

# A Basic Doctrinal Difference Among Lutherans

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“Confusion confounded” would be a pretty apt description of the average layman’s impression of the total picture of Lutheranism in the United States today. Living in an age when names and titles of government agencies, college courses, and secular societies, for the sake of brevity, are reduced to letters like so much alphabet soup he finds his own Lutheran church in the same situation. When the layman picks up his synodical church paper or reads an item of a religious nature in the newspaper concerning the Lutheran church, he often finds, himself thoroughly confused by groups of letters like ULC, ALC, ELC, UELC, the SC, LFC, AELC, the WS, the MS, the new TALC and others; all referring to different Lutheran synodical bodies. If he takes the time to sift through all of these letters and decipher their meaning his confusion is often further increased when he finds that some of these Lutheran groups, although separate entities, work hand in hand in other larger bodies and organizations like the NLC, the LWF and the WCCC.

Is it any wonder, then, that when the layman hears that 14 major Lutheran bodies in the North American hemisphere operate 23 seminaries, 33 four-year colleges, 11 publishing houses, have nearly 18,000 pastors with 13,000 of these serving about 18,000 organized congregations, have a total baptized membership of over 8 million and a confirmed membership of over 5 million, when he hears that these 14 major groups handle close to 400 million dollars annually and that they have property valued at nearly 2 billion dollars collectively, that their number, if taken together, makes “Lutheranism” the third largest “protestant” religious body in the United States and Canada ...yes, is it any wonder that the layman is often innocently moved to repeat the banner-word of the American Lutheran ecumenical movement: “Wouldn’t it be wonderful if there were just ONE BIG Lutheran church! ...If all Lutheran synods would be together?” (Luth. Church Directory of the U.S. & Canada; 1959, pg. 4 ff.)

The Synodical Conference Lutheran pastor, upon hearing these words from one of his parishioners, would usually agree: “Yes, it would be nice if all Lutheran Christians would be together, if there would be one big Lutheran church,” but he would go on with one little qualifying word, “IF they would all stand for and teach the same things on the basis of the Word of God!” With that answer, more often than not, the pastor would find himself looking at a raised eyebrow or a blank stare from the layman that as much as says to him...”Our pastor is one of those conservative Synodical Conference Lutheran ‘Kleinigkeitskraemer’ - ‘a hair splitter’, a fuss-pot of theological minutiae!”

In the picture of Lutheran ecumenicity the Synodical Conference is regarded by many Lutheran lay-people in the same light as it is looked upon and judged by many pastors and theologians of other Lutheran bodies: “The Synodical Conference synods are the flies in the ointment of total Lutheran unity! They are the proverbial ‘bulls in the china shop’ of Lutheran union! The Synodical Conference, and especially the Wisconsin Synod, plays the part of the theological termites undermining the ‘wonderful’ movements toward ONE Lutheran Church in our world!”

Why should this be? After all, is not the impression given and taken by the majority of Lutheran people that the differences between ALL Lutheran groups is so slight, so infinitesimal that it should scarcely be regarded at all? Isn’t the impression often given that if the pastors of the Synodical Conference and especially those of the Wisconsin Synod would be a ‘little more brotherly,’ if they would have a little more of that good old American spirit of ‘give and take,’ total Lutheran unity could be an accomplished fact yesterday?

Are the differences between American Lutheran bodies so slight? Many people believe that they amount to no more than a little difference in interpretation, policies or practice. Among the so-called ‘slight’ differences between the Synodical Conference and other Lutheran bodies that you often find commonly expressed are these:

1) Many other Lutheran groups accept, or at least tolerate, lodge membership on the part of their people -- the Synodical Conference doesn’t; or

2) Women have the right to vote in other Lutheran church bodies -- the Synodical Conference just hasn't yet gotten around to granting women their equal rights; or

3) Other Lutheran groups are not quite so 'close' in the matter of who it is that they allow to commune in their churches -- the Synodical Conference, or at least the Wisconsin Synod, won't allow other Lutheran Christians to come to communion; or

4) Other Lutheran groups are more cooperative with and tolerant of other Christian churches in the community -- Synodical Conference churches are for the large part 'isolationist'; or

5) The requirements for the acceptance of adult members and the requirements for church membership are not quite as stringent and narrow among other Lutheran groups as they are within Synodical Conference churches; or

6) The Synodical Conference is more interested in parochial education for its children than are other Lutherans; or, finally

7) While most of "Lutheranism" is in favor of total Lutheran unity -- the Synodical Conference, or at least the Wisconsin Synod, is not.

The thing that is being expressed by these commonly thought of believed differences -- between the Synodical Conference and other Lutheran bodies is that we of the Synodical Conference are anti-unity. What is not understood by lay-people because they are often only casual observers, and what is often not understood by other Lutheran groups and their theologians because there is a basic difference of more recent development in their approach to the Scriptures, is that the Synodical Conference and the Wisconsin Synod are not anti-unity BUT anti-unionism:

While the average impression exists that the only differences between the Synodical Conference and other Lutheran groups are of a minor nature -- undivisible and unimportant, the truth of the matter is that there is A BASIC DOCTRINAL DIFFERENCE AMONG LUTHERANS. It is a difference which, unresolved, will mean the separation of Christ-centered, Bible-loving Wisconsin Synod Lutherans from other Lutheranism for as long as the church exists or until that difference is resolved. It is a difference in the approach to and regard for the Word of God! - the Holy Scripture! This difference can be easily seen if we briefly review what it is that the Synodical Conference and other Lutheran bodies teach about the Bible.

## I

### WHAT DOES THE SYNODICAL CONFERENCE TEACH ABOUT THE BIBLE?

On the basis of what the Bible -- the inspired, the infallible, inerrant Word of God -- says of itself, our Wisconsin Synod at its convention at Saginaw, Michigan, in 1959 adopted the following Statement on Scripture:

Part II., The Inspiration of Scripture - "We believe and teach that all Scripture (that is, all the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments) is given by inspiration of God and is in its entirety, in its parts, and in its very words inspired by the Holy Spirit. God revealed Himself personally and directly to such men as Abraham, Moses and the prophets. Some of these He called to transmit His message to men orally or in writing. Their message was thus not their own, but God's Word. They were moved by the Holy Spirit, so that He is the true author of their every word. Inspiration means, then, that mighty act of God whereby He spoke His Word in the words of men and made them the effective and final vehicle of His revelation. Hence these words do not merely inform us concerning God's past action; they also convey God's action now.

I THESSALONIANS 2:13... 'For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.'

II PETER 1:19-21... 'We have also a more sure word of prophecy: whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts:

Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scriptures is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.'

II TIMOTHY 3:15-17... 'And from a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.'

I CORINTHIANS 2:13... 'Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.'

ROMANS 1:16-17... 'For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, the just shall live by faith.'

In giving men His message by inspiration, God had men express His Word in their own language (Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek), and in their own style (personal, historical, poetic, oratorical). (Cf. the superscription of the cross, Matt. 27:37; Mark 15:26; Luke 23:38, John 19:19-20.) Thus the holy writers felt personally responsible for every word they wrote (cf. II Cor. 7:8.. 'For though I made you sorry with a letter, I do not repent, though I did repent: for I perceive the same epistle hath made you sorry, though it were but for a season.), which at the same time knew that their words were given by the Holy Spirit. (I CORINTHIANS 2:12-1.3)''

On the basis of that same Word of God, the Holy Scripture, the following false teachings were rejected in this Statement on Scripture:

"We reject as a distortion of the true conception of verbal inspiration any idea which makes the act of inspiration a mere mechanical dictation.

