

Reflections on the Story of the Wis. Luth. Synod: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow

By: E.A. Sitz

[Read at the 1972 Arizona-California District Convention.]

The Church is always in need of reformation. That is to say, as Scripture indicates, that the Gospel is not in absolute possession of any denomination, church body, synod, nor congregation. Not only that Scripture warns against false trends, but finds it necessary continually to instruct and correct. History also clearly shows that it has been a continuing struggle toward purity of doctrine, so to say, a variable approaching the limit. The Gospel is a blessing that must not only be cherished, loved, and adhered to, but it is a good that must be guarded and in order to retain it one must fight the good fight. And that goes for the Wisconsin Synod as well. I am happy to see that some polemics are appearing in our Quarterly.

We are reminded of Luther's classic observation, "The Gospel is a shower that falls. All under turns green. But it passes on and returns not again. It is a fact that the Gospel has not remained in one place in its purity above the memory of an old man."

Easy it comes off to find and castigate false doctrine and practice in the Roman Catholic Church and in the Reformed bodies. But Lutheranism is not immune to this evil plague. Fifty years ago over the signature of one of the editors of the *Lutheran Witness* editorials appeared regularly that uncovered and censured Reformed teachings ending up in the refrain, "We thank God that it is not thus with us." What would he say today of the Missouri Synod? Rarely was there so much as a whisper that some things might need correction in that synod. Scripture says, "The time is come for judgment to begin at the house of God." We should do well in the Wisconsin Synod to ponder and apply this word. But self-criticism still proves itself a virtue seldom practiced in Lutheran circles. One of the serious sins found in the Lutheran Church remains never to admit you were wrong, or made a mistake.

It will constitute a top criterion for the future of the Wisconsin Synod: its ability - and that of its individual members - to exercise and accept self-judgment by applying the Word of God, specifically the Gospel, to itself. For the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the power of God to reform, renew, and reinvigorate the life of the Church, and it exclusively. We sum up this introduction with the four principles laid down by St. Paul in his Letter to Titus. They read: sound doctrine, sound faith, sound speech, and sober-mindedness. Well were it for our Synod if the Holy Spirit were to inculcate these four in our synodical ranks through the Gospel.

The Theology of the Wisconsin Synod

The history of the Early Church after the decease of the Apostles was filled with doctrinal confusion and controversy. Everywhere there sprang up Greek philosophy, Greek speculation, and reason pressuring theology. Political intrigue and imperial interference coupled with oppression, violence, exile, and wholesale excommunications, deprivation of property and livelihood and rank, persecution even to the death tore at the vitals of the Church. Yet the Early Church must be credited with having wrestled with, often in savage debate, the tremendously profound and fundamental doctrines of the Trinity and the two natures in the Person of Christ. But it generally left the work of defining Baptism, Holy Communion, the Priesthood of Believers, the role of Faith, the Last Things, and Church and Ministry to later generations.

This brief paper cannot spare room for a discussion of medieval theological struggles, innovations, and aberrations. Its attempts to meet the loud cry for reform came to naught. The monasteries failed, the imperial courts had no better success, and the church councils wallowing in ecclesiastical corruption only made reform more necessary. These all failed in their efforts because they understood not the Gospel and so could not apply what proves to be the only remedy when reform is called for. It remained for one man under God and with God's Word to bring a genuine reformation about. That was Martin Luther. He came out of the crucible of agony caused by a knowledge of sin and a burned conscience into faith in a gracious, forgiving God, into the

peace that only the Gospel can give. And so the Reformation was brought about by the Word of God published by the lone monk, a Reformation that still influences modern times 450 years later because its principles still apply and support what is sensible and good in today's world.

After his death, as he had foreseen and foretold, his Reformation ran out into troublous times. This occurred in two directions: the reign of dogmatics in the 17th century that rolled away into the sands of orthodoxism and intellectualism with its *distinguendum est*, in the other direction that of pietism, an emotional protest against the rigidity of dogmatics. Both intellectualism and emotionalism brought on and ended up in rationalism. For dogmatics tends to apply logical conclusion to Scripture, rationalizes and binds by proof texts lifted out of context, while pietism soars away to ride the clouds of emotion only eventually to plummet into the fog of sentimentality. Both ultimately run the danger of losing the power of the Gospel.

