

The Church's Confession And Our Christian Witness

[This essay, under the title *Bekennntnis and Bekennen*, was presented to and adopted by the 78th convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church held in Zwickau, Germany, October 11 to 13, 1991. The essayist is pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in Dresden. The translator is Dr. John F. Sullivan, professor of German and philosophy at Northwestern College, Watertown, Wisconsin, from 1964 to 1984. Dr. Sullivan now lives in retirement in Milwaukee.]

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Introduction

It is my intention to highlight the word "and" in the title of this year's convention essay. If one does not have a firm set of principles one believes in, obviously one has nothing to promote, nothing one feels constrained to talk about, to stand up for, and to defend. But in this paper we are not talking about just any set of principles; we are talking about the church's confession of faith, which, we trust, is also your personal confession of faith, the principles you live by, and, if necessary, God giving you the strength, for which you are ready to die. Hearing the word "confession," some will be thinking of the Apostles' Creed, others of the Augsburg Confession, since we are members of the Lutheran Church, or possibly even the joint confession of sins we make in the church service. We wish, however, to concern ourselves in this doctrinal paper chiefly with two types of confession: first of all, the doctrinal confession of our church or its creed, its faith, that is, what it believes, and then, secondly, with the commitment to propagating that faith, in other words, mission activity. Even with these self-imposed limitations, there is no guarantee that I will touch on every aspect involved, and I therefore ask your indulgence should I neglect to bring in a point one or the other of you considers of great importance.

In preparing this paper, I was guided by Paul's admonition at the end of the 15th chapter of his First Letter to the Corinthians: "Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain."

The apostle, having demonstrated to the recipients of his letter, and, of course, also to us who read that letter, the importance of the physical resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, concludes that demonstration with the familiar words: "But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." And the conclusion he draws from this is: "Stand firm. Let nothing move you." In 1 Timothy 3:15 he uses the noun form of the same Greek stem for "firm" [ἑδραίοι], as the "pillar and foundation" [ἑδραίωμα] of truth. We hear this call for unshakable constancy in other New Testament writings—for example, in Colossians 2:7, "rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith," i.e., in the redeeming love of Christ; also in Ephesians 3:17.

Paul underscores this firmness: "Let nothing move you." And in Colossians 1:23 Paul unmistakably identifies where the strength for such firmness is found: "established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel." Remaining firm and immovable is directly connected with the Word of God: "This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed." Mind you, not just some customs and particular usages are involved here, but God's very Word, Christ's teaching (Jn 8:31,32), and there we dare not yield ground; there we must stand firm and immovable. Even as a well-constructed building stands on a substantial, solid foundation, so we are to take our stand on the firm foundation laid by God himself, on his unshakable Word. Or to use another comparison: Firmly rooted as a tree is in the earth, so the roots of our faith are to be found in God's Word in order to remain firm and steadfast in our faith as it draws nourishment and strength from that Word. Such a faith will be a living faith, "always giving ourselves fully to the work of the Lord" (1 Cor 16:10). In the chapter following our text Paul reminds the Corinthians that Timothy is also carrying on the Lord's work, is preaching the same gospel as Paul (1 Cor 4:17), is seeing to the needs of the Philippian congregation (Php 2:19,20), and in doing so, is not promoting himself but the gospel and Christ's cause (Php 2:21,22). The Lord's work is characterized as preaching the gospel, which, however, also involves combating false doctrine (1 Cor

16:9). It is well to note that the Lord's work results from faith and the power of God that provides the necessary strength for such work (Ga 5:6; 2 Th 2:17).

Opposing the Lord's work, which is really synonymous with good works, are the "works of darkness" (Ro 13:12), to which man, handicapped by original sin, is prone (Ro 1:18ff). By the grace of God available in his Son, however, we are his. We are the Lord's work, for "we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Eph 2:8-10). And as our text expresses it, "Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your work in the Lord is not in vain."

Although our work in the Lord may at times seem to be in vain, the adverb "always" encourages us to continue in such work, as Paul admonishes Timothy, "Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage-with great patience and careful instruction" (2 Tm 4:2), The Lord's work is to go on whether the times seem favorable for such work or hostile to it (1 Cor 16:9; Eph 5:16), whether there is active persecution of the Word (1 Pe 1:6; Ac 5:18-20), or whether there is a lull in persecution (Ac 9:31).

In the first half of this paper our attention will be directed mainly toward the first half of our basic text, "Stand firm; let nothing move you," since the church's confessional writings must also be our personal conviction; whereas the latter half of the text, "Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord," will be treated in the second section of the paper, living that faith. May the Lord bless our endeavor.

A. The church's confession of faith

Basic text: *"Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm; let nothing move you, . . ." (1 Cor 15:58a).*

1. Christian faith arises solely as a result of the proclaiming of God's Word, where and when such Word is humbly accepted in faith

"For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard it did not combine it with faith" (He 4:2). This is as much as to say, God's Word has no effect on persons who obstinately oppose it, whereas the Holy Spirit accomplishes his blessed work by means of the divine Word, read or heard, in persons who do not willfully harden their heart against it.

"Faith comes from hearing the message and the message is heard through the word of Christ" (Ro 10:17). "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts" (He 3;7,8). In every instance when people hear God's Word, have due respect for it, take it to heart, and do not by their own fault deprive themselves of its blessing, there the Holy Spirit moves them to respond to it, to acknowledge and confess it as God's Word.

The law, that aspect of the divine Word which leads to a proper and realistic knowledge of man, results in a sobering admission and *confession of sin*. "Through the law we become conscious of sin" (Ro 3:20). "Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what it was to covet, if the law had not said, 'Do not covet' (Ro 7:7). Admission and confession of sin are a result of the Holy Spirit's operation in connection with the divine Word. Then our response can only be: Before the holy God I admit and confess my guilt. "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 Jn 1:8,9).

The situation is the same when the gospel, the good news of salvation as a result of the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, enters the picture: the announcement of the salvation of every sinner as an act of pure mercy and love, available freely to all who accept that Savior in faith, is used by the Holy Spirit to produce a grateful *testimony of praise* on the part of those who realize its significance. Thus Paul, writing to the members of the congregation at Thessalonica, declares, "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 Th 2:13). And writing to the Ephesians, he confirms the same truth,

"Because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace that you have been saved" (2:5).

The apostle never tires of reassuring the recipients of his letters on this point, but also gratefully confesses concerning his own person, "By the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect" (1 Cor 15:10). And again in Romans 5:11, "We also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation."

For a person who has come to the knowledge of his sin and to a saving faith in his Redeemer as a result of his contact with God's Word the Holy Scriptures are a treasure of inestimable value, for he knows that "in Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col 2:3). He relies on Christ's assurance: "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (Jn 8:31,32).