"We condemn and reject any and all teachings and statements that would limit the inerrancy and sufficiency of Scripture; or that deny the divine authorship of certain portions of Scripture. inspiration applies not only to such statements as speak directly of Christ, but also to such as may seem very remote (e.g. in the field of history, geography and nature) . ...., the historical framework in which the Gospel message is set in Scripture is an essential part of the inspired Word just as much as the spiritual truths revealed in it.

"We reject the idea that verbal inspiration is called into question by accidents in the transmission of the text and the resultant variants in the manuscripts."

In part III., The Authority of Scripture - the Following statement is found:

"We believe and teach that where Scripture has not spoken decisively or is silent, differences of opinion may be held without violating Scripture or breaking the bonds of fellowship. Such matters fall into the area called 'open questions'. Scripture itself must determine which questions are to be considered as open."

And in part IV., The Interpretation of Scripture - on clear passages of the Word of God, the following statements were adopted:

"Since Scripture is God's Word, the interpretation of Scripture should not be regarded as merely or primarily an intellectual task . ... Scripture alone is to interpret Scripture . ...clear passages of Scripture, not any theological system or dogmatical summary or Bible doctrine, are to determine the interpretation . ... Where Scripture speaks historically, as for example in Genesis 1-3, it must be understood as speaking of literal, historical facts. Where Scripture speaks symbolically, metaphorically or metonymically, as for example in Revelations 20, it must be interpreted on these its own terms.

"Since Scripture is in all its parts and in all its words the inspired Word of God, we reject and condemn any use of the phrase 'totality of Scripture' which tends to abridge or annul the force of any clear passage of Scripture. Similarly we reject the use of any phrase which makes room the idea that the Scripture as a whole may be regarded as the Word of God, though it in many details is regarded as only the words of man.

"We reject and condemn 'demythologizing' as a denial of the Word of God. Where Scripture records as historical facts those events and deeds which far surpass the ordinary experience of men, that record must be understood literally, as a record of the facts; the miraculous and mysterious may not be dismissed as intended to

have only a metaphorical or symbolical meaning.” (Statement on Scripture ...Proceedings of the Thirty-Fifth Convention, Wisconsin Synod, 1959)

A similar statement on the Holy Scripture, not quite as full or complete, was contained in a document drawn up by the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod and adopted in 1932. This Statement, called “The Brief Statement,” was referred to by our Synod as a summary of what we within the Wisconsin Synod also believed on the Scripture, as revealed by the Word of God.

For as long as we know of the church, the authority of the Scripture has been implicitly or explicitly acknowledged. Hence we find among the church fathers statements like these: -

Polycarp declares, “he is the first-born of Satan whoever perverts the logia of the Lord.” He uses the term ‘logia’ frequently in connection with quotations from the old and new Scriptures.

Barnabas often used phrases such as, “the Lord saith in the prophet,” and, “the Spirit of the Lord prophesieth.” He said also, “The prophets received their gift from Christ and spoke of him.”

In the writings of Clement of Rome, scholars of the fathers tell us that he used often “for Scripture saith,” “by the testimony of Scripture,” and “the Holy Spirit saith.” He encouraged his readers “to look carefully into the Scriptures, which are the true utterances of the Holy Spirit.” “The blessed Paul wrote by inspiration to the Corinthians.”

Hippolytus claimed, “as the divine Scriptures proclaimed the truth, so let us view it; ....”

And for Cyprian the books of the Old and New Testaments were regarded as “the foundation of our hope, the bulwark of our faith, the support of our hearts, the guide of our path, the safeguard of our salvation.” As he prepared men for martyrdom he rejected “the intricacies of human speech” but “sets down those things which God says and by which Christ exhorts His servants.”

Clement of Alexandria, in his writings, declares that the foundations of the Christian faith are sure, “for we have received them from God through the Scriptures.”

And Origen writes, “We cannot say of the writings of the Holy Spirit that anything in them is otiose or superfluous, even if they seem to some obscure.” (Quotations from the Fathers are to be found in Appendix B of Wescott’s, “An Introduction To The Study Of The Gospels,” London & Cambridge: Macmillan, 1867; c.f. CTM, XXVII, No. 9)

From quotations such as these, it is evident that the Bible-based position of the Synodical Conference on the inspiration, the inerrancy, the infallibility of the Holy Scriptures is, indeed, that which was held by some of the earliest church fathers.

Dr. Martin Luther, too, some centuries later held to the doctrine of the inspiration of the Holy Scripture. Although his interest in Scripture was the accentuation of the sola Scriptura; since the question of Scripture’s inerrancy and inspiration was not one of pressing moment in his day; nevertheless there is nothing in Luther’s works that denies the verbal and plenary inspiration of the canonical books of the Bible. Constantly throughout his works one finds words like: “God speaks,” “Scripture speaks,” “the Scriptures are divine; in them God speaks, and they are His Word” (Weimar Ed., III, 41,6; 451,26). In countless places throughout his writings Luther, who acknowledged no degrees of inspiration, maintained that whatever is asserted without Scripture or without its sure revelation need not be believed (W. 6,5013;10;2,91;2,297,279,309,315). He claimed that the true God speaks in Scripture, wherefor we must accept in simple faith what it says (W. 40,2,593), For Luther, whatever Paul said, the Holy Spirit said; and whatever is contrary to Paul’s Word is contrary also to the Holy Spirit (W. 10,2,139ff). Luther believed and wrote that the apostles received the Holy Spirit; therefore their words are God’s Word (W. 40.1,173ff); so then Scripture is the Word of God and not the Word of men; God is the author of the Gospel (W. 8,584); the Holy Spirit is the Author of Genesis (W. 44,532); and the Bible is the peculiar Scripture of the Holy Spirit (W. 7,638; 46,545, 47, 133). (“Luther’s Doctrine of Inspiration” - J. T. Mueller, CHRISTIANITY TODAY, Vol I No. 8, pg 3-6, Jan. 21, 1957) In contrast with those, some of whom can even be found in the more liberal Lutheran bodies today, who believe in the development of doctrines and interpretations of the Word of God; and hence would deny the inspiration, inerrancy and infallibility of Scripture, Luther said... “We are not out to invent new things, but hold, and remain with the old Word of God, as the ancient church held it.” (St.L. XVII, 1659)

Although the writers of confessions of the Lutheran church, from the Book of Concord of 1580, do not give a separate treatment of the doctrine of inspiration, they show in many ways that the Bible was for them, and is, God's Word and the only infallible guide and authority. In the summary statements to the FORMULA OF CONCORD (Triglotta, pg 777-779) we find statements like this that show how the writers of the Confessions held the Scripture:

1. "We believe, teach and confess that the sole rule and standard according to which all dogmas together with (all) teachers should be estimated and judged are the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures of the Old and of the New Testament alone, as it is written...Psalm 119:105:... 'Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.' And St. Paul: 'Though an angel from heaven preach any other Gospel unto you, let him be accursed.'

3. ... "To this direction, as above announced, all doctrines are to be conformed, and what is contrary thereto is to be rejected and condemned as opposed to the unanimous declaration of our faith."

"In this way the distinction between the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament and all other writing is preserved, and the Holy Scriptures alone remain the only judge, rule and standard, according to which, as the only test-stone, all dogmas shall and must be discerned, as to whether they are good or evil, right or wrong."

And among the Lutheran theologians for whom the Scriptures were the inspired, inerrant, infallible Word of God, we find men like Chemnitz, Selnecker, Gerhardt; and later Quenstedt, Dannhauer and many others. (Lutheran Cyclopaedia; - "Inspiration," pg 511-514)

From the Words of Scripture themselves, from quotations of early church fathers, Luther, the Lutheran Confessions, and theologians of Luther's day and after there can be only one logical assumption; namely, the doctrinal position of the Lutheran bodies of the Synodical Conference on the vernal inspiration, inerrancy and infallibility of the Scripture; is the same as that testified to by the Scriptures themselves and held to and believed by church fathers, Luther, the writers of the Lutheran Confessions, Lutheran theologians of Luther's time and after, to the present day. The attitude and approach of the Synodical Conference to the Bible, the Holy Scripture; the inerrant, verbally inspired Word of God is contained in the prayer, "Lord, sanctify us in Thy Truth; Thy Word is Truth."