It was in the early mid nineteenth century that the Lutheran Church in Germany and the Scandinavian countries experienced a reawakening, a form of pietism that reacted against rationalism. Alongside in the arts romanticism appeared, for there exists always a relationship between what is going on in the Church and in the world. The Church influences the world, on rare occasions like in the Reformation, for the better; but too often for the worse because of a departure in some point from the Word of God. This type of pietism crossed denominational lines and brought on what in Germany was called the Union. It was an attempt of the King of Prussia to force a union of the Reformed and Lutheran Churches. It irked the king, who was Reformed, that he could not take Communion with the queen, who was a Lutheran. Those Lutherans who protested were subjected to harsh measures, including imprisonment and exile. Partly in consequence large numbers emigrated to America, led by staunch Lutheran leaders. The report of good land available appealed to many others and they joined the emigrants. To serve the staunch and to gather the others into the Christian fold the mission houses in Germany sent men to minister to them. This type of activity marks the beginnings of the Wisconsin Synod.

University training was almost unknown in the Synod. That of the men who had come was almost exclusively that of the mission houses, a training much like that of Springfield in the early days of the Missouri Synod. As a result doctrinal solidity left somewhat to be desired; and the Missouri Synod looked down upon Wisconsin as having fallen short of Lutheran stability. But when Hoenecke, a university man, and his friends made their conservative stand known, they were joined by a growing number of mission house men. Their influence made possible to organize with Missouri the Synodical Conference in 1872.

In the early eighties the savage *Gnadenwahlstreit* broke out, centering on the predestination question, "*Cur alii prae aliis.*" Concomitant with that question came the debate on conversion. The fight took place on dogmatical fields. Remarkable it is that the Ohioans and their cohorts had the dogmaticians on their side with their *intuitu fidei*. This forced the Missouri men and those of Wisconsin to draw toward the Confessions and Luther, and ultimately in the case of Wisconsin a conscious return to the Scriptures. This trend flowered in the Wisconsin Synod in the fore part of the 1900's in what has been called the Wauwatosa Theology. It came as a determined effort of the Wauwatosa Seminary Faculty, then consisting of the Professors John P. Koehler, August Pieper, and John Schaller. Sad to say, neither the Wisconsin Synod, to say nothing of the Missouri Synod, ever took up whole-heartedly with the so-called Wauwatosa Gospel, though some of its influence surfaces in Wisconsin circles today. The debate revolved largely about the doctrine of Church and Ministry. Emphasis was laid on getting back into the Bible, study of the Scriptures also in the original texts. Exegesis was insisted upon, isagogics gone into, more than just a passing acquaintance with the Lutheran Confessions expected, a more intense knowledge of Church History encouraged, and a reading knowledge of Luther was said to be a necessity for a rounded Lutheran theologian.

Did you know that Professor Pieper's exegesis of Isaiah, chapters 40 to 66, has received approbation in theological circles, especially for his stupendous success in rendering the text in beautiful metrical German? Pieper's effort reflects the thought of the Prophet with fidelity. Just two weeks ago I read the following comment in a German theological journal regarding the Church History of Prof. Koehler. The editor makes the astounding resume: "Koehler's magnum opus, his History of the Christian Church of 770 pages, appeared in 1917. Judgments of an acute depth, such as are not found in Europe nor America! The shallowing out of Missouri, primarily because of the influence of Americanization and then also because of German theological

faculties, Koehler could have stemmed, if the Missourians had diligently worked through this volume.” Since I have put in a personal note on these two professors, let a word be said about Prof. Schaller. He was a master of German in print; he understood the student, he handled his dogmatics, homiletics, but especially pastoral theology well, but above all was a gentleman. I did not personally know Dr. Hoenecke, but Mrs. Sitz knew him well, for as a girl she went in and out of the Hoenecke home. She says he was the finest man she ever knew, so kind and considerate. My wife also loved the lady of that house, saying that she never has seen a more harmonious home than theirs. Indeed, I knew Mrs. Schaller, Mrs. Pieper, and Mrs. Koehler, all of whom were ladies that reflected a luster on their homes.

To return to Church and Ministry. Prof. Ernst did not share the Wauwatosa stand on Church and Ministry. At Northwestern he used to drill us on the following definition: “A church consists of an organized group of Christians in one locality who have a pastor; as such they possess the keys of the kingdom.” Pastor F. Uplegger in the famous Manitowoc debate on that matter told one of its protagonists, “I can prove to you in two minutes that your assertion lacks grounds. When you were called to Wausau by a splinter group who had no pastor, according to your stand they were no congregation.”

Our Synod’s stand on Scriptural grounds remains that any group of Christians, gathered about the Means of Grace in orderly composition and action, is Church, be they a local congregation, a synod, or even a Christian eleemosynary institution and has the keys.”

Closely related to Church and Ministry one finds the divine call. A rather run-away concept of the divine call has left the track. In an essay read to a synodical convention it was said that ministers, professors, athletic coaches, teachers, women teachers, organists, choir directors, Sunday school teachers, all have a ‘divine’ call. It becomes ironic when the law decreeing equal pay for equal work forces our Synod to take a hard second look at this matter and puts us on the road to sober-mindedness.

