CONCORDIA
THEOLOGICAL
QUARTERLY

CTQ

Volume 52, Number 4

OCTOBER 1988

CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL QUARTERLY

CTQ

ISSN 0038-8610

Issued Quarterly by the Faculty of
Concordia Theological Seminary

The *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, a continuation of the *The Springfielder*, is a theological journal of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, published for its ministerium by the faculty of Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

The CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL QUARTERLY is indexed in Religion Index One: Periodicals, and abstracted in Old Testament Abstracts and New Testament Abstracts.

The CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL QUARTERLY is published in January, April, July and October. All changes of address (including Missouri Synod clergymen), paid subscriptions and other business matters should be sent to Concordia Theological Quarterly, Concordia Theological Seminary, 6600 N. Clinton Street, Fort Wayne, Indiana 46825.

Annual subscription rate: $5.00

"Levels of Fellowship": A Response

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A video-taped presentation, "Conversations: Inter-Christian Relationships," was recently sent to every circuit of our Synod, with the recommendation that it be shown to the widest possible audience and that reactions and responses be sent back to St. Louis. Since the presentation is public, and in no sense confidential, and since it deals with matters crucial to the integrity of our Synod's confessional position, this response is public also. Our chief concern is with the advocacy of "levels of fellowship" as a key notion or building block for a theological solution of our Synod's present fellowship problems. It is the burden of our critique that the "levels of fellowship" scheme, as it has been put forward so far, is (1) theologically confused and confusing and (2), given the known context, misleading and damaging in its foreseeable consequences.

1. Theological Confusion

Although Dr. Nafzger claims that the "levels of fellowship" scheme "forces us to come clean and to give definitions to the terms that we use," his own treatment of the matter lends little support to this claim. This is all the more astonishing as the video is not a first attempt, but something that should have profited from the ample criticism generated by previous versions of that same proposal.[1] It is probably in response to such criticism that the video expressly specifies two meanings of "fellowship"to which the notion of "levels" does not apply. One is external church fellowship (pulpit and altar fellowship), and the other is that internal bond of fellowship with Christ and all Christians which is saving faith itself. Neither of these, Dr. Nafzger rightly observes, can be treated in terms of "levels." That admission should have put an end to the whole matter, since thereby the only two theologically relevant meanings of "fellowship" have been ruled out. (Apology VII-VIII, for instance, speaks only of the "association of outward things and rites" and of the "association of faith and of the

Holy Spirit in the hearts" [par. 5] but of nothing in between. The German has *Gesellschaft* [association] and *Gemeinschaft* [fellowship] respectively, but can also use the latter term for the former, pars. 3,12.)

Dr. Nafzger argues, however, that still a third meaning of "fellowship" is possible, namely that contained in phrases like "good fellowship," "fellowship hall," "fellowship eating" (?) and "fellowship club." But if this is the sort of thing to which "levels of fellowship" is meant to refer, then we are faced with a *katabasis eis allo genos*, that is, from the sublime to the ridiculous. For when "fellowship hall fellowship" is cashed out concretely it must yield sub-species like "rummage sale fellowship," "sauerkraut fellowship," "bingo fellowship," etc. It is clear that "levels of fellowship" talk is not needed to cope with such non-issues. Dr. Nafzger himself notes that "there we're simply talking about enjoying each other's company and liking to be with one another and that context..." He continues at once that "it's important that we begin to distinguish and be more precise in the way we talk about fellowship." What follows is as close as we ever get to an explanation of what is really meant by "levels of fellowship":

> When we talk about levels of fellowship, at least when I talk about levels of fellowship, I was addressing that problem of how can we relate to those whom we recognize on the basis of their confession, Billy Graham for example, as a brother in Christ, but with whom we disagree in the confession of our faith in Jesus Christ. And we say these differences are important, but we continue to have a relationship with him, even though it's not the kind of relationship that we call altar and pulpit fellowship.

