<sup>668</sup>

For decades, the discussions have involved verbal exchanges, sometimes heated exchanges, and most often in an informal way — discussions during conference recesses around the coffee pot — and in recent years through an exchange of emails. The following are examples of these email exchanges during the recent debate:

Dear ... ,

Your lack of information shows. In fact a minority of pastors in our synod have held to the Missouri view. It definitely never was nor is now the predominant view. Some who held to that view changed their minds in the 70's. They were convinced by the Scriptural evidence that the other view was more acceptable. I know. I was on the pastoral conference committee on church/ministry that drew up and presented a statement (which I wrote in part). I was secretary of the floor committee for doctrine which presented a statement on church/ministry to one of the conventions in the 70's for action. I was involved since my seminary days in the 50's, when one of the professors held to the Missouri view.

You refer again to the doctrinal statement in the brochure, which I wrote. You cannot use that to affirm the Missouri view, which I have never held. Nothing has changed in regard to the Missouri view. Men who hold that view have always been accepted into our fellowship. However, in some areas the present discussion has gone beyond the differences in years past. In some cases, false statements have been made, in supposed defense of the Missouri view. I have neither the time nor the interest in going into details on that, but I know this to be true...

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<sup>668</sup> Among the points set forth by the ELS Doctrinal Committee defining the Doctrine of the Ministry is:

Thesis 5 Christ has instituted one public office in His church, the office of the public ministry. This office is not limited to any divinely fixed form as such. The form of the public ministry may vary as the need arises, yet there is only one public ministry in the church. While the nature and duties of this office do not change (such as oversight of doctrine, oversight of the flock, teaching, preaching, and administration of the Sacraments), yet the church does have some freedom in how she carries out these duties in her midst.

- a. In our synod, the primary and most comprehensive form of the public ministry (*Predigtamt*) is the pastoral office (*Pfarramt*)\*\*\*, which includes the full public use of the office of the keys as exercised through confession and absolution, the preaching of the Word, the administering of the Sacraments, the exercise of proper church discipline and the taking oversight of doctrine.
- b. The public ministry assumes various specialized/limited forms according to the needs and circumstances of the church. Some, such as office of missionary, chaplain, theological professor, and synodical president, assume training for the pastoral office. Others, such as the office of catechist and Lutheran elementary school teacher, presuppose neither a full course of pastoral training nor the full scope of that office.

(I Peter 5:1-4; I Corinthians 12:4-11, 27-31; Ephesians 4:11-12; Acts 20:28; I Timothy 3:1-7; I Timothy 5:17; AC XXIII 16, p. 54; AC XXVIII 21, p. 84; SA II III 1, pp. 297-298; *Treatise* 63-66, p. 331; *Treatise* 72, p. 332; *Treatise* 26, p. 324)

(From the ELS Doctrinal Committee Mailing entitled, "THE DOCTRINE OF THE PUBLIC MINISTRY (2002)").

Dear ...,

Interesting you should mention H, since he changed his mind on this. There were changes also from some others you mention. The majority, including the leaders, did not hold to the Missouri view...

Dear ...,

I agree with much of what D... says, but also disagree in some respects...

Dear ...,

I also believe that anyone without an agenda and using good sense and the Scripture, will come pretty much to what we call the WELS position...

Etc. etc. etc.

Because these are similar to what was stated by many during the course of time, names have been omitted and specific references to dates and times have been left out. Numerous members of the ELS said the same things repeatedly over the decades. It was as if these individuals were talking past each other as they held to their particular positions.

Such divergent views can only be united if we return to the Scriptures and use the definition that God Himself has provided. Because orthodox, confessional Lutherans accept the Bible as the wholly inspired and inerrant Word of God and the final source and authority in all matters of doctrine and life, the Bible must be the final determining factor in settling all doctrinal matters, including this one. This is commonly accepted by orthodox, conservative members of the Lutheran Church.

## **6.2 What Is the Proper Use of the Terms “Minister” and “Ministry?”**

Who is a minister? Who is involved in ministry? In English, the word “minister” comes from a Latin word that means “servant.” It still carries that meaning today, although most commonly it has come to mean the person who officiates in a religious worship service. At the time when the King James translation of the Bible was made, 1611, the word referred to servants of every kind. The English used in the King James Version influenced and shaped theological English which is still used today. Through the centuries “minister” has come to be used almost entirely as a technical term for one of two types of service. One of these is a “clergyman” or a “pastor”, especially one from a non-Roman Catholic yet Christian denomination. The other is a high officer of state entrusted with the management of a division of governmental activities such as the Minister of the Interior, the Prime Minister, etc. or a diplomatic representative of state such as an ambassador.

In the Old Testament, the priesthood was limited to the descendents of the tribe of Levi. Those who came from the other tribes could not participate in serving the Lord in the Tabernacle, and later in the Temple. In the New Testament, however, this has changed. The New Testament



Church is different from the Old Testament Church, not only in its message — the Savior has come rather than the Savior will come — but also in its priesthood. This change came about when Christ, the Great High Priest, offered the all-atoning sacrifice on Calvary's cross. Now, everyone who believes in Jesus Christ is a priest. Every Christian can and does serve the Lord in His Church. We refer to this as the Priesthood of All Believers. Each Christian serves our LORD in their daily life. This service, this ministry, we refer to as “private ministry” or “individual ministry.” I will discuss private ministry later in this paper.

As I have indicated, not just one word but many words are used in the Bible to describe what is the “ministry” of the Church and who is involved with this “ministry”. In the New Testament two very important words— *diakoneo*, διακονέω, and *diakonia*, διακονία, — are not limited to describing the service rendered by those men whose work corresponded to that of our modern pastors. These words also refer to other kinds of service, including waiting on tables.

When we use the words “minister” and “ministry” to refer to other forms of service in the church other than that of the pastor, we are simply returning to the wider usage of the term “service” or “ministry” as we find it in the New Testament. For example, when we speak about the work done by Christian teachers in a school operated by the Lutheran Church, we are speaking about a ministry because their teaching is proclaiming the Word of God, therefore it is ministry. When we state this, we are simply recognizing that the New Testament uses the same word group to refer to waiting on tables, to the pastoral ministry, and to other forms of spiritual service. The New Testament does not have a specialized technical term, equivalent to the term “minister” as we find it in current English usage.

This wider usage of the term “minister” is also supported by a less common use of the English word “minister”, which the dictionary also defines as “one who acts as the agent of another”. In this sense everyone who is called by the church to carry out some service in the name of the church is a “minister”. This is what we often call the “public ministry”. A person has been designated, or called, by the church to perform a certain task publicly, on behalf of the congregation, as its representative. This is a task that any Christian, as a member of the Priesthood of All Believers, could do. However, because God is a God of order (1 Corinthians 14:33) and so that things may be done in an orderly manner (1 Corinthians 14:40), the believers call an individual to do the task rather than all of them doing it simultaneously.

Because the wider usage of “ministry” is described as archaic by the dictionary, to avoid confusion we must make it clear that we are returning to a wider usage of the term “minister” than that which has been commonly used in the recent past. We must be careful that we do not confuse the service which Christians do on their own initiative as part of the Priesthood of All Believers with the service that they carry out in response to the church's call and in the name of the church (the public ministry). We also must be careful that we do not diminish respect for the pastoral ministry, the most comprehensive form of the public ministry of the Word. If “ministry” is going to be used in a wider sense, which reflects both its Latin meaning and the usage of the Greek word *diakonia*,

this should be done with careful explanation, so that the distinction of the Priesthood Of All Believers from the pastoral ministry and other forms of public ministry is not blurred or confused. It is because “ministry” can be understood in these different ways, that merely citing what another church member from another century said about the ministry has resulted in confusion. Statements from the past that have been taken out of context and without clarification as to the type of ministry have been interpreted and used according the modern usage of the word. The result has been continued confusion and controversy.

In its widest and most basic sense, the term “the ministry” refers to ***the gospel ministry*** or ***the ministry of the Word***, which was established by Christ and given to the whole church, not just to certain individuals, and not to the local congregation. This usage of the term “ministry” is essentially the same way that we use it when we speak of the “ministry of the keys”. This one ministry of the Word is exercised in two ways, privately and publicly.

We find that this wide usage of the term is present both in Scripture and the Confessions:

Now if the ministry (διακονία) that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, fading though it was, will not the ministry (διακονία) of the Spirit be even more glorious? If the ministry (διακονία) that condemns men is glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry (διακονία) that brings righteousness! — (2 Corinthians 3:7-9, NIV)

Because “the priesthood of the New Testament is the ministry of the Spirit (*ministerium Spiritus*, Latin) or an office (*Amt*, German) through which the Spirit works (*dadurch der Heilige Geist wirkt*, German) as Paul teaches (2 Corinthians 3:6), it, accordingly, has but the one sacrifice of Christ, which is satisfactory and applied for the sins of others... The ministry of the Spirit is that through which the Holy Spirit is efficacious in hearts.”<sup>669</sup>

The ministry of the Church (*Kirchendienst*, German) (*ministerium Verbi*, Latin), is the Word preached and heard (*das gepredigte und gehörte Wort*, German) (*praedicatum et auditu perceptum Verbum*, Latin).<sup>670</sup>

That we might obtain this faith, the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the sacraments was instituted.<sup>671</sup>

(Article XIV of the Augsburg Confession also deals with the ministry, but more specifically is dealing with decency and order in the performance of the ministry).<sup>672</sup>

<sup>669</sup> Concordia Triglote. “Apology of the Augsburg Confession” Article XXIV Of the Mass. p. 404 § 59.

<sup>670</sup> Concordia Triglote. “The Formula of Concord. Epitome” Article XII Of Other Factions and Sects. p. 840 § 22.

<sup>671</sup> Concordia Triglote. “Augsburg Confession” Article V Of the Ministry. p. 45 § 1.

<sup>672</sup> Concordia Triglote. “Augsburg Confession” Article XIV Of Ecclesiastical Order. p. 49.

All Christians may exercise this ministry of the Word in their private dealings with others. They do this whenever they use God's law to condemn sin and His gospel to proclaim forgiveness. We call this **personal ministry** or **private ministry**. Such ministry is part of the exercise of the Priesthood of All Believers.

Only Christians who are properly qualified and who are called by the church may exercise this ministry publicly, that is, in the name of the church. We call this **public ministry** or **representative ministry**. It is ministry performed in the presence of others, on behalf of others, and in the name of others.

The **pastoral ministry** is the most comprehensive form of the public ministry of the Word, but it is not the only form. Sometimes when speaking of the pastoral ministry, we may call it “the public ministry”, “the ministry of the Word”, or simply “the ministry”, but we should remember that in such cases we are using these more inclusive names for one specific form of public ministry.

The Lord did not limit the ministry to the pastoral office. Although certainly the pastoral office performs the ministry, there are other offices and positions within the church that also perform ministry. The Apostle Paul tells us: “It was He [Christ] who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:11-13, NIV). As I noted earlier, the offices of deacon, supervising pastor or bishop, elder, helper, assistant, and liturgist also existed in the New Testament Church. Those who held those offices in the past as well as those who hold these offices today perform ministry.

Up to now, we have been talking about “the ministry of the Word”. The New Testament also uses the term “ministry” when it speaks of areas of service within the church that did not include the proclamation of the Word. Although the area of service of the “deacons” in Acts 6 was distinguished from the ministry of the Word, their work was called “ministry”; they were called by the church to act as its representatives: and they were placed into office with the laying on of hands. From this it is clear that they were exercising public ministry for the church.

The Book of Acts does not specify whether the preaching of Stephen and Philip was done privately as laymen or on the basis of a call to publicly proclaim the Word on behalf of the church. Sometime later, Philip is identified as an evangelist (Acts 21:8). Many scholars agree with Luther that the ministry which Stephen and Philip performed was done initially as laymen.

Because “public” means representative and “ministry” means service, we could legitimately speak of a **“public ministry” within the church that does not involve the Means of Grace**. However, this is not the way in which we as Lutherans normally speak about the “public ministry”.

We could also use the term “*lay ministry*”. However the use of this expression is often confusing because it does not distinguish clearly between the service that lay people render privately as part of the Priesthood of All Believers and that which they perform publicly as called representatives of their congregation.

### **6.3 Is the Pastoral Ministry Divinely Ordained in Contrast to Other Forms of Public Ministry?**

Is the pastoral ministry divinely ordained in contrast to other forms of public ministry? Are other forms of public ministry merely human institutions or auxiliary offices to the pastoral ministry?

That the public ministry, including the office of the pastoral ministry, is divinely ordained is clearly attested to by Scripture. For example:

- + God has specifically given ministers to His Church. (This is stated in the following Bible verses: Acts 20:28, 1 Corinthians 12:28, Ephesians 4:11).
- + Without a call, no one can serve as a public minister. (Scripture tells us this in Romans 10:15).
- + There are special qualifications for the public ministry. (These qualifications are listed in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1).
- + Specific offices or forms of the public ministry are named (These are stated in 1 Timothy 3, 1 Corinthians 12:27-30, and Ephesians 4).
- + Those called to be in the public ministry are supported by those whom they serve. (The Bible tells us this should be the case in 1 Corinthians 9:7-14).

We completely reject the false teachings of Johann Wilhelm Friedrich Hoefling who was a professor at the University of Erlangen. He died in 1853. Professor Hoefling erroneously held that the ministry was something that the church contrived to meet a particular need that had arisen. According to Hoefling, the ministry was created by man only because of a need that existed at a particular time, much as a university might create a new professorship to teach a class on a special subject, for example, “Global Warming and its Effects on the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”. Obviously, such a course did not exist even a decade ago. It was created because of a current situation. Hoefling thought that the ministry was something that the church created to meet a specific need during a specific epoch of history.

Although the pastoral ministry is the most comprehensive form of the public ministry, nowhere does Scripture indicate that the pastoral ministry is specifically instituted by the Lord ***in contrast to other forms of public ministry***.