Because he has accepted the Bible as the inspired Word of his God and Savior, he trusts that Word despite any and all objections his limited and therefore fallible reason might raise, and he believes the statements of the Holy Scriptures implicitly. If his reason balks at the scriptural account of creation or at its information concerning Balaam or Jonah, he can fall back on the words of his Savior in such matters (Lk 24:27,44,45 and Jn 5:46,47: "If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?")

The study of God's Word and the abundance of striking statements in it compel the Christian to marshal his knowledge of divine truths, and he formulates a kind of doctrinal *confession of faith*. Another factor impelling him in this direction is the spiritual error and false doctrine with which he comes into contact. Thus he gives expression to the truths of God's Word and remains aloof from all contradictions of the same. We have examples of this in the creeds or doctrinal statements of the early Christian church and also in Paul's charge to Timothy: "Fight the good fight of faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses" (1 Tm 6:12).

Finally, let us turn to the church's and the individual Christian's *confession of his adherence to Christ's teachings*. This is also a result of the Holy Spirit's operation in connection with the divine Word and will constitute the focus of our study. Christians proclaim the good news of the redemption of all sinners through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ: "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Ac 4:12).

This joyful testimony of a Christian when involved with others is a direct result of Jesus' commission given to all his disciples, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation" (Mk 16:15; Mt 28:18-20). For a Christian who occupies himself with God's Word, enjoys hearing, reading, and studying it, there is this compulsion to give expression in some form or other to the faith by which he lives in keeping with the particular situation at any given time. Since he himself has been the object of Jesus' message of salvation, it will always be a matter of concern for him that others hear that same glorious news (Ac 4:20; 2 Cor 5:14).

Since the four forms of testimony and confession described above are exclusively a result of contact with the divine Word and therefore inextricably associated with it, they are reciprocally interdependent. This realization is of special importance in connection with the following presentation since in all unrestrained, wildly enthusiastic and fanatic (*schwämerisch*) circles and increasingly also in circles rationally oriented the erroneous opinion prevails that a close adherence to the Bible and to teaching drawn from it hinders and even stifles missionary activity.

2. The reciprocal relationship between the church's doctrinal commitment and the duty of propagating that faith is particularly evident in the confessional writings of the Evangelical Lutheran Church

In the large church bodies still calling themselves Lutheran, the doctrinal confessional writings assembled in the Book of Concord of 1580 and still possessing a *de jure* stamp in those churches are in fact to a great extent regarded as dead weight and encumbering those churches' progress toward the establishment of one

world-wide church. Indeed, Christians in the Lutheran confessional churches must wonder if they too do not merely regard the Lutheran Confessions (with the exception of Luther's Small Catechism) as material for theologians, church historians, and commissions on inter-church relations. Hans-Lutz Poetsch in his book entitled, *Theologie der Evangelisation*, writes:

It seems nothing short of a miracle when one reads that at one time the Lutheran Church in the United States of America experienced a revival of spiritual life as a result of studying the Formula of Concord...¹

This fact should start us thinking and indeed encourage us to continue an intensified study of our Lutheran confessional writings already embarked upon in a few of our congregations. Of course, there is the reproach often directed at our church body that may give some people in our own circles pause: If you do that, slowly but surely the confessional writings will assume greater importance for you than the Bible itself. But if we consider the above quotation and what has been said up till now, we will not fail to realize that the confessional writings have their source in Scripture. Besides, as we study our Confessions, we shall have the joyful experience of noting that they are not products of dead dogmatism, but rather evidence of the fact that their authors were persons moved deeply in the depth of their being by the Spirit and that their writings are moving testimonies of their faith and of their heartfelt wish that others too through the study of God's Word might experience the joy of salvation. In the introduction to the Formula of Concord we are struck by the statement confirming what has just been stated:

[The intent of the document is]...that we should take pains, with the greatest earnestness and to our utmost ability, to attend to those matters which promote the extension of God's name and glory, the propagation of His Word...and the instruction and consolation of disturbed consciences....²

We would like to add another quotation from the Formula itself:

If we wish to consider our eternal election to salvation with profit, we must in every way hold sturdily and firmly to this, that as the preaching of repentance, so also the promise of the Gospel is *universalis* (universal), that is, it pertains to all men (Luke 24:47). For this reason Christ has commanded that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among ALL nations. For God loved the WORLD and gave His Son (John 3:16). Christ bore the sins of the WORLD (John 1:29); gave His flesh for the life of the WORLD (John 6:51); His blood is the propitiation for the sins of the WHOLE WORLD (1 John 1:7; 2:2). Christ says, "Come unto Me ALL ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28)...It is Christ's command that to all in common to whom repentance is preached, this promise of the Gospel also should be offered.³

In Luther's Smalcald Articles the Reformer's testimony to God's rich, abundant grace is found:

First, through the spoken Word by which the forgiveness of sins is preached in the whole world; which is the peculiar office of the Gospel.⁴

¹ Hans-Lutz Poetsch, *Theologie der Evangelisation*, p 24.

² Introduction to the Book of Concord of 1580, *Bekennnisschriften der ev.-luth. Kirche*, p 14; *Concordia Triglotta*, p 23.

³ Formula of Concord, S.D., XI, 28, *BSLK*, pp 1071f; *Triglotta*, pp 1071ff.

⁴ Smalcald Articles, Part 3, 4th Article, *BSLK*, p 449; *Triglotta*, p 491.

In his Large Catechism Luther writes: so that the merit and work of our Lord Jesus Christ may not be forgotten and be to no purpose

...God has caused the Word to go forth and be proclaimed, in which He gives the Holy Ghost to bring this treasure home and appropriate it to us.⁵

And finally another quotation from Luther's Large Catechism bearing on the Second Petition of the Lord's Prayer:

Therefore we pray here in the first place that this may become effective with us and that His name be so praised through the holy Word of God and a Christian life that both we who have accepted it may abide and daily grow therein, and that it may gain approbation and adherence among other people and proceed with power throughout the world, that many may find entrance into the Kingdom of Grace, be made partakers of redemption, being led thereto by the Holy Ghost, in order that thus we may all together remain in it forever in the one kingdom now begun.⁶

In the confessional writings of our Evangelical Lutheran Church our fathers have repeatedly stressed that not only must we say Yes to what the Scriptures teach, but that we must also expressly say No to contrary doctrine. The truth and a lie cannot stand side by side. "What fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?" (2 Cor 6:14,15).