This is really a *non-sequitur*. Dr. Nafzger has himself just established three meanings of "fellowship," two of which admittedly cannot be divided into "levels." Are we meant then to "relate" to Billy Graham in terms of the only remaining category, that of "fellowship hall fellowship"? If so, the whole thing is trivial; if not, it is a muddle. The clue to the real nature of the difficulty appears to lie in what follows directly:

> *Bohlmann*: So what you're really saying with that terminology whether you use "levels of fellowship" or

"levels of relationship," which may be a little less ambiguous for a lot of people in the church, is that Christian people today, and this has always been true, exist and live out their Christian life and action in a variety of relationships simultaneously, ranging all the way from a kind of minimal agreement, I suppose, but nonetheless important unity that we have among all of us who believe in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, ranging all the way from a relatively minimal agreement in this faith, all the way over to the other end of the continuum, where we have full agreement in the whole doctrine of the Gospel as taught in the Scripture, and then establish fellowship and have a strong altar and pulpit fellowship, unity of confession. You're suggesting, as I think I am too, that between one end and the other end of this continuum, the Christian finds himself at various levels and various points where there are agreements, but at some points disagreements, and that we need to be perhaps more precise in identifying what we can do as a result of where we find ourselves in a relationship at any point.

Nafzger: Precisely.

As sociological description, as a *prima facie* impression of some bafflements created by the tragedy of Christian divisions, all this may be unexceptionable, and even eloquent. As theological analysis, however, or as a proposed theological remedy, the approach embodies a fatal flaw, that of a category mistake. Sociologically, that is, when describing appearances and so walking by sight rather than by faith, one may perhaps speak of a "continuum" of "relationships," with complete pulpit and altar fellowship at one end, and the invisible fellowship of faith as ideal limit at the other. It is perfectly true, for example, that baptised Christians of different confessions have more in common with each other than they do with non-Christians. Nor have orthodox Lutherans ever doubted the validity and the efficacy of the public ministry and of its ministrations of such means of grace as were retained within heterodox but still Trinitarian churches (Roman Catholic or Calvinist). (It was left to modern quasi-Lutherans, in negotiations with neo-Anglicans, to invent, or rather adopt, the

pseudo-problem of "mutual recognition" of the validity of ministries.) But confessional Lutherans have never regarded this as grounds for viewing fellowship, in the theological sense, as a multi-level continuum, with "full" church fellowship at one extreme and "mere" or "minimal" (!) saving faith at the other:

> There are even those who suppose that they can establish degrees of unity. The degrees match the level of agreement reached so far in the discussions. The consensus one tries to read out of Article VII [of the Augsburg Confession] is in all such cases a purely human arrangement. . .Not the agreement in doctrine...but only the consensus in the *pure* doctrine and in the *right* administration of the sacraments is the consensus demanded in the Augsburg Confession [H. Sasse, *We Confess the Church*, p. 67].
>
> Interconfessional relations are nowadays sometimes so arranged that where church fellowship is complete there is mutual welcoming of the laity to the Sacrament and of the clergy to its celebration, while where church fellowship is incomplete the laity may mutually receive the Sacrament but the clergy may not mutually celebrate it. Such gradations and distinctions in church fellowship have absolutely no connection with the regulations of the early church. . .Either there was or there was not fellowship between two churches or two bishops, which practically amounted to the same thing. . .Never did the relations between two churches and their bishops provide for permitting the laity to receive the Sacrament while denying the clergy the privilege of officiating in it because church fellowship was somehow incomplete or because the congregations or their bishops were of different confessions or only in partial confessional agreement. There was either complete fellowship or none at all [W. Elert, *Eucharist and Church Fellowship in the First Four Centuries*, p. 164].