We are on the question of theology and what makes a Lutheran theologian. How many of us read Scripture prayerfully, book-wise, consecutively, and in context? Who of us reads regularly in the Lutheran Confessions? When have you spent time reading Church History? Show me the man among us who knows his Luther. He who meets these qualifications affirmatively can under the guidance of the Holy Spirit begin to lay claim to being a Lutheran theologian. And what about tomorrow? Perhaps as we progress with this paper we may stumble onto a modicum of prognosis.

In genuine Lutheran theology it has always been *sola scriptura, sola gratia, sola fide*. The full atonement wrought by Jesus Christ in His blood has laid the solid foundation for salvation by faith alone without good works. But today we hear more in our Synod about fellowship than any other point. Scripture speaks about fellowship. This fellowship flourishes within the Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints. It transcends any other type of fellowship. For this fellowship is of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and lies on an absolute level, a level that the Holy Spirit Himself has established. It takes precedence over denominational and synodical fellowship. For the fellowship of faith rests on the rock bottom of the Word of God. But the external Synodical Fellowship based at best on confessional grounds formulated from Scriptures by human hand does not roll on the level of inspiration, nor is it to be equated with fellowship in the Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints. Several dangers appear in over-drastring application of synodical fellowship: 1) nurturing cocksureness; 2) the danger of becoming pharisaic; 3) of falling into the separatistic slough of the CLC and LCR.

The Church is healthiest when it succeeds in declaring the whole counsel of God, for the Word of God, Holy Scripture, the Gospel manifests itself as the spiritual antibiotic against the virus of error. As Christ also says, “If ye abide in My Word, then are ye truly My disciples.” And St. Paul’s incisive word comes to mind, “If any man preaches unto you any other gospel than that which ye received, let him be anathema.” On the other hand, let no one assert that he, or any body of Christians, including our Synod has an absolute knowledge of the Scriptures and their doctrinal content.

Reflections On Theological Disciplines

It seems appropriate at this point to put some thought on the branches of theological study. As we all know, they are listed as Dogmatics, Exegesis, Church History, Isagogics, Pastoral Practice, and, not to forget, Homiletics. At the outset we state that subjective treatment may - and to a certain degree will - enter into the teaching of Dogmatics, Exegesis, Church History, and Pastoral Practice. What Admiral Morrison in his recent excellent *History of the United States* says of historians, namely, that there exists no truly objective history since no historian can divest himself of the subjective, holds true also of the dogmatician, the exegete, the church historian, the pastoral theolog, and the homiletician. Their writings are one step away from the sole integrity of Holy Scripture, which only is inspired, inerrant, and infallible. When St. John warns us "to prove the spirits," the Holy Spirit speaking through John makes absolutely no exceptions: he includes every one and every theologian except those who wrote the books of the Bible. Outside of them none dare claim absolute perfection.

The dogmatician must constantly guard against subjecting Scripture to a conclusion he has already arrived at. Dogmatics, yea, even our Confessions, must always submit to the scrutiny and mastery of Scripture, not turned about. It is a matter of fact that no system of dogmatics agrees wholly with any other dogmatician's system, giving rise to the conclusion that Dogmatics in general do not perfectly reflect the teaching of Scripture. Will your reading of Franz Pieper's *Christian Dogmatics* call forth complete agreement in every detail? Because Dogmatics is one step away from inspiration and depends to no trifling extent on intellectual process, ratiocination, and conclusion, it invites debate, may engender disagreement leading to factional strife, as we see it today in the disastrous break in the Missouri Synod. Yet Dogmatics serves a useful purpose when rightly pursued. It calls for meticulous study of Scriptural doctrines. Its rightful place calls for subservience to Scripture.

No method of approach to Scripture may lay claim to absolute understanding of its text. That holds true therefore of Exegesis, whose field has to do with the direct exposition of the text. Ideally Exegesis lets the text itself divulge its content in context, time, in historical, and in geographical, and ethnic environment. Proper exegetical procedure lies closer to Scripture than the discipline of Dogmatics, for it has to do with the running narrative of the Bible. Yet it also cannot lay claim to infallibility. For instance, no two exegetes will find themselves in total agreement on the Letter to the Romans. Beyond that it finds itself subject even to gross misuse, as the theological libraries amply demonstrate, and as church history always has shown.

In our day its misuse has cloaked itself in the toga of scholarship, a scholarship that despite a wide range of detail has nonetheless turned out shallow, conceited, and disrespectful of the authority of Scripture. Much of it shows the 'exegete' wheeling into the enclosure of Scripture bricks processed in his own intellectual kiln, and after he has dumped the load into the yard of Holy Writ he exclaims, "See what I found!"