The rejection of false doctrine is an unavoidable consequence of the clear application of God's Word and is of great importance for our missionary testimony, especially in our day of chaos on the church scene and the proliferation of sects. It must also be our concern that, as we adhere to the Confessions, we engage in teaching the truth of Scripture and also expose and reject error "for the needed comfort and instruction of poor, confused consciences" (see note 2). It may indeed become necessary because of certain social circumstances that we, in the course of time, may have to expand or even formulate new confessions, with the same intent, however, described in the introduction to the Formula of Concord:

...in order that the pure doctrine and profession of our faith may, by the help of the Holy Ghost, be preserved and propagated also to our posterity until the glorious advent of Jesus Christ, our only Redeemer and Savior. Since, therefore, such is the case, and being instructed from the Prophetic and Apostolic Scriptures, we are sure concerning our doctrine and confession, and by the grace of the Holy Ghost our minds and consciences have been confirmed to a greater degree, ...it seemed exceedingly necessary that, amidst so many errors that had arisen in our times, as well as causes of offense, variances, and these long-continued dissensions, there should exist a godly explanation concerning all these controversies, derived from God's Word, according to the terms of which the pure doctrine might be discriminated and separated from the false.⁷

Every error that is tolerated, every doubt raised regarding a specific teaching, every mutilation of God's Word is ultimately detrimental to the comforting gospel of our Savior, as has often been stressed in the Lutheran Church. As an example of those many statements we quote Luther's well-known words from his Commentary on Galatians:

⁵ Large Catechism II, 38; *BSLK*, p 654; *Triglotta*, p 689.

⁶ *Ibid*, III, 52; *BSLY*, pp 673f; *Triglotta*, p 711.

⁷ Preface of the Book of Concord of 1580, *BSLK*, pp 13f; *Triglotta*, p 21.

Where Christian doctrine is involved, there is no room for leeway, so one might give or take just a little where Scripture is involved without causing great havoc and damage For that reason Christian teachings might be compared with a gold ring without the least flaw or weak point, for if such is present, the ring is no longer perfect.⁸

3. Complete doctrinal agreement is a prerequisite for every kind of church fellowship, including missionary activity

It is evident from the Holy Scriptures and especially from the example of the holy apostles that where a commitment to missions is involved, we can not settle for just a general, superficial testimony involving a few isolated facts pertaining to our redemption. The Great Commission of our Lord Jesus states: "...teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Mt 28:20).

In keeping with this injunction, the Apostle Paul, upon taking leave of the church elders at Miletus, solemnly assured them, "Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men, for I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God" (Ac 20:26,27).

Even that early the phrase "proclaiming the whole will of God" implied conscious exclusion of all error and of any denial of biblical truth. Having made that avowal, the apostle in keeping with Christ's instruction that we be on our guard against false prophets speaking beguiling words (Mt 7:15), continued: "Guard 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. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples for themselves" (Ac 20:28-30).

By inspiration of the Holy Ghost the same apostle in various New Testament writings recorded the results arising from such circumstances which are predictable on the basis of God's Word. One of these follows: "I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people" (Ro 16:17,18).

Setting up boundaries against the propagators of false doctrine coming from the outside and also arising within the church is never a private initiative, but rather a matter of obedience to God's own order in the interest of the church and an assurance of the credibility of its missionary witness. The acceptance or rejection of this teaching of Holy Scripture will always have to give answer to the question, "Do you consider false doctrine to be as dangerous as Jesus and his apostles describe it to be in the Bible?" We must always keep in mind the weak in faith and the naive, who in their association with the heterodox are readily prone to become confused in their beliefs.

The example of believers in the early church should give us pause. According to Irenaeus, the Apostle John refused to sit beside Cerinthus. Polycarp, a disciple of John, would not greet the heretic Marcion, and when the latter indignantly inquired, "Don't you know who I am?" Polycarp's reply was, "Yes, I recognize in you Satan's firstborn."⁹

Irenaeus comments: "The apostles and their disciples were extremely cautious on this score and would not even engage in a conversation with those who deceitfully sought to distort the truth with their own imaginings."¹⁰

In full accord with this we too at our ordination pledged to observe the restrictions mentioned in the Smalcald Articles:

This being the case, all Christians should always be on their guard not to become involved with such ungodly teachings, blasphemies, and improper zeal. They should rather avoid the pope and

⁸ Quotation from C. F. W. Walther, *Kirche and Amt*, Erlangen, 1865, 2nd ed., p 122.

⁹ Quotation from C. F. W. Walther, *Kirche and Amt*, Erlangen, 1865, 2nd ed., p 140.

¹⁰ Quotation, *ibid*, p 144.

his adherents as belonging to the Antichrist's accursed kingdom in keeping with Christ's command, "Beware of false prophets." Paul also orders us to avoid false preachers and to curse them as an abomination. In 2 Corinthians 6 he says, "Be not yoked together with unbelievers, for what fellowship can light have with darkness?" True, it is difficult to separate oneself from so many areas and people and be of a different religious persuasion. Yet there is God's command in the matter that bids us be on our guard and not make common cause with those who espouse false doctrine or use force to impose and support it.¹¹

Be reminded once more of the constitution of the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church, Article II, 2,3:

Our church rejects all toleration of doctrinal variation (unionism); all fellowship involving heterodox churches and doctrine; all pulpit and altar fellowship with false teachers and with those who may give lip-service to the confessional writings listed above, but who deviate from them in doctrine and practice, and also rejects any participation in the religious services and mission work of heterodox and unionistic societies.

For us these are not peripheral questions but involve the basic principles of our faith. True, in the minds of some the question arises whether under those circumstances we can indeed be engaged in effective missionary work. They are of the opinion that our reading of the Bible causes us to set up unnecessary limits of association and this causes Christianity to appear ridiculous in the eyes of those among whom we might attempt missionary work because so many of the heterodox also lay claim to be proclaiming the truth. Their argument runs: Isn't it of prime necessity first of all to preach Christ crucified on our behalf without confusing the issue by referring to false doctrine? In doing that, doesn't one deprive oneself of countless opportunities? Before addressing this line of argumentation and our practice of confessional missionary activity, I should like to take a stand regarding a negative assertion and charge against the Lutheran Church which first came from fanatic and wildly enthusiastic circles, but of late is increasingly heard in such church circles in which one permits rational considerations to have a bearing on doctrine.

4. The Lutheran Confessions as a presumed handicap for active and effective missionary testimony

Let us begin this section with a quotation: "The Evangelical Lutheran Free Church is a small confessional body aglow with missionary zeal. To be sure, there has been no notable increase in its rate of growth, but its members are eager to win souls for Christ. This ardent desire is perceptible in many places, this desire that not a single person be lost, but rather that all be saved for eternity. Heart-warming are its Bible hours and forums open to all, where one can sense that the confessional writings of the Lutheran Church are still meaningful for our own day. Perhaps that is the reason why its members rarely miss the weekly Bible hour. One must be there on time, or one will have trouble finding a vacant chair."

Do I hear someone say, "But he's painting too rosy a picture"? I must admit that, at least in part, the above quotation owes something to my imagination. And do we not hear voices in pietistical revival circles and among charismatics and other enthusiasts (*Schwärmer*) berating our strict adherence to the Lutheran Confessions with the charge that the latter are dead letters, paralyzing and stiffing the Holy Spirit?

