

Hold On ... To the Narrow Lutheran Middle

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Reverend Fathers, Beloved Sons, Dear Brothers in Christ Jesus!

The paper that is to set the tone for your Convention this year has the theme: Hold On! and Hold Forth! Pastor Seifert has asked that I address you with the first half of the intended emphasis, an emphasis on what we should hold on to. For if we are unclear about that, then the second half of the emphasis, the evangelism emphasis of holding forth, will be shallow at best, misleading and destructive of faith at worst.

In the Bible the balance between holding on and holding forth is everywhere evident. Already in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) Jesus made it clear. "Make disciples of all nations," he said. How? Disciples in what respect? "...teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you." The specific passage which is the center of your Convention likewise gets it right. St. Paul charges Timothy, "What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you – guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in you" (2 Timothy 1:13-14). Or if we might translate with the emphasis of the original: "That pattern of correct (i.e., sound, healthy) doctrine which you heard from me, that and none other keep in faith and love (which have their center, source and inspiration in and from Christ Jesus). The good deposit [the only one you have or need] guard as with your life through the Holy Spirit who is dwelling in you." In vs. 13 the adjective "sound" is really a verbal adjective; the doctrine is sound or healthy in itself, but it also gives soundness, health to those who hold and hear it. Faith is that confidence which comes from and is created by the Holy Spirit through the means of grace; it is confidence in the truth, in the fact that Christ has redeemed the world and therefore also has redeemed me. Love is that attribute which flows from the miraculous gift of faith; it seeks the best interest of my neighbor, as Christ in his life and death and resurrection and then in his gospel has sought my best interest and eternal well being.

The Apostle's words are filled with urgency, even drama: The devil and the world and false brothers are literally hell-bent on destroying that sound pattern. And the flesh does not much care for it either. For the flesh the message means persecution from the world, and it means dissension and strife with false brothers. The ministry of the Apostle gave abundant evidence of the same, and Paul wants his dear son Timothy to have no illusions; Paul's experience was not unique but typical. Exactly that opposition and dissension is what Christ promised the Apostle at the time of his conversion (Acts 9:16). And exactly that Christ had often promised the disciples during the three years of their training while he was preparing them for their work of teaching and sharing (e.g., Matthew 5:11-12, 10:17-36, John 15:18-16:4). Wherever the gospel is purely held and proclaimed, the devil's kingdom is threatened. He will therefore stir up persecution on every hand to wipe out the saving message.

If the persecution of the world does not destroy the pure preaching of the gospel, then he will use doctrinal deviation and strife to turn people from it. Emperor Maximilian II (d. 1576) seriously considered becoming a Lutheran; but the doctrinal strife in Lutheran circles was so fierce that he could not figure out what it really meant to be a Lutheran. So he remained a Catholic (though he refused Last Rites on his death bed).

If persecution from the outside and false doctrine within do not wipe out the gospel message, then the devil will attack the piety of the members. He will especially take aim at the piety of the pastors, so that, pure though the doctrine may be, their lives become such a disgrace that no one is interested in their doctrine. 1 Corinthians and the letters to the Seven Churches (Revelation 2-3) show us that that problem existed from the first days of Christianity. Indeed that devilish device goes back to Old Testament times (Jeremiah 7, Ezekiel 36), yes to the Garden of Eden itself. The Montanist and Donatist heresies in the ancient church were in part a reaction against the notion that "as long as I belong to the right church, it doesn't matter what I do." Luther, in

his preface to the Large Catechism and elsewhere often lamented that attitude in his own day. Shortly after Luther's death, the scandal of the bigamy of Philip of Hesse caused inestimable damage to the pure gospel message. The rise of Pietism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries likewise has its roots to a considerable extent in a loss among many of the necessary connection between the doctrines of justification and sanctification.