Like the church herself, the fellowship of the church is one and indivisible: *communio una est.* The two theological meanings of "fellowship" (*koinoonia*), the internal and the external, are not two different and separate fellowships, but

two distinct but in principle unseparated aspects of the *one* fellowship of the church. Unlike Calvinism, Lutheran teaching does not divide the church invisible and the church visible into two churches. Rather, there is only one church, considered either properly speaking as the believers or more broadly speaking as the same believers gathered round the external Gospel and Sacraments of Christ, plus the unbelieving "hangers-on." What keeps these two aspects or "modes" of the one church from flying apart into two churches is precisely the biblical, evangelical doctrine that the external Gospel and Sacraments are not mere outward symbols or formalities which may or may not be accompanied by spiritual efficacy, but are powerful, faith-creating—and therefore church-creating—*media salutis* (instruments of salvation) imparting forgiveness, life, and salvation. Since there can be no faith apart from these external means of grace, the Gospel and Sacraments also keep the internal fellowship of faith and the external fellowship in the means of grace from splitting apart into two fellowships. Rather, the one fellowship of the church consists of the internal bond of faith and of the external bond of the evangelical confession (pure Gospel and Sacraments).

Now, to insert between these twin "poles" of internal and external fellowship a whole "continuum" of sociological "relationships," and then to think and talk of this disparate mixture of apples and oranges as "levels of fellowship," is to reduce the doctrine of fellowship to incoherence. Firstly, the very notion of such a "continuum" implies that without it there would be a gap, an empty space, in short, a separation, between internal and external church fellowship. Secondly, the scheme relativizes the true, God-given, Gospel-based external fellowship of the church (basically pulpit and altar fellowship) by making it part of a continuum with all sorts of other things. As part of a continuum, pulpit and altar fellowship then differs only in degree but not in kind from all sorts of other, purely human arrangements. Although lip service may still be paid to pulpit and altar fellowship, in practice it is relegated now to an ideal ("extreme"?)at one end of a scale, with most other manifestations (levels) of fellowship to be expected nearer the middle or the other end of the continuum. Thirdly, this sociologizing reductionism affects even the understanding of faith itself. To speak with the video of the "important unity

that we have among all of us who believe in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior" as a "relatively minimal agreement in this faith" is misleading. An outward dogmatic consensus among individuals of different confessions may indeed be "minimal," but it does not express the oneness of faith which we in fact do have with all Christians. Since only the Holy Spirit can and does create faith in the hearts of Christians, and since He is the Spirit of truth, He works the same true faith in all, namely, the one faith in the one Lord, imparted and confessed in the one baptism (Eph. 4:5). Any aberrations from that one faith come not from the Holy Spirit but from our own sinful flesh and constitute not "faith" but its opposite (Matt. 16:21-23; Rom. 16:17-18). The true, internal unity of faith and of the church remains, of course, in this life an article of faith, not of sight, since our "life is hid with Christ in God" (Col.3:3). Fourthly, the "levels" scheme focuses more on individuals ("Christians") than on the *church* and on *churches*. This fosters subjectivism and suggests that beside the internal and external fellowship of the church there is also a hybrid *tertium quid* (something third), a "Christian fellowship" short of church fellowship. The one church and her fellowship come to public and legitimate expression precisely in her pure marks, the pure preaching of the Gospel and the right administration of the Sacraments. To wish to express an "*una sancta* fellowship" apart from or even contrary to these marks is enthusiasm. It is also enthusiasm to treat Christians, for purposes of church fellowship, as isolated individuals, apart from the altars and pulpits to which they are attached.[2] In this context it is alarming that Dr. Nafzger's "levels of fellowship" approach is expressly designed to accommodate both Luther's and Schleiermacher's conceptions of fellowship![3]