Let us view two recent derailments in exegesis. Rom. 16:17 was lifted from its context and applied to such who to some degree erred from the Word of God. Then came along such who noted verse 18 and sought to apply exegetical procedure. The unfortunate translation in the King James Version 'belly' for the Greek '*koilia*' proved a shocker. But now '*koilia*' answers best to our word 'heart.' Jesus plainly tells us that the heart is the source of all evil. But He also portrays the heart of the believing Christian as the fountain of that which is good. Now the Greek felt joy, sorrow, fear -indeed any emotional experience - in the region of the solar plexus, as we do too when a siren and flashing red light tell us we have been speeding. Hence St. Paul's use of '*koilia*' in Rom. 16:18. In that passage '*koilia*' is not looked upon as the source of vile, low, lascivious passions, as modern Americans connect them with the belly and below the belt, but the highest philosophical thought and pseudo-religious vagaries on any plane. Let the conceited 'scholars' take note.

The other recent derailment has to do with the same passage in Romans 16. It exegizes: "Simply mark, and then cut off." Romans 16:18 is slighted. Verse 17, they say, places its emphasis on the work "Mark." Once you have marked, then you must cut off. No room, they say, is left for remonstrance, patient discussion, and correction; Mark, and then to the guillotine. All admonitions to patience, longsuffering in love restoring the erring are lost sight of.

The chief error introduced into exegesis stems from the relation to Scripture. It is demoted to the level of human documents, hence not only subject to criticism, but also to mistake. The absolute authority of Scripture

as the Word of God is not only denied, but the critic leaps into the chair of authority. Ultimately he reaches the point where he not only tears the Bible to shreds ready for the waste-basket, but even declares that Jesus committed errors of ignorance. In our day we must guard against letting top doctrinal interests, e.g., fellowship, creep in to color interpretation. Again, we find the broad effort of Lenski to cover the whole New Testament lacking profundity, showing not a little shallowness, and occasionally controlled by dogmatic interest. For true exegesis reveals a profound respect, reverence, and faith in Holy Writ as the absolute Word of God. A competent exegete will revel in a running exposition of a whole book of the Bible, heart and ear attuned to the voice of God in every word. In short, he will let the text speak. We had men like that in the Synodical Conference: Dr. Georg Stoeckhardt, Prof. John P. Koehler, and Prof. August Pieper.

We come to Church History. It is most profitable if rightly studied. Enlightening it is to trace the progress of the Gospel and fortunes of the kingdom of God in this sinful world. Again regression appears, even apparent bankruptcy when the tyranny of the Papacy ruled, and recurring attempts at reform. Through it all one can recognize the truth of Christ's promise that the gates of hell shall not prevail against the true Church, though at times it was reduced to the very small remnant Isaiah speaks of.

Church History was largely ignored in Lutheran circles generally in America. That was also true in the component synods of the old Synodical Conference. To this day the Missouri Synod lacks acquaintance with the history of the Church. Had they been at home in it, they might have been spared their present pass. From the turn of the century Church History occupied a prominent place in our Seminary's course till about 1930. Then again it began to fade out. History can show us how often and in how many ways the Word of God in Gospel and Sacrament has been twisted, obscured, and been departed from. Always these breaks have derailed the Church, damaged it, brought on strife, division, schism, and heresy, even bloodshed and the stake. Again the history of the Church has been filled with abortive attempts to salvage the wreck only to fail because the Gospel, the power of God, was not employed. One wonders how the true Church survived. Indeed, if the Holy Spirit had not intervened and raised up men like Augustine and Ambrose, and sustained the lowly and the quiet in the faith, the massive confusion must have become much worse.

But history can also be used to damage the Church and our Synod. Why go back into the Middle Ages to borrow liturgical practice from the Roman Catholic Church? The collect for the 5th Sunday after Trinity is pure papal theology, as is also that for Ash Wednesday. Why the miserably short collect for Christmas, and then four long ones for New Year? Why in the morning service is the absolution followed by a cry for mercy in the Kyrie? And when Lutheran liturgics has always emphasized the centrality of the sermon, why have we borrowed the long liturgical tail following the sermon in the evening service? When attention was drawn to the anomalous ballast, one of our Seminary professors pronounced it wonderful in content. It was encouraging when another leading light agreed with an enthusiastic handshake that it is what the Germans call '*Zopf*,' we might say a Chinese pigtail. Dr. Sasse, probably the greatest living church historian, a man who came from rank liberalism to conservative Lutheranism, whose vast knowledge of history I came to know at the Oakland Conclave in 1959, also on occasion makes the mistake of laying ground for his liturgical, and even his doctrinal, stand not from Scripture solely, but on the happenings of history.

On a different historical direction one must admire the German Free Churches, which within the fortnight plan to merge, our Confessional Church excepted, for their knowledge of, and their adherence to, the Book of Concord. On occasion the impression is left that the Confessions take precedence over Scripture. Well to remember that the Book of Concord must bow to biblical control and censure. It were well if better acquaintance with the Book of Concord held sway with us; and it would add no little profit to our ministry if the ministerium of WELS were to read more Church History, using sober-minded evangelical critique.