Scripture does not provide any divine command, comparable to the institution of baptism or the institution of the Lord's Supper, which specifically states the **form** that the public ministry of the

Word should take in New Testament congregations. The situation, therefore, is somewhat analogous to the divine institution of government. That government is instituted by God is directly stated in Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2. However, there is no specific command or regulation concerning the form that the government must have. Although kings are mentioned as an existing form of government, the divine institution is not limited to monarchies, but it applies to other forms of government developed by human beings. Therefore, specific forms of government are both divine institutions (Romans 13:1) and human institutions (1 Peter 2:13).

As we read through the New Testament, we find that various forms of ministry existed in the New Testament churches. There is no indication that they were derived from the office of pastor, or even that the office of pastor existed in the exact form in which we have it today. The New Testament explicitly says there are “different forms of ministry” (1 Corinthians 12:5). Numerous examples show that this is true not only of ministry in the wide sense of the term, but of the public ministry of the Word as well. (Examples of these different forms of service or ministry are found in 1 Timothy 4:13, 4:11 3:2, 6:2, 3:5, 5:17, Ephesians 4:11, 1 Corinthians 12:28, Romans 12:6-8, etc.). Various forms of ministry have existed in the Church for centuries. It is the needs and the call of the church that determine the form that the ministry takes.

To point to the writings of Dr. Martin Luther and say that what he wrote about the ministry applies only to the office of the parish pastor would be an error. Johannes Bugenhagen held the office of Pfarrer of St. Mary’s Church in Wittenberg. He participated in the selection of the four deacons who helped preach some five hundred sermons annually and administer the sacraments in Wittenberg and the surrounding area. They are referred to as priests or chaplains. Today, we would call them pastors, or assistant pastors. Bugenhagen also participated in the selection of the sexton, the school master of the “Latin school” and the school master of the girls’ school. All of these workers, or ministers, were responsible to him. He was the only called worker in the church. The others were all hired.<sup>673</sup> A similar mistake would be made in pointing to the writings of Dr. C.F.W. Walther. He served as the President of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, as the President of the Seminary in St. Louis, as a seminary professor, as the editor of the publication *der Luteraner*, and as Pfarrer of four congregations in the area surrounding St. Louis, Missouri. He held all of these offices at the same time. He also had men who would help him carry on this work. Yes, Bugenhagen and Walther had men who were their assistants. But we cannot equate the ministries of Bugenhagen or of Walther with a parish pastor today. The pastoral office is totally different. Church polity is totally different. Congregations are totally different. Today, a man may serve a group of one thousand, another man a group of fifteen, yet both are ministers. It is the proclaiming of the Word that makes one’s work ministry. It is the call that places a person into the public ministry.

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<sup>673</sup> Nass. “The Pastoral Ministry as a Distinct Form of the Public Ministry”, p. 6.

In his *Dogmatik*, Professor Adolf Hoenecke, entitles the section that deals with the public ministry “*Das Lehramt*”<sup>674</sup>, which is the office of teacher. Hoenecke wrote and taught that the public ministry was the teaching of the things that Christ commanded. The function of the minister, therefore, is primarily to teach the word of God to the group for which he is responsible.

Citing what Werner Elert wrote in his *The Structure of Lutheranism*, Professor Thomas Nass points out that after the Reformation, “The pastoral profession (*Pfarrerstand*) was made the ‘teaching profession’ (*Lehrstand*).”<sup>675</sup> More was involved in the work of the ministry. It was not just hearing confessions and administering the sacraments. Preaching and teaching the Word of God became the heart and core of the Gospel ministry.

#### **6.4 The Priesthood of All Believers**

The impression has sometimes been given that the New Testament priesthood of believers is something new, which in some ways replaced the Old Testament priesthood. This is incorrect. There was a priesthood of believers in the Old Testament also. “‘You will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites” (Exodus 19:6, NIV). This priesthood was distinct from the public ministries of Moses, Aaron, and the Levitical priests. Every believer shares the priestly privilege of praying directly to God, as a child of God, a member of a holy nation of believers. God wanted His Old Testament believers to hear these words: “‘You will be for me a kingdom of priests.’” He wants us, His New Testament believers, to hear these words also. All believers, whether they are those in the Old Testament who believed that God would send a Savior, or those of us living in the New Testament era who believe that God has fulfilled His promise and sent the Savior, are members of the universal Priesthood of All Believers.

The New Testament priesthood of believers is simply a continuation of the priesthood of believers which already existed in the Old Testament (Exodus 19:6). The New Testament priesthood of believers is described in terms which applied to the whole people of Israel, not in terms descriptive of the Levitical priesthood (1 Peter 2:9). Both the Levitical priesthood and the New Testament pastoral ministry are special forms of the called public ministry. The unique duties of the Levitical priesthood find fulfillment and succession neither in the New Testament priesthood of believers nor in the New Testament public ministry, but solely in the unique priesthood of Christ.

The priesthood of believers does not give any individual the right to usurp the duties of the public ministry. Without the call, one may not perform the duties of the public ministry. That individual may not represent the group, or act on its behalf without officially being asked to do so by the group. Misguided attempts to usurp the public ministry on the basis of a universal priesthood are not new. They were already happening during the Old Testament era (Numbers 12:2, 16:3).

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<sup>674</sup> Adolf Hoenecke, *Evangelisch-lutherische Dogmatik*. Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Northwestern Publishing House, 1909. Volume IV. pp. 175-205.

<sup>675</sup> Nass. p. 5.

Reference to the call refuted the pretensions of Miriam and Korah, Dathan and Abiram. It also refutes those who despise the called ministry today.

What is the Priesthood of All Believers? Each Christian has received a call from God. This is a call to faith. The Third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Ghost, has called each believer out of the darkness of sin into the marvelous light of Almighty God (1 Peter 2:9). We have been called to faith through the proclamation of the Gospel message (Romans 10:17). We have been called to tell others about God, and what He has done for everyone. Because of this work of the Holy Ghost, we not only know and believe in the Triune God, but we can also heed our Savior's instruction: "let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16, NIV).

As Christians, we are special. The Bible refers to us as "a chosen people". Each Christian has been chosen by God. We are "a royal priesthood." As priests, each of us can directly approach God our heavenly Father in prayer and speak with Him. As priests, each of us can serve the Lord. More than that, however, we are "royal priests." We shall live and reign eternally with Christ our King. Through His redemptive work, we have been given the rights and privileges of heaven. We have become children and heirs of the heavenly Father. By God's grace, we are royal priests. As such, we serve Him with our individual ministries as we are instructed to do in Hebrews 13:15-16; Revelation 7:15.

We are "a holy nation." We are not just a nation. We are holy. We are free from sin and guilt because of the redemptive work of Christ Jesus. We are holy; we have been given saving faith through the working of the Holy Ghost. We are saints, having been sanctified also through the working of the Holy Ghost. All of these blessings are ours as believers because of the redemptive work of Christ Jesus. He purchased and won us, not with silver and gold, but with His holy, precious blood (1 Peter 1:18-19). We are not free to live our lives as we please. We have been bought with a price. We belong to God, therefore we should glorify God (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). We are compelled by Christ's love to do this. Because of Christ's redemptive work, we are the people of God. "He [Christ] died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again" (2 Corinthians 5:15, NIV).

In his first epistle, Peter tells us, "You are... a royal priesthood... that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9, NIV). John says that Jesus through His saving work has made us who believe in Him to be priests. "To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father — to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen" (Revelation 1:5-6, NIV). Paul states that a believer's life consists of daily priestly sacrifices to our God. "I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices" (Romans 12:1, NIV). "Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Ephesians 5:1-2, NIV). And, "...the gifts you sent...are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God" (Philippians 4:18, NIV). However, the sacrifices of the

Christian priesthood do not in any way make payment for sin. Jesus did that. “By one sacrifice he [Jesus Christ] has made perfect forever those who are being made holy... there is no longer any sacrifice for sin” (Hebrews 10:14, 18, NIV). The sacrifices of the Christian priesthood are thank offerings (Romans 14:5-8; 1 Corinthians 10:31; 2 Corinthians 9:12) that are rendered to God as expressions of gratitude for everything that He has done for us.

What marvelous blessings God has bestowed upon those of us who are Christians! We are His chosen people. We are priests of God. By means of our faith we are a holy nation. And we are God’s very own; we are a people that belong to God. We are members of His Kingdom and heirs of His household. We serve Him. This service is ministry. This ministry that is performed by individual Christians in their private, daily lives we refer to as “private ministry.” It is a work of faith flowing from the heart and done on behalf of an individual Christian rather than on behalf of a group of Christians.

We sometimes call the Christian ministry a universal priesthood. This term as such is not found in Scripture, but the concept that every Christian is a priest involved in ministry, in serving our LORD, is clearly taught. The commands of Jesus to do ministry were given to all Christians (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15; Acts 1:8; Matthew 16:9; 18:18). When we say that this priesthood is universal, we mean that all Christians, no matter where or when they live, are priests in Christian ministry. Peter’s words were addressed to all believers: “You are... a royal priesthood” (1 Peter 2:9, NIV). John’s words were addressed to all believers: “(Jesus) has made us to be a kingdom and priests” (Revelation 1:6, NIV).

The ministry which Jesus has given every Christian as a member of the universal priesthood is the ministry of all believers, clergy and laity alike. The Bible clearly teaches that Christian ministry, or the functioning of the universal priesthood, is ministry performed by the laity. Our English words “laity”, “layman” and “laywoman” come from the New Testament Greek word for people, λαός.

Jesus came to make us His people. The angel told Mary, “You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21, NIV). It was the work of John the Baptist “to make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (Luke 1:17, NIV). That Christians were regarded as God’s people by the early church in the first century is clearly indicated in Scripture. “Simon has described to us how God at first showed his concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for himself” (Acts 15:14, NIV). “I will call them ‘my people’ who are not my people ... they will be called ‘sons of the living God.’” (Romans 9:25-26, NIV). “We are the temple of the living God. As God has said: ‘I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people.’” (2 Corinthians 6:16, NIV). “They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God” (Revelation 21:3, NIV). Through the atoning work of Christ our Savior, every Christian has become one of God’s people.



The ministry of the church of God is the work of all the members, not just a few. The ministry is what each believer does every day for the glory of God and for the benefit of their neighbor.<sup>676</sup> It is only when we have an understanding of God's will for His Church that we will be encouraged in our ministry to one another and to the world in the way in which our Lord intended. Such knowledge and understanding only comes through the study and the use of God's Word.

The Bible makes it clear that it is the work of God's people (the laity) to minister. Paul writes, "... Jesus Christ... gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good" (Titus 2:13-14). Peter says, "You are... a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God" (1 Peter 2:9-10). Paul reminds us that God has saved us and given us the gift of faith so that we may serve Him, may be involved in ministry, by doing good works. "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Ephesians 2:8-10). That the laity should serve in the ministry, then, is clearly a biblical concept. It is everything that every believer does in word or deed as a minister of Jesus Christ. This ministry is the whole-life sacrifice offered by every member of the universal priesthood. This ministry is performed individually, by every Christian in their private lives. We therefore refer to this ministry as **private ministry** as opposed to the public ministry or the representative ministry.

The ministry of all Christians involves doing similar things such as worship, prayer, supporting the work of the ministry with our financial gifts, and using our time and talents to glorify God and for work in His Kingdom. Every Christian also participates in telling others about Jesus. Although some individuals have been called to be pastors, teachers, and evangelists, all Christians have been called to tell others about Christ. The final words of our Savior to His Church before His ascension are: "you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8, NIV).

The ministry of witnessing involves an absolute commitment to Christ. From the beginning of His earthly ministry, Jesus made it very clear that witnessing would involve a cost (Matthew 10:32-39). That cost might involve the loss of friends or the loss of a job opportunity. It might come in some form of persecution. It may even be death. Therefore, the call to tell others about Jesus is a call to accept death, if it is necessary. The Greek word for witness is *μάρτυς*—the same word from which we derive our word martyr. In fact, we could define *μάρτυς* as "the witness for Jesus who dies because of his or her testimony for Christ." The connotation is obvious. Starting with Stephen (Acts 7), one after another the disciples have given their lives because they bore witness for Christ. The term that describes their testimony was related to the idea of martyrdom. The expression that is used for witnessing for Christ in the New Testament involves three elements: (1) a demonstration

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<sup>676</sup> **Note:** one's neighbor is anyone in need (Luke 10:29-37; Galatians 6:10) not just the person who lives immediately next door.

of the power of the gospel in our lives, (2) a verbal proclamation of the Good News concerning Christ, and (3) enduring persecution, suffering, and even death, if it is necessary.

The gospel is not merely a truth, as though it were one among many. It is The Truth. It is the way to live and it is life (John 14:6). Consequently, the truth of the gospel should change from abstract words and concepts to concrete realities that manifest themselves in the daily situations of life. The gospel has authority and will manifest itself in words and deeds.

Thus, every Christian is a witness for Christ. We can be either a good witness or a bad witness for Christ. Those around us observe our actions and our attitudes. As they observe us, we are proclaiming a message. As they hear us, as they observe us, our words and actions proclaim a message about Christ and our faith. What message is our life proclaiming to our neighbors and associates?

Our Christian presence in the world is not enough. Simply being here is not sufficient to bear witness to Christ. Some people say, "You can tell others about Jesus Christ if you want to, but I am shy. I do not want to speak to others about my faith; I simply will live it." That seems good. Many find it appealing. However, it lacks two very important things. The first one is that none of us is quite good enough in and of ourselves to allow only our lives to bear witness about Christ. We have to use words to direct the attention of others beyond us. We need to get their eyes off our lives and directed to Christ. We have to direct them to our Lord and Savior. The second thing is that even though Jesus is true God, simply being born of the Virgin Mary and growing up in Nazareth was not enough to redeem and save us. Undoubtedly, He was a model citizen. He worked hard. Every time that He fabricated a door, every time He built a table, the people were pleased with the final product. However, this did nothing for their salvation. It was not until Jesus left the carpenter's shop and traveled away from Nazareth to teach that people heard the Good News. Even Jesus had to bear witness with His words and testify to the love of God and His plan of salvation.