In sum, the "levels of fellowship"scheme slices up the living, organic fullness of the fellowship of the church, and makes its component elements appear like disconnected and desiccated items artificially arranged, together with alien material, into a false pattern. In one of his video speeches, for instance, Dr. Nafzger says that in John and the rest of Scripture the term "fellowship" is used "most frequently, not exclusively" to refer to the inner unity of Christians in Christ. As if St. John could possibly have thought of fellowship in Christ without including in that thought the mediating three that bear

witness on earth: the spirit, the water, and the blood (1 John 5:8)! And then Dr. Nafzger continues as though the orthodox understanding of fellowship were a recent "Missourian" peculiarity: "We in the Missouri Synod, however, have picked up on and used that word 'fellowship' most commonly to refer to what we would today recognize as a church body level of relationship." These confusions may be put into proper perspective by way of dramatic contrast with this genuinely Lutheran exposition from the pen of Dr. H. Sasse:

> To search for a new and closer relation between [Lutheran, Reformed, and Union] churches would be both thinkable and praiseworthy. But whatever one might call such a relation, the expression "church fellowship" for it is impossible, since this has a fixed meaning in the teaching and church law of the Lutheran church (and not only in that church), a meaning going back to the earliest church and one deeply rooted in the New Testament. It is the fellowship which, within the one, holy, catholic church, joins believing individuals and their local congregations to the unity of the body of Christ. It is fellowship of the church, not of the churches; unless one understands churches to be local congregations or dioceses, each of which is *the* church of Christ, *the* people of God, in the place concerned (for example, in Jerusalem, in Corinth, in Ephesus, in Rome).
>
> The biblical word for this fellowship is *koinoonia*, *communio*. This *koinoonia* differs from other fellowships in that it is not of human origin, and in that it reaches beyond the sphere of the earthly and human. . .
>
> It, rather, is produced by the divine means of grace, the Word of God and the Sacraments of Christ. "That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3, see also 6,7). . .The fellowship is established by Baptism and finds its concrete expression in the Sacrament of the breaking of bread. This fits to a nicety the language of Paul: God called the believers "into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 1:9); "By one

> Spirit we were baptised into one body. . .and all were made to drink of one Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:13). The connection with the Lord's Supper is quite clear in 1 Corinthians 10:16-17; the *koinoonia* of the body and blood of Christ is one with the *koinoonia* of the church. . .For the *koinoonia* which exists among the believers, the saints according to the New Testament, finds its clearest expression in the fellowship of those who receive the body and blood of the Lord as they assemble around His Table. "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the *koinoonia tou haimatos tou Christou* (fellowship of the blood of Christ)?" (1 Cor. 10:16). The fellowship is not brought about by the actions of blessing and breaking, but by the content of the cup and the bread: "For *one* bread [it is], *one* body we are, the many, for we all partake of *one* bread" (v. 17). . .This passage shows how closely the idea of the Church as the Body of Christ is tied up with the idea of the sacramental body in the Sacrament.[4]

Although Karl Rahner's own theology is not exactly an exercise in simplification, his comment is worth noting here:

> One question which is recognized to be very urgent is that of *communicatio in sacris*. There is a danger that in practice people will soon cease to pay any further heed to the prescriptions of both the Catholic and the non-Catholic church authorities. The rules which have hitherto been in force in this sphere are not simple and imaginative enough and, on the contrary, give the impression of a somewhat illogical compromise.[5]

It is to be feared that "levels of fellowship" will only render our present confusions worse confounded. Of course, it is not to be expected that a mystery of faith—and the church is such a mystery—can be made plain in a few journalistic "sound bites" (or "sight bites," for that matter). There is, however, a compelling internal logic, simplicity, and consistency inherent in the biblical, evangelical, Lutheran approach to church fellowship. That internal logic is well set out in the Overseas Committee's theses on "Fellowship in Its Necessary Context of the Doctrine of the Church," presented to the recessed forty-sixth convention of the Synodical Conference. Omitting biblical and confessional references, here are the basic conclusions of that most significant document:

12. The fellowship created by Word and Sacraments shows itself fundamentally in pulpit and altar fellowship. It can show itself in many other ways, some of which, like prayer and worship and love of the brethren, the church cannot do without; others of which, like the holy kiss or the handshake or the reception into one's house, vary from place to place and from time to time. In whatever way the fellowship created by Word and Sacraments shows itself, all visible manifestations of fellowship must be truthful and in accordance with the supreme demands of the marks of the church. The "sacred things" (*sacra*) are the means of grace, and only by way of them is anything else a "sacred thing" (*sacrum*). . .