But see how the Apostle sets us right! Hold on, hold fast to that one true and only doctrine which has been given in the unerring Word inspired by the Holy Spirit who lives in you through that same Word. Guard it with your life! It works faith which saves and produces love to God, love which is active in obedience and in service to all. For the faith which trusts Christ alone for salvation is never alone. It always is busy, active, and zealous in loving service, as Luther so often liked to point out. And what greater service could there be than this that we strive to be faithful to the Word and then strive to share it with one another and with those who have it not? For it is the message that saves, the only message that saves, and our sharing of it is a most noble service that lasts for time and for eternity.

Yes, the Apostle gets it right. Like Jesus in the Great Commission he sees everything as dependent on teaching, correct teaching, teaching only that and nothing else but that which we have received from the Holy Spirit in the Word. Guard that deposit! Guard it with your life! And then act and live, preach and teach in accord with it.

Perhaps all of the above sounds obvious to you and utterly simple to follow. But it is not simple or obvious at all. Indeed the very urgency of the Apostle's words suggests that holding on is difficult, not at all obvious and certainly not to be taken for granted. The threat is always very real that we will emphasize one aspect of the message or of the Great Commission at the expense and ultimately almost to the exclusion of some other aspect. A not at all uncommon imbalance in the history of the church is the imbalance that occurs when orthodox teaching for the creation of faith in vs. 13 becomes the only thing that is important. Then the active love in the same verse, love which bears fruit in the Christian's life, not least in the sharing of that gospel may lie neglected, or even labeled as pietism. At least as dangerous is the reverse error, the error of an active love that shares but shares less and less because shallow or careless teaching leaves it with less and less to share. That is what happens when teaching is relegated to the back of the room and all the emphasis is placed on sharing. It dare never be either/or. It must be both/and. Otherwise we have not preserved either sound teaching or the love which shares the sound teaching.

Or do you perhaps still think that the balance is an easy one to strike? Permit me a brief walk down memory lane. I remember when I joined the Wisconsin Synod some 43 years ago how most sermons ended. No matter what the text we would be urged to read the Bible. In those days the Wisconsin Synod was called the doctrinal conscience of the Synodical Conference. The Northwestern Lutheran carried articles by J.P. Meyer on the Lutheran Confessions with a careful analysis of their content and significance. There was little in the way of emphasis on missions or on personal evangelism, compared to today. Some thought that there was an overemphasis on doctrinal purity for its own sake. And they wanted the pendulum to swing in a more gospel sharing direction. They said that what they wanted was a shift of emphasis, not a change of message, a re-balancing, not a new unbalancing.

Has the pendulum swung? Has it swung too far in the other direction? These days the application in almost all sermons, again no matter what the text, is: "Now be sure to go out and share the gospel!" Indeed some of our members have come to think that the only sin is the "not witnessing-to-my neighbor" sin; the shy and the timid leave church feeling guilty and ashamed.

Or I think of conventions in the "olden days." In those days after the fellowship controversy was resolved with a separation from the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and the dissolution of the Synodical Conference some actually said: "Now that we have the matter of pure doctrine settled, it's time to get out and evangelize." In this District some advocated the closing of our parish school system with the motto: "Why should some hear the gospel twice, when so many have not heard it once?" On the other side were those who, no matter what activity was proposed, would get up and protest: "I see a danger here!" And so the accusations

were hurled from the one side to the other: “If you DO something, you’re going down the road of Missouri!” or: “All you want to do is defend fortress orthodoxy; you’re too lazy actually to do anything else! Those who do nothing have no right to criticize those doing everything.” But by the end of the 60s the wind was in the sails of the “Do something” side of the floor and the “I see a danger here” crowd was rapidly losing influence. The cry went out for “Kingdom balance.” That meant devoting fewer resources to education and worker training and more resources to missions, both home and foreign.