One should not confuse the telling of others about Christ that all Christians do with formal preaching. Nor should we infer from it that every Christian must be involved in some form of organized evangelism. People should not feel that they are unqualified to testify about Christ simply because they have not been formally educated in respect to all of the events in Jesus' life. Any Christian can tell others about Jesus, or they can ask their pastor for more information to share with someone else. Time and again, the Christian will encounter situations in which it is necessary to be a witness of the Lord. To remain silent when a Christian can tell others about the Savior represents betrayal of the Lord and a failure to help one's neighbor in need.

The Bible makes it clear that all the Christians have a part, a speaking part, in the Great Commission. The office of Pastor-Teacher exists to equip the people of God for their service or ministry. A part of that ministry for all Christians is bearing witness to their faith. God also gives His

Church the gift of evangelists to bring the gospel boldly to the world. The world is like a field that is ready to be harvested (Matthew 9:37). God calls each believer to participate in the harvest.

Each Christian has direct access to God. They can go to their Lord any hour of the day or night. They can speak to the Lord in prayer without having to go through an intermediary. Every Christian has free and unlimited access to the Word of God. They can read their Bible wherever and whenever they choose. In the Scriptures, they can hear the wise counsel, guidance, and advice of their dear Father in heaven. They read and search the Scriptures. As a priest, they also have the right and privilege of conveying the saving Gospel message to others. Proclaiming the Gospel is not a task that God has given to a limited few. He has given this task to all Christians of all times. Therefore, every Christian has the right to minister for the Lord, to serve Him with joy and gladness, to offer themselves and their lives as living sacrifices for His glory. The ministry of every Christian is all-inclusive. Whatever they do, they do in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him (Colossians 3:17).

As I have stated, the concept that all Christians are ministers of God is known as “the Priesthood of All Believers.” This teaching of the Bible was one of the cornerstones, one of the foundations, of the Lutheran Reformation. Prior to the time of Luther, the priesthood within the Church of Rome robbed individual Christians of their royal priesthood. The only thing that the individual Christian could do was to listen to the priests and obey them. What a wonderful day it was when the glorious light of God’s saving grace shone forth upon this teaching of Scripture revealing that all Christians are priests of God!

It should be noted that the universal Priesthood of All Believers did not begin when Luther uncovered the clear teaching of Scripture and shared this good news with others. Adam and Eve, and their family, were the first priests of God. They called upon the name of the Lord. They worshipped the Lord. They looked forward to the fulfillment of the promise that the Messiah would come. Scripture reveals that the Messiah is Jesus Christ. The universal Priesthood of All Believers includes everyone who is a believer in Jesus Christ; it is the body of believers. It is the church.

Based on this clear teaching of Scripture, the entire concept of the ministry changed with the Reformation. As a result, lay people could read and interpret their own Bible. They could teach their own children in their own house. Very important also was the understanding that each Christian, without regard for his occupation or position in society, was serving God whenever what he did was in full accord with the will of God. Every Christian is involved in ministry. However, not every Christian has been called to represent others by serving in the public ministry.

## **6.5 *Performing the Ministry Publicly***

Within the church, we have the priesthood of all the believers and the public ministry. Sometimes confusion has arisen regarding this, as if the responsibility of the one is not similar to the responsibility of the other. However, there are not two ministries. There is only one ministry that

Christ has given to His church. The public ministry and the priesthood of all Christian believers are two species of the same ministry of the Word. The public ministry is a special way, or form, of performing the only ministry of the Gospel. The public ministry is done in the name of the church, of a congregation, or a group of believers. The called person serves as public minister on behalf of and in the name of the group. The called person does the ministry of the group as their representative. Whenever anyone leaves the public ministry, that person once again takes a place among the Christian laity. He does not possess any special position or rank until the end of his life. The person serves in the public ministry only as long as there is a valid call. If the person resigns, retires, or the call is terminated, the person is no longer serving in the public ministry. In order to serve in the public ministry, a divine call from God through the church is necessary. The Bible does not teach that an indelible character is created at the moment of ordination and that it remains throughout a person's life until death.

The ministry is not a position that a person holds within the church. The ministry is a function that our Savior has given to His Church. There is only one ministry. Jesus instituted this ministry when He told His disciples, "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19, NIV). "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation" (Mark 16:15, NIV). "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8, NIV). Although Jesus gave these instructions to His first disciples, it is clear from the Scriptures that this ministry is performed individually by all the members of the universal priesthood. Jesus gave these instructions to all Christians to proclaim the Gospel message throughout the world. It is the work of the Priesthood of All Believers. It is the work in which all believers are involved.

There is a clearly declared need for such a public ministry. Paul writes: "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!'" (Romans 10:14-15, NIV).

It is also clear in the Scriptures that Christ considered what we now call the public ministry to be an aspect of His ministry. Paul, one of Christ's apostles, says that God Himself gave him this ministry. He writes, "God, ... gave us the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:18, NIV). Paul called himself "an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God" (1 Corinthians 1:1, NIV); "a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God" (Romans 1:1, NIV); "an apostle—sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father" (Galatians 1:1, NIV); and "a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ for the faith of God's elect and the knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness" (Titus 1:1, NIV). Paul had a direct call from God to serve in the public ministry.

Although Paul received Christ's direct call for his work as an apostle, it is clear that he considered others who did not have a direct call from God nevertheless to have been given their public

ministry by God. He said to the elders in Ephesus, “Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood” (Acts 20:28, NIV).

That the public ministry is an aspect of the ministry that Christ has given to each member of His church, and that it is not something separate and distinct can be observed when reading the New Testament. Although our Savior instituted the public ministry, there is no distinct institution given for the public ministry as opposed to the ministry of the universal priesthood. The ministry of both is one and the same. Jesus instituted one ministry — to preach the Gospel. The Scriptures do not speak of any form of service in the public ministry that individual Christians cannot do.

The public ministry only differs from the ministry of all believers in the fact that it is public. It is done on behalf of, in the name of, and in the place of other believers. It is a “representative ministry.” The public ministry represents a group of believers when it acts for them.

The public ministry should be entrusted “to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others” (2 Timothy 2:2, NIV). All Christians have the responsibility of teaching others from God’s Word. This is usually done on a one-to-one basis, or within families. Those in the public ministry act on behalf of and for the good of the entire congregation when they teach and preach. They have been instructed to take care of our Lord’s sheep, that is, His believers (John 21:17; Acts 20:28). Paul states, “What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task” (1 Corinthians 3:5, NIV). The Lord calls each pastor. The Lord gives each pastor a task. God has entrusted each pastor with a specific responsibility. Paul was called by God and sent through the Church to proclaim the Word on their behalf (Acts 13:1-3). Paul would report to them on the work that he had done. He was responsible to those that sent him on their behalf (Acts 14:26-28; 18:22). This practice is still followed today especially by missionaries, but also by others in the public ministry.

We can also see that the public ministry is an aspect of the ministry that Our Lord has given to His church. When we consider what the Bible says about the divine call into the public ministry, we can see that the public ministry comes out of the universal Priesthood of All Believers. The Bible tells us that nobody should assume the public ministry unless called by God to do it. Hebrews 5:4 states this truth thusly: “No one takes this honor upon himself; he must be called by God” (NIV). Moreover, we can see that the public ministry comes out of the ministry of the universal priesthood because God extends His call to a public minister through the group of believers that this person shall serve. The following are examples from Scripture:

In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.” This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full

of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them (Acts 6:1-6, NIV).

In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off (Acts 13:1-3, NIV).

Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust (Acts 14:23, NIV).

He was chosen by the churches to accompany us (2 Corinthians 8:19, NIV).

The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you (Titus 1:5, NIV).

We will discuss the divine call a little later.

Because there is only one ministry, the Priesthood of All Believers lovingly and willingly supports the public ministry. The most important kind of support that the Priesthood of All Believers gives to the public ministry is respect for the message that it proclaims. Paul appreciated this support from the Thessalonians: "we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe" (1 Thessalonians 2:13, NIV). It is the message that the called workers bring — instead of their personalities or abilities — that makes them worthy of the respect of those that receive their message. "The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching" (1 Timothy 5:17, NIV). The church respects the called workers because of the message that they proclaim and because of the great spiritual responsibility that accompanies the proclaiming of that message of the Word. The author of the epistle to the Hebrews tells us, "Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you" (Hebrews 13:17, NIV). When there is no respect for the called worker, there is no respect for the message; there is no respect for the Word of God.

Because the public ministry comes out of the ministry of all Christians, the universal Priesthood of All Believers, the entire church, all believers are concerned with keeping the message pure. No church has remained doctrinally strong and pure without the commitment of the laity to maintain the message pure and hold its called workers to the teaching of the Holy Scripture. That is the reason that Jesus warns, "Watch out for false prophets" (Matthew 7:15, NIV). John exhorts his readers, "do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God" (1 John 4:1, NIV). The ability of each believer to verify the teaching of the called worker presupposes that each

Christian has knowledge of the Scriptures. This was clear in the case of those living in the Greek city of Berea. “They received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true” (Acts 17:11, NIV).

The support of the church for its called workers, of course, includes the type of life that they live in response to the message that has been proclaimed. When we see a person of noble character and high standards, we want to imitate that person. Those who are called workers should be exemplary models. The members of the church should want to imitate its called workers. “Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith” (Hebrews 13:7, NIV). When the lifestyle of the called workers corresponds to the message that they are proclaiming, imitating them is another way to honor the message that they proclaim.

The support for those in the public ministry also includes providing material support. Paul puts it this way: “Anyone who receives instruction in the word must share all good things with his instructor” (Galatians 6:6, NIV). The Bible requires such an honor for called workers. “For the Scripture says, ‘Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain,’ and ‘The worker deserves his wages’” (1 Timothy 5:18, NIV). And, again, “Don’t you know that those who work in the temple get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in what is offered on the altar? In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel” (1 Corinthians 9:13-14, NIV).

To identify the public minister in the church, it is necessary to remember what a public minister is and what this minister does. A public minister has the same ministry as an individual priest. No work can be assigned to a public minister in the church that each of the universal priests does not already possess for his private ministry. If we think that public ministers are the only ones in the church that work with the Word and doctrine, we paint a deceiving picture. It would create a false division between the work of the universal priesthood and that of the public ministry. It would cause the lay members to think that their ministry does not involve the Word and doctrine. Moreover, it could lead us to conclude incorrectly that those in the public ministry who do not constantly use the Word and doctrine are not really in the public ministry. Such thinking would create ranks and hierarchies within the church that God did not create.

It is interesting to note that the same root word used in Acts 6:1-6 for the ministry of those that were chosen (called) to assist at the tables is also used for the work of those that were relieved of this task so that they could pay full attention to the ministry of the Word (Acts 6:4). Those that assisted at the tables were public ministers. They served in the name of and on behalf of other Christians. The same is true of those designated as “elders.” Frequently the elders are described as having a spiritual responsibility connected with the Word and doctrine (Acts 15:6, 22; 20:17, 28; 1 Timothy 4:14; James 5:14). Some of the elders, however, were involved in administration, directing the affairs of the church, and apparently did not work directly with the Word and doctrine. Rather they devoted their time to guiding and directing the operations of the church (1 Timothy

5:17). These elders were also called servants in the public ministry of our Lord. What they did, they did in the name of and on behalf of others.

Who were these elders? It seems that they were men from the church who were well qualified (1 Timothy 3:1-7), who had been trained and were prepared to serve as spiritual leaders. The Apostle John referred to himself as an elder (2 John 1; 3 John 1). Obviously, not all elders were apostles. Were all apostles elders? Scripture does not reveal that to us, and it would not be proper to speculate. Some of the elders served as spiritual leaders of congregations, for example, those in Crete. They would thus be serving as pastors or assistant pastors. Other elders may have worked together sharing responsibilities, as they do in our congregations today, but not serving as the pastor of the congregation. The difference is not in rank, but in responsibility. Elders have substituted, at times, for pastors in remote areas or for short periods of time so that the pastor can attend conferences or take a vacation. In such instances, the elder reads a sermon, conducts a worship service, makes hospital calls and shut-in visits, and if the need arises, calls the pastor for advice or asks the pastor to return, for example, for a funeral.

## **6.6 The Call to Public Ministry**

What is important is that we recognize all the public servants in our congregations. The specific area of work is not what determines who the public ministers are, or if they are working full-time or not in their ministry, or if their call was formally recognized by an installation service, or whether or not they receive lodging and a salary. The group of Christians that asks somebody to serve them publicly determines all these matters. The responsibilities and the extent of a public servant's work are established by the call.

In other words, a pastor who receives a call from a group of Christians to serve in the pastoral office is in the public ministry. A teacher who receives a call from a group of Christians to serve as a teacher of religion for that group is in the public ministry. The person called by the Board of Education for a Church operated college to teach athletics and coach football is in the public ministry. Why? Because this individual as a Christian is to set forth Christian standards and moral values and thereby is teaching God's Word and applying it in coaching and counseling the players. In a similar way, a member of the congregation who is requested by the congregation to assist in the ministry of the congregation, for example, as one who makes evangelism calls, or as one who serves as an elected official of the congregation, is serving in the public ministry of the church.

A word of caution is in order, however. To say that a person can be involved in the public ministry of the church, even when not directly involved with preaching or teaching the Word or the administration of the Sacraments, does not mean to suggest that every time a person participates in some work for the congregation — for example, putting away chairs after an event, or mailing the congregation's worship folder and newsletter — that such a person is exercising the office of the public ministry. No, both Acts 6 and 1 Timothy 5:17 describe a call to some type of position of continuous leadership. This does not have to be a full-time, salaried position. It could have a



specific time limit. It should, however, involve more than simply responding to a general request for volunteers. The public ministry involves some type of role of leadership, although the extent of that leadership will not be the same in every form of ministry.