As we have already noticed from our few quotations from the confessional writings, the charge that because of its adherence to the Bible and the confessional writings the Lutheran Church cannot pursue really effective missionary activity, is a contradiction per se. We should really calmly answer this charge with the counter question: Can the denominations of a charismatic stamp really avoid having any doctrinal confession at all? True, one will not find written doctrinal statements such as we have in our Book of Concord, yet their lack

¹¹ Quotation, *ibid*, p 118.

of such and their substituting rather modest "special explanations" cannot save these groups from the torpidity so much lamented in our day.

The joyful witness of our Lutheran confessors cannot be the reason for the danger feared by so many that any joyful missionary witness must yield to an unwelcome paralysis. Their testimony breathes too strong an evangelical spirit to justify such a charge. Where are we to look, however, for the reasons that also in our midst things are not entirely as they should be and as we ourselves would like to have them paralleling those described in the New Testament?

If we were to prepare a long list of self-accusations, which surely would not apply to all congregations in our church body, and if we were to resort to a philosophical lacerating of ourselves, that would lead us nowhere. For that reason I shall endeavor to clear up this matter by listing those treasures of our Lutheran Church which alone are capable of coping with stagnation and paralysis.

The proper use of law and gospel

Even our Small Catechism in its expository section speaks with such dazzling clarity of this matter which is of prime importance that here I will simply call attention to the pertinent section entitled, "The Importance of the Law." In 2 Timothy 2:15, the Apostle Paul admonishes his young disciple, indicating very clearly how important the application of law and gospel in keeping with the spirit of the Scriptures is: "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth."

Only when, because of the severity of the divine law, we are struck with the devastating realization, I am a hopelessly lost sinner, will we begin to sense anew with grateful hearts the incomprehensible glory of our dear Savior's holy gospel. Only by an announcement of the whole counsel of God appropriate to the situation can there again be stirred up a love for God, because the Holy Spirit is active in connection with the Word. To be sure, the law is incapable of instilling in the battered Christian new zeal for the Lord's work and of kindling anew in him joy for missionary commitment. He is not rendering his fellow Christians a service whoever relies on the law to accomplish this and who in a thunderous voice harangues his congregation in the following fashion: "Jesus has given the solemn command that we are to engage in missionary activity. Why aren't you engaged in that endeavor? If in the army severe punishment is meted out to those who disobey a command, just think of the punishment God will inflict on such who disobey his commands!"—No, it is solely the means of grace that can effect the great miracle of new zeal for the Lord's work in weak, sinful men.

The proper practice in the Lutheran Church is the constant employment of the Word and sacraments as the means ordained by God through which the Holy Spirit imparts forgiveness of sins, redemption, and eternal salvation, making these spiritual gifts their very own. By means of Word and sacrament the incomprehensibly great love of God descends upon us, endowing us with "renewed strength" so that we rise "on eagle's wings," so that we can "run and not become weary," for "he gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak" (Is 40:29ff). Using what? His holy Word and the sacraments! For only by these means does faith result, faith which expresses itself in love (Ga 5:6).

Prayer and Christian fellowship

In all probability with good reason in Acts 2:42 in addition to the means of grace, prayer and Christian fellowship are mentioned as being characteristic marks of an active Christian congregation. Christ himself desired and established a fellowship of believing brethren as a secure haven for mutual admonition, comfort, and intercessory prayer. Of what great significance the congregation at Antioch must have been for Paul and his co-workers! It was a congregation with missionary zeal (Ac 13:1-3), a congregation of comfort, and surely a congregation given to intercession (Ac 14:27,28).

We readily surmise what a blessed source of evangelistic activity in the first period of the church the Jerusalem congregation was, as we read Luke's account in Acts. We also become aware of the pervasive

influence of biblical teaching on everyday life in this same congregation and of the intimate connection between doctrinal testimony and missionary witnessing, for after Stephen's martyrdom a wave of persecution engulfed the Jerusalem congregation: "And Saul was there, giving approval to his death. On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria" (Ac 8:1,2).

Because of its doctrinal confession on the basis of the Old Testament Scriptures that Jesus Christ was the promised Messiah, this congregation was fiercely persecuted by the Pharisee Saul. At any rate, those Jewish Christians could not detect anything common to both Christianity and Judaism, as many do today, because the Judaism from which they had sprung rejected Jesus of Nazareth, refusing to recognize him as the Messiah. It is possible that a more "ecumenical" stance in this question might have spared them from imprisonment, suffering, and even death; yet they were prepared to face up to all of that rather than deny their Savior; and their testimony and commitment to Jesus, the Christ or Messiah, could not be silenced for "those who had been scattered preached the Word wherever they went" (Ac 8:4). And a little later we actually read: "Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, telling the message" (Ac 11:19).

At first they witnessed to the Jews and afterwards to the Greeks that in Jesus Christ the long expected Messiah had finally come. Perhaps with something of envy (except, of course, for the persecution) we think back to that blessed time and the joy of being involved in such an endeavor, which nothing could deter from proclaiming the saving Word of God. And we marvel at the fact that these were ordinary Christians, for the apostles, as we have heard, had remained behind in Jerusalem. Let us now ask ourselves what it was that motivated these Christians and whether it is possible for us to find our way back to this "first love."

5. Our faith's missionary witness directed toward the salvation of our fellowmen who are either unbelievers or adherents of false doctrine

Motivation

There are various reasons Christians cite when the question is brought up whether there should not be more missionary activity. One sometimes hears: "Why, the decline in our own congregation's membership should get us moving in that direction!" Behind such words lurk thoughts like the following: So that our congregation may grow and we no longer are so ridiculously small! But in that case our missionary witness (if one indeed dare call it that) would be merely self-serving. We have no scriptural grounds for such motivation. Remember that on a single day 3,000 souls were added to the Jerusalem congregation, and yet they continued their missionary activity. Another argument, which is no invention of mine, and which because of its shabbiness will not even be discussed, is: "If we did more missionary work, we might pull in a few really big contributors." There are other reasons confronting us that might once again remind us that Jesus has given us a clear assignment and that should move us to direct the spiritual gifts that are ours by faith in a proper direction. The newly won freedom in our country (i.e., in eastern Germany), which, to be sure, is attended by many new problems but which also opens new possibilities; the immeasurable spiritual distress of our fellow citizens; the confusion about spiritual things prevailing in our nation because of the presence of countless sects; the increasing liberalism in the large mainline church bodies—all of these should remind us of the fact that only the Word of God can supply us with a proper motivation.