## II

### WHAT DO OTHER LUTHERAN BODIES TEACH ABOUT THE BIBLE?

In connection, then, with what the Synodical Conference holds and teaches about the Bible, the question might be raised, "Isn't that what all of the Lutheran bodies teach? Don't all of them accept the Bible as the inspired, inerrant, infallible Word of God?" A brief look: at the confessional paragraphs of the Constitutions of some of the larger Lutheran groups of our country provide our answer.

From the Constitution of the United Lutheran Church in America (organized in 1918) we read: "The United Lutheran Church in America receives and holds the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the inspired Word of God and as the only infallible rule and standard of faith and practice, according to which all doctrines and teachers are to be judged." (ARTICLE II - "Doctrinal Basis" - Section 1)

In the Constitution of the former American Lutheran Church (organized in 1930, now a member of The American Lutheran Church, 1960) we find the statement:

"The Church accepts the canonical books of the old and New Testaments as the inspired Word of God and the only infallible authority in all matters of faith and life." (ARTICLE II - "Confession of Faith" - Section 1)

And the proposed (and since adopted) constitution of the new The American Lutheran Church (TALC - made up of the former American Lutheran Church, ALC; the Evangelical Lutheran church, ELC; and the United Evangelical Lutheran Church, UELC) reads:

“The American Lutheran Church accepts all the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments as a whole and in all their parts as the divinely inspired, revealed, and inerrant Word of God, and submits to this as the only infallible authority in all matters of faith and life.” (ARTICLE IV -“Confession” - Section 1)

From statements like these it would seem that the answer to our question - “Don’t all Lutheran bodies believe and teach the same thing about the Bible?” - would be, “yes:” And we would have to be among the first to admit that there are many consecrated Lutheran lay—people in these other Lutheran bodies who believe that the Bible, the Holy Scripture, is the inspired, inerrant, infallible Word of God just as we do, and we would also have to admit that there are devout and consecrated Lutheran pastors in these other synodical bodies who are teaching their people God’s own truth concerning His Word.

But since the turn of the century, or even before, there has been an increasing tendency in many Lutheran bodies to alter and change the attitude to Scriptures that is so forthrightly expressed in the confessional paragraphs of their synodical constitutions. In fellowship agreements with other Lutheran bodies, for the sake of reaching agreements where there are actually no agreements at all, the confessional stand of respective synods has had to be watered down to come into agreement with the neo-orthodox leanings and teachings of some of the more liberal scholars and leaders in the ecumenical movements. The more conservative voices who would still accept the Scriptures for what the Scriptures declare themselves to be, find themselves a minority influence. Those who would ‘demythologize’ the Bible, who would ‘bring the Bible up-to-date,’ who would claim to have ‘a new, more scientific approach to the understanding and acceptance of Scriptures’ seem to gain more and more ground in Lutheran circles.

As much as we sympathize with those Christians, pastors and laymen alike, who agree with us on the teachings of God’s Word; as much as our hearts yearn to be one with them because of their personal faith and confessional status; the writings, the statements, the teachings of their synodical theologians and scholars, often un-Biblical and sometimes anti-Biblical, go undisciplined and are passively accepted and condoned by the particular synodical groups from which those statements come, thereby separating us from one another.

But we might ask, “Is it so important for all members of a particular Lutheran group to be agreed on everything? Isn’t it enough that we bear the name Lutheran, agree in most parts to believe and teach the same things and accept the same Bible and confession?” While it is apparent from their writings and confessional statements that this opinion is held by many Lutheran groups outside of the Synodical Conference, on the basis of God’s Word it is not our belief. In the “Brief Statement” we confess:

“The orthodox character of a church is established not by its mere name nor by its outward acceptance of, and subscription to, an orthodox creed, but by the doctrine which is “actually” taught in its pulpits, in its theological seminaries, and in its publications. (emphasis ours) On the other hand, a church does not forfeit its orthodox character through the casual intrusion of errors, provided these are combated and eventually removed by means of doctrinal discipline - Acts 20:30 ‘Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. I Timothy 1:3 ‘As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine.’” (Section - “OF THE CHURCH”)

The errors in other Lutheran bodies in respect to the Word of God, while they may have “intruded casually,” are not being “combated and removed” within these groups “by means of doctrinal discipline.” Rather the spirit of neo-orthodoxy that began with the “higher criticism” of Scripture is on the increase and becomes greater with each ecumenical move on the chessboard of Lutheranism.

In spite of the good confessional statements of the constitutions of other Lutheran bodies, look at what is being taught by their scholars and theologians, listen to what their theological students are learning; hear what the liberal “spokesman” for “Lutheranism” are saying in church periodicals and books:

Back in 1927 Dr. E. H. Dells (ULC) said at the installation of Professors Stamm, Hoover and Aberly at the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg, Pa.:

“When I came to the seminary years ago, I fully believed in the verbal inspiration of every book of the Bible. The Bible was to me an infallible authority in its statements concerning astronomy, geology, anthropology, history, ethics and religion ...I fancy I had plenty of company in my jejune conception and belief that the Bible in all its statements was inerrant... What a change has been wrought in the sphere of New Testament scholarship during the last fifty years.” (Theological Monthly, VII, pg 172)

Other ULC pastors and professors wrote:

Christian liberty knows how to distinguish between Scripture and Scripture, between the shell and the content between the chaff and the wheat, between the letter and the spirit.... Christian liberty does not fall into the sin of bibliolatry (Dr. M. G. G. Scherer – Christian Liberty and Church Union - pg 81)

“Bibliolatry is perhaps the finest and most exalted form of idolatry but idolatry it is nevertheless ....A stilted veneration for the Word betrays an inward weakness rather than a virile faith, and out of it proceeds a nervous anxiety to prove ‘the complete inerrancy’ of the Bible ‘from cover to cover.’ (Dr. C. A. Wendell - What Is Lutheranism? - pg 235)

Within the same book, “What is Lutheranism” – p. 293 – V. Fern states:

“The doctrine of the complete inerrancy of the Bible, upon which historic Lutheranism has built up a system of orthodoxy, can hardly, without a loss of intellectual integrity and vitality, be today maintained in the light of the historical method of understanding the Scriptures:”

Dr. H. F. Baughman, present President of the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg, Pa., back in 1935 in the Lutheran Church Quarterly (pg 258), wrote:

“The idea of verbal inspiration and the practice of literal interpretation may destroy the reality of the Bible’s message. Its authority is not to be identified with the form of the language which announces the truth of God, but must be found in the light of the experience through which the word of God came to the soul of men.”

Within that last statement... “the light of the experience through which the word of God came to the soul of men” ...we have a neat summary of the neo-orthodox approach to Scriptures. The Bible is the Word of God, says the liberal, not because the Lord inspired it, but as man receives it and applies it to his life; and only that in the Bible is the Word of God which man CAN apply to his life and faith in his present situation.

A. W. Haas, in “What Is Lutheranism” - pg 176, says:

“There must be a clear distinction kept in mind between the Word of God and the Bible. The Bible is the Word of God because it contains the Word of God.”