The Lord also has established the public ministry in His church. This ministry does not arise from a priestly cast apart from the laity, because all Christians are priests of God. The difference is in the word “public”. The public ministry is a service performed in the church for fellow Christians. It is a service done in their name. Somebody does this task as a representative of the group. Just as a public official of the government works on behalf of those fellow citizens who have elected that person, in a similar manner, the minister in the church has an office with responsibilities that were entrusted to him by fellow Christians. These responsibilities are not different in essence from those that Christ has commended to each Christian. The one involved in public ministry must also serve in the work of the gospel as Paul and Timothy did (Philippians 2:19-23). The one involved in public ministry must work in the Word preaching and teaching doctrine (1 Timothy 5:17). The one involved in public ministry must speak the Word of God (Hebrews 13:17). The public minister in the church functions very much like the government official. An official of the government serves within their government representing the people who have elected them or the person who has appointed him or her to their position. The one who serves in the public ministry serves in the church, for the church, and as a representative of the church.

However, to serve in the public ministry, a person should have a divine call. What is a call? The Bible tells us that all Christians have been “called to be holy” (Romans 1:7, NIV). The apostle tells us as He told the Christians in Thessalonica that God “called you by means of the gospel” (2 Thessalonians 2:14, NIV). God chose each one of us who believes in Him. God made us Christians. Consequently, we can say that every Christian has a call from God to be what they are, namely, a member of the family of God and one that testifies to others about Jesus Christ. God has personally chosen each individual believer. God has selected and empowered each believer to do works of ministry. Each Christian has been called to a personal ministry.

How does an individual Christian enter into the public ministry? How does an individual Christian become a public minister?

As we read in the Bible, we find certain individuals whom God called to a special public ministry — Moses (Exodus 3), Aaron and his children (Exodus 28), Paul (Acts 9), etc. In these cases, God called the individual person directly, or immediately. These people didn’t just decide that they wanted to publicly serve the Lord, and thus they claimed a divine office. To serve the Lord, a person should be called. In Hebrews we read: “No one takes this honor upon himself; he must be called by God” (Hebrews 5:4, NIV). When God called somebody, either to be a priest or a prophet, God chose that person and put him in a particular position of public service. This was a divine call in addition to the call that the person had received to become a believer, to be a Christian.

In both calls — the call to be a Christian and the call to serve publicly — God is active. He is the one that calls a sinner to become one of His children. He is the one that calls one of His believers to serve in the public ministry. In either case, God puts somebody in a particular position. God does not hire us to serve Him based on an agreement that we make with Him. There is no type of contract that a person establishes with God. There is no business agreement that is made. The call of God is an action with a single direction — it comes from God to man.

What is more, unless God calls us, we cannot serve publicly. The Lord does not look favorably upon those that do. To the “evil ones”, or the unbelievers, who were falsely serving, God asks, “What right have you to recite my laws or take my covenant on your lips?” (Psalm 50:16, NIV). Christians are the only ones called by God to proclaim His Word, to speak with others about Him. That is the call that each person has received to be a believer and to be a Christian.

In a similar way, a special call is necessary to serve in the public ministry. Paul asks, “How can they preach unless they are sent?” (Romans 10:15, NIV). Although each Christian has a call to proclaim Christ to the world, a specific call is necessary to serve in the public ministry; this includes the pastoral office.

Inside the church, each Christian, as a priest of God, possesses the ministry in equal measure. However, good order requires that nobody works publicly in an assembly of Christians, nor as its representative, unless they have been properly commissioned by means of a call — “everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way” (1 Corinthians 14:40, NIV). A group of Christians should call those that will serve them in the public ministry. God has given His church the authority to call someone into the public ministry. The authority to call derives from the authority to proclaim the Gospel. This authority is also known as the Office of the Keys — the right that each Christian has to forgive or retain sins. Because our Lord has given the keys to all believers, only Christians may designate, select, elect, appoint, choose, or “call” the individual, or the individuals, who will serve in their name and on their behalf.

One of the official confessional writings of the Lutheran Church, The Augsburg Confession, states it this way: “no one should publicly teach in the Church or administer the Sacraments unless he be regularly called.”<sup>677</sup> It should be obvious; of course, that they should only call individuals who have been properly trained for the ministry that they will carry out on behalf of others. It would not be good order to call someone to preach who did not know how to construct and present a sermon. It would not be good order to call someone to teach Biblical Greek who had never studied the language. It would not be good order to call someone to be the congregation’s choirmaster who could not read music, etc.

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<sup>677</sup> Concordia Triglot. The Augsburg Confession, Article XIV. p. 49.

Luther explained the call, saying:

You should put the Christian into two places. First, if he is in a place where there are no Christians he needs no other call than to be a Christian, called and anointed by God from within. Here it is his duty to preach and to teach the gospel to erring heathen or non-Christians, because of the duty of brotherly love, even though no man calls him to do so. This is what Stephen did, Acts 6-7, even though he had not been ordered into any office by the apostles. Yet he still preached and did great signs among the people. Again, Philip, the deacon and Stephen's comrade, Acts 8[:5], did the same thing even though the office of preaching was not commanded to him either. Again, Apollos did so too, Acts 18[:25]. In such a case a Christian looks with brotherly love at the need of the poor and perishing souls and does not wait until he is given a command or letter from a prince or bishop. For need breaks all laws and has none. Thus it is the duty of love to help if there is no one else who could or should help.

Second, if he is at a place where there are Christians who have the same power and right as he, he should not draw attention to himself. Instead, he should let himself be called and chosen to preach and to teach in the place of and by the command of the others.<sup>678</sup>

Another of the confessional writings, The Smalcald Articles, states:

Therefore it is necessary for the Church to retain the authority to call, elect, and ordain ministers. And this authority is a gift which in reality is given to the Church, which no human power can wrest from the Church, as Paul also testifies to the Ephesians when he says, Eph 4:8: *He ascended, He gave gifts to men*. And he enumerates among the gifts specially belonging to the Church *pastors and teachers*, and adds that such are given for the ministry, *for the edifying of the body of Christ*. Hence, wherever there is a true church, the right to elect and ordain ministers necessarily exists. Just as in a case of necessity even a layman absolves, and becomes the minister and pastor of another; as Augustine narrates the story of two Christians in a ship, one of whom baptized the catechumen, who after Baptism then absolved the baptizer.

**68]** Here belong the statements of Christ which testify that the keys have been given to the Church, and not merely to certain persons, Matt. 18:20: *Where two or three are gathered together in My name, etc.*

**69]** Lastly, the statement of Peter also confirms this, 1 Pet. 2:9: *Ye are a royal priesthood*. These words pertain to the true Church, which certainly has the right to elect and ordain ministers since it alone has the priesthood.<sup>679</sup>

Luther declares emphatically:

“The first point demands that the preacher have an office, that he be certain of being called and delegated, and that everything he does be done in the interest of his office. I dare not preach without a call. I must not go to Leipzig or to Magdeburg for the purpose of preaching there, for I have neither call nor office to take me to those places. Yes, even if I heard that nothing but heresy was rampant in the pulpit at Leipzig, I would have to let it go on. It is none of my business, and I must let them preach. I have not sowed there. Consequently, I am not entitled to

<sup>678</sup> Luther, Luther's Works: vol. 39: Church and Ministry I, p. 310.

<sup>679</sup> Concordia Triglot. The Smalcald Articles. The Treatise: “Of the Power and Jurisdiction of Bishops” § 67-69. p. 523.

harvest there. But if our Lord God bade me go, then I would and should go, just as I was called here as preacher and am duty-bound to preach.”<sup>680</sup>

Even when one has a call, one is still obligated to preach and teach God’s Word in its truth and purity. Luther strongly disapproved of any false preaching. He continues:

“Secondly, a preacher must be sure that he is teaching and preaching God’s Word and that he is not dealing in doctrines of man or of the devil. All is well when a preacher is certain that he is preaching God’s Word and when he is convinced at the same time that he has a call to do this. The trouble is that men violate and disregard these two points, the office and the Word. This is demonstrated by the example of the fanatics, who make much ado about the Holy Spirit. But they appear on the scene of their own accord; no one asked them to come. They sneak in, befoul everything, and say that they were called by the Holy Spirit. Called indeed, but by the devil! I will tolerate no preacher in office, even if he worked miracles, unless he is persuaded that he is preaching the true doctrine and Word, and that he has a definite office and knows that he is sent.

Both of these points must go together. Even though a person has an office and a call—such as the pope and the bishops, who are invested with a spiritual office the same as I and every pastor and minister—that is not enough; for they must assuredly have God’s Word also. Conversely, even though a person possesses God’s Word, is a learned man, and knows that he has God’s Word, he must still keep silence and not encroach upon the office and preach. Unless he is called, it is not sufficient to have the Word. Such a person must hold his peace and not preach until he has a call.”<sup>681</sup>

(These quotations from Luther do not establish the doctrine, only Scripture can do that. What Luther does is expound and elaborate on what the Bible says.)

The manner in which a group of believers calls an individual into the public ministry is not set forth in Scripture. God does not provide us with instructions or procedures that we should follow to call someone. Individuals within the Bible were called into public ministry through a variety of ways, for example: the casting of lots as in the case of Mathias (Acts 1:26); congregational participation as in the case of the seven deacons in Jerusalem (Acts 6:1-6); by appointment as was done with the elders that Paul and Barnabas appointed in Antioch and Syria (Acts 14:23); and those that Paul instructed Titus to appoint in Crete (Titus 1:5). It would seem that these appointments were made in consultation with the congregation. How an individual is called, the particular procedure that is followed, is not important. Scripture only states that it should be done in an orderly way (1 Corinthians 14:33, 40) and that it be done in love (Christian love) (1 Corinthians 14:1). What is important is that the individual receives a legitimate call.

But, what is a “legitimate call” into the public ministry? How does God give His public servants to His church? We know that our Lord Jesus directly chose the apostles. He directly chose Saul, or Paul (Acts 13:9), to be His apostle. In his epistle to the Christians in Galatia, Paul emphasizes that he is an apostle “not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father” (Galatians

<sup>680</sup> Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 23: *Sermons on the Gospel of St. John: Chapters 6-8*, p. 227.

<sup>681</sup> Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 23, p. 227

1:1, NIV). The Lord called Paul, as He called the other apostles in the New Testament, and Moses, Isaiah, and others in the Old Testament, to proclaim His Word. God called these individuals in a direct way, in a personal way. This is a direct call from God, an immediate call (*vocatio immediata*). The Bible tells us that anyone who says that he or she has an immediate call from God must corroborate it by signs and miracles (Exodus 4:1-9; Deuteronomy 18:21-22; 13:1-5; Mark 16:20; Acts 14:3; 2 Corinthians 12:12.).

However, the Lord Jesus is no longer visibly present on the earth. He does not speak directly to anyone and call him to be a pastor of a certain congregation. Nor has He promised to appear in some way before a congregation and tell them who their pastor will be. Nevertheless, our Savior promises, "Where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them" (Matthew 18:20, NIV). Therefore, Jesus is always with a Christian congregation when it gathers in His name. This includes when it meets in His name to choose, or to call, a fellow Christian believer to be the pastor of that group. It is by means of this action by the church, this assembly of believers to whom God has given His Word, that our Lord calls individuals to serve publicly in His church. Frequently, this group of Christians is the voters assembly in the local congregation. It can be a mission board that sends missionaries to serve on behalf of the whole church. It can be a board of Christian education that calls somebody to teach in its church school, secondary school, college, or seminary. It can be the board of directors for an institution that is calling a worker. In all of these cases, the call is an indirect call (*mediate vocatio*). The call comes from God but through a group of believers — the church.

However, such a call through the church is no less divine than a call that came directly from the Lord Himself. It is God who works through the church and recognizes the validity of the action of the congregation (Matthew 18:19; Ephesians 4:11; 1 Corinthians 12:28). According to Acts 20:28, the elders from Ephesus were told that the Holy Ghost had made them bishops with the responsibility of feeding the flock of God with His Word. Their call, although it was an indirect call, was a divine call. The Holy Ghost made them bishops. The Holy Ghost put them into their office.

Paul was the last of the apostles to be called. Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus (Acts 9). Paul received a direct, or an immediate, call. After this, however, the Lord does not provide His church with His public servants by means of an immediate call or a direct call. If anyone were to make such a claim, they would have to verify it with signs and miracles as was mentioned previously.

But, what about those who claim that they feel that God has called them to serve? According to 1 Timothy 3:1, an interior call can only be understood with reference to a deep desire to prepare oneself for the ministry and to be put at the disposition of the church. The Scriptures do not extend the promise to the church that the Lord will provide public servants by means of some immediate interior call or through a direct assignment by God. The Lord calls His public servants through His church, the assembly of Christians (see Acts 6 and Titus 1:5).

In Titus 1:5, Paul instructed Titus, “appoint elders in every town, as I directed you” (NIV). We are not told how Titus did this. It is doubtful that he merely named somebody without the participation of the congregations. We have a more complete description of the procedure used when the church in Jerusalem chose the seven deacons. In Acts 6:1-6, we read:

In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word. This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. (NIV).

What did the congregation do? How did they do it? They identified the need. They determined how to deal with that need. They described the position that would fulfill their need. They established a list of qualifications. Then they thought about men that could meet these qualifications. They choose seven men with the necessary qualifications to fulfill their need. We are not told how these seven men were selected. Did the congregation in Jerusalem vote by raising their hands? Did they vote using some sort of a ballot? Was there a box for each of the candidates into which each voter would drop a stone indicating his choice? Was each individual named by the whole group, or only by a committee that represented the whole group? Did they vote or did they use another method to select these men? We don't know. How these men were chosen is not important. That they were chosen is very important.

The methods used to call workers into the public ministry are a matter of Christian liberty. The group of believers, the church, issuing the call generally follows a procedure similar to the one used in Jerusalem — it determines the need, it establishes the necessary qualifications for how to fulfill that need, it adopts a list of qualified candidates, it chooses the called worker by a majority vote. The group then agrees unanimously to select the person chosen. If there is more than one position to fill, the procedure is repeated.

This is not a hiring process that the group of believers uses. God is present and He is involved with the procedure of the call. The group of believers, the church, is the body through which the Lord calls His workers into the public ministry in His Church. The believers pray that the Lord will be with them and that He will bless them. They ask the Holy Ghost to guide them in everything that they do. With such a prayer in their hearts and on their lips, they act in the fear of God, using their best judgment according to the will of the Lord as it is revealed in the Bible.