13. Prayer is not one of the marks of the church and should not be coordinated with Word and Sacraments, as though it were essentially of the same nature as they. As a response to the divine Word, it is an expression of faith and a fruit of faith, and when spoken before others, a profession of faith: As a profession of faith it must be in harmony with and under the control of the marks of the church. . .

This statement bears within it (a) the implication that the member churches of the Synodical Conference have not enunciated and carried through the principles outlined in it in their documents of fellowship with the necessary clarity and consistency, and (b) the suggestion that the goal of the Synodical Conference discussion is to be reached by the traditional highway of the doctrine of the church. Since the premature turning off into the byway of fellowship has led to a dead end, it would seem best, first of all, to return to the highway and there move forward together guided only by the marks of the church.[6]

2. Forseeable Consequences

In and of itself the phrase "levels of fellowship" could, of course, have a perfectly good and valid meaning. For instance, it could reflect the very important fact that church fellowship needs to be expressed (or refused!) appropriately at all relevant levels of our church life—local parish, district, Synod. Such a usage, however, would not slice up church fellowship itself into "levels," but would simply note different organizational levels

of application. In our present situation, however, the fact is that both the origins and some of the known applications of the concept "levels of fellowship" are unsound. Dr. Bohlmann remarks on the video: "Some have taken this whole talk of levels as it has gone on in our discussion in the last year or so and suggested to others that this concept is borrowed from liberal Christianity, that it's intended to lead our Synod down some primrose path to be irresponsible in effect in terms of our relationship to others. That clearly is not what we are trying to do." Of course, that is not the intention of our reverend colleagues on the video. Dr. Bohlmann is mistaken, however, when he suggests that "levels of fellowship" is *not* "borrowed from liberal Christianity," or at least from liberal Lutheranism.

The genealogy of "levels of fellowship" may be traced as follows: On 22 August 1953 Professors Kinder of Muenster and von Krause of Neuendettelsau by request transmitted to President Stolz of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia a memorandum entitled "*Cooperation and Federation of Churches*, with special attention to the principles valid for Evangelical Lutheran churches, and to the Lutheran World Federation" (our translation). In his painstaking analysis and critique of this document Dr. Hans-Lutz Poetsch pointed out its central fallacy: ". . .depending on the measure of the *consensus* or *dissensus* existing between churches, the possibility is conceded, and in part even demanded, of a looser or tighter connection—also in *internis*. Thereby *consensus* and *dissensus* are measured *not qualitatively but quantitatively,* which yields a fundamentally different posture toward false doctrine."[7]

A few years later these same matters were discussed between the constituent synods of the expiring National Lutheran Council (which were also members of the Lutheran World Federation) and the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. These discussions eventually resulted in the formation of the now defunct Lutheran Council in the USA. A crucial difference between the two parties was precisely the matter of "levels of fellowship." At a meeting in 1960 LC-MS President J.W. Behnken presented his Synod's position as ruling out in principle *cooperatio in sacris* (cooperation in sacred matters)

with the National Lutheran Council member churches. He gave an unambiguous definition of unionism on behalf of the Missouri Synod: "In essence religious unionism consists in joint worship and work of those who are not united in doctrine."[8] One of the counter-questions put to Dr. Behnken in the course of the discussion was: "Are there not different levels of cooperation possible according to degrees of unity?"