And Dr. H. C. Allen in the “Lutheran” of January 14, 1937, goes so far as to declare certain portions of the Scriptures to be “dregs and filth,” which must be separated from the parts that are pure and clean. He says: “The Bible is not a sacred oracle speaking infallibly in every book on everything that is contained in it; yet it is infallible when it speaks of the object of our faith and the way of life.” Dr. Alleman’s views, the views of the neo-orthodox, have certainly caught on in Lutheranism today for we find that same thing expressed in most of the confessional and merger statements of the larger Lutheran groups from the past 10 to 20 years; “Scripture is the Word of God, only when it speaks of the object of our faith and the way of life.”

Prof. T. A. Kantonen of the Hamma Divinity School in Springfield, Ohio, (ULC), is also among those who deny the verbal inspiration of Scriptures. In an article on “God” in the book “What Lutherans Are Thinking,” he takes the modernists approach to Scriptures that the doctrines of the church, taken from Scriptures, were a process of gradual development. He states: “without the existential approach to Christ, however, the church’s faith could have assumed a binitarian instead of a trinitarian form ....The Trinity, then, is the church’s interpretation, in the philosophical language of an ancient day, of the existential contact with God which her Lord continues to give.” Can we expect to find anything but such rationalization from a man who declared in another article: “The Canned Goods Of Past Theology” (the Lutheran, Dec. 12 ff, 1935)... “Lutheran

exegesis will be seriously handicapped unless it abandons once and for all the unpsychological and mechanical theories of inspiration and unhistorical views of verbal inerrancy which the application of scientific and historical methods to the study of the Bible has rendered obsolete.” Just the year before he wrote (Lutheran Church Quarterly, 1934, p. 114), “A living theology ...will not set up a deified book in the place of the deified Church of Roman Catholicism nor hold to legalistic, unhistorical, and unpsychological theories of its inspiration.”

Men like Kantonen, Wendell, Haas, Wentz and others whose quotations against the inerrancy and inspiration of Scriptures could here be listed, are actually doing no more than following the liberalism of a forerunner, the aforementioned Dr. E. H. Delk who said (Lutheran Church Quarterly, 1912, pg 568), “Higher criticism has set theology free from that tyrannous literalism and false idea of inspiration which made all attempts at the adjustment of theology with modern thought in history, science, and philosophy either impious or revolutionary ....No theory of verbal inspiration is any longer tenable.” Following this approach to the Holy Scripture it comes as no surprise to read in the same periodical just 25 years later: ... “It is, of course, no secret that Verbal Inspiration is not taught in some of the seminaries of the United Lutheran Church ....” (Lutheran Church Quarterly, 1937, pg 195)

Not only the United Lutheran Church in America has been touched with this liberalism; but other Lutheran bodies as well, through their periodicals and theological authors, have come out in favor of the neo-orthodox approach to Scriptures. A. D. Mattson (Augustana Synod) wrote in the Journal of Theology of the American Lutheran Conference (1941, pg 546 ff.) “...many theories have been advanced as to how God inspired the Bible ...All theories of inspiration within the Lutheran Church are the theories of individuals, some more or less adequate ...Fact remain, but theories may be transitional.” In his article, when he refers to Verbal Inspiration, Mattson calls it “the enslaving legalism of the letter.”

In 1942 the Lutheran Herald (Luth. Herald, October 13, 1942) publication of the Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELC) comments on an article by Edwin Lewis in which he found “much unnecessary baggage” in the Bible. The editor of the Lutheran Herald commended Edwin Lewis for taking his position with the words: “He accepts the *fact* (italics in original) of the inspiration of the Bible without much theorizing.” The Lutheran Companion, publication of the Augustana Lutheran Church, has complained that “Lutheran unity is made contingent upon the acceptance of definite individualistic interpretations of certain doctrines in which the Church has not made a final pronouncement or has permitted considerable latitude of opinion.” (Lutheran Companion, March 30, 1939) And even the Lutheran Standard, publication of the former American Lutheran Church (ALC - now in TALC), says that “theological minutiae should never become divisive in the Lutheran church” (May 2, 1942) and that “to quibble over theories of inspiration is no less a disaster” than to quarrel over “the color of vestments” (March 22, 1941). In 1949 the Lutheran Herald printed a series of four articles by Dr. Jacob Tanner on “The Inspiration of the Bible” (Sept. 27 to Oct. 25, 1949). Although the article claimed to be a defense of the doctrine of Inspiration - and for the most part they were - the articles called attention to a number of alleged “difficulties and discrepancies” in the Bible, and then failed to offer any explanation. Certain allegedly incorrect quotations from the Old Testament found in the New Testament were questioned by asking: “By what right could the New Testament authors make such use of the Old Testament?” And the Old Testament is also charged with an inferior morality” because it records “polygamous practices” of such men as Abraham, Jacob and David; and because the Old Testament contains “the so-called imprecatory Psalms” which offer prayers that no Christian could pray (e.g. Ps. 69:22-29; Ps. 109:6-16) (Theologische Quartalschrift, January 1951) Then in 1950 the Lutheran Herald states in an editorial, “Dr. Tanner is a sound theologian.” (Lutheran Herald Jan. 10, 1950) The former American Lutheran Church seems to have agreed with Dr. Tanner, or at least the editor of its Lutheran Standard does, for in 1953 (Lutheran Standard, Feb. 21, 1953) on page 15, in an article which discusses the imprecatory Psalms (called “deprecatory” in the article) the statement is made that Psalms 59, 69, 109 are “out of line with the spirit of Christ .... To us, children of the New Testament, they (the imprecatory Psalms) must remain foreign in spirit. Here Jesus is our pattern!” Certainly this attitude toward the Holy Scriptures of the Old Testament in the ALC and ELC sounds much different than the words of Dr. T. Engelder of the Missouri Synod who writes of this matter: “Because the sentiments in the imprecatory Psalms



are offensive to the moderns, they will not believe in Verbal Inspiration. Because we believe in Verbal Inspiration, we know that those sentiments express the mind of God; and while some of the expressions may seem too harsh to us, we bridle our thoughts. We know that, while we now see through a glass darkly, the light of glory will reveal to us that every word of the imprecatory Psalms is in full accord with the eternal holiness.”

Because everything else in the world is subject to change; because everything else in our world today seems to have to pass the test of science and logic and reason; it becomes apparent that those who would deny the verbal inspiration, the inerrancy and infallibility of the Word of God feel that Christian doctrine must change and, in fact, ever is changing: This thought is expressed by V. Ferm in “What is Lutheranism?” (pg 279f) when he says: “Much water has passed under the bridge since the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries ...We must make readjustments with the findings of the best Biblical scholarship and interpretation, with the best recent scholarship.” The writer of the pamphlet “A Living Lutheran Theology” certainly gives vent to the same feelings when he claims to be disgusted with the old-style Lutheranism and its firm insistence on “changeless doctrines,” on “eternal, unchanging doctrines.” He finds it disturbing, to say the least, for that same old-style Lutheranism to claim that “these doctrines are derived from the Bible and set forth in the Confessions of the Church” and that “they must be accepted as true in their minutest points.” (pg 8, 9, 17) .

In II Thessalonians 2:15 God’s inspired Apostle encourages us: “Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.” Today the exponents of the higher criticism of Scriptures and the neo-orthodox among Lutherans tell us that man must be freed from Biblical authority. The Lord Himself told his followers: “Blessed are they that hear the Word of God and keep it.” (Luke 11:28) The modernist among Lutherans raises the doubt of Satan within our sinful hearts by asking... “How can you be sure that you have heard God right? Unless the Word of God is heard by you as meaningful for your faith and life, that Word has no real authority over you!” The inspired writer of Scriptures warns his people then, and all of us today: “If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house...” (II John 10) But the neo-orthodox modernist in Lutheranism says: “Doctrines have to change and are changing. Science, geology and history speak to us now of things that the writers of the Bible never knew or understood. Hence, some of this “filling” in the Bible can be left out without altering the main message of the Word.” In an article entitled “A Layman And His Faith” (Christianity Today, May 23, 1960) Dr. L. Nelson Bell, a Protestant, sums up neatly the failing of this rationalistic approach to Scripture:

“Little wonder that neo-orthodoxy has yet to produce a great soul winner: Wherever faith in the authority and integrity of the Scriptures is destroyed by injection of human interpretation denying clear affirmations of Scripture, the nerve of spiritual power is cut. One may exhibit a high degree of scholarship and intellectual attainment, but the one thing necessary is lacking.”