Another point to consider is this: when is a call divine, when it is extended by a congregation, or when is it accepted, or both? When a person is called into the public ministry today, two actions should occur before this person begins serving publicly. First, the congregation, the group of

believers, should extend the call to the person that it has chosen; second the person who has received the call should accept it. Because God has trusted the keys to His Church, a gathering of Christians, usually a congregation, has been given the right to call to a person to administer the keys as its representative. In the case of a pastor, the voting members of the congregation extend the call. In the case of a missionary, the Board for Missions, elected by the entire church body to represent them, in turn extends the call. In the case of a teacher in a Christian school, the voters of the entire congregation may extend the call, or they may delegate the responsibility to their education committee or to a board of regents. Consequently, the call is divine when extended because the group of believers has the right to do extend it and Christ has promised that He would be present with His church. Our Lord, therefore, is also present at the calling meeting. His divine power guides and directs the calling of the person.

When a candidate receives the call to serve in the public ministry, that person must decide if this is how they can best serve the Lord. If they are already serving in the public ministry, they must decide if they should continue to serve in their present call, or if they should accept the new call. It is a difficult decision; much different from merely changing jobs. When a person is in the public ministry, they not only are serving others, they also are serving our Lord, and they want to do the will of our Lord. Through many long hours of prayer, for days and nights, often weeks, the person will seek the Lord's guidance to help them make the correct decision. In case of a pastor, who after such prayerful consideration chooses to accept the new call that has been issued, we can be sure that it is the Lord who has put this person in charge of that group of believers, even though in all of this the Lord has worked through human means (His Church on earth). The same is true whenever a person enters any other form of public ministry.

We can speak of the divine call in two ways. First, when it is extended by a group of Christian believers and second, when the call to serve is accepted by the person and as a result a new relationship of called worker-to-calling body is established because both actions took place under the direction of God.

## ***6.7 The Scriptural Qualifications to Serve in the Public Ministry***

In the early Church, the process of the call began when the existence of a particular need arose. Then a list of qualifications necessary to fill that need was established. What are the qualifications necessary to serve in the public ministry?

The different types of ministries have different necessities. A group of senior citizens has needs that are different from those of a group of people in their twenties that were recently married. The people in the one group have completed most of their life, are in retirement, and are often troubled by the younger generation. The other has just established a new home life, perhaps is purchasing their first home, perhaps is paying off educational loans, and probably is beginning to realize the challenges of raising a family. A group that is living in a new subdivision has needs that are different from a group that is located in a downtown metropolitan area. There is one common

denominator that exists no matter what the size, or the age, or the situation, or the demography of the group — all these people are sinful. They all need to hear the Law and the Gospel. They all need to hear the message of sin followed by the Good News of God's grace.

The public ministry was instituted by God. In His Word, He tells His church what qualifications a called worker should have. We find these qualifications in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and in Titus 1:6-9.

In 1 Timothy 3:1-7, we are told:

<sup>1</sup> If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task. <sup>2</sup> Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, <sup>3</sup> not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. <sup>4</sup> He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. <sup>5</sup> (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) <sup>6</sup> He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. <sup>7</sup> He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap. (NIV).

And in Titus 1:6-9, we are told:

<sup>6</sup> An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. <sup>7</sup> Since an overseer is entrusted with God's work, he must be blameless—not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. <sup>8</sup> Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. <sup>9</sup> He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it. (NIV).

For a person to be qualified to serve in the public ministry, it is necessary to be ἀνεπίλημτον, irreproachable and ἀνεγκλητον, irreprehensible.

This is not speaking about being perfect and without reproach in the sight of God. In God's eyes, we all are guilty sinners. It is only by means of faith in the redemptive work that Jesus accomplished on the cross of Calvary that God has declared us to be holy. What these verses are speaking about is the individual's life and behavior. In the eyes of fellow Christians, a called worker should be irreproachable. This also applies to the opinion of those who are not members of the church. "He must also have a good reputation with outsiders" (1 Timothy 3:7, NIV).

Why is that important? There are those who might argue that what a person does in their own home, or on their own time is no one else's business. However, suppose that there is an individual who is a pastor of a congregation, who the community thinks is a drunkard, or a womanizer, or a shoplifter, or who visits brothels, or worse. This person would have a tarnished reputation. Their lifestyle and habits would not conform to the standards of their office as set forth in Scripture. Who would want to seek spiritual guidance and leadership from such an individual? How could you trust a person who on Sunday says "do not....." and yet on Friday night this person is doing the very same thing that has been preached against? There would be a huge credibility gap. Moreover, gossip and rumors would undermine any valid counseling and advice this person may have to



give. That is why those who are in the public ministry must have a good reputation with all people and be irreproachable.

They must be “the husband of but one wife” (1 Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:6, NIV). This is speaking about the man’s personal life, especially his sexual life. In this area, especially, a called worker should be irreproachable. In the first century AD it was very common for people to violate the sixth commandment (i.e., to have sex outside of marriage) before and after marriage and to change wives as often as we change our clothes. Sadly, it is almost the same today. If a pastor, for example, would commit adultery even though he later regrets his sin and repents, still that act of indiscretion causes him to be no longer irreproachable. Even though he may be doing the very same thing that many of his members may be doing, he is beyond excuse. He should be on a level above them, not on a par with them. Regrettably, today, as the church becomes more and more like the world, instead of serving as a beacon to guide people out of the sinful and destructive ways of the world, there is a growing tolerance for weakening this qualification, for permitting divorced clergy and others to continue to serve publicly in many church bodies.

Another qualification is that they “not [be] given to drunkenness” (1 Timothy 3:3 and Titus 1:7, NIV). The matter of temperance is beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice it to say that wine was a common beverage in Biblical times. Paul even advised Timothy, “Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses” (1 Timothy 5:23, NIV). Even in the twenty-first century, there are countries in the world where tap water is not safe to drink. Many drink bottled water. In restaurants, it is not unusual to have a glass of wine as the beverage with meals. The Scriptural qualification does not say, “Never drink alcoholic beverages”. It says do not be given to drunkenness, the abuse of liquor. Not only does drunkenness destroy the person’s body, affecting the mind and the liver, but it also affects the person’s ability to function and perform to the best of their abilities. If these qualifications were being written today, no doubt, there would also be a prohibition on the use of certain drugs.

Moreover, it is important that he is “not a lover of money” (1 Timothy 3:3, NIV). This is a temptation for many, especially with the current economic situation. Yet, even in difficult times, we need to trust the Lord who provides us with everything that we need. In chapter 6 of 1 Timothy, Paul warns: “the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs” (1 Timothy 6:10, NIV). Many have misunderstood this passage. They have thought that having any money is the root of all evil. Some have even thought that it is better to be poor, than to have any possessions. However, that is not what the verse says. What it is speaking against is a love of money.

A called worker who is greedy does not serve the Lord God. Jesus tells us, “No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money” (Matthew 6:24, NIV). If the called worker loves money, they can succumb to the temptation of being “a lover of money” (1 Timothy 3:3 and Titus 1:7,

NIV). This may cause them to be dishonest, to help themselves to the food in the food pantry to avoid spending their own money for food, or become involved in gambling, for example. Or, it may cause them to compromise themselves so as not to risk losing a very large contribution of money from a person who has a questionable lifestyle. If the called worker does things for dishonest reasons, that worker is not irreproachable; he has become reproachable.

In addition, they should be “temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable” (1 Timothy 3:2, NIV). These are some positive characteristics that further describe that the called worker should be irreproachable.

The characteristics that we have just seen apply to all people that have a role of leadership in the congregation. It especially applies to those who are pastors. There is another qualification that applies to pastors, “He must not be a recent convert” (1 Timothy 3:6, NIV). Although those new to the faith are filled with joy and exuberance, they lack the depth of knowledge in God’s Word to serve the daily needs of parishioners. They should be further trained, not only for their own spiritual growth, but also so they may be better able to serve the people of God. In thirty plus years in the public ministry, I have seen many new converts to Christianity all eager and enthused to go forth and serve. Some have become excellent members of Evangelism Committees. Some have become wonderful Sunday School Teachers. A few have gone on to study at our college and then at our seminary and have become pastors. A few, unfortunately, have “flamed out” so to speak; their enthusiasm was short-lived, it died quickly.

Among the qualifications that Paul mentions, are several abilities that a pastor needs. These can be natural abilities. Or, they can be abilities that are acquired as a result of training and experience.

Probably the most basic of these is that to be a pastor, one must be “able to teach” (1 Timothy 3:2, NIV). Although this paper is not an exposition of pedagogics, let me say that there is a very big difference between imparting information and teaching that information. A newscaster imparts information. We may or may not be impressed with the news that we have heard. In many cases today, it is just another opinion on the topic of the day. You may even be fortunate to watch or listen to the news on several stations, and sometimes wonder if it is the same event because the way the same story is presented and the opinions expressed differ so widely. That is presenting information. Teaching involves taking the information and presenting it in such a way that the student learns and understands the materials so that they can apply it in their daily lives. Not everyone who gets in front of a classroom of students does this. The pastor needs to be able to teach, not merely present the information. The pastor needs to be able to take the information from the Bible and present it in such a way that the student not only understands it, but can appropriate it, apply it into their own life situation, and then use it in their personal lives or as they encourage others, especially their fellow believers; so that they can “always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks [them] to give the reason for the hope that [they] have” (1 Peter 3:15, NIV). This is

very challenging for pastors because they must be able to teach to all levels, children, teenagers, adults, and senior citizens. Not everyone can do this.

Paul instructs Timothy: “the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others” (2 Timothy 2:2, NIV). Our Lord tells His church that it should train and educate those that it plans to call into the public ministry. The people that the church prepares for leadership should be reliable, trustworthy, and faithful. This includes having the ability to learn and to apply what has been learned. The goal of this training is to make them capable and reliable preachers and teachers of the Word.

The most important thing in this instruction, of course, is the subject matter. To work in the church, a person has to know the Scriptures. Today, many church bodies are tempted to become more modern, to shorten the time of preparation, to add different areas of studies. While it is good and wholesome to know bio-chemistry, the laws of physics, the differences between Jung and Freud, the concepts of Skinner and Mead, and the major influences on eighteenth century poetry — what kind of pastor would the church be training if the candidate for the pastoral office did not know the Word of God? If this candidate could not properly apply the Law and Gospel? If this candidate cannot investigate the Scriptures in the original languages? Or, if this candidate did not know the difference between sin and sins?<sup>682</sup>

“He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it” (Titus 1:9, NIV).

To do this, the training of called workers should have a high priority in the program of the church. When those that will serve in the public ministry receive the best education, the church body can assure the congregations that their pastors and teachers are those “able to teach” according to the will of our LORD.

Another of the pastor’s qualifications is the ability to work with others in an orderly and peaceful way. How can we know if a person has this ability? Paul says, “He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God’s church?)” (1 Timothy 3:4-5, NIV). If this person has a family, this person should be “a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient” (Titus 1:6, NIV). This is another difficult and challenging qualification, especially in these days when the family unit is disintegrating and children often have little, or no, respect for their parents.

An additional qualification is that the person be “self-controlled, ... not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome” (1 Timothy 3:2-3, NIV), “not quick-tempered, ... not violent, ... one who loves what is

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<sup>682</sup> **Note:** “Sin” refers to Original Sin, the sin of Adam with which everyone is born. “Sins” refers to the individual transgressions of God’s Holy Law of which we are all guilty because of having been born with Original Sin.

good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined” (Titus 1:7-8, NIV). These speak to the character and disposition of the person who will publicly serve.

The Bible does not give us a broad list of all of the responsibilities for those who are called into the public ministry. Such a list does not exist. It is doubtful that any individual person could do everything that the ministry incorporates. Even the Apostle Paul was not called to do everything that could have been included in the call of a pastor or a missionary. He says, “Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel” (1 Corinthians 1:17, NIV).

The duties of those that serve will differ according to the needs of the group calling the public minister. Not every congregation is exactly alike. Not all pastors have the same duties in every congregation. Not all pastors produce a monthly newsletter. A pastor serving a congregation in a retirement community will probably not have many infant baptisms, or children in Sunday School. A pastor serving a congregation comprised mainly of newlyweds and young families will probably not have many funerals. In large congregations, there are often so many challenges and responsibilities to meet the spiritual needs of all of the souls, that the congregation will call more than one pastor. The calling body will declare in each case what is expected in the type of ministry that it has called the worker to do.

Jesus tells us, “the fields are ripe for the harvest” (John 4:35, NIV). Many people need to hear the Word of God. To satisfy this need, some church bodies have begun to call women to serve as pastors. However, unless it is a rare case of a congregation comprised solely of women, there is a problem with this humanly devised solution to meet a need.

When a congregation assigns duties, it should not ask a woman to assume any duty that would require her to serve in any way that does not agree with her divinely created role. She was not created first; man was. She was created as a companion and a “helper.” Let’s look at the Bible. “The Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being” (Genesis 2:7, NIV). “The Lord God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him’” (Genesis 2:18, NIV). “The Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man” (Genesis 2:22, NIV).

Consequently, a congregation that believes what the Bible says, a church body that accepts the Bible as the wholly inspired and inerrant Word of God, would never call a woman for a position in which she would “have authority over a man” (1 Timothy 2:12, NIV), knowing she “must be in submission” (1 Corinthians 14:34, NIV). In other words, according to the Word of God, the church should not ask a woman to serve as a pastor of a congregation. According to the Scriptures, she should not even teach an adult Bible class in which men are present. God’s Word is very clear: “Do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent” (1 Timothy 2:12, NIV). That does not mean she is not a valuable member of the church. It does not mean that there is no way in which she can serve the church. There are positions for which she could be especially

qualified, for example: instructing children, advising adolescents, teaching and counseling mothers, wives, or widows. Every Christian woman has a valuable private ministry to perform. She also may be called by the church to serve in some form of public ministry that is not prohibited by Scripture.