Consideration of Pastoral Practice would take us too far. Permit a pertinent remark, however. Pastoral's first concern must be cure of souls. What a terrific responsibility rightly to apply the Word of God to the individual! And who of us can join with the prominent pastor of yesteryear in our Synod who stated, "I know that I am a sinner, but I am not cognizant of having committed any sin in office." Some have mistaken soul cure to mean that type of clean practice that affords boasting of a "clean" congregation. So-called clean practice runs in danger of degenerating into application of rule and regulation; let's face it, stark legalism. And legalistic

practice in the name of the Gospel of Jesus Christ becomes the dirtiest practice of all, perverting the Gospel and damaging souls bought with the blood of Christ.

Preaching

Since we have been writing about worship and practice in the Church, it will surely not be amiss to say somewhat about preaching. In the earliest days of our Synod the itinerant preachers, mostly sent out from the Mission Houses in Germany, went from house to house, often afoot and for great distances. They confined their preaching largely to the catechism truths, baptized the children, and on occasion celebrated Communion. When organization had progressed to the building of churches and schools, the preaching became more regular, usually making use of the pericopes. Occasionally a bolder spirit would resort the third year to the use of 'free texts.' Much practical material found its way into the sermons calling for stricter personal life. In the course of time seminary training made itself felt in more orderly disposition. Accent was laid on law and gospel and doctrinal discourse. When a child I remember the pastor announcing, "*Heute wollen wir handeln von der Lehre von der Rechtfertigung.*" Sometimes the discourse was both dry and wooden. Fifty years ago a young pastor told me, "You know, I never got anything out of my father's sermons." Although I didn't know his father, I ventured the opinion that there were sermons he enjoyed: his Lenten sermons. He cried, "You're right!" That was because he based them directly on the narrative of Scripture.

The treatment was generally dogmatic in character. My folks were pioneers in the Missouri Synod in Minnesota, so I am giving impressions of preaching in that synod, though with 14 years I came to know Wisconsin synod preaching also. It was less dogmatic. In the Missouri Synod it was not true that only dogmatical sermons were heard. As a young punk I could usually tell whether visiting preachers came from St. Louis or from Springfield. The former were dogmatic and didactic; the Springfielders in those days usually being older men used their text and spoke from Gospel experience. They permitted the text to speak clearly. Wisconsin also had a marked tendency in the fore part of the century to let the text speak clearly, applying Scripture to life. I think there of men like Carl Buenger, Hermann Gieschen, Carl Gausewitz - a pulpit orator - W. J. Schmidt, and Ernie Sprengeler in our own District. One could also list you a number of washouts, but the old Latin proverb prevents: *De mortuis nihil nisi bonum*. Indeed, there are times when what we sing in the offertory has pointed application, "Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation." Each of us ought to pray that the joy of salvation be the content of each of our sermons.

One notes a present-day tendency among today's younger preachers to favor Epistle texts in didactic manner. Even when Gospel pericopes are used, there seems to be a propensity to confine the discourse to a verse or two taken from the text. There is nothing wrong here, only questionable. In recent correspondence with Prof. Kowalke I drew attention to it. He replied that he hungered for a sermon on the Gospel lessons. Our people love expositions based on episodes taken from Scripture and applied to life here and now. Who can improve on portions of the Gospel like the story of the centurion, the four friends of the palsied man, the Syro-Phoenician woman? All exalt and encourage faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. And which man can outpoint in experience and plain talk that which the Lord Jesus has to say?

I find another seeming lack in our preaching. We hear much about sin, about forgiveness of sin and about sanctification, but little indeed about the righteousness without which we shall not see God. We all agree that it cannot be the righteousness we ourselves produce. Scripture very plainly tells us that it cannot be any other than the righteousness of God that comes to us from outside of us, from above, from God Himself. This righteousness from God in heaven, gained for us by the Lord Jesus Christ, is spoken of by Scripture constantly as being reckoned to us. "Christ is our righteousness." Paul writes of the "gift of righteousness." Again, "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." God made Him Who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God. It might be well for all of us to study the Word of God on this point and preach it to our people. The Book of Concord underscores this point, and Luther loves to dwell on it. For "Except your righteousness be better than that of the scribes and the Pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven." Which righteousness may that be? God's own, gained by Christ, laid hold on by faith. Dare we withhold this top news from our people?