In view of the intellectual rationalization that seems to be ruling Lutheran theologians in many of the bodies outside of the Synodical Conference; and in spite of the fact that we are sure that many consecrated pastors and laymen within those other synodical bodies, who would be loyal to the Lord and His Word, would not subscribe to such un-Scriptural and anti-Scriptural statements; we still can come to only one conclusion: The confessional position of other Lutheran bodies on the Scriptures, while seemingly the same or similar to the confessional position of the Synodical Conference, is nevertheless denied by the writings and teachings of their undisciplined theologians, officials and theological publications. Rather than following the banner-word “put off the old -- on with the new,” how much better for all of Lutheranism today if the modernists within it could have it said of themselves, “They continued steadfastly in the Apostle’s doctrine...” (Acts 2:42)

### III

#### **WHAT EFFECT DO THE NEO-ORTHODOX LEANINGS AND TEACHINGS OF THEOLOGIAN IN OTHER LUTHERAN BODIES HAVE UPON THEIR APPROACH TO OTHER DOCTRINES OF SCRIPTURE AND UPON THEIR PRACTICE?**

With the denial of the inspiration, infallibility and inerrance of God’s Word, it would necessarily follow that other doctrines of Scripture, as well as practices of the church, would be affected. This has certainly been

the case in many of the Lutheran bodies outside of the Synodical Conference and, in some instances, the cause of no end of confusion and disturbance in our own group. In spite of the clear teachings of Scripture on doctrines such as Conversion, Election, Justification, the Church, the Anti-Christ, Sunday and others, and in spite of clear passages of Scripture which can be applied to the practices of the church where the matter of lodges and fellowship with others inside and outside of the Lutheran church are concerned, the logical positivists among modern Lutheranism (those who deny meaning to any statement that is not either logical, self-evident or scientifically verifiable) take these doctrines and passages of Scripture, hold them up to the light of their own misguided reason or to certain scientific rules of higher criticism and then accept what they want and reject the rest. A brief look at a few of these doctrines from the standpoint of Scriptures and then from the standpoint of statements made by theologians outside of the Synodical Conference on these doctrines, should very quickly give us at least a basic impression of what is involved.

On the basis of passages such as Ephesians 2:8-9: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast." - and I Corinthians 12:3: "No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost." - and many others, our Synodical Conference has taught "that" man's "conversion consists in this, that a man, having learned from the Law of God that he is a lost and condemned sinner, is brought to faith in the Gospel which offers him forgiveness of sins and eternal salvation for the sake of Christ's vicarious satisfaction." We have always rejected the synergistic error that man's conversion is not solely the work of God's grace alone, "but in part also ...the cooperation of man himself." "As to the question why not all men are converted and saved... we confess that we cannot answer it. From Scripture we know only this: A man owes his conversion to the grace of God. But any man's non-conversion is due to himself alone."... (Brief Statement "Of Conversion") It is only such a stand, the Scriptural stand, on conversion that makes Luther's explanation to the Third Article truly meaningful... "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, My Lord, nor come to Him; but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith ...."

Although there was a time when the synergistic error of man's cooperation in his conversion was held by Lutheran groups outside of the Synodical Conference (notably the Iowa Synod), according to the Chicago Thesis of 1928-29 that view was no longer considered to be held by those bodies which later became part of the American Lutheran Conference and have since been absorbed by the new TALC. But statements such as those of G. Fritschel... "whether a sinner will be saved or lost depends in the last analysis on his free self-determination either for or against grace"...were neither explained nor retracted. The old Ohio Synod in its *Zeitblaetter* (1887), while teaching the doctrine of man's conversion properly and Scripturally, still qualified its teachings with the statement: ... "From this it follows incontestably that conversion and salvation in a certain respect depend also on man, not on God alone." In an article on "The Work of The Holy Spirit" by G. C. Carfeldt of the Augustana Seminary at Rock Island, Ill. (What Lutherans Are Thinking), we read... "It is indeed God who is the auctor principalis in the process of conversion, but He does not thrust His grace upon those who are not willing to receive it ....man must permit the power of the Spirit to become operative in his life if he is to be converted." (pg 228)

In the matter of the doctrine of election (or predestination) the Scriptural truth "that all those who by the grace of God alone, for Christ's sake, through the means of grace, are brought to faith, are justified, sanctified, and preserved in faith here in time, that all these have already from eternity been endowed by God with faith, justification, sanctification and preservation in faith, and this for the same reason, namely by grace alone, for Christ's sake, and by way of the means of grace..." (Brief Statement "Of The Election Of Grace") - is upheld by the Synodical Conference. The Ohio Synod, a charter member of the Synodical Conference, in 1881 resigned its membership in this body because of a controversy over the doctrine of election. Already then an attempt was made to find an answer to the question, "Why did God elect or predestinate some and not others to salvation?" (*cur alii prae aliis?*) by rationalization ...and the view was held that an answer could be found "'intuitu fidei"; that is, "the predestination of the elect unto life eternal took place 'in view of their faith'." Man's faith, if not the motivating cause, was thought to be the explanatory cause as to why God elected him to eternal salvation in preference to others. Although the "intuitu fidei" term has passed into disuse, and although good statements can

be found in other Lutheran bodies defending the Scriptural doctrine of election or predestination, other statements can also be found in these groups in which individuals teach “intuitu fidei” in different clothing, in that God still saves the elect by foreseeing something within those individuals that moved Him to elect them. Hence, not God alone but man also plays a part in man’s election to salvation; a denial of God’s grace.

Where justification is concerned, that on passages such as Romans 5:12, II Corinthians 5:19 ...we teach that in Christ God declared the whole world justified of all sins.... that Scriptural truth, too, was rejected by the Ohio Synod, now part of the former ALC and the new TALC. That rejection of objective justification by the Ohio Synod was reaffirmed by the “Declaration of the American Lutheran Church in 1938.”

In the matter of the Antichrist where we on the basis of passages such as II Thessalonians 2:3-12 and I John 2:18 declare the institution of the papacy to be “the very Antichrist,” (Confessions, Brief Statement; Wis. Synod Statement on the Antichrist) this doctrine of Scripture is rejected. Dr. Deindoerfer of the old Iowa Synod held that the teaching that the pope is the Antichrist is a “human application of the Scripture doctrine of the Antichrist ...which must be clearly distinguished from the Scripture doctrine itself.” In the Synodical Conference Dr. Stoeckhardt in the 1904 Vol. of “Lehre and Wehre” wrote: “Certainly the fact that the pope has damned and cursed the article of the forgiveness of sin which is the comfort of the Christian in life and death ...and that he proclaims this as true and pure doctrine - that is what makes him the first-born of Satan, yes, worse than all devils. That the pope with his work-doctrine with all his decretals, lies, blasphemies, tears Christ, the only Savior of sinners, out of the hearts and consciences of Christians, that makes him the real true Antichrist.” (pg 494) That Scriptural position was upheld by our Wisconsin Synod when at its Convention in Saginaw, Michigan, in 1959, it adopted the fine Scriptural “Statement on the Antichrist.” (Synodical Proceedings pg. 200 ff) But Prof. T. G. Tappert of the United Lutheran Church (What Lutherans Are Thinking, pg 355-356) would label such a statement, as he does the Lutheran Confessional statements on the Antichrist, “unlovely and abusive.” (Wicke’s Catechism of Differences, pg 53)