With regard to those that serve in the public ministry, the congregation or the group that sends the call also has responsibilities. Paul, speaking about those in the public ministry, exhorts the Christians in the congregation in Corinth, “men ought to regard us as servants of Christ” (1 Corinthians 4:1, NIV). The called worker is not somebody simply hired to do a job. They are servants of Christ. They are the gifts from our Lord to His church. “The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching” (1 Timothy 5:17, NIV). This is not merely an exhortation to personally honor someone called to publicly serve for work that has been done well, rather it is to glorify and to praise almighty God whom this person serves.

God also tells us “those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel” (1 Corinthians 9:14, NIV). To illustrate this point, Paul uses the example of a plowman and of a man who threshes grain (1 Corinthians 9:10). These are men who do their work in the hope of sharing in the harvest. The apostle says, “If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you?” (1 Corinthians 9:11, NIV). Just as the man who plows the field and the thresher receive their subsistence from their work, so should the person called for public ministry. The spiritual seed, the Gospel in the Word and sacraments, however, is always a free gift from God. Nothing material, neither the salary nor the benefits that a pastor receives as compensation, can buy these blessings or can serve as a reimbursement for them. Luther writes: “because this stupendous and incalculable gift cannot be administered except by men who need food and clothing, it is necessary to nourish and support them. This, however, is not payment for the gift; it is payment for the service and the work.”<sup>683</sup> In this way, a congregation can show the double honor toward those that serve them with the priceless spiritual blessings of the Lord.

Because a congregation assigns the duties to its called workers and pays their salary, the question can arise: To whom is the called worker responsible? The painter the congregation hires is responsible to the congregation for his work. The workers that repair the roof are responsible to the property and grounds committee, and to the whole congregation. But, what about those who preach and teach the Gospel? To whom are they responsible? They are “servants of Christ.” Because of this, Paul says, “I do not even judge myself... It is the Lord who judges me” (1 Corinthians 4:4, NIV). The pastor who is called to serve in a congregation is mainly responsible to the Lord. To forget this is to forget that it is the Lord Himself that has called this individual to serve. To forget this is to make the pastor merely a servant of human beings. That would be an abuse of what God intended when He instituted the ministry.

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<sup>683</sup> Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 4: *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 21-25*, p. 204.

The Scriptures tell Christians how they should regard their called workers: “Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith” (Hebrews 13:7, NIV). A few verses later, Christians are exhorted, “Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you” (Hebrews 13:17, NIV).

The pastor has the authority and can expect the obedience of the members. However, this does not make the pastor a dictator. The pastor is not able to demand that the congregation build a church according to a plan that the pastor has chosen, or that the congregation should have its worship service at a time that the pastor decides. The pastor can only expect obedience when proclaiming the Word of God. Such obedience, then, is not obedience to a human being, but to God to whom the pastor is responsible.

However, is not the pastor somehow responsible to the congregation through whom the Lord has called him? Certainly, but only in a secondary way. Paul commended the Christians in the congregation in Berea for responsibly supporting what he preached. They did not simply hear what Paul said and blindly accept it. “They received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true” (Acts 17:11, NIV). No congregation can permit its pastor to preach or to live contrary to the Word of God. A congregation also has a God-given responsibility to act whenever a called servant is no longer “irreproachable” or no longer is “capable to teach”, or no longer is able to “hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it”. If a pastor, or any called worker, is guilty of immoral behavior, or teaching false doctrine, or if there is evidence of infidelity, or incompetence, a congregation may need to terminate its call. When the congregation does this, in fact, it also holds the called worker responsible before God.

Because in a call it is the Lord who by means of His church looks for the person for a particular office, the office should seek the man and not the man the office. It is not like a candidate seeking an office in the political realm. A called worker should not take steps to get a particular position inside the church. It is considered an objectionable practice if a called worker makes known their availability to a different congregation, or offers to be a candidate for a particular public ministry, or uses acquaintances, friends, or relatives in a congregation to suggest their name and to influence the voting. Although the calling procedure and the financial income of the ministry seldom leads to the use of bribery, such practices are similar to simony (Acts 8:18-21).

Any form of actively seeking an office, or of preaching a trial sermon, is contrary to the nature of the call. It degrades the sacred office, making it into a matter of competition. This easily degenerates into an effort on the part of the called worker to “sell themselves” to a congregation.

Certainly, it is a good thing if anyone “sets his heart on being an overseer” (1 Timothy 3:1, NIV). The person can put himself at the disposition of the Lord saying, “Here am I. Send me!” (Isaiah 6:8, NIV). It

is appropriate that people are available for the training that will qualify them to be candidates for the public ministry (2 Timothy 2:2). However, this is very different than attempting to gain or win a specific position.

There will be occasions when a pastor will feel the “need for a change.” It can be that problems hinder the work of the ministry. It can be that problems have been created through bad judgment and practice, and the pastor thinks that the situation can be resolved by accepting a call to another congregation. It can be that personal problems have arisen, or a matter of family health which require a change of location to an area with better climate. In situations such as these, the pastor should take the matter to the Lord in prayer. The pastor should also speak with a fellow pastor, or with an official of the national church. However, to request another call without any reason can give the appearance of infidelity to the current call, even if this is not the case.

In order that the call may proceed in an appropriate way (*vocatio legitima*), neither the congregation nor the pastor should do anything that would not be in complete harmony with everything that the Scriptures say concerning the call into the public ministry.

## **6.8 Ordination**

Many times in a discussion of the ministry, the topic of ordination arises. What is ordination? Is it necessary? What does ordination always presuppose?

There are no biblical words that correspond to our English words “ordain” or “ordination”. There are ten different Hebrew verbs and thirteen different Greek words that are translated as some form of the word “ordain”. Some of these indicate appointment to an office. We find no definition of ordination in the Bible. Neither do we find any command that New Testament ministers of the Word should be ordained.

In a manner of speaking, Aaron and his sons were “ordained” into the Aaronic priesthood in the Old Testament. However, this priesthood no longer exists in the New Testament. Christ made, or appointed, (ἔποιήσεν) the apostles (Mark 13:13-16). Jesus presented, or appointed, (ἠνέδειξεν) the seventy [two] disciples to go out as missionaries (Luke 10:1). The congregation in Jerusalem nominated (ἔστησαν) two qualified candidates to replace Judas Iscariot. One of these was chosen by the casting of lots (ἔδωκεν κλήρους) (Acts 1). The congregation chose (ἐπισκέψασθε / ἔξελέξαντο) the seven deacons and presented them to the apostles, who appointed (καταστήσομεν) them to their office and laid their hands (ἐπέθηκαν τὰς χεῖρας) upon them (Acts 6). The congregation, at the direction of the Holy Spirit, set apart (ἀφορίσατε) Paul and Barnabas to be missionaries (Acts 13). Paul and Barnabas appointed (χειροτονήσαντες) elders for each church (Acts 14:23). [χειροτονέω does not mean the laying on of hands. It means to elect by a show of hands.] Titus appointed (καταστήσης) elders in every town (Titus 1:5) when Paul left him in Crete to complete the work that Paul had left unfinished (ἐπιδιορθώση τὰ λείποντα). The whole

church together with the apostles and elders decided to select (ἐκλεξαμένους) some of their own men, sending them to accompany Paul and Barnabas when they went to Antioch (Acts 15:22). One of the members of the church was chosen (χειροτονηθείς) by the churches to accompany Paul's group as they took the special offering to the congregation in Jerusalem (2 Corinthians 8:19). The concept of selecting, appointing, and commissioning does exist in the New Testament as a way in which a called worker enters into the public ministry. In most instances this did not involve the laying on of hands. There are twenty-four references to the laying on of hands in the New Testament. Fifteen of these pertain to acts of healing done by Jesus or one of the apostles. Two instances relate to the bestowing of the gifts of the Holy Ghost. There are only seven instances that relate to someone entering into the public ministry. There is no command in Scripture that there must be a laying on of hands. Nor is there a command that there must be an ordination. The church, in Christian liberty, is free to decide for itself if it will use either of these practices, and how it shall use them.<sup>684</sup>

Ordination is not a divine institution. It is a church custom that has existed since apostolic times. Ordination is a special service in which a man is installed into the pastoral office for the first time. Ordination is a religious service that serves to recognize publicly the person's aptitude and the validity of the call that has been extended to him. In the Smalcald Articles, one of the confessional writings of the Lutheran Church, we read, "For formerly the people chose pastors and bishops. Then came a bishop, either of that church or a neighboring one, who confirmed the one elected by the laying on of hands; and ordination was nothing else than such a ratification."<sup>685</sup>

Ordination does not confer the pastoral office. Ordination does not make a man a pastor. It is the call that confers the pastoral office. Ordination is a liturgical form of confirming the genuineness of the call, and invoking the blessing of God on the ministry that this person will perform. Without a legitimate call, there cannot be an ordination. Under normal circumstances, a pastor goes through the rite of ordination only one time, at the beginning of his ministry. After that, he is "installed" wherever he has been called to serve. The word "ordination" means "named."

The public service in which a pastor is ordained or installed is a very good thing. It shows everyone that is present that this man has a legitimate call. The pastor and the congregation can publicly hear and see their respective responsibilities. The congregation can publicly welcome their new pastor, they can publicly pray for him, and they can publicly commit themselves to the leadership of God and the spiritual care of this pastor that Christ has given them.

In the worship service in which a pastor is ordained, or established, other pastors are present and place their hands on the head of the new pastor. This follows a custom that occurred several times in the New Testament. The ministries of the seven deacons, Paul and Barnabas as missionaries, and Timothy as Paul's assistant began with a ceremony that included the placing of hands upon

<sup>684</sup> John F. Brug, "Ordination and Installation in the Scriptures". Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly. Volume 92. No. 4. Fall 1995. pages 263-270.

<sup>685</sup> Concordia Triglot. The Smalcald Articles. The Treatise: "Of the Power and Jurisdiction of Bishops" p. 525 § 70.



the head (Acts 6:6; 13:3; 1 Timothy 4:14). However, there is not any command in the Scriptures that makes ordination, or installation, or the laying on of hands a divinely prescribed ceremony. There is no divine mandate for it. The call establishes the relationship between the pastor and the congregation. The call, not ordination, puts a man into the public ministry. His public service lasts only as long as the call to this specific group.

Some church bodies confer the public ministry, usually the pastoral ministry, through “apostolic succession.” According to those who accept “apostolic succession”, only those men are legitimate pastors who have been ordained by someone in the apostolic line. It establishes a special caste of clergy that is mentioned nowhere in the Bible. By means of “apostolic succession”, the bishop confers the public ministry on an individual and permanently authorizes him to carry out the functions of this office. Thus, those who believe in “apostolic succession” believe that once a person becomes a priest or a pastor, he continues to hold that office until his death. They believe that “apostolic succession” confers an indelible character. They believe that by virtue of the ceremony in which this is conferred, which they refer to as ordination, the priest has a permanent position in the church. Bible-believing Lutherans do not accept that an individual is placed into a permanent ministry through such a ceremony. Nor do Bible-believing Lutherans regard Ordination as a sacrament.<sup>686</sup> Ordination is a ceremony or a rite of the church. It is a matter of adiaphora. That is, neither ordination nor installation is commanded or prohibited in the Scriptures. The church in Christian liberty is free to determine the purpose and the use of this rite in the interest of good order. Throughout history, among those who have served in the public ministry there have been some who have been ordained and some who have not been ordained. The fact that some were ordained while others were not does not place those who were ordained on a higher level or give them greater authority than those who were not ordained. It is not the ordination; it is the divine call that puts an individual in the public ministry.

## **6.9 Scripture Must Determine the Doctrine of the Ministry**

When we read the writings of men like Walther, Hoenecke and Pieper, we must be careful to keep in mind the specific historical circumstances in which they were writing and the specific questions they were addressing. If they were writing today in changed circumstances and when different issues and dangers are confronting the church, they might word things differently or emphasize different points. Even when applying the statements of the Confessions and of Scripture, we must be careful to give full attention to their whole context, so that we do not misapply the passages by using them to answer questions which the authors were not addressing. Much of the confusion that exists today is due to understanding of Predigtamt (the office of the one who publicly

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<sup>686</sup> The Lutheran Church considers a sacrament to be a Means of Grace, i.e., a means that God has established for giving and distributing to Christians the benefits of Christ’s death and resurrection. A sacrament has 5 characteristics: 1) It is a sacred act. The sacraments involve the action of God in conveying something to us. 2) It was instituted by God. God established it and commanded us to observe this act. It was not devised by man. 3) There is a visible element involved in the sacrament. There is something visibly and tangibly present. 4) This sacred act is connected with the Word of God and it is an action that is commanded by God. It is not something that is optional. And 5) A sacrament promises and gives the forgiveness of sins to the recipient.

proclaims the Word) and Pfarramt (the pastoral office) in a context other than Walther originally wrote, and relying on a poor translation of the original German by those who only speak English.

To arrive at an understanding of who is a minister and what is ministry, one must look for the answers that God Himself has given us for His Church. In resolving the current controversy, initially, the discussion should focus on thorough exegesis of all of the pertinent passages of Scripture. Unless there is agreement on what Scripture says about the matter, little progress can be made by debating interpretations of the confessions, historical precedents and contemporary practice.

Useful as they are, most recent works by adherents of the LCMS view have focused on the Confessions without laying an adequate foundation for this discussion in a thorough exegesis of Scripture. As we have seen in this paper, this style developed as a result of their historical background and various theological and cultural influences that have affected the Missouri Synod. The ELS is not the LCMS. The ELS does not agree with the doctrinal position taken by the Missouri Synod on several doctrines. The ELS needs to formulate its own doctrine. To do this, it is necessary to do a thorough study of the *norma normans* (the “guiding guide”, this being God’s Word) before we are ready to discuss our understanding of the *norma normata* (a “guided guide”, a writing based on something else, in this case, the Holy Scriptures).