Peter and John expressed the motivation for an active, effective missionary testimony this way when they were called to account in the presence of the Sanhedrin, "We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard" (Ac 4:20). True, we have not seen our Lord with our physical eyes, and yet what Peter wrote in his First Letter to the Christians of his day applies to us: "Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him" (1:8). Of this same love which flows from the redemptive cross of our Savior into our hearts and from there in greater or lesser measure out to others Paul writes: "For Christ's love compels us....And he died for all that those who live should no longer live for

themselves, but for him who died for them and was raised again.... We are therefore Christ's ambassadors as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God" (2 Cor 5:14-20).

It is this redeeming love of Christ, which, along with him, dwells in our hearts by faith, which motivates us as we meet lost human beings. It has the desire our Lord has, "who wants all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tm 2:4). This should be the sole motive behind all our missionary witness and commitment. Any other motive dishonors our Lord and casts a dubious light on our credibility.

Whom are we addressing in our missionary endeavor?

That we are to preach the gospel to the heathen who do not know the Savior is perfectly clear and does not require extensive proof from the Bible. But what about such who want to be regarded as Christians and possibly are members of some church but are espousing false doctrine? Are we not becoming guilty of "sheep-stealing" if we testify to them of our faith? And what is possibly an even more questionable situation: members of a church calling itself Lutheran but no longer committed to the Lutheran Confessions? Actually, in both instances the questions we must ask ourselves are the following: How bad and how dangerous do we view contradictions and errors where the Word of the living God is involved? Do we love our neighbor, and how much do we wish that he may not be lost but come to the knowledge of the truth?

If we realize with what soul-destroying power all false doctrine is fraught, the love of Christ which moves us to testify will not permit us to keep silent where Christ is mentioned but the truths of the Holy Scriptures are either ignored or turned into a lie. If catechism truths are not only lodged in our memories but also in our hearts, we should be shocked when we realize that one of the fundamental teachings of the churches of Baptist persuasion cuts off access of the youngest and weakest to salvation in Jesus. This is surely a denial of the scriptural truth that through baptism the sinner receives salvation, and this denial must therefore be characterized as a satanical lie. Does not Jesus himself say that those who are brought to him (infants and very young children) should not be cut off from the kingdom of heaven? And if our Master says so, we can hardly keep silent in the face of a basic error on the part of those committed to Baptist doctrine. If the clarity and truth of the divine Word are called into question, and such questioning is even defended and raised to the level of official doctrine, we surely cannot hide under a bushel the truth committed to us! I would remind you of Paul's statement: "It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation. Rather, as it is written [Is 52:15]: 'Those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand'" (Ro 15:20).

In the light of this passage we should have no compunctions in approaching all those who never belonged to a church body, or who have left one, but also such who may be members of a state-church congregation [in our circumstances, a liberal Lutheran congregation—tr.] and who are suffering under the "ministrations" of a liberal pastor who has abandoned the basic truths of Christianity (Ho 4:6; Ga 1:9; 1 Jn 2:22f), as well as those who, though still holding nominal church membership, have themselves withdrawn from the influence of the divine Word. It goes without saying that we may, indeed should, testify to all who are in thralldom to non-Christian sects such as the Mormons, the Christian Scientists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the more recent aberrations like the New Way, the Moonies, and the like. Where Christians, however, are still members of other church bodies that still hold to the Bible and the sacraments and in which the gospel of the crucified and physically resurrected Redeemer is proclaimed, there we have no calling and should not attempt to recruit for our church body.¹²

Attachment to a local orthodox congregation

¹² See *Die Innere Mission unserer Kirche—Proceedings of the Ev. Lutheran Free Church*, Hamburg, 1925, paper by Pastor Heinrich Stallmann, Berlin; [also "A Definitive Study of Proselytizing" by Carl Lawrenz, *WLQ*, Vol 73, No 1 (January 1976), pp 23-41—ed.].

In approaching unbelieving or heterodox persons we should always keep in mind their eventual attachment to a local orthodox congregation. It is in keeping with the testimony of the Scriptures and the Confessions that membership in a heterodox church may well bar the way to heaven and that it is the sacred duty of a Christian to join in commitment with those in the fullest sense possible who hold the same one true faith he does.¹³ If our proclamation of the Good News in the case of a particular individual is accepted, then we certainly must make every effort to carefully integrate him into the fellowship of a local orthodox congregation.

It would be counter to our very wish to save his soul, if we were to turn him over to a heterodox fellowship, where he would get to hear soul-destroying errors. Unfortunately, this is common practice in state-church congregations where evangelists often direct their converts away from their own church body because of the liberalism rampant there [or in our own country where evangelists bitten by the ecumenical bug attach little importance to doctrinal distinctions, tr.]. By contrast, if a Christian caught up in error accepts our witness on the basis of God's Word, then for the same reason the only direction in which we can and must point him is toward an orthodox congregation. If there are still some points of unclarity, then we might ask ourselves: Does he now have what he needs to keep him on the way to heaven? Can he at the place to which we are directing him consistently hear God's Word clearly and faithfully proclaimed and receive the sacrament of the Lord's body and blood there in confirmation of his deliverance? Our decision will depend on the characteristic marks of the church.

B. Our Christian witness: Living our faith and thus confessing it

Basic text: *"Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain"* (1 Cor 15:58b).

1. The believer's responsibility and task

Our Relationship to the Master

For a joyful fulfillment of the Great Commission the relationship between our Master and us, the recipients of his charge, is of the greatest importance. The Master-servant relationship revealed in the Bible between Christ and the Christian differs basically from the dependency of a servant on his master in any situation here in this earthly life. The following illustrations will underscore that.

Head and members

All true Christians are members of the body of the Christ (Eph 1:7,22; 5:23). Hence, every member has a duty toward the other members (1 Cor 6:15; 12:12ff). Into him, the firstborn from the dead (Col 1:18), our Head, we grow in all things (Eph 4:15). And it is the Holy Ghost who directs and governs the body of Christ by distributing varying gifts to individual members for the benefit of the whole body (Ro 12:3ff; 1 Cor 12:12ff). The relationship between this one Spirit and the one body is inseparable (Eph 4:4). It is he who is the "Giver of life" to the body (Nicene Creed) for the various living functions of the church ordained by Christ, e.g., he equips and enables the church for its missionary witness.

The Vine and the branches

¹³ See Thesis VIII in Walther's *Kirche and Amt*.

Just as the branches of a vine, through which the vital sap courses because of their firm attachment to the vine, have support, even when whipped by storms, thus spiritual strength (δύναμις, Ro 1:16) flows from Christ into his members. Rooted in him (Eph 3:17; Jn 8:31f), they are proof against the hostile onslaughts of the world, their own flesh, and the devil. Apart from Jesus Christ, the Vine, they are impotent. Only in him and through him are they fit for his service and enabled to produce genuine good works (2 Cor 3:5f; Eph 2:10).