On the matter of the doctrine of the Sunday where we within the Synodical Conference on the basis of Scripture teach that the keeping of no special day, or even one day, of the week is commanded by God (c.f. Romans 14:5-6, Colossians 2:16-17), one quotation from the “Lutheran” (July 30, 1931) will suffice to briefly illustrate what is taught and held by a number of Lutherans outside of the Synodical Conference: “The church among the Gentiles was guided by the Holy Spirit in discontinuing heathen holidays and celebrating the first day of the week as the Lord’s Day. The purposes of the Mosaic third law were continued as an essential part of the revelation of God to man concerning doing His will on earth. What one might call the letter of them was modified in the new dispensation, but not their spirit of profitableness ....Christians of today are called upon to set Sunday apart from the remainder of the week and use it for rest and for worship with their brethren. God has a prior lien on the first day of the week. Concerning this there is no more room for argument than concerning profaning His name, committing adultery, or bearing false witness.” Is it any wonder that we often then find Lutherans in the forefront along with other “sabbatarians” trying to uphold or establish Sunday “blue-laws” in communities across our nation?

In the matter of the “millennium” - that ‘notion’ based on misinterpretation of Revelations 20:4 that “Christ will return upon earth a thousand years before the end of the world and establish a reign of glory for His church here on earth,” which we reject upon Scriptures (Luke 17:20-21, John 18:36, Matthew 25:31-32, Matthew 24:36-37) (Wicke’s “Catechism of Differences”, pg 47-49), we would not expect to find the Lutheran church involved. In statements from outstanding theologians in other Lutheran bodies outside the Synodical Conference we often find agreement with our Scriptural position. But there are many, even within the Lutheran church, who still hold to that false ‘notion.’ Adolph Harnack, distinguished German scholar, writes: “This doctrine of Christ’s second advent, and the kingdom, appears so early that it might be questioned whether it ought not to be regarded as an essential part of the Christian religion.” Among other Lutheran scholars and writers who held to one form or another of “millennialism” we find Dr. Joseph Seiss, Lutheran author and preacher of Philadelphia, author of a commentary on Revelations; Dr. Milton Lindberg, author of “Beacon Lights Of Prophecy” and for many years dean of the Augustana Lutheran Theological Seminary in Rock Island, Illinois; the late Dr. Leander S. Keyser of the Hamma Divinity School. Among living Lutheran theologians who

are premillennial is Dr. O. Hallesby of Oslo, Norway; Dr. Samuel Miller, first dean of the Lutheran Bible Institute of Minneapolis; Dr. H. G. Randolph and others.” (Lutheran Standard, June 22, 1957)

The Essence and Object of the Lord’s Supper, the Universal Conversion of the Jews, the matter of a First Resurrection, these and yet others are among the doctrines on which there is disagreement between the Synodical Conference and other Lutheran bodies - a difference which can be directly traced to the rationalistic approach of those modernists within the Lutheran church to the Holy Scriptures. As the “Catechism of Differences” states, “This list (the aforementioned and treated doctrines) does not exhaust the doctrinal differences that exist, but touches upon the most important ones.” (pg 11)

The area where this difference in attitude or approach to the Scriptures and its doctrines between the Synodical Conference and other Lutheran bodies becomes most notable is in the unionistic fellowship practices that are being carried on, and increasingly so, in modern “Lutheranism.” We find it expressed predominately in two things; namely, the matter of lodge membership and the Lutheran church; and, secondly, in the matter of fellowship with religious groups outside the pale of Lutheranism and even outside Christianity.

It should not be necessary to explain the stand of the Synodical Conference where lodge membership for its members is concerned. But, perhaps it would be well to point out that not only the Synodical Conference but most other Lutheran bodies as well take the same or similar stands on the fraternal organization question. The pseudo-religious practices and the work-righteous teachings of the lodge are condemned by the majority of the larger Lutheran bodies in our country - but this is on paper. This seems to be about as far as it goes except for isolated cases of an anti-lodge, pro-Christ and Scriptures pastor or congregation in their groups. Here, too, neo-orthodoxy has left its grimy footprint. For in spite of the fact that the Constitution of the former American Lutheran Church (ALC) read: “The church is earnestly opposed to all organizations or societies, secret or open, which, without confessing faith in the triune God and in Jesus Christ as the eternal Son of the eternal God, incarnate in order to be our only Savior from sin, are avowedly religious or practice forms of religion, teaching salvation by works. It declares such organizations and societies to be anti-Christian, and rejects any fellowship with them, ...and in spite of the fact that a similar statement can be found in the Minneapolis Theses, adopted in 1930 by the five Lutheran churches that formed the American Lutheran Conference, those fine-sounding confessional words, based on Scriptures, are not being upheld within many of the churches of those other Lutheran bodies, as many of our pastors can testify! Instead, there is a steady whittling away and subtle brainwashing going on that would tell pastors and members of these other Lutheran synods, “Thank God, by no means every member of a secret society accepts these erroneous and dangerous teachings. Many men, perhaps most men, join such societies for business and social reasons. That is why the American Lutheran Church has declared that the treatment of individual lodge members is a matter of pastoral care. The American Lutheran Church and its local congregations are interested not in ‘fighting the lodge’ but in saving and conserving souls.” (Lutheran Standard, March 17, 1956) Since the “care” and “treatment” seldom take place at all, it seems that at least half of the last statement is true; and that the policy of much of Lutheranism on the lodge today is governed not by Scripture, but by the old saying: “If ya can’t lick ‘em, join ‘em.”

Perhaps that is what the JCUL (Joint Commission on Lutheran Unity) of the Augustana Lutheran Church, the Suomi Synod and the American Lutheran Church had in mind when they finally adopted the following lodge provision: “If the church shall be free to advise and admonish concerning association and affiliation with organizations which claim to possess in their teachings and ceremonies that which the Lord has given solely to His church, its ministry must not be compromised by pastors who belong to such organizations. Provisions shall be made in the constitution of the church whereby ministers ordained in the new church shall agree to refrain from membership in such organizations or be subject to discipline.” (The Luth. Oct. 8, Nov. 5, Dec. 3, 1958) Dr. Franklin Clark Fry, called “Mr. Lutheranism” by TIME magazine, hastened to call the attention of his ULCA in convention at Dayton, Ohio, to four points in connection with that lodge provision, among which were:

1) “The proposed regulation does not apply to lay people - to any lay people - and will not be extended to do so;

2) “It has only to do with men entering the ministry, by ordination or otherwise, after the new church is formed. Ministers who are members of lodges or other secret societies on the date of the merging convention will not be affected by this enactment. They will be subject to no discriminations or disabilities. Their future relations with such organizations will be scrupulously left to their own volition and consciences, exactly as they have been in the past.” ...”

Certain Scripture passages such as II Corinthians 6:14-18... “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers...” and Romans 16:17... “Mark them which cause divisions and offenses among you...” and I John 2:23... “Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father,” it seems no longer are to be regarded by the Lutheran church. It may be true that we do not find the terms “fraternal organization,” “Freemasonry” or “lodge membership,” as such, mentioned in the Bible. But then neither do we find the terms “graft,” “homicide,” “sodomy,” “sadism” and many others. But there is no doubt that clear passages of Scripture tell us these things are wrong and sinful; just as there are other clear passages of Scripture that warn us against following the work-righteous, Christ-less religion of the lodge.