The Word of God directs us in determining what we are to believe. The Holy Scriptures are the principium doctrinae, the beginning and the source of our doctrine. From what we learn in the Bible, then, we set forth our statement of faith, our confessional writings, so that it is clear for us, for those who follow us in the generations to come, and for others to know exactly what we believe. These confessional writings do not supercede or replace the Scriptures. To permit this would be to elevate the word of humans to the same level as the Word of God. The Confessional statements are important, but not more important than the Bible. The Confessional writings are a “generation removed” so to speak from the Scriptures. They are a guide for our teaching, yes. However, they are a guide that has been guided by the Scriptures. The doctrine of Church and Ministry must be established on the clear teachings of the Bible.

With this in mind, it is hoped that the ELS will formally adopt an official position on the ministry that is Scripturally based and clearly worded. To do this, it must set forth at least four points: 1) Christ instituted one office in His Church; that office is the ministry of the Gospel, 2) The purpose of this ministry is the edification of the members of the church through the proclamation of the Gospel, 3) Christ has especially appointed individuals to publicly perform the duties of this one ministry, and 4) The public ministry is not generically different from the ministry of the priesthood of all Christians; the only difference being that it is done in the name of and in behalf of a group of believers.

## **6.10 ELS official statement on the Doctrine of the Ministry**

After decades of study, debate, and heated exchanges at conferences and on the floor of the synod's annual conventions, the ELS decided how it would word its official statement on the Doctrine of the Ministry. The decision did not come easily. Agreement was not unanimous, as it should have been. There are still many members of the ELS who think that only a parish pastor is involved in the ministry. Some were willing to broaden their position a little more and include missionaries and seminary professors as those serving in the ministry. The majority decided to accept the broader sense of the term.

In an official statement emailed to all clergy members of the ELS, President John Molstad stated:

The 88th Convention of our Evangelical Lutheran Synod has drawn to a close and a number of you may have some mixed emotions about the sessions. As I reflect on the session last Thursday and also that of the day before where we adopted "The Public Ministry of the Word," I regret if there were emotionally charged words that may have caused dedicated, faithful men to be not as loving and patient with each other. Since there were a sizable number of men who did not vote in favor of the PCM<sup>687</sup> statement, those who voted with the majority need to exercise caution and patience before coming to unwarranted conclusions. Not all who voted against adopting the PCM document were doing so for conscience reasons. In fact, as I mentioned earlier, no letters were received at my office in the days leading up to convention that raised the charge of false doctrine in the PCM document. (Email Letter to the ELS Pastors from President John A. Molstadt Jr. June 25, 2005).

The official statement on the ministry adopted by the ELS is as follows:

### **The Public Ministry of the Word**

Adopted 2005

#### **Salvation Won by Christ and Received through Faith**

*We teach that men cannot be justified before God by their own strength, merits or works, but are freely justified for Christ's sake through faith, when they believe that they are received into favor and that their sins are forgiven for Christ's sake, who by His death, has made satisfaction for our sins. This faith God accounts as righteousness in His sight, Rom. 3 and 4 (Augsburg Confession IV, Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary, 9).*

#### **Salvation Distributed**

*That we may obtain this faith, the office of teaching the Gospel and administering the sacraments was instituted. For through the Word and sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Spirit is given, who works faith where and when it pleases God in those who hear the Gospel. That is, God, not because of our own merits, but*

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<sup>687</sup> PCM is an abbreviation for Publicly Called to Minister. The PCM document deals with the procedures for calling and the individual who is called into the public ministry.

*for Christ's sake, justifies those who believe that they are received into favor for Christ's sake. (AC V, Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary, 9)*

*We reject the teaching that the Holy Spirit comes without the external Word but through their own preparations and works (AC V, Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary, 9).*

## **The Role of the Church in Salvation Distributed**

### **I. The Office of the Keys**

God has given to His church on earth the Office of the Keys (Matthew 16:19, Matthew 18:18-20, John 20:21-23; also see Smalcald Articles, Part III, Art. VII, 1"). "The Office of the Keys is the special authority which Christ has given to His Church on earth, to forgive the sins of the penitent sinners and to retain the sins of the impenitent as long as they do not repent" (Luther's Small Catechism, "The Office of the Keys and Confession", ELS 2001 ed.; "Doctrine of the Church," Thesis III, ELS Synod Report, 1979, p. 31 and 1980, p. 76). The church uses the keys to preach the Gospel, administer the sacraments, and practice church discipline. The keys are used privately or unofficially<sup>688</sup> when individual Christians, on behalf of Christ, speak the Gospel of forgiveness to others; when they forgive the sins of those who sin against them; when they retain the sins of those who do not repent, e.g., when they confront in a brotherly way those who need to repent of their sins; and when in "the mutual conversation and consolation of the brethren" they comfort one another with the words of the Gospel (1 Peter 2:9, Matthew 18:15-18, Matthew 6:12 – The 5th Petition of the Lord's Prayer; SA Part III, Art. IV). Christians also use the keys publicly or officially when scripturally qualified individuals, who have been called by Christ through the church, forgive and retain sins on behalf of Christ and His church (Romans 10:14–17, Acts 14:23, Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope, 67). Christians also use the keys to judge the teaching of their pastors and teachers; they are to beware of false prophets (Matthew 7:15-16, 1 John 4:1, 2 Timothy 3:16).

1. We reject any teaching that denies individual Christians the use of the keys privately in their calling as the Universal Priesthood of All Believers.
2. We reject any teaching that treats the Universal Priesthood and the Public Ministry as one and the same thing.

### **II. The Public Ministry of the Word**

This public use of the keys is the Public Ministry of the Word. "That we may obtain this faith, the office of teaching the Gospel and administering the sacraments was instituted" (AC V). This divinely instituted Public Ministry of the Word includes both a narrower and a wider sense. The narrower sense refers to a presiding office that is indispensable for the church; see II A. The wider sense refers, in addition to a presiding office, to offices having a limited public use of the keys, offices that the church, in her freedom, may establish; see II B. The divine institution of this preaching and teaching office is not located in just one particular passage. Rather,

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<sup>688</sup> In this document when we speak of the *private or unofficial* use of the keys we mean the duty and authority belonging to individual believers (the Universal Priesthood of All Believers) which is their personal responsibility toward their neighbor. When we speak of the *public or official* use of the keys we are referring to the duty and authority of those who are called to act on behalf of Christ and His believers.

throughout the New Testament, a divine ordering, establishment, and institution of the preaching and teaching office is indicated and presupposed (John 20:21-23, John 21:15ff, Matthew 28:18-20 [NKJV], Matthew 9:36-38, Ephesians 4:11-12, 1 Peter 5:1-4, Acts 20:28, 1 Corinthians 4:1; see also Treatise 10). Those in this office by virtue of God's call through the church perform their duties on behalf of the church and in the name and in the stead of Christ, so that whenever we hear Christ's servant we hear Christ Himself speak (Luke 10:16, AC XXVIII, 22, Apology of the Augsburg Confession VII & VIII, 28, 47).

3. We reject any teaching that the Public Ministry is a development of the church and not a divine institution.

4. We reject any teaching that holds that the Public Ministry is established merely by the orderly carrying out of the Universal Priesthood according to 1 Corinthians 14:40.

**A. The Public Ministry of the Word in a Narrower Sense: The Pastoral Office in its Various Manifestations.**<sup>689</sup>

The church is commanded to appoint ministers who will preside over the churches (2 Timothy 2:2, Titus 1:5, Ap XIII, 12), who must have the scriptural qualifications for a full use of the keys: "The Gospel requires of those who preside over the churches that they preach the Gospel, remit sins, administer the sacraments, and, in addition, exercise jurisdiction, that is, excommunicate those who are guilty of notorious crimes and absolve those who repent...[T]his power belongs by divine right to all who preside over the churches, whether they are called pastors, presbyters or bishops" (Treatise 60-61). God commands that properly called men publicly preach, teach, administer the sacraments, forgive and retain sins, and have oversight of doctrine in the name of Christ and the church (1 Timothy 2:11-12). Therefore a presiding office, whether it is called that of pastor, shepherd, bishop, presbyter, elder or by any other name, is indispensable for the church (Luke 10:16, 1 Corinthians 12:27-31, Matthew 28:18-20, Hebrews 13:17, Acts 20:28, Ephesians 4:11-12, 1 Peter 5:1-2).

5. We reject any teaching that denies the exercise of spiritual oversight by the pastoral office.

6. We reject any teaching that the apostolic authority of the Public Ministry of the Word or the validity of the sacraments depends on or is derived from ordination by a bishop standing in an unbroken chain of succession from the apostles, or the necessity of maintaining a "historic episcopate."

Scripture clearly teaches that women are not to be in the pastoral office, because this presiding office includes the exercise of authority over men (1 Corinthians 14:34-35, 1 Timothy 2:11-12). Also, when Scripture refers to one who officiates at the Word and sacrament liturgy it speaks in male terms (1 Timothy 3:2, 1 Timothy 4:13). Therefore women shall not read the Scripture lessons in the divine service, preach the sermon, administer Baptism or distribute the Lord's Supper, for these

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<sup>689</sup> The term "pastoral office" has been used historically according to a more restrictive meaning (referring only to those men who are called to the pastorate of a local congregation), and according to a less restrictive meaning (referring to all those men who are called to a ministry of pastoral oversight in local congregations, as well as in other specialized fields of labor). In this document the term is being used according to its less restrictive meaning.

things are intimately related to the pastoral office (1 Timothy 4:13-14, 1 Corinthians 4:1).<sup>690</sup>

The church is free to divide the labors of the pastoral office among qualified men (1 Corinthians 1:17, 1 Corinthians 12:4-6). While every incumbent of this office must be qualified for a full use of the keys, not every incumbent must be responsible for full use of the keys. Missionary, assistant pastor, professor of theology, synod president (who supervises doctrine in the church), and chaplain are some examples of this.

7. We reject the teaching that the Public Ministry of the Word is limited to the ministry of a parish pastor.

### **B. The Public Ministry of the Word in a Wider Sense: Other Offices That Have a Limited Public Use of the Keys.**

The church has freedom<sup>691</sup> in dividing the labors of the public ministry (for example, vicars, principals, Lutheran elementary school teachers and other teachers), but must not go beyond the bounds of God's commands when calling men or women to carry out a limited public use of the keys (1 Corinthians 14:34, 1 Timothy 2:12ff, etc). The extent to which one is authorized by the call of the church to exercise the keys publicly is the extent to which one is in the Public Ministry of the Word. Authorization to exercise a limited part of the Public Ministry of the Word does not imply authorization to exercise all or other parts of it (1 Corinthians 12:5, 28, Romans 12:6-8, Philippians 1:1, 1 Timothy 3:8, 5:17).

### **Teachers of Children in Christian Schools.**

In the Old and New Testaments, our Lord commands parents to train their children in the fear of the Lord. He also has commanded His church and the Public Ministry of the Word to feed the lambs of His flock with His saving Word. Teachers of children in Christian schools established by the church therefore have their authority from both of these divinely established estates (Deuteronomy 6:1-7, Matthew 15:4, Ephesians 6:1-4, John 21:15-17, Large Catechism I, 141).

Extending calls to teachers who have spiritual care of children in Christian schools is not merely a laudable custom, but is in accordance with Romans 10:14-17 and Augsburg Confession XIV, not only for the sake of good order, but also because these teachers carry out a specific part of the Public Ministry. It is by human right that the church separates a limited portion of the office to one individual. But it is by divine right that one exercises that work on behalf of the Christians through whom the call has come.

8. We reject the teaching that only those qualified to carry out a full use of the keys are in the Public Ministry.

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<sup>690</sup> Certainly emergency situations may arise, such as when our catechism states "Q: Who should administer baptism? A: Ordinarily the called minister of Christ should administer Baptism, but in emergency any Christian may and should do so" (ELS Catechism, p. 182). For further discussion of emergency situations, see the 1862 Lay Ministry Theses, parr. 5-7 (*Grace for Grace*, p. 139).

<sup>691</sup> Christian freedom is given to the church by God. "By divine right" refers to those things which are commanded by God. "By human right" refers to those things neither commanded nor forbidden by God which Christians may arrange according to their needs and circumstances (Acts 6:1-7, 15:22-29, 4:32, 5:29, 1 Cor 3:21, 22, 14:40, Gal 5:1)

9. We reject the teaching that the Public Ministry is limited to any one divinely fixed form, that is, limited to the pastoral office to the exclusion of other teachers of the Word.

10. We reject any teaching which would conclude that the means of grace are effective only when used by a pastor.

11. We reject any teaching that makes the office of the Lutheran elementary school teacher, Sunday school teacher or any other limited office in the church equivalent to the pastoral office.

### **C. Qualifications.**

Those in the Public Ministry of the Word by virtue of a regular call are to conform to the specific and general qualifications given in Scripture (see especially 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus, as well as directives such as Matthew 28:19, 20, John 21:15-17, Acts 14:23, 20:28, and Romans 12:6-8).

### **III. The Divine Call into the Public Ministry**

One cannot hold the office of the Public Ministry of the Word unless called by God (Romans 10:14-17, AC XIV). Some men, such as the apostles, were called immediately, directly by God, to the Public Ministry. Since the time of the apostles God calls mediately (Acts 1:15-26) through the church so that there will always be qualified individuals who have been set apart to administer publicly His means of grace for the salvation of souls. The church in an orderly way extends divine calls in the name and stead of Christ and on behalf of the believers. Those who possess divine calls are serving in the Public Ministry of the Word in either a narrower or a wider sense (Acts 13:2-3, 14:23, 20:28; 1 Corinthians 3:4-9, 21-23).

12. We reject the teaching that every Christian is a public minister of the Word.

13. We reject any teaching that one may publicly teach, preach, or administer the sacraments in the church without a regular call (AC XIV).

### **IV. Ordination and Installation**

In the Lutheran Confessions ordination is understood as the rite by which the church confirms a man to be suitable for a call to the pastoral office (SA Part III, Art. X, Treatise 66–69). Historically the Lutheran church has reserved this rite for those entering the pastoral office.