You see, it’s not so easy to get the balance right, or even knowing if we have gotten or are getting it right. Nor should that come as any great surprise to us. The church throughout its history has had difficulty finding and keeping to the narrow middle between the false alternatives that emphasize the one at the expense of the other, either careful teaching or outreach. In the second century, for very different reasons than those at work today, outreach became everything. The unwritten slogan was: If you want to be orthodox, just belong to a church that was founded by an apostle or is in fellowship with a church founded by an apostle. That was in a day when the church was underground, persecuted by the government, without schools or a worker training system and with a membership scattered far and wide, with many members in slavery or illiterate. The test of orthodoxy became not faithfulness to a Bible that most did not have and could not read, but rather faithfulness to an outward, visible organization. Who could imagine at the time that such an emphasis would evolve into an excuse for not studying the Bible? For as long as one belonged to the right organization, he would eventually get to heaven. From that neglect of the Word, of careful teaching of the Word, eventually came forth the Antichrist, foretold by St Paul in his warning words in 2 Thessalonians 2.

But that error did not die with the Reformation. It has re-emerged in every century. Just belong to the right church, the right synod; we’ve got to reach out and grow the organization. How easily that can slip into: Then heaven is yours! No need to study. No need to think. No need to examine doctrine taught. No need to teach much doctrine at all. No need really to have a well-trained clergy. As long as our pastors are good “people-persons,” good with the kids, good at raising enough for the budget, yes, good sharers of the gospel, that’s what counts. Because our church has the truth (– though a less and less examined truth –), the main thing is to get out there and share it.

But what if you still don’t grow outwardly? Well, then there must be something wrong with the message, or the messenger, or at the very least with the methods we are using to share the gospel. So let’s try something new, something different. What’s the matter with our worker training system anyway? It doesn’t have enough methods courses, not enough on modern technology, not enough multi-cultural stuff, not enough psychology courses that show them how to persuade people. So let’s get more of that. If that means we have to get rid of some history or literature or the confessional languages, well, that’s all right. After all, it’s possible to be a good pastor without any of those courses, isn’t it?

And how shall we answer such a challenge to the system? For it is true that there is not one single course in our pre-seminary curriculum that is absolutely necessary for the training of pastors. In point of fact, not even the training in the biblical languages is absolutely essential for the training of pastors. It is not a specific course that defines good pre-seminary training. It’s the curriculum taken as a whole. And like an arch or a wall of bricks: no one brick is absolutely necessary for the wall; but when you take bricks out, you had better be sure you replace them with something as good or better. If you do not, sooner or later the wall will collapse.

Again, it is a matter of balance, and getting the balance right is no easy task. We have had what seem to be an unending series of study committees in the past twenty years trying to get that balance right in our worker training system. Prof. Toppe’s brilliant writings on the importance of the liberal arts, of refining reading, listening and writing skill and the use of the languages to that end were part of the marrow in our bones. The need to hang on to the classics so that we would understand better the world in which we live, how it got to be the way that it is, and the importance of that understanding for the gospel ministry were subjects of constant review by faculty in-service meetings at the beginning of each school year. The ability to analyze forms in the languages was supposed to carry over into at least the beginnings of a critical analytical facility in the humanities and in the study of the content of biblical texts. Much of that is either gone now or going. In its place

are courses in history and literature taught in the same way to future pastors as to future fourth grade teachers. In place of the things that the faculty used to study is a decree from the BME that the schools must report on how they will implement outreach initiatives in the curriculum, and the MLC faculty this summer will attend an outreach school to help achieve that emphasis in the classroom.

There is room for considerable disagreement on whether or not the balance has been struck or the mark missed altogether. But if we are going to continue on the path of weakening our traditional liberal arts and language emphasis in the interest of a greater emphasis on outreach and evangelism, at the very least some important questions need to be considered if we hope to retain any kind of balance. These questions are at once theoretical and utterly practical. If they are ignored because of a single-minded devotion to growth for its own sake, ultimately the growth will be weeds, not wheat. (Here is where we put on our: "I see a danger here" hat.) If the goal of worker training and the public activity of the church becomes too one sided in the interest of outward growth, we run the risk of forgetting some vital truths of the Scriptures about the nature of man, about faith, about the church itself. If we tinker endlessly under the delusion that the church will grow and prosper if we just get real "people-person" pastors and friendly members, then the pendulum has swung too far, and we are in danger of losing the heart and core of the Bible. Yes, while shouting "gospel, gospel" from the rooftops, we can do what so many have done before us, i.e., degenerate into a club, a lodge with a cross on top of it. Certainly no one wants that. Let us therefore give some thought to the following, as we consider this matter of holding on to the pattern of sound doctrine while we strive to hold forth an authentic and genuinely biblical gospel.