What of our future work in the pulpit? The closer our preaching adheres to the Gospel, the oftener we derive our illustrations from the rich store of them in the Bible, the more diligently we read the Book the better we shall serve our people. And let us always bear in mind that any degree of success any of us may have in the ministry, true success, must be credited to the Gospel. And give your people a sermon of proper length and instruction. One young minister in one of our larger congregations has never preached a sermon clocked beyond 12 minutes, and once shrank the time down to seven. The pulpit still functions as the central point in Lutheran worship, and not the altar, as some of our enthusiastic liturgists would have it.

Our Educational System

Something should be said about our educational system. In the early nineteen hundreds parochial school teachers were almost all of them men. I can recall but three lady teachers at that time: Johanna Brockmann, Miss Sperling, and one other. In the Synod convention of 1919 at New Ulm Professor Schaller expressed his alarm that our schools, like that of the public type, were in danger of being taken over by women. What must we say today when the lists show 540 male teachers, 87 of which are professors emeriti, leaving but 453, while the women teachers number 670? Of this year's graduating class no fewer than 21 women received no assignment because they were being married. Women teachers are quick to claim a divine call, as some professors are reported to have taught them, but the biological call takes swift precedence over it. Ironical that the law's threat of equal compensation is nudging our Synod to take a hard look at the divine call. Whatever provision may have been reached to recoup the original outlay for the education of the 21, at \$5000 each for the 4-year course it runs up to the tidy sum of \$105,000.

It is a matter of fact the parochial education and what supports it has taken top spot in our Synod, even outranking the more important ministerial branch. Proof of this observation can be found in a number of things. For years the department has had two secretaries. Parochial schools - the name itself fastens the support of them upon the local congregation - are being imposed upon the Synod's budget, thereby drawing off funds that should be marked for missions. The Conference of Presidents has the call to appoint editors, but the Educator's staff appoints its own editors. A further indication of top rank lies in the fact that no other publication in the Synod presses synod personnel to subscribe to its publication.

We point to a danger in higher education. There is a growing insistence that professors should seek post graduate degrees. More pastors and teachers are reaching out for them. Where can they be gotten? In Lutheran institutions? In the unbelieving world's. Having been studying in that corrupt atmosphere they cannot well avoid bringing away on their jackets some of the dust. Much of the trouble plaguing the Missouri Synod has come in with the MA's and the Ph.D.'s. They march in the front ranks of that Synod's dissidents. We remark that the top theological work in our Synod was produced by the three-man faculty of our Seminary years ago, none of whom had a doctor's degree, a masters, or even a bachelor of divinity. Let WELS take care in this matter of degrees. Would that our institutions conferred the degree Luther had: Doctor of Theology, or as he loved later to call it: Doctor of Holy Scripture.

Another thought on higher education of ministers, but especially of teachers. Note the emphasis on methodology. Methodology rightly employed gives order to teaching and preaching. But there appears more than just order when method begins to overshadow the facts that are the substance of education. The world's educational system exalts method nigh to top place.

May we insert one more observation on Church education. It has to do with the world's principle of academic freedom. The principle operates in the realm of the external and confines to this world. It has engendered progress in material things, scientific matter, and may lead to the discovery and use of natural laws and powers God has created in nature. On the other hand, academic freedom has descended into license in the realm of knowledge, speculative philosophy, the liberal arts, on the moral level, you name it, and so is contributing to intellectual and moral bankruptcy.

But we are interested in the demand for academic freedom in theology. Where the Word of God, Holy Scripture, inspired and inerrant, is concerned, academic freedom is an anomaly. As the infallible Word of God on the principle that Scripture cannot be broken, substance and doctrine are absolute. This not only rules out

academic freedom, but its subjective companion, the historical-critical method as being inapplicable to Scripture's content. For this method demotes the Bible to the level of a human book, at once vaulting the critic into the chair of authority above Scripture. What arrogant conceit these 'scholars' exhibit: The old case, "Ye shall be as gods and know what is good and evil." The Lutheran theologian must know, and act on, scriptural authority as absolute and so conform to his ordination vow and honor his pledge to the Book of Concord as reflecting correct doctrine. So the freedom the Lutheran possesses after his conversion mirrors in free will obedience to the Word of God. "If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and His Gospel lays hold of true freedom, eternal freedom.

Some are inclined to think of the Church as separate and unrelated to the world. Christ indeed says of His people, "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." St. Paul agrees perfectly in his epistles with this separation from the world. Yet he does say that there remains contact and reaction with the world, "else must ye needs go out of this world." Action and reaction results both ways: of the Church upon the world, and of the world upon the Church. Sometimes as in the case of the apostolic church and the Reformation the Church exercised a deeply incisive action on the world. At other times the reaction of the world upon the Church - and of even a corrupt church upon the world - has been for evil.