Shepherd and flock

Jesus Christ is our Good Shepherd, leading us Christians to the nourishing pastures and the wholesome water of his Word. Thus he is always with us so that we need not fear when we have to pass through dark valleys in this life (Ps 23). He actually sacrificed his life for the sheep, and for that reason they can recognize his voice among a thousand others and will follow him. Through the varying scenes of life he leads them into the heavenly sheepfold.

Groom and bride

The communion of saints is the beloved bride of Christ (2 Cor 11:2) for whom he offered up his life (Eph 5:25). With this, the ultimate sacrifice, he proved his boundless love for her. She did not become his bride because of her natural beauty, but it was he who made her beautiful (Eph 2:10; 5:26f). In keeping with his will and by virtue of his faithfulness this union shall last forever (Ho 2:21f; Is54:10; 2Tm2:13).

The King and his people (1 Pe 2:9)

Christ is the heavenly King, and his kingdom is not of this world (Jn 18:36; Lk 23:42). It was not his people who chose him (Jn 15:16), but rather he who chose for himself "a people belonging to God" (1 Pe 2:9), purchased at the price of his own blood (Re 5:9; 1 Pe 1:18ff).

This selection of verses indicates clearly that our relationship with our Savior is a very special one and is one which we owe solely to him. Each and every possible activity on our part is contingent entirely upon his redemptive act, motivated solely by divine grace and love. Everything we are and have is his free gift. By faith in him we are pardoned sinners, richly endowed beggars, raised to the honored status of his servants. In his letter to the Philippian congregation Paul, describing his previous life during which he enjoyed the respect of his nation but which life was apart from God's grace and favor, writes: "But whatever was to my profit, I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things, and I consider them rubbish" (Php 3:7f).

In spite of hostility because of his commitment to Christ (1 Cor 15:30), in spite of physical suffering by way of correction, in spite of countless dangers encountered on his missionary journeys, in spite of toil and hardships, in spite of many deprivations (2 Cor 11:24ff), he can joyfully and gratefully proclaim: "I, Paul, have become a servant [i.e., of Christ]" (Col 1:23). This statement is indicative of the grateful joy of the apostle for having been permitted to work along in God's plan of saving human souls. God does not need us, yet he deigns to use us.

Our assignment: Confess him before men

Into our dark, comfortless world there resounds the cry of the Lord of lords: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (Jn 8:12). In our world flawed

with sorrow, hopelessness, and death is heard his comforting voice: "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me, will never die" (Jn 11:25,26).

It is by faith that we are permitted to enter into this wonderful relationship with him. Saved solely by his merciful favor; called by him, who has life in his very own person, to life eternal; enlightened by him, who is the light of the world, his Word assures us: "You are the light of the world" (Mt 5:14).

Commissioned by the mightiest of all lords, to whom "all power is given in heaven and on earth," we are called and charged to be lights in this world as we proclaim and in our lives give evidence of the "message of the cross," the life-giving gospel, in his name. By virtue of the authority which he conveys to us we are his ambassadors in and to the world: "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor 5:19-21).

Actually, the substance of this announcement is the Lord himself, and we have been commissioned to pass on his promise in which he reveals himself to those who hear it and calls them to faith and trust in his person and work (Ro 10:17). This passing on of God's Word is described by various verbs in the New Testament. There is the word *εὐαγγελίζεσθαι*, which we might translate as evangelize. It occurs chiefly in three forms: with an object, when it has the sense of "to announce something as a divine message of salvation" (Ac 8:35; 1 Cor 15:1; Ga 1:8); without an object when it is equivalent to "announce the divine message" (Ro 1:15; Ga 4:13); and also with the addition of *τινα* meaning, "by announcing the message of salvation, establishing for someone a relationship to the gospel," i.e., "evangelizing him" (Ac 8:40;14:21; Ga 1:9;1 Pe 1:12). With reference to those evangelized, the verb *διδάσκειν* is used, which means "teach" (Ac 5:42; 15:35). Although we, in employing the verb teach, often mean simply the mere imparting of knowledge, this does not hold true for the New Testament use of this word. The proclaiming of the Good News involves that, to be sure, but it is not limited to that. Such a limited sense would indeed run counter to Jesus' commission. Another verb, also frequently used is *κηρύσσειν*, which is usually translated as "preach" and has the sense of "announcing the Good News and at the same time extending an invitation to accept it and share in it" (Ro 10:8-15; 1 Cor 15:11). There are also the verbs *πείθειν*, "persuade, convince" (Ac 12:2;19:26), *ὁμιλεῖν* (Ac 20:11), from which "homiletics," the art and science of preparing and delivering sermons is derived and which has the meaning of "talk with each other," and there is also *ὁμολογεῖν* (1 Jn 2:23; 1 Tm 6:12f), used in the sense of "confess," as in the Lutheran confessional writings, "confess by way of contrast to something else" (1 Jn 2:23;1 Tm 6:12f).¹⁴

Wherever there is an opening and incessantly

Two related factors are implied in the Savior's charge to evangelize: mobility ("Go into all the world") and uninterrupted, incessant activity ("teaching them to observe"). These are also found in our basic verse or text: "Be firm and immovable and give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord." One might put it this way: Stand firm, but do not keep on standing there. We are to stand firm, stay put, deeply rooted in the divine Word, not unlike a tree (Ps 1; Eph 3:17). Around each single verse of the Scriptures we are to entwine the roots of our faith, adhering firmly, in order to "grow in all things," in every respect (Eph 4:15), so that we may not be swayed by the onslaughts of human opinions, false doctrines, and prevailing philosophies which are constructed on the "basic principles of the world rather than on Christ" (Col 2:8).

"Stand firm and immovable" on the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions, which are drawn from the Scriptures! And do that, even though all others deviate from God's Word, interpreting it and twisting it to conform to their own thinking, and do not be intimidated by their ridicule. Stand firm, since you know that "all Scripture is God-breathed" and "is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (2

¹⁴ See Hans-Lutz Poetach, *Grundsätze evangelischer Verkündigung*, Grosz Oesingen, 1981, pp 10-12.

Tm 3:16). We may, however, be "mobile" and move around when it is a matter of establishing contact with our fellow man. We might say, "Necessity is the mother of invention," for the spiritual need and distress of our unbelieving neighbor is of great concern to us. What are his inmost thoughts, feelings, concerns? How can we lead him to the Savior? Where and when is he best approachable?—"Always giving yourselves fully to the work of the Lord." This calls for our being flexible, for using our gifts, our imagination. We can learn how to be flexible by observing a soccer player. He has his one leg firmly planted and the other ready for action; with the latter he can send the ball flying, but only because his other leg is firmly planted. But when he is in action, both legs must be well coordinated, one leg always determining the movement of the other. If we stand firmly on the Scriptures and the Confessions, then our flexibility will be determined by their allowable limits—and these allow for considerable latitude.