By far the worst practice to which the neo-orthodox attitude and approach to Scriptures has led many Lutheran bodies today is the unionism and spiritually compromising situations with other religious bodies. Unionism, plain and simple, is church fellowship without doctrinal unity. For years our Synodical Conference on clear passages of Scripture has insisted that there can be no fellowship between church bodies, even Lutheran church bodies, unless there is first of all complete agreement in all matters of Scriptural doctrine and practice. Because of the modernist influence that would have us differentiate between “essential” and “non-essential” doctrines of Scripture, sad to say, this matter of church fellowship has become a point of dispute between the member synods of our Synodical Conference. Although Paul says in I Timothy 1:3: “Charge some that they teach no other doctrine” and Romans 16:17 ... “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them,” and although the Old Testament Prophet asks the question: “Can two walk together, except they be agreed?” (Amos 3:3); most of the Lutheran bodies outside of the Synodical Conference today feel that church fellowship can be entered into with any Lutheran body “that confesses adherence to Holy Scriptures as the Word of God in all matters of faith and life (emphasis ours - notice the qualifying statement) and subscribe to the confessions of the Lutheran church” (Resolution of TALC from its Constituting Convention). Hailing the “new” approach to church fellowship, the Lutheran Messenger (May 3, 1960) said: “During the early years of the Lutheran Church in America there were seemingly justifiable reasons for the many divisions. Different national origins, languages, customs, traditions, practices were barriers to closer fellowship among Lutherans.. This separateness fostered prejudices and mistrust. Differences in interpretation of the Word and practices were often magnified, while the underlying basic unity of the Lutheran Church as expressed in her confessions was not emphasized.” Robert Paul Roth, expressed similar feelings in respect to inter-Lutheran fellowship in an article “The Unity Of The Church In Christ” (Lutheran Herald, Jan 5, 1960). Discussing the 51 theses drawn up by the Lutheran World Federation, 1957, he stated: “Certainly unity will not be accomplished by discussion of doctrinal differences nor by seeking for common feelings of fellowship; but if we believe we are really one in Christ, despite our differences, we will not hesitate to manifest this faith in works of love for those who are in need among people separated from us.” “Agreed to disagree” is the motto of the Lutheran unionist.

Holding to the line that simple confession of faith in Christ and acceptance of the Lutheran confessions is enough for fellowship, the American Lutheran Church took our sister synod (Missouri) to task for failing to recognize the wonderful fellowship and ecumenical possibilities, when Missouri refused to join the Lutheran World Federation in 1956. Editor E. W. S. Schramm of the Lutheran Standard (January 28, 1956) in an article entitled “Confession or Obsession,” maintains that “the only definition of church fellowship which the Scriptures contain is this: I must recognize as my brother everyone whom Christ recognizes as His brother. The practical application of this principle must, of course, reckon with the fact that Christ’s brethren are not all agreed on all the doctrines revealed in Scripture—particularly the doctrine of the Lord’s Supper. For us Lutherans this results in degrees of fellowship with fellow Christians—a wider fellowship that embraces all the brethren of Christ and a narrower, deeper, fellowship that embraces all fellow-Lutherans.” Schramm quotes the

late Dr. Albert Jagnow in defense of his rationalization ... “Throughout the Age of Orthodoxy the insistence on ‘pure teaching’ as necessary to church fellowship was intensified, and ‘pure teaching’ was defined in ever more detail ...By about 1850 this rationalistic insistence on absolute agreement in minute theological detail had been transferred to the New World, and had become an obsession with some branches of Lutheranism in America’s great Middle West!” Then Editor Schramm wags a warning finger at the Missouri Synod and asks it to “re-examine its position on fellowship and on membership in the Lutheran World Federation and the National Lutheran Council and see, in the light of Scriptures, whether what it considers a courageous confession is not in reality a misguided obsession.” If this is the sentiment of the American Lutheran Church toward the Missouri Synod, with whom they were ‘holding hands’ at the time these words were spoken, one wonders with what terms of endearment our own Wisconsin Synod would be addressed for its Scriptural, confessional stand on church fellowship? At least the ELC group that went into the new TALC is not holding its breath over what the Synodical Conference will be doing on Lutheran unity, when the editor of its Lutheran Herald said (December 8, 1959)... “the goal of total Lutheran unity is not anywhere in sight unless and until the third (Synodical Conference, especially the Missouri Synod) can be brought into some relationship with the two-thirds... No one in his senses can believe that we are on the threshold of the day of total Lutheran union in American....”

The full exponents of neo-orthodoxy and the ecumenical movement, however, are not satisfied to limit their efforts and their ecumenical dreaming to Lutheranism. Dr. Anders Nygren, of Lund, Sweden, outstanding authority on Kierkegaardian existentialism, and one of the strongest voices in the Lutheran ecumenical movement says of Lutheran unity: “Each one must surrender something in order to reach a common result. It must be clear at once that for such a conception of ecumenicity a strong confessional consciousness is indeed a threat.” (Emphasis ours) (Lutheran World Review, January 1949, “The Basis of Ecumenicity in Lutheran Theology.”) And of unity in general he says: .....”The Gospel is so exceedingly rich that no section of Christendom can claim a full and exhaustive grasp of its richness. One church has grasped more of it, another less. One has penetrated to the central things, while another has remained to a greater degree at peripheral points. One has grasped one side the other another side. In this respect the churches can learn from each other and help each other to arrive at a simpler, richer and deeper understanding of the Gospel (N.L.C. New Bureau Release, June 30, 1947) .... “Just as we Lutherans cannot give up any of the truth which has been given to us and recognized by us, so we hope that other Christian churches will hold to their convictions.” Would it not be that we are sure he is referring only to Christian religious bodies, we could feel that Mr. Nygren could almost subscribe to the verse the Universalists and Unitarians love to quote:

So many gods, so many creeds,  
So many paths that wind and wind;  
When just the art of being kind  
Is all this sad world needs.

Following the modern prophets of neo-orthodoxy and ecumenicity has led many Lutheran pastors and congregations down the primrose path of some very Scripturally compromising situations - the following cases from some years back are fairly typical of what you find today. (Concordia Theo. Monthly - August 1931 - Vol. II No. 8 “What Is Unionism?” by Theodore Graebner pgs 574 - 577) “Dean Shailer Mathews of the Divinity School of Chicago University speaks in a Dayton church of the U.L.C. In Philadelphia an “Outdoor Twilight Community Workshop” is programmed, with Baptists, Congregationalists, Quakers, and U.L.C. Lutherans participating. A Methodist, a Baptist, and an Episcopalian preacher are on the program of the Reformation quadricentennial in Rochester. In the same city a Community Thanksgiving Service is held in which Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Baptists, and U.L.C. Lutherans unite, the invocation being pronounced by a Unitarian and a Rabbi serving as chairman. A prayer is spoken by a General Synod professor of theology in the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church, New York City. In Syracuse seventy pastors exchange pulpits, and among those Participating are five Lutheran clergymen. In the same city a Civic (?) Lenten Service is held in which a Lutheran prays and in which a Presbyterian makes the address. At Richmond, Va., sixty-six preachers exchange

pulpits, the U.L.C. again participating. At Fort Recovery, O., four local churches—Trinity Lutheran, the Methodist Episcopal, the Church of Christ, and the Congregational Christian—conduct a united series of community meetings as Sunday evening services during the winter and spring months. In Clark County, O., a County School of Religious Education is organized under the direction of Wittenberg College, an Evangelical and two Presbyterian clergymen serving with the Wittenberg professors' on the faculty. A School of Religious Education in Los Angeles finds another U.L.C. minister willing to serve on the Board of Directors. In Brazil the U.L.C. missionary unites with men of the La Plate Synod in the establishment of the Evangelical Institute. Membership in local church federations, with the constant fraternal intercourse which such connections involve, is, as far as the U.L.C. is concerned, more the rule than the exception. ....A meeting was held in Symphony Hall, Boston, on Thanksgiving Day under the auspices of the Boston Federation of Churches. A Jewish Rabbi was the speaker, and Unitarian preachers were participants. A Swedish Lutheran clergyman, Rev. S. G. Haegglund, pronounced the benediction. This is the defense put up by Rev. Haegglund when called to account by Rev. S. M. Miller in the Bible Banner: "Doubtless it would have been far more satisfactory to many of us if the speaker had been an orthodox Christian, and I fear that the conservative Protestant churches are in great danger of compromising their position when they extend the right hand of fellowship to representatives of Modernism and heterodoxy. But can we not, must be not, be courteous to each other? Is it not, after all, the sort of danger to which Jesus exposed Himself when He mingles freely with publicans and sinners, with Pharisees and scribes, and when He worshiped in the Synagogues? Can we not believe that in every conflict of religious opinions, truth and the purer spirituality will prevail? Are not we Lutherans called to put the leaven of true Christianity into the three measures of meal?"