1. Have we taken into account the fact that the message of the law and the gospel is always counter-cultural? No one wants to hear that he is by nature a doomed and damned sinner. No one wants to hear that even in his best works he fails, he sins. No one wants to hear that according to the flesh he is a rank idolater, deserving of nothing but death and hell, and incapable of changing his situation or even contributing to the change. Indeed the chief difference between one culture and another may well be the different ways in which each culture displays its inherent and utter depravity. But regardless of the culture no one wants to hear that Jesus is everything, the whole of salvation, its beginning, its middle, its end, and that heaven is and can only be a gift purchased and won by Jesus alone. No one by nature wants to hear that faith is entirely a gift in the gospel, not the free decision of the believer by which he at least contributes a little bit to his own salvation. No one wants to hear what the liturgy confesses week in and week out, that we are still sinners, in desperate need of grace and pardon.
2. Have we taken into account the fact that in the Old Testament as well as in the New Testament and in the whole history of the church, the church has remained "*das Häuflein klein*"? It has remained "the little flock" precisely because the message of the law and the gospel is so entirely counter-cultural, so entirely loathsome to natural man, and because faith therefore is always from beginning to end not only a gift, but a miraculous gift! Is it possible that the constant search for new gimmicks that will bring people in betrays a basic lack of trust in the gospel itself as the only means able to work and preserve the miracle of faith? Is it possible that we really are so arrogant and so foolish as to imagine that our cute and clever presentations, our folksy and funny presentations will crush the old man and bring to life the new man, work which only God can do and has promised to do only through the law and the gospel?
3. Have we taken into account the fact that if the external growth of the church becomes the sole reason for its existence, we may be in for a big disappointment when all we get is what Jesus promised? Instead of growth there is resistance, resentment, persecution. Even

with growth there comes division, dissension, a church that mirrors Corinth much more than heaven. To be sure there are times when the outward growth of the church is spectacular and there is growth from the outside and peace on the inside. But those times are relatively rare, and they are never guaranteed to last. Do we really think that the Great Commission means we can win everybody? Do we too easily forget that the command to go, while promising success (cf. also Is. 55), still needs to be balanced with the doctrine of election? Does an emphasis on outreach that forgets the doctrine of election breed arrogance or self-importance in the mission vision, just as an overemphasis on the doctrine of election may breed laziness in outreach?

4. Have we taken into account that one sure way to grow is to forget the doctrine of original sin, and to forget much of the rest of the Bible as well. Forget the doctrine of fellowship, the biblical roles for man and woman, the teaching that prayer is not a means of grace. Maybe we can get to those later, but for now they will only hinder growth. Better that more people hear and believe some of the gospel than that we turn them off to all of the gospel by teaching too much of the truth too soon! Turn the Sunday service into a self-improvement course. Get people to feel good about themselves, and they will feel good about Jesus, and yes, about you too! Trivialize the law; lest people fear the wrath of God and turn away. Of course then you will have to trivialize the gospel too; for where there is no dread of hell there is little appreciation for the unspeakable riches of grace in Christ by which we are delivered from hell.
5. Have we taken into account that fact so obvious in the Scriptures that the joy of the gospel is not the joy of the world. It is a joy that comes after the cry of the publican in the temple and the Christian in the opening liturgy: God, be merciful to me, a sinner! It is a joy that is rooted in an Easter Sunday that must have Good Friday in front of it. It is a joy that clings to the promises of God in spite of all the outward reasons for gloom. To cite just one example: St. Paul's most upbeat and happy epistle is Philippians, a prison epistle. The apostle goes on and on about joy in that epistle, not because everything is going well, but because nothing is going well except for the certainty that God will always keep his Word and finally deliver us. Luther talks about that kind of joy so often; he says that we should rejoice when things go badly, because it is proof that God always keeps his promise. And if he keeps the promise so difficult for him, the promise that allows and sends suffering to those he loves, then we can be sure he will keep the rest of his promises too.