All history revolves in action and reaction, of a relation of religion to secularism. We touch upon a few of the evil reactions. The first cites an evil reaction the Church had on the world. We speak of existentialism. It was promulgated by the Danish philosophical theologian Kierkegaard. He declared in essence, "Whatsoever seems right to you, that becomes for you truth." That opens the door wide not only to wild individualism in religion, but to an individualism that ends up in moral bankruptcy. We see it on every hand. It has ruined the Church, divorced it from the Gospel, and helped bring into the Church the pious-sounding, but broadly shallowing slogan, "The Christ in us." In fact, it is a rejection of the authority of the Gospel.

Existentialism has also brought about wild reaction in the world. The world took it up with gusto. It reduced it to the vicious, "Now I can do as I damn please. For the Church says it's OK." Need it be pointed out? Those who cannot see it must be blind. One of our professors at the Seminary told us, "My lords, if you want to know what's going on in the world, keep your eyes open on your own Main Street."

And now the ecumenically-minded 'Church,' having undermined the authority of Scripture, but having the ear of the world, is condemned by God to publish its foolishness. With profound sounding but shallow pronouncements, usually to the left, it presumes to instruct the governments of the world on their course of action. Lacking any moral foundation and operating with complete rejection and ignorance of the Gospel, even the world turns away from them and ignores their mouthings.

We live in grave danger of WELS being infiltrated by secularism. The German '*Diesseitigkeit*' covers the trend well. What with growth, spread, affluence, and material success - think of the annual income of \$5,000,000 compared to the balance in the early years of less than \$100 - we also are likely to concentrate on this life and let the new heavens and the new earth fade out. But how can we forget eternity? One man has said of it, "If there were a block of steel 100 miles wide, 100 miles thick, and 100 miles high, and a bird wiped his bill on it once every century, the block would be worn down even with the ground long before eternity would be well begun." And death ushers all into eternity. Let us not fall for the chimera that the kingdom of heaven consists in making this world a better place to live in. For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Ecumenism, unionism, and fellowship seem for many to lie in the same bed. But ecumenicity becomes a gross caricature of Christian fellowship. Unionism takes fellowship to the hospital with paratyphoid. On the other hand, it is possible to blow up fellowship to the point of bursting. When fellowship is exalted well-nigh into the position of top principle, it is in danger of becoming cocksure, approaching pharisaism, and of imposing its concept upon others.

What constitutes a completely clear definition of fellowship? Top fellowship exists on the individual basis of Christian to Christian, believer to believer, child of God to child of God. This lives within the precincts of the Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints, which fellowship the Holy Spirit Himself has set up and that by election and faith in Jesus Christ. This type of fellowship transcends every other and is genuine, as

we shall see and experience in the new heavens and the new earth. Fellowship on the inferior level of denominational and synodical life will have no place there, for no synods as such will go to heaven.

In these organizations here in this world there exists external organizational fellowship based on a type of confession. Tell me, how much true fellowship can be found in a purely modernistic church? Would anyone assert that every congregation in WELS consists of none but true believers? True, confessional fellowship strives to base on the Word of God, on expression of faith in the Gospel, and expresses itself in a public doctrinal stand. But we all agree that it does not identify with the God-given fellowship in the Holy Christian Church. Nonetheless it is an important witness in the history of the Church to share the confession of a synod whose stand reflects the doctrine of Holy Writ.

Two things are to be observed here. No denomination, no church body, no synod has a monopoly on the truth. This thought should keep us humble and help us to avoid any arrogance over against others. On the other hand, we as a synod must avoid making common cause in the sight of the world with such whom we believe to be Christian, let us name Billy Graham, because in joining his campaigns we should fall into a unionism that ultimately infers that what you believe and have published as a scriptural doctrine is after all not too important. In the end that leads to indifference, the grandfather to disbelief.

Synodical Organization-Missions

A few words need still to be spoken on synodical organization. That has not only to do with constitution and by-laws, but with administration, and eventually with the real work of the Kingdom. Throughout the years I have observed how our Synod goes to great length to set up those regulations, which the Synod and its members in brotherly love are to follow, yet when some seeming exigency pops up the regulations are circumvented. This takes on the hue of more than just a thread of pietism in our synodical blanket. Personally I have been keenly aware of this, because in 1935-37 as secretary of the Constitution Committee we not only translated the original German constitution of the Synod into English, but also revised it. Prof. Meyer served as chairman. Again, when our constitution was thoroughly overhauled and augmented in the middle fifties, James Schaefer, Attorney Dammann, and I served on that committee. Hence my interest in how well the Synod and those in authority respect the provisions of the governing document.

On both occasions I proposed that the Synod establish its control of missions in one of two ways: either to institute a central board, or give authority to District boards. The outcome was a compromise: the General Board of Home Missions was set up to fix policy and found missions, the District boards to act as executives to carry out GBHM's decisions. Compromises, they say, are of the essence of democracy, but they always lack somewhere. A certain degree of incompetence has shown up in some district boards, from which the boards active in our District are expressly exempted, for they have manifested expertise.