One of the leading Missouri Synod representatives in these discussions, Dr. M. Franzmann, put it like this: "The NLC presentation looks toward a variety of ecumenical relationships and envisages degrees or stages of fellowship proportionate to the degree of consensus which has been attained. The Missouri presentation is oriented toward doctrinal confessional unity between Lutherans and raises the question of the *damnamus* as indispensable to the proclamation of the Gospel as both a savor of life and a savor of death."[9] By contrast, NLC representative Conrad Bergendoff wrote:

> Even those whose profession of faith may be less comprehensive than the confessions may have a certain unity with Christians of other confessions, because of significant agreements in the preaching of the Gospel. In short we may claim that in the degree to which we can come to a common understanding of the Gospel, in that degree we are able to work together in the ministry of reconciliation. . .With other Christians who profess faith in the Gospel, Lutherans may recognize a partial unity by a fellowship of certain types of common evangelism and even forms of prayer and thanksgiving, while working toward a more complete unity expressed in pulpit and altar fellowship. . . .The proposition of complete unity or none at all cannot be defended on scriptural grounds, nor is it the description of the relations between Christians in church history. Rather the Scriptures teach a unity between the believer and the Redeemer which issues in a unity between believers that varies according to circumstances.[10]

Now, Dr. Nafzger himself has stated on the video that the topic of "levels of fellowship" for his seminal paper on the subject had been assigned to him by the Lutheran Council in the USA, which of course included the heirs of the old National Lutheran Council. The pedigree of the concept, therefore, is

crystal clear.[11] That in itself, of course, does not prove that Dr. Nafzger's own use of that phrase is objectionable. More ominous is the pro-unionistic use to which "levels of fellowship" language was already being put within the Missouri Synod *before* Dr. Nafzger launched his series of presentations on the subject. The 17 June 1985 *Reporter* states that the Atlantic District Convention voted " 'to affirm inter-Lutheran relations' by imploring[!] the Synod's 1986 convention to acknowledge that 'decisions regarding the exercise of fellowship at the congregational level are best made at the congregational level.' "

On the video both Dr. Bohlmann and Dr. Nafzger reject this sort of "selective fellowship," and Dr. Bohlmann states his opposition to joint services with churches not in altar and pulpit fellowship with our Synod. The theological rationale for such judgments, however, has become fuzzier than it used to be, and a tendency appears, also on the video, to compensate for this by appealing to the "covenant" of the synodical constitution, which as such represents purely human rather than divine authority.

Dr. Bohlmann remarks, Dr. Nafzger concurring: "The two ideas, levels and selective fellowship really have nothing in common in my judgment." But Dr. Nafzger's very definition of pulpit and altar fellowship as "a church body level of relationship" invites opponents of our Synod's stand to argue, exactly as did the Atlantic District Convention in 1985: Very well, but then at the local level, allow us to practice fellowship as we see fit, even though at the national level we cannot do so. That is selective fellowship! Nor does it help when Dr. Nafzger, having called "selective fellowship" a "very confusing term," himself misdefines it as "a decision by the denomination as a whole, as the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, if we were to do something like that, to let individual congregations decide with whom they are going to practice altar and pulpit fellowship." This means that "selective fellowship" cannot by definition be practiced in our Synod, since our "denomination as a whole" has not decided to do so. The whole point of selective fellowship is that everyone does what seems best to him, with or without formal authority from anybody else. And so President Richard Hinz of our Southeast-

ern District can, in the October 1988 issue of his official district newsletter, hail the video as a long-expected presidential " 'initiative' on levels of fellowship," and then extol the virtues of "a joint Reformation Service" with the ELCA (this year with a notorious ELCA "pastoress" as preacher in Washington, D.C.). Yet according to the letter of Dr. Nafzger's organizationally oriented definition, these and similar instances of flagrant unionism do not constitute "selective fellowship."