We want to reach out. We want to grow. But if we become obsessed with numbers, we run the risk of forsaking the truth. Success first and foremost must be success in holding fast to the pattern of sound doctrine. Faithfulness to the message must precede and surround the message that is shared. Otherwise the love we allege will be a love, not for souls, not for the Word, not for Jesus, but merely for the synod as an institution, as an end in itself.

So you see, balance is not so easy. It requires constant attention and careful self-examination according to the norm of the Scriptures themselves. If we are to achieve or maintain such a balance between Hold On! and Hold Forth!, we may need to give some attention to two other matters where the balance between Hold On! and Hold Forth! is often lost. These other two are the necessary balance between exegetical theology and dogmatic theology, and the balance between the doctrine of the universal priesthood of all believers and the doctrine of the holy office of the ministry.

It is easy to lose the balance between exegetical theology and dogmatic theology. The early years of the Synodical Conference and the early history of the Wisconsin Synod demonstrate the effort to find and maintain

such a balance. Exegetical theology is the study of books and passages in the Bible. It is the crowning glory of the Lutheran Church that it loves the Scriptures and delights in careful examination of books, passages, grammar and individual words in the original languages of the Bible. We love to do that, to mine the mind of the Holy Spirit, to breathe in his sacred breath through the very words that he breathed into the apostles and prophets. It is a worthy end in itself.

But exegesis is also a means to an end, namely the formulation of the collected wisdom of the Spirit into doctrinal propositions that summarize what God has to say on any given subject. That's the task of dogmatic theology. Sometimes in the history of the church dogmatic theology got too important. Passages of the Bible were dragged kicking and screaming to make a dogmatic point, with little attention paid to the careful consideration of the passage itself. When that happens orthodoxy can degenerate into a mindless recitation of dogmatic formulae with little regard for their life-giving source. But the reverse can happen too. In fact it does happen when the balance between Hold On! and Hold Forth! is lost. Listen to some of the best preachers on TBN, all very outreach and mission minded people, and you will hear some really clever, sometimes very good, studies of biblical texts and applications of those texts that are quite timely. But you will also notice that the study of the text has been separated from the centrality of Christ in the Scriptures. You will notice that the message has been separated from the great doctrines of sin and grace. You will notice that justification has either been ignored or has been confused with sanctification. You will notice that even sanctification has become a self-help course in how to get along better with myself or my spouse or maybe even with God. When everything becomes Hold Forth!, the doctrinal unity of the Scriptures gets lost in a lust for a superficial relevance that gives up the heart and core of the Bible, Christ, justification by grace alone, the true nature of faith, the means of grace, the theology of the cross.

We need good exegesis for its own sake. But we need good exegesis for the sake of dogmatic summaries of the scriptures as well. We need Bible classes that examine individual passages with care. We need Bible classes that come to doctrinal conclusions in harmony with the *analogy of faith*. We need sermons that are faithful to the text. We need sermons that do not shun the doctrinal context of the text and its expression in the Confessions and in the grand procession of doctrines through the various seasons of the liturgical year. In short we need sermons that are as our fathers used to say *Schriftgemäss, Bekenntnisgemäss, und Zeitgemäss*.

Finding the balance, again, is not always easy. But it is by no means impossible. The greatest dogmatic theologians of the church have also been among her greatest exegetes. Martin Chemnitz, our greatest dogmatician, had as his motto: *Ad fontes!* In our own history men like Schaller, J.P. Meyer, Carl Lawrenz spring to mind, and many others, men who loved the Scriptures and therefore loved the doctrinal conclusions drawn from the Scriptures. But history demonstrates as well that the balance can be lost. When it is, it is usually lost because of a loss of balance between Hold On! and Hold Forth!