2. New possibilities—open doors—new goals

The new situation obtaining in both rural and urban regions [this refers to the uniting of what were formerly two Germanies, tr.] has resulted in many negative manifestations: all sorts of sects appealing especially to young people, and an increase in the use of drugs, unemployment, various seductive temptations which are not without appeal to our own youth, but also as yet unrealized possibilities, unhindered development and progress. What we often wished for under the former regime we now simply may and can lay claim to: no state censorship, no extremely long delays in the printing and book-binding industries, our own church publishing house, copying and printing equipment, access to the mass media. We can readily rent meeting places, set up an information booth on market days, and even engage in missionary activity beyond the borders of our country. There are countless new opportunities. Doors stand wide open.

And what about people?

Especially in the eastern part of Germany there is no doubt that many people, because of problems they are facing, have begun to ask questions. It is for this reason that various sects and cults are enjoying a field day. Surely we Christians must be concerned when we see people in great numbers looking for help in sects, new religions, spiritism, esoterics, and other dark, dangerous powers, without realizing what they are letting themselves in for.

But where and just how shall we begin? Are not our resources too few? Many of us are asking ourselves questions like that and wishing that our church would be "doing something in the area of missions." In this connection, let us not forget that the desire to witness to one's faith is a direct result of that divine Word which is proclaimed in our congregations Sunday after Sunday. If we were now to say, "Now we have to start mission work," we would be unjust toward many of our fellow Christians. Much is being done without a lot of boasting about it, and it is only by chance that one gets to hear about it. If our members and pastors for good reason avoid the custom of the charismatics and the fanatic enthusiasts (*Schwärmer*) and proclaim to all the world: "Yesterday I witnessed to so and so," or "I've been instrumental in converting another person,"-why, that certainly does not mean that we are sitting on our hands. The question bothering a good number in our church is: "How can I talk about my faith with greater ease? How can I overcome my timidity? Just where can I help?"

And there is another question: "Where and how can we jointly, either as a congregation or an entire church body, become active in a missionary way?" The latter question cannot be answered by simply selecting a ready-made mission program, of which there certainly are a large number available. Mission work cannot be programmed. But one can plan for it. With this in mind, our church has a special board called the Commission on Evangelism and Publicity which is to gather information, suggestions, and critical opinions. This may lead to new endeavors, contacts with other committees in our church and with sister churches, and to intensifying these efforts. Planning in our case should have only one meaning: We want to do everything possible so that in keeping with our abilities and opportunities "we declare the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Pe 2:9).

In addition to the possibilities for missionary witness in use in our church which have already proven their value, such as tracts, brochures on special themes, sermon books, the *Ev. Luth. Volkskalender* [the

Yearbook of the Ev. Lutheran Free Church], periodicals like *Lutherische Gemeindebriefe* [their church paper, tr.], *Theologische Handreichung* [their theological journal], and the like, there are new possibilities now. Our radio work was initiated with the broadcast of a service from Zwickau-Planitz on September 22, 1991, and will be continued in subsequent services and morning devotions. Such broadcasts are also possible in other federal states of our country, financed by brethren in the faith. Videos and tapes for members living at great distances and also for other interested parties will be available on a larger scale in the future. Every congregation can apply to our Committee on Evangelism and Publicity for help in arranging informational evenings, mission festivals, and special services with invitations distributed in a particular area. Musical events with brass ensembles, other instrumental or choral presentations, and congregational festivals with a special missionary accent can be arranged and invitations can be extended on a larger scale than formerly. We can organize retreats with a missionary accent for young people and for children. We can even think of jointly sharing a foreign mission with one or the other of our sister churches.

It is evident even from this rather brief listing that we have to husband our resources and plan carefully. Even in our congregations there are fellow believers who are in need of our help, who are experiencing distress; are encumbered with worries, and who would appreciate a visit. Surely we should be taking care of our own, but that does not mean that we are not to be concerned about others. For that reason, it is necessary that we communicate with each other even more than previously, asking ourselves, "How can we deal with this new situation? How should we proceed?" And let us not just utilize the discussion that will follow the reading of this paper to do so, but also use the opportunity each time a congregation sends out invitations to attend its mission festival. In the board of elders meetings there could be thorough discussions so as to try together with the pastor to come up with some practical suggestions. In this section of my paper I can only call attention to the many, many possibilities. In the final analysis, whatever is undertaken in the congregations and at their initiative will be determined by the gospel and by those who not only hear the Word but also do what it says (Jas 1:22) and, of course, within the framework of the available resources. Although these often appear to be very limited, yet even here the congregation really serious about the Lord's commission should never rule out the possibility of his miracles in this area!

3. Practical aspects of confessing one's faith

There are various thoughts regarding witnessing to one's faith and related areas that are very helpful. The following points might be of importance for many of our guests [at this synod convention, tr.] and for the missionary approach and ambiance we are endeavoring to establish.

"...and if I have all knowledge"

You will find these words in 1 Corinthians 13, where the kind of love that meets with God's approval is celebrated. The opening words of that chapter read: "If I speak with the tongues of men and angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal...and if I have all knowledge...but have not love, I am nothing." It is important for our missionary witness that we keep in mind that a person without contact with God and also the Christian caught up in error will not have the same thought patterns as a person who has grown up in our church. If he begins to attend our Bible hour or some other congregational activity, we cannot expect that after one hour of instruction (and probably not after the third and fourth hour) he will have gained the conviction that the Bible is God's inspired Word. Whether he turns up for a second or third time may well depend upon our being patient with him and letting him freely express himself and tolerating his erroneous notions for a while. We must not have the attitude, he does not know anything, and he better listen to me, and then land on him like a ton of bricks the moment he expresses an erroneous thought. In short, if we assume the role of a strict school master, he probably will not return.

Neither does to "have all knowledge" imply that in the shortest possible time, you, the instructor, are going to convey all that knowledge. Both Peter and Paul compare the imparting of the teachings of the gospel

with feeding a person as he grows from infancy to adulthood (1 Cor 3:2; 1 Pe 2:2; also He 5:12f). No mother will feed her baby improper solid food, but first milk and easily digestible food. So too when persons come to us for instruction, we should start out by offering them spiritual food commensurate with their state of knowledge and experience, and only gradually with the "whole counsel of God." First the "milk" of the gospel and later on more highly spiced "Lutheran" dishes (*Schinkenbrote*).