It is being not only suggested, but in certain quarters pushed, to set up four regional boards in the Home Mission sector. These are to have decisive say. One cannot but be disturbed about it. What one must fear relates to a multiplication of machinery, accompanied in turn by higher financial outlay. Not only that, but a rivalry and compromise will be provoked as among the four regionals. Each will wish to receive at least as much man-power, number of new missions, and money as other, and the real growth of the Synod may suffer. For as our World Missions should long ago have entered the rich and neglected field of South America, so our Synod should concentrate on its more promising fields in our own country. If early self-support of home mission churches offers any criterion, then those in the Gulf, Southwest, and Pacific region lead. Geographically the largest District in the Synod, it also numbers more than 35,000,000, 75% of whom have come within the last 20 years. Consequently this is a pioneer field.

At the same time we should avoid over-extending our efforts, spreading ourselves too thin. And the jingo, "In every state by '78:" has no *Hausrecht* in our Church. We go where the Lord has pointed up for us a bountiful harvest. As not a few farmers in the depression bought up farm after farm and became "land-poor," so a synod by over-expansion and poor judgment can become mission poor.

Of Reform

We began this paper with the call for self-criticism and continuing reform, reform guided by Scripture, the Confessions, and Luther. We purpose to end on the same note. The church that is static is close to becoming stagnant. Sure, reform for reform's sake turns into an empty exercise. Real reform bases on conscious review and progression rooted in the Word of God. Will any of us take exception to the remark that our Synod, corporately and individually, did not experience the agony and guilt of sin as Luther did? Consequently the deepest comfort and healing of the Gospel has not been felt. Has this not left us largely with an intellectual proclamation of the Gospel tending toward the routine? Ought we not lie in the ears of the Holy Spirit to move us to preach the Gospel with fervor and genuine enthusiasm?

Luther's approach was that of love for the Gospel. God caused him to become the greatest man in the history of the Church since St. Paul. His knowledge and preachment of the Word of God has been a dominating influence in the world history ever since. Not only that he restored the Gospel to its rightful place, but his influence spread into other fields: separation of church and state; education; economics; the arts; government's responsibility toward its citizens and the poor; and the like more.

It is a matter of fact that the Lutheran Church and its Lutheranism reached a higher level in America than at any time since that of Luther. Sad to say, in the last decades it has been on a steep toboggan. The Lutheran Church in America has long since cast doctrine and practice into the ashcan. The American Lutheran Church has cast out the gear of its ship and is in the process of following with the lading. The once staunch Missouri Synod is rapidly approaching a disastrous break-up. This should be a warning to WELS. It can't happen here? That very thought marks the beginning to the slide. At the Missouri Synod convention at Cleveland in 1962 a young minister of that Synod leaned over to me and said, "You Wisconsinites are going to go the same way Missouri is going now." Prophetic?

Let it be said that there is call for reform in our circles in respect to our reading, not to mention study. A catastrophic dearth of Lutheran literature in the English language obtains. An abysmal ignorance of the German language, in which most good Lutheran theology has found print, must be deplored. It gives one pleasure, however, to report that the current translation of Luther's Works into the American idiom has succeeded remarkably well in preserving the style and content of Luther's original. Too much of our reading fastens on Reformed literature, and some Reformed thinking rubs off. One should be very critical in reading the magazine *Christianity Today*, not to mention many books bearing on theological topics.

We have need in our Wisconsin Synod to be diligent in reading Scripture, quite occasionally in the original. Attention is called to the 1966 edition of the New Testament in Greek distributed by the American Bible Society. It is an excellent piece of work. We should be at home also in the Lutheran Confessions. To be more than just casual readers of Luther is to be commended highly. Looking back I am particularly happy over the purchase in the early years of my ministry of the St. Louis edition of Luther's Works, an edition that called forth recognition even in German historical circles. I repeat the caption of an article in the *Quartalschrift* by Prof. Pieper, "*Qu major Luthero, eo melior theologos.*" Whoever reads German should obtain the *Quartalschrift* from 1904 to 1930. The same thing should be said of Prof. Koehler's "*Lehrbuch der Kirchengeschichte*," a work that has received remarkable praise in German historical studies. And certainly the Lutheran minister in WELS should have in his library the recently published *History of the Wisconsin Synod*.

Only as outlined above, under the grace of God, will we in our Synod avoid going down the road into humanism, ecumenicity, and ultimate secularism. The Lord preserve to us His Gospel, grant us His Holy Spirit, and give to us renewed fidelity to His Word, obedience to His gracious will, and new zeal in proclaiming the Gospel. God grant to our Synod preachers who reflect sound doctrine, sound faith, sound speech, and sober-mindedness.