The second matter that requires some scrutiny is the balance between the doctrine of the universal priesthood of all believers on the one hand and the doctrine of the holy office of the ministry on the other hand. And again, history suggests that there is often a certain tension between the two, maybe even a necessary tension. But where the balance between Hold On! and Hold Forth! gets lost, one will see that the balance between these two doctrines comes under attack as well. For years our synod was accused of being a thoroughly clergy dominated church. The pastor decided everything, did everything. For only the pastor knew everything. But with the renewed emphasis on evangelism came a renewed (corrective?) emphasis on the doctrine of the universal priesthood of all believers. But we may wonder whether the pendulum has swung now too far the other way. To be sure, the pastors cannot do it all. We need our members to take seriously their role as priests before God to whom everything Christ has been given, so that they might share it.

But where the universal priesthood is emphasized almost if not entirely to the exclusion of the doctrine of the holy office of the ministry, things start to get out of hand. Once upon a time the term "minister" had a very precise meaning that everyone understood and accepted. Has the term now joined the word "marriage" in becoming meaningless? Everyone a minister? We pray now for all of our separate, our individual ministries. It all sounds so democratic, so bourgeois, middle class, so American, so politically correct. Is the pastor just a team leader? Is he the coach? Is he just the "worship leader"? Is he nothing other than an elected representative

of the group? In speaking of “representative ministry” do we mean that the pastor only represents the congregation, that his Call and his absolution do not come from Christ, but only from the people? Have we forgotten the doctrinal point that the only essential difference between a *mediate* Call and an *immediate* Call is in the way in which the Call is transmitted?

When all these things begin to come to pass – when the above considered questions and matters needing scrutiny are finally and fully dismissed – then lift up your heads and behold. You will see bright and smiling middle class faces on billboards declaring that we have all been saved. We are all happy as clams in the Wisconsin Synod. And if you want to be happy, just come and visit us. You’ll find a warm and welcoming happy-face service, without depressing talk of sin and repentance, and certainly no “Deny yourself, take up the cross and follow Him!” We will have fully succumbed to the theology of glory. We will have forgotten that the church on earth imitates Christ in his state of humiliation; exaltation comes not without mortification, not without death to self and finally the grave. Christ’s exaltation came on Easter Sunday. Ours comes in the resurrection and not before. And guess what the end result is when the balance has been completely lost. Where the balance has been lost, the message of sin and grace, law and gospel becomes gospel reductionism, universalism. Universalism is the heresy that God is happy with everybody just as they are, and forgiveness is really little more than a license to continue in sin. When universalism has triumphed, there will really be no further need for outreach, no need to come to the WELS. For there will be nothing there worth coming to. Can you count the number of churches where that has already happened? God has promised that his church will always survive. But he has not promised that it will always survive among us. Do you see how vital it is to make sure that we have a balance? Do you see how easy it is to lose the balance, and that with all the best of intentions? If all the emphasis is on Holding Forth, there eventually is nothing to hold forth.

As so often happens in history, once the pendulum has begun to swing, it can easily swing from one extreme to the opposite extreme. Have we reached that point in our history? Has the pendulum swung so far that the solid Lutheran middle is in danger of becoming a wasteland? Are our pastors and our members running off to the right and to the left, each to do his own thing, and that with little but contempt for the whole or for the “brothers”? In some services the pastor’s favorite pronoun is “I.” Has he forgotten that he wears a robe to hide himself so that the emphasis may be on Jesus? Has he forgotten that his greatest honor is in his Call to be an ambassador who has just come from the palace with the message of pardon for those doomed to death and hell? Does he really think there is room for pulpit humor in that role? It would be better for us all to heed the Word of the Lord to Isaiah: “This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word” (Is. 66:2). St. John (1 John 32:1-2) reminds us that before the judgment seat of God we have but one consolation when our heart condemns us. That consolation is not the autobiography of the pastor, not his personality and cleverness. It is the One who is greater than our heart. It is Jesus; the sin-bearer, Jesus the risen, ascended and coming again Redeemer.