What we read in one of this year's synodical essays of SELK [the large federated Lutheran free church in Germany, tr.] is a direct affront to apostolic teaching. There we find a call for a reduction in religious instruction to just basic gospel teachings. The author says by way of explanation:

Let us not in connection with our faith and its confession again lapse into a kind of legalism.... We must be on our guard not to set up anew a legalistic religion: the acceptance of certain antiquated "scientific" views as prerequisites for receiving divine grace! Such a procedure has little in common with the freedom of God's children—nor does it evince any real love for the persons we are instructing. It only puts obstacles in the way of their obtaining salvation. I am thinking in this connection of a preoccupation with certain aspects of historical critical research, something which, of course, is not insignificant where our fellowship with Lutheran church bodies which keep aloof from us is involved.... In this area there is still a lot of rigidity, and there are all sorts of somersaults in our own circles which act as roadblocks in the path of earnest souls outside our own church body: If I have to accept all that...¹⁵

The above was said in connection with the six-day creation account and the report on Jonah's three-day stay in the belly of the great fish. Whoever no longer dares to accept such truths clearly recorded in the Bible will also logically suppose them to be unnecessary hurdles for others investigating the faith. For one thing, we note here that the real sense of the word faith is being hollowed out, and, in the second place, this concept is in itself a legalistic religion far removed from the "liberty of the children of God," because from a fear of punishment something has to be accepted as true which one really no longer wants to accept. The imagined liberty, however, of no longer having to believe something is a slavery to fallible human reason. David, on the other hand, enjoys complete freedom when he confesses, "Your promises have been thoroughly tested, and your servant loves them" (Ps 119:140), and also, "All your words are true" (Ps 119:160a).

Our Lord has charged us "to preach the gospel" and "to teach them to obey everything I have commanded you." Those who have learned to love this Lord because of the testimony of the gospel will not take offense at the miracles which this mighty Lord is able to do, even though man's reason rears up in disbelief. We have now arrived at what one might term "missionary accommodation or adaptation."

To the Jew, I became like a Jew, to the Greek, a Greek

The Apostle Paul once wrote: "To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews.... To those not having the law, I became as one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law...), so as to win those not having the law.... I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some (1 Cor 9:20ff).

In our case, this does not mean, for example, that we are to become atheists in order to lead atheists to the faith. Surely, no social worker will make himself dependent on drugs in order to be in a position to help drug addicts! But the apostle is showing us how he, motivated by love for Christ and lost souls, adapts and accommodates himself to them, tries to understand them and empathize with them in order to find the right words in approaching them. He is not ashamed to approach those whom his former colleagues among the Pharisees avoided at all costs. He steps down to their level, whereas the others would have given them a wide berth. He envisions himself as being in their situation. His heart, moved by Christ's love, suffers along with

¹⁵ Minutes of the 7th convention of the Independent Ev. Lutheran Church (SELK), 1991, p 99, essay by W. Mey.

them. How glorious that must be, if an antisocial person, a victim of drugs or alcohol, a person who has generally been shunned by others, as a result of our witness is attracted and drawn to the Savior and so gains a new hold on life. Indeed, as Jesus assures us, "There is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents" (Lk 15:10).

Sincerely and clearly

As a rule, very few people [in so-called Lutheran countries, tr.] are aware of the fact that alongside congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran churches with ties to the state and congregations of the churches that have come out of the Prussian Union, there exists the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church, a federation of confessionally committed congregations independent of any attachment to the state. We realize that we must acquaint others, both near and far, with the reasons for our separate existence. In the past a leaflet issued by our Free Church Concordia Publishing House [in Zwickau] and entitled, "The Ev. Lutheran Free Church," performed such a service. It is in need of revision, however, with reference to present conditions. In addition, there is also the possibility of newspaper advertisements, posters, and flyers which can be distributed to families in the neighborhood. A very good approach which has proved effective is a newspaper article containing a picture of the church and a detailed description of an upcoming event. No cost is involved since it is news of regional interest. As a matter of fact, some [German, tr.] papers will even pay an honorarium.

No matter what one chooses to use, the style should be frank and unambiguous. The reader should have a clear picture of who we really are and why we choose to exist free of any attachments to the state. This is something we should not conceal, nor the smallness of our congregations either, since a chance guest will soon get the true picture. If we introduce ourselves simply as "Evangelical Lutheran" and omit the addition "Free Church," for whatever reason, we are not going to help our cause, and we run the risk of being charged with duplicity. Nor should we fudge the distinctly confessional commitment of our church body, since there are actually some people, though few in number, who are looking for a Lutheran Church with a confessional stamp. In all of this, however, we should put a high value on being sincere and clear. Remember the Savior's admonition: "Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one" (Mt 5:37).

The secret of pastoral care

Now that we have almost reached the end of our presentation, we wish to add a few words on this important point. If as a result of contact with the Word of God a new member is gained, it is only natural that those who are already members are happy and would like to know something about the newcomer. Let the pastor not forget, however, if he was the contact person, that the newcomer may have shared with him worries, problems, and troubles that that particular person might not care to have others know about. Without really being fully aware of it at the time, we may have become that person's confidant. Spiritual distress, family secrets, problems involving others that have been shared with us are no one else's business, and what we have been told should by all means remain confidential. Being a good, sympathetic listener is important, and holding one's tongue is also important (Jas 1:19). If we have confided in someone, we certainly would not relish having a third person approach us and say, "Why, I heard that you . . ."

4. Whether it is a joy or a burden as far as you are concerned, the power is in the Word

If joint missionary witness or that of a single individual, for that matter, is not to resemble a quickly blazing straw fire that will just as quickly die down, then it must feed on and be nourished by the Word of God. But even then, not all experiences will be joyful and exhilarating; there will also be disappointments and discouraging times. There will at times be opposition to and rejection of the Word so dear to us, or the person

whom we have been instructing suddenly stops coming. Then what was a source of joy suddenly becomes a burden, and we have an empty feeling, deeming ourselves worthless instruments of our Savior. We will begin asking ourselves, "What did we do wrong?" and perhaps even torment ourselves with the thought: What if that soul is lost because of my ineptness? How good, if that does happen, that we can remind ourselves that we too live by grace and that there is also forgiveness for us; that we can pour out our heart to our God, certain that he will not turn his back on us. After all, we do not have to be "professional evangelists" to be his witnesses. The Lord knows my weaknesses and failings, and he can see to it that his cause will not suffer because of them. Did he not take simple fishermen into his service? I will do the best I can and leave the outcome in his hands.

In such dark moments we realize that we are nothing and Christ is everything, and we experience the liberating, comforting, strengthening power of his Word. When we feel our weakness, he calls out to us, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor 12:9). Paul goes on to say, "Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me" (2 Cor 12:9b,10). It is not with talents we may or may not have that we make people Christians, but rather it is God's Word through which the Holy Spirit works (Is 55aOf). What God's Word has accomplished in our case, it can also effect in others. For that reason, we ourselves will not neglect that Word, but faithfully hear, read, and study it (Col 3:16f), live it, witness to it, and urge others to do the same. And above all, pray for its success, and just leave everything else to the one who has not charged us to do any more than witness. "Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain" (1 Cor 15:58). We pray: "Prompt our will to obey your Word. Teach us to live it and to confess you with word and deed as our Lord. And when and where we are weak, strengthen us. Praise the Lord! Amen."