The church also has used rites of installation for all those called into the Public Ministry, in both the narrow and the wide senses. Through such rites, the church makes clear that those installed in office have been properly called to it and invokes the Lord's blessing on them. At the same time those who are called to serve the people of God give public testimony to their submission to the Word of God as it is taught in the Lutheran Confessions. Rites of installation also have been used among us for congregational officers and occasional teachers in Christian congregations (Sunday school teachers, etc).<sup>692</sup>

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<sup>692</sup> <http://www.evangelicallutheransynod.org/believe/els/publicministry>

As in the case with its statement on the doctrine of the Church, the struggle regarding the doctrine of the Ministry was primarily an internal matter prior to this formal statement. References to it have been few and far between. What has appeared has been merely the slightest mention and that without comment. Once again, as had been done with the doctrine on the Church, the ELS in its publications — *The Lutheran Sentinel* and the *Lutheran Quarterly* — did not publish the views of one side or the other, thus choosing to remain neutral. It is only through research in the ELS synod archives of the past reports of the ELS Doctrine Committee and the personal papers of the late Professor Milton Otto, along with personal interviews with the men who were engaged in the struggle decades ago as well as reading the current emails and conversing with the current ELS voting members that one gains an understanding of what has been transpiring in the debate.

This official position is based on Scripture. It also contains references to the Confessional writings of the Lutheran Church, a modern version of Luther's Small catechism, and the hymnal currently used in many of the ELS congregations. Its composition is thus a compromise using Scripture as the basis of the doctrinal facets emphasized in the statement, and at the same time it uses human writings to produce a view from the derivative sense and also to further elaborate on what the Bible says.

Whenever there are compromises, sacrifices have to be made. That has been true in the case of adopting this statement as well. Rather than dealing with the ministry that Christ has given to His Church, the statement focuses itself on the public ministry and how it relates to those engaged in doing the work of the Church. The position on the public ministry has been broadened beyond the narrow, restrictive view of only a parish pastor, to a broader sense that includes missionaries and professors. It could have been more clearly stated that anyone who is doing the work of the church in the name of and on behalf of the church and that has been called by the church to do this particular work, is doing the work of the public ministry. It did not. This still remains a point of debate. Scripture references are not used as often and as frequently as they could have been. The second point at the top of the statement, "Salvation Distributed", does not have any Bible passages listed to support it. References to the new ELS Catechism and the ELS hymnal, although they are based on Scripture and indirectly state what the Bible says, would better serve in a class on the doctrine as examples instead of in the statement itself. Such references are meaningful only to the members of the ELS, or to those who have access to these references. Because this is the synod's official statement on the doctrine of the Ministry, which will be read also by those outside the ELS and outside of Lutheranism, it would have been better to state the Scriptural references directly. Over all, although the wording could have been different, the statement of the official position does not say anything that is contrary to the Scriptural doctrine of the Ministry. It is the author's opinion, shared by many others, that the statement could have been stronger.

The same men who responded to my questionnaire, referred to in chapter 5, regarding the doctrine of the Church also commented regarding the doctrine of the Ministry. Again there were serious concerns and reservations expressed regarding the two sides of the issue and what had



already transpired in the debate. All of the respondents indicated their hope and desire that the official statement on the doctrine of the Ministry would be a faithful statement of what the ELS believes. Subsequent correspondence and email exchanges during the past decade also expressed the same desire. Yet wrangling over the precise wording resulted in many heated exchanges and several revisions of the entire statement. That the synod in convention “called the question” and brought the matter to a vote on the floor merely terminated the endless meetings whose agendas were filled with the same things being repeated over and over again ad infinitum over the past decades.

The statement was not adopted unanimously. Had it been an academic debate using human terms and human evidence, one could say that neither side had thoroughly or even sufficiently convinced the other that their position was the better one. Establishing doctrine, however, is not a matter of academic debate. It is setting forth of God’s Word on the matter.

Those who voted against the statement, by and large, thought that it was too broad and not restrictive enough. These were primarily the former members of the LCMS. They continue to regard the church as being only the local congregation and the pastor of that congregation as being the only one in the ministry.

Prior to the vote on the statement, convention delegates had the opportunity to speak on the issue. As we read President Moldstad’s comments above, we note that there were the following: “mixed emotions”, “emotionally charged words”, “a sizable number of men who did not vote in favor”, “not all who voted against adopting [it] were doing so for conscience reasons”, “no letters were received at my office [i.e., President Moldstad’s] in the days leading up to convention that raised the charge of false doctrine” clearly indicate that the matter has not been satisfactorily resolved. The two approaches to developing doctrine have not resulted in unanimity of opinion. The derivative approach to developing doctrine based primarily on the use of selected statements from the writings of Luther, the Confessions, and the Lutheran dogmaticians has not yielded the same position (not just words but the actual stance) that has been achieved through the direct-Bible approach. Hence you really have two doctrinal concepts and not one. On the one hand, there is the concept based on human understanding, views, and opinions attained through the derived approach. On the other hand there is the concept based on what the Bible says. In the past, whenever there was a divergence of opinion this wide, the Norwegian Synod split. We do not know if this will happen this time. At the time of this writing, talks were being planned to try to “unruffled the feathers” and keep the two sides from dividing further. President Moldstad has a very difficult job ahead of him, one which will require the blessing of the Lord and the support and advice of faithful, Bible-believing Christians.

The doctrine of the Ministry is important because it sets forth what is to be done as the work of the Church and who it is that does the work of the Church.

## Chapter

# 7 Epilogue

Defining the church and ministry involves not only these two doctrines — the doctrines of the church and its ministry — but also the doctrine of church fellowship. The struggle in defining these doctrines has been long and drawn out because those responsible for setting forth the official doctrinal statement recognize the importance of what it says. In many cases there have been long, personal struggles, brother against brother, as in the case of August and Franz Pieper; in other cases entire families have been divided much as Christ said would happen when His Gospel message is proclaimed (Matthew 10:32-39). Even now, many within the ELS think that the struggle has gone on too long; that it is time to achieve a God-pleasing conclusion.

Until recently this has not been able to take place in the ELS because the Norwegian descendants in the United States would rather mediate, discuss all sides of an issue, and seek a “middle ground” resolution. At times, part of the problem has involved some confusion on the issues. Sometimes statements were not worded precisely. At other times, there was a confusion of the meaning of terms, as, for example, thinking that there were two churches, not one. Words have not been translated correctly and as a result have been used interchangeably creating a lack of consensus. Still at other times, too much attention has been devoted to matters of casuistry and details that fall into the category of *adiaphora*. The words, concepts, and opinions of men have been elevated to a position where they are often put on a par with the Word of God itself.

While there are those who ask serious questions to gain a better understanding of the doctrine and the synod’s official position — and there is nothing wrong with that — there are others who appear to nitpick every minute issue to absurdity using an *argumentum ad ridiculum*. Others, like the child in the classroom who desperately wants to be noticed, simply repeat and parrot back what someone else has already stated. Each person, of course, has a right to their own opinion; and they should be heard. This has affected the ELS as it seeks to consider every possible point of view for each issue. The result is a prolongation of the struggle in developing statements that define these doctrines. While there is no problem with being thorough, especially in matters of doctrine, simply to take the insights they have gained and extrapolate them into situations and scenarios that may or may not ever exist merely prolongs the struggle. I do not wish to appear judgmental. This extrapolation has actually occurred — as evidenced in numerous e-mails and personal conversations in which I have been openly told — by numerous members of the ELS — something to the effect of: “we Norwegians like to discuss every side of the issue. That is why at times we look to our brothers of German heritage who can study a situation and come to a clear decision upon which they act.” However, when no new ideas are forthcoming, and the only discussions that occur are merely repetitions of what someone else has said already in the past — in some cases year after year for decades — it becomes time to cease the debate and formalize a position. If they want to be more like Luther, they need to do what Luther did at Marburg in 1529,

when, with his finger, he wrote Scripture on the desk in front of Zwingli. The time has come to write Scripture, as Luther did.

In recent decades the ELS has been able to take a stand on the doctrines of the church and church fellowship. The official position on the church in the ELS came only after decades of heated debate and was the result of a compromise seeking to cover the topic while not saying anything that not everyone present could agree with to some degree. At the time, it may have solved the bitter floor debates at the annual synodical conventions allowing the delegates to move on to other matters with which they needed to deal. However, there are still those who are divided on the issue as I have been told in my discussions with the ELS pastors who are still living and were involved with these doctrines back in the 1960's and early 1970's. Some say the compromise went too far, others that it did not go far enough. The same thing has now happened with the ELS statement on the doctrine of the Ministry.

These doctrines are not that difficult to define when we let Scripture speak, and when we let Scripture interpret Scripture, as orthodox, conservative Lutherans have done for centuries. It is only when we go back in history and find citations for a particular situation that were made for a particular time in the past and then we try to apply those statements to all situations in general or to a particular situation today, be it real or hypothetical, that defining doctrine becomes more complicated.

In this paper I have dealt with the issue of whether or not those using a derivative approach to Biblical understanding can arrive at the same doctrinal stance on a particular doctrine as those who use a direct-Bible approach. More specifically, I have sought to answer the question as to whether or not the use of the Waltherian format set forth in Kirche und Amt has impeded and hindered the ELS from attaining its doctrinal statements on the doctrines of the Church and its Ministry.

In Chapter 1, I set the stage and indicated the origin of the problem. In Chapter 2, I dealt with the historical background and the influence of Dr. C.F.W. Walther on some members of the ELS. In Chapter 3, there was an overview of the life and work of Dr. Walther as well as a brief evaluation of his *Theses on the Church and Ministry*. Some of the short-comings of Walther's derivative approach to developing doctrinal positions were also presented. In Chapter 4, there was an overview of various approaches to Biblical interpretation as well as a presentation on several modern approaches used by Lutherans in the USA to establish their doctrinal positions. At the end of the chapter, I indicated my personal preference for the conservative, orthodox Lutheran approach. In Chapter 5, the nature of the Church was presented from the perspective of a Bible-believing conservative orthodox Lutheran Christian. At the end of the chapter, the official statement on the doctrine of the Church adopted by the ELS was presented along with the author's comments on it. In chapter 6, the nature of the Ministry was presented from the perspective of a Bible-believing conservative orthodox Lutheran Christian. At the end of the chapter, the official statement on the doctrine of the Church adopted by the ELS was presented

along with the author's comments on it. In this final chapter, chapter 7, the author's concluding comments are presented.

The results of my study and the evidence demonstrated annually on the floor of the ELS convention indicate a conclusive unanimity, at least in regard to these two doctrines. President John Moldstad writing about "ELS Bright Spots" and reporting on "Convention news:" stated, "Our recent synod convention proved to be a momentous one and one at which much has been accomplished:... adopted a doctrinal statement on the public ministry, after a long period of study, discussions and debates."<sup>693</sup> Yet the statement that was adopted was far from unanimously approved. Instead there were harsh and angry words exchanged and the existence of two positions, not one, was very much in evidence. This was not a mere disagreement over the use of a particular word here and there. There were two different views and opinions of what the ministry actually is and who it is that does the ministry. The same thing happened in 1980 regarding the doctrine of the Church; the ELS adopted a position in the face of objections and opposition.

Can the derivative method of deriving Biblical doctrine by using primarily the writings of Luther, the Confessions and the Lutheran dogmaticians of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries produce the same doctrinal position as does the approach of developing a doctrinal position attained through a direct study of the Bible? Remember, we are not concerned about the same exact words here, the answer to that would be an obvious "no." As I indicated in chapter 3, it is possible because Luther, the authors of the Lutheran Confessions, and the Lutheran dogmaticians of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries all were involved in thorough exegetical studies of the Bible and based their views, opinions, and teachings on what the Bible says. So, it is possible. On the other hand, it is possible through the application of "citation theology" to use references and quotations that are out of context or that applied to totally different situations and circumstances, and as a result attain a view that is totally different than the one attained through an exegetical study of Scripture. This is what has happened in the ELS. Using the Waltherian format of citation theology a different doctrinal position on the doctrines of the Church and its Ministry has been attained than the position attained through direct study of the Bible. In respect to these two doctrines, at least, the answer to the question is clearly "no"; the results, the doctrinal position, are not one and the same. They are very much different.

Has the Waltherian format hindered and hampered the ELS in the formulation of its doctrinal statements regarding the doctrine of the Church and its Ministry? The ELS conventions and this paper have shown that the Waltherian format has indeed hindered and hampered the formulation of ELS doctrinal statements.

The continued influx of pastors and congregations from the LCMS into the ELS has influenced the synodical procedures and the debates, as stated earlier. While these confessional Lutherans seek to uphold the Bible as the source and fountain of their beliefs, they continue to view the Church

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<sup>693</sup> <http://www.evangelicallutheransynod.org/President/news/elsnews/July-05/view>

and its Ministry through Walther's eyeglasses. They continue to perceive citation theology as a way to attain a doctrinal stance; they do not consider it just the best way, but the only way. As their numbers continue to increase through colloquy and acceptance into the ELS, it will require much patience, continual review and instruction as they seek to adapt themselves to their new surroundings and adjust to the doctrines and teachings of the ELS. The debate may continue; the doctrine will certainly be reviewed time and again. Procedures are in place which will allow this to happen, but for the moment, the synodical convention has adopted formal statements on the doctrines of both the Church and its Ministry. To arrive at these formal statements, they studied the Scriptures first and then went to see what other writers had to say about the subject, which is the procedure I have promoted throughout this thesis. God willing, they will continue to use such Scripture-based practices in the future and will continue to hold faithfully to the one thing that remains constant in this ever-changing world, the unalterable Word of God.

God's Word is our great heritage,  
 And shall be ours forever;  
 To spread its light from age to age  
 Shall be our chief endeavor.  
 Through life it guides our way;  
 In death it is our stay.  
 Lord, grant, while worlds endure,  
 We keep its teachings pure,  
 Throughout all generations.<sup>694</sup>

Hymn 583.

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<sup>694</sup> Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary. Mankato: The Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1996. (NOTE: This is the official hymnal of the ELS)

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<sup>695</sup> Also known as the St. Louis edition.

<sup>696</sup> also known as the Weimarer Ausgabe or (WA).

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