Or at the other end of the spectrum, and perhaps as a reaction against the service as entertainment crowd, we have those who over-defend the pastor’s role by what we used to call a “Romanizing tendency” in the liturgical practice. But do we really think that by ignoring the level of understanding in our people we can wow them into respect for the message and the messenger by making liturgical purity an end in itself and that contrary to our Confessions (AC, XV, 2, XVII, 40-41, FC, X, et al.)? Would we not do better to remove the stumbling blocks to worship and to our unity that are presented by unnecessary ostentation? Can we find the middle that Jesus presents in the last book of the Bible? John falls at Jesus’ feet as a dead man when Jesus appears in his glory. And what raises him up? The Word of the Savior in the gospel (Rev. 1:17-18). Yes, and then we catch the beautiful sameness and the beautiful difference in the balance between and the holy office of the ministry and the universal priesthood of all believers; Jesus holds the stars in his right hand and walks in the midst of the candlesticks (Rev. 2-3)! They are the same—only different.

Hold on to the pattern of sound doctrine, so that what you hold forth is the gospel, not a gimmick. Hold on to the faith and to the love that is in Christ Jesus so that the Holy Spirit who dwells in you by that saving message may come to dwell also in the hearts of those with whom you share the message or to whom you proclaim it. Hold on so that what you hold forth causes the church to grow in grace and in knowledge (1 Cor. 1:4-9, Eph. 1:17-19, Col. 1:3-7, et al.) to the glory of God and the increase of peace and joy from Christ in the hearts of the faithful.

But be aware of the temptation to let go of the heritage that has been handed down to us from our fathers at so great a cost to them. Getting this balance right so that we have something worth holding forth has profound implications for our activity as a church body. On the one hand we have almost limitless opportunities for proclaiming the gospel. They are often expensive and our resources are limited. On the other hand we have those opportunities at a time when hostility to the message is increasing with an immorality of mind and body so pervasive that the best recognize and escape its clutches only with the greatest difficulty. In such a world the church cannot afford to save money for outreach by superficial training of the servants of the Word. But thorough training too is expensive and the competition for limited resources ever more intense.

I have no magic solution to the problem. I make only the appeal that we remain aware of the need to do both, to Hold On! and to Hold Forth! I make only the appeal that we recognize the need for balance and that in considering that need and its urgency we not jump too quickly or too far from one extreme to the other. Some have concluded that the balance already has been lost, perhaps irretrievably lost. I pray that they are mistaken, that it is not yet too late. At the same time I cannot deny a gnawing sense that we are losing our way, that outreach has become so important that depth of training for our workers and instruction for our people is in retreat.

Our school system, the envy of all Christian church bodies, dare not lose the Hold On! in a one sided emphasis on Hold Forth! The problem is, in a word: MONEY. They need to compete with wealthier public systems to stay viable. So let's make the schools an outreach tool. Nothing wrong with that is there? We need the tuition income. But now we have to confront the temptation to make the message agreeable to heretics and unbelievers; if we don't they won't come! And then there is the matter of the fellowship principles when it comes to high school choirs made up of members and non-members. Our grade schools and our area Lutheran high schools need to remain devoted to the pure proclamation of all of God's Word; an outreach emphasis, be it the high-minded one of sharing the gospel with the lost, or the purely pragmatic one of preserving the institution and its staff, dare not be an emphasis that dilutes the message. Finally, if they want to do nothing more than successfully compete with public schools, they will ultimately lose the reason for their existence.

At the same time our prep schools, if they are to be saved, if they are to be worth saving, need to remember their distinct purpose. They cannot afford to lose themselves in a competition with the area Lutheran high schools. If our prep schools merely try to compete with the area Lutheran high schools in curriculum, in extra-curricular activities, if they lose their focused academic rigor and expectation, then why bother with the expense? If they are to remain viable, it will not be because they collect a lot of bodies that could be served just as well by the broader and more general purposes of an area Lutheran high school. Their curriculum, the rigor of their instruction, the emphasis on critical reading and analytical writing, on long term memory skills, on history and literature that is more than merely topical will aim at forming servants of the Word that understand the world. Along with imparting an understanding of the world, the prep schools will hold out the challenge of sharing a gospel to which that world is unremittingly hostile. It will strive to balance the joy of the gospel ministry with its challenge, its difficulties, its inherent frustration. In language training we can thump our breast all we want, that our traditional commitment to the biblical languages remains intact; but the simple fact of the matter is that no church body that has given up on a strong prep system with a strong emphasis on an analytical approach to language study has succeeded in retaining a strong biblical language emphasis in its seminaries. The assignment of the prep schools is a more limited one than that of the area Lutheran high schools. If the prep schools do not recognize that, if they do not aim at fulfilling their own distinctive purpose as best they can, they will lose out in the competition for limited resources and the church will be much the poorer for it. For when the college receives no standard bearers with a high bar to which others aspire and finally reach, then education at