"At Gettysburg Theological Seminary of the ULCA, a chapel built in the colonial style and costing \$150,000 was dedicated, Bishop Edwin Holt Hughes of the Methodist Church gave the lectures on preaching during the annual pastors week." (CTM, Aug. 1942) A correspondent for the "Lutheran Companion," church paper of the Augustana Lutheran Church, reports:... "It is hard for me to believe that a Lutheran pastor would refuse to officiate at the funeral of anyone." In 1949 from the church bulletin of one of the largest Lutheran churches in Philadelphia:... "Members of other churches who believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and in the forgiveness of sin through Him are welcome to join with us in this sacred Sacrament." (CTM, Aug. 1949) In 1942 to demonstrate his unity of faith with those in the Reformed denomination, Rev. Otto H. Bostrom, pastor of Gustavus Adolphus Lutheran Church, sometime ago, held a union Lenten service in St. Marks-in-the-Bouwerie "with two Episcopals and one Presbyterian clergyman." (CTM, May 1942, pg 392) On March 21-22, 1950, Rabbi Abramowitz of Chicago was invited to be the speaker at "the regular daily chapel services" at Augustana College in Rock Island, Ill. (Moline, Ill. "Dispatch, March 20, 1950 - "The Leaven of the Sadducees" Walter E. Wegner, Quartalschrift., Oct. 1952, pg 252). In 1956 (Lutheran Standard, March 31, 1956) Mr. Adlai Stevenson, a Unitarian by profession or confession and a member of a Presbyterian church, received Holy Communion at Ebenezer Lutheran Church (Augustana) in Minneapolis, in a party with Gov. Orville Freeman, a deacon at Ebenezer. In 1956 a Lutheran, Rev. Dana Johnson, pastor of Fourth Lutheran Church of Springfield, Ohio, was one of ten protestant clergymen, named to cross the Atlantic in 1957 and preach in various British pulpits and attend denominational and interdenominational conferences in Great Britain under the sponsorship of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. and the British Council of Churches. Other members of the group included Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, Evangelical and Reformed clergymen. (CTM, July 1956) In Amsterdam, Holland, pulpit and altar fellowship has been established between the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Netherlands and the Netherlands Reformed Church (Hervormde Kerk). The decision to establish this fellowship was based on the conviction that: "discussions between the Lutheran and Reformed Churches can have meaning only if the churches are prepared to go beyond the particularities of their respective confessions to a new dogmatic consideration of salvation in a new confrontation with the Holy Scriptures, which the Lord of the Church also gives in the Sacrament of Holy Communion." (In my own northwestern Wisconsin community, last year the ELC pastor is supposed to have taken part in the installation service of the new Congregational minister; while 9 miles to the north a month ago,

at the annual high school baccalaureate, the opening prayer was given (surprisingly) by a Catholic priest, the address by a pastor of the former ELC, and the closing benediction was rendered by a Seventh Day Baptist.).

Quite frankly, all of this “churchines” and “brotherliness” is appealing to our sinful flesh. Whether we understand what is involved or not, it sure “looks neighborly to see all of those preachers together!” But how does it look to our Lord? When Lutherans, loyal to their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and His true, inspired Word, are led to shrug off Scriptural differences and unite in religious fellowship with church bodies with whom they are not in agreement, do they not make of themselves the kind of “laughing stock” portrayed by a young man who describes his impressions of a Pan-Protestant Reformation Rally?

“I have always found the Pan-Protestant Reformation Rally to be frightfully depressing. It is the annual ecstasy of American ecumania, and nothing depresses me quite as much as ecumania...”

“The Rally is usually held, fittingly enough, in a Masonic Temple, an edifice decorated with the religious symbolism of Islam, that ancient and horrible foe of the Roman Catholic Church. This is to remind us that we are not alone in our struggle. If not a single Masonic Temple is to be had for the occasion, which must be something of a nightmare crisis for the Blue Lodge clergy, then we are treated to Martin Luther on a high wire in a circus tent, or John Calvin dribbling to the net in a gymnasium, or, Canterbury forbid, Thomas Cranmer on stage at the Roxie. If things really go wrong, then the main event will be John and Charles Wesley squaring off on a tennis court. The primary concern is evidently to keep the whole bizarre spectacle as far removed from a Christian sanctuary as possible, which is, of course, a decision in excellent taste.

“The Rally program is generally about the same each year, and all non-Roman Catholic denominations may participate. There is an invocation from a local Druid. There are endless, overjoyed greetings from the Father Divine Peace Mission, the Self-Realization Fellowship, the Science of Mind Church, the Rosicrucians, and Jehovah’s Witnesses (we so admire their zeal, zeal, zeal). There are civic-minded prayers from Lions, Elks, Moose, and other species in the fraternal zoo. There is an address by an outstanding (but previously unknown) theologian from Anfechtung Divinity School who has recently demythologized Mother Goose. The substance of his remarks is that Martin Luther overcame existential tensions to give us the Bill of Rights and the American Way. And then there is that inevitable conclusion, that bombastic, lungbursting rendition of “A Mighty Fortress”, during which the entire hodge-podge of holy men is supposedly united by the sheer loudness of a song.” (AD MAIOREM GLORIAM DEI - “Table Talk” - Jack Lindquist, pg. 24-25)

In view of the different doctrinal stands and different practical applications of the various doctrines of Scripture between the Synodical Conference and other Lutheran bodies, one can only come to the conclusion that the confessional duplicity and the influence of the neo-orthodox approach to the Scriptures on the part of much of Lutheranism outside the Synodical Conference leads to aberrations on various doctrines of the Scripture, in addition to the doctrine of the Word of God itself and it leads to false and unionistic practices within the church!

In Deuteronomy 4:2 the Lord told His people, and He tells us today: ...”Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you.” And the Prophet Jeremiah, divinely inspired, adds: ... “He that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully.” (Jeremiah 23:28) Sunday after Sunday, in our churches we pray for that Word of God when we recite the First Petition of the Lord’s Prayer... “Hallowed be Thy Name.” As Luther tells us, we know that the name of God (and that includes His Word) is holy in itself; but we are praying in that petition that God would keep His name holy among us also. There is only one way in which this can be done; and we pray that this will ever be done in our beloved Synodical Conference of the Lutheran Church ....

“When the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity, and we as the children of God lead a holy life according to it. To this help us dear Father in heaven:

“But he that teaches and lives otherwise than God’s Word teaches, profanes the name of God among us. From this preserve us, Heavenly Father.” Amen. (Luther’s Small Catechism, NWPH ed. 1956, pg 7)



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