the college level falters. It panders to the lowest common denominator. Grade inflation makes things look nice on the outside. But underneath rigor gives way to the merely popular, and those who go on to the seminary cannot read critically, cannot write analytically, can only to an increasing degree be clever and personable.

Then what will happen to Hold Forth! when Hold On! has been lost. What will happen to an outreach emphasis when de Tocqville's description (Democracy in America) of American religion has also come to include us – a mile wide and an inch deep, always enamored of the merely emotional and flitting from one transitory fad to another.

Perhaps, just perhaps, getting the balance right isn't so easy after all? Making disciples in all the world by teaching all that Jesus has commanded requires a church with teachers who know all that he has commanded. It requires a church with pastors who are serious about and ready to take on the opposition from the devil, the world and the flesh to everything that he has commanded. Getting such teachers takes time. It is more expensive than getting teachers who are just good at the latest methods, or at being cute and clever "people-persons." I found it interesting that the report of the latest study committee on the prep system in its own way suggested the need to revisit the matter of balance, of balancing resources between Hold On! and Hold Forth! It used to be that the call for balance was in the direction of more for outreach, less for education. But the pendulum has swung. Listen to the committee's comment:

Our synod faces many challenges as we seek to carry out our ministry program in a rapidly changing world. The same convention that adopted a North American Outreach emphasis also directed a review of our prep school system. Ministerial education and sharing the gospel are linked. Both are vital for the work that God has entrusted to us. We want to share the gospel with others and to do that we need well-prepared candidates for all phases of ministry. Our future called workers need to be solidly grounded in God's Word and, especially for pastoral candidates, well equipped to use the biblical languages. We not only need well-prepared workers, but we also need them in adequate numbers to meet our future needs. At the same time, we see all of the opportunities around us to bring the gospel to people through our established congregations and new missions. Our synodical challenge is to be wise stewards as we seek to carry out a balanced ministry. ("Report to the Twelve Districts," the Report of the Prep School Study Committee – 2, p. 25)

So we need to strike a balance between in-depth teaching of our pastors and teachers and then outreach with those gifts of well-trained pastors and teachers that Christ gives to his church (Ephesians 4). And in that training we need also to strike a balance; we want workers who love the truth because they know the truth, and who love Jesus therefore and love his people. For the world is indeed dying, and we have to get out there with the gospel. To do that we really don't need any more James Kennedy Wanna-Bes, who think that the words "worship" and "entertainment" are synonyms, and that the church will grow if we can just get rid of the stultifying liturgy and doctrinal emphasis that "turns people off." Their creed will eventually degenerate into "Jesus loves me, this I know, and this is all I want to know!" There are indeed times when such a theme is the right answer to the despair of the confused and afflicted conscience. But as the sum and substance of what we have to preach and teach it certainly misses altogether the Great Commission challenge to "teach all things" and St. Paul's charge to Timothy to guard as with his life the pattern of sound teaching which the Holy Spirit had entrusted to Timothy in the Sacred Scriptures.

Let me close with the timely metaphor of Luther. With just a few words he says all that I have wanted to say: "In a good government there is need not only for good builders and rulers, but also for defenders, protectors, and vigilant guardians" (Large Catechism, The Third Petition [Kolb: p. 448]). To which I can only add: Amen! May God give us grace to get it right, or grace and strength to reclaim it!