In April 1985 the Southeastern District of the LC-MS adopted Resolution 85-05-02, "To Express Consensus in Inter-Christian Relationships." The following points are among the "broad principles reflecting the consensus" of the district's "thought regarding inter-Christian relationships":

> 4. Decisions regarding the exercise of fellowship on the local level are best made at the local level. . .
>
> 9. There is a growing recognition that an "all or nothing," "either/or" approach to fellowship is inadequate.
>
> 10. Christian relationships differ at various levels: international, national, church body, synod, district, congregation, and individual, and may require diverse and appropriate responses.

Again, the Pentecost 1987 issue of *The Atlantic District News* carried an official "Fellowship Report," prepared by a District Task Force. The report argued, in part:

> Any question of fellowship must also recognize the different levels of fellowship that exist between congregations and Synod. As our survey points out, two distinct types of fellowship stand side by side.
>
> One is the local pulpit and altar fellowship of a particular congregation. . .
>
> The other side of fellowship is that which is formulated through a common agreement of congregations. The Synod is one example of the kind of fellowship that unites congregations far from one another in a common mission and ministry and obligates them to accept one another's communicants. The pulpit and altar fellowship between Synods is also this kind of fellowship. . .
>
> Problems result when documents fail to distinguish

> between these types of fellowship and therefore fail to respect the differences. Fellowship, the kind between Synods, is more reflected in the document *The Nature and Implications of the Concept of Fellowship.* The local fellowship of a particular congregation is something quite different. It has yet to be addressed by any document from CTCR.
>
> . . .Our survey is reflective of the local fellowship that exists between a particular altar and pulpit and other Christians, and not the Synod as a whole. Although the Synod has disputed the claim that selective fellowship is an option, that view is not shared by congregations of the Atlantic District. It appears from the survey that Atlantic District parishes feel that they have not only the right, but the obligation to decide these issues on their own.

When "levels of fellowship" talk is widely exploited in the interests of a unionistic theology, proponents of it will have to do better than remark lamely: "That is not what we are talking about." If the new approach is to claim the virtue of being able to cope with the way things really are—as distinct from "ivory tower" abstractions—then it must demonstrate at the very least an ability to withstand and correct flagrant abuses of its terminology. So far the "levels initiative" has failed to articulate norms and definitions by which the proper use of "levels of fellowship" language might even be distinguished from abuses, let alone defended.

The most promising move toward credible theological controls is Dr. Bohlmann's reference, early in the video, to "our long tradition of distinguishing between what we can do in what we call fellowship in sacred things, *communio in sacris* was the technical term for that, and on the other hand, cooperation in external things, *cooperatio in externis,* the dogmaticians called it." Standing as it does already under a certain pall of the past tense, the statement is completely nonfunctional in the argument. Actually, it stands in flat contradiction to the whole "levels" scheme, for the latter posits a "continuum" of entities differing from each other in degree, not in kind, whereas the *in sacris—in externis* distinction means that fellowship as a whole differs sharply and qualitatively from mere cooperation in externals. Dr. Bohl-

mann comments: "We have long recognized that there can be various levels of interaction with other Christians, and that the amount or degree of doctrinal agreement is a key factor in determining what we can do together, if indeed we can do anything at all." But if the controlling category is fellowship vs. mere cooperation in externals, how can the "amount or degree of doctrinal agreement" be a "key factor"? Either there is agreement in the pure Gospel and the right administration of the Sacraments, and then there is fellowship, or there is no such agreement and therefore no fellowship. But cooperation in externals requires no doctrinal agreement at all. Can we not freely cooperate with Buddhists and atheists in various worthy civil endeavors? What has doctrine to do with it? In other words, "levels of fellowship" and the old *in sacris-in externis* distinction define two different and fundamentally incompatible frames of reference or "models" of fellowship.

It is disturbing that Dr. Bohlmann brings up the former Lutheran Council in the USA as an example of "levels of interaction" (levels of fellowship) based on "the amount or degree of doctrinal agreement." Dr. Behnken, on the contrary, had ruled out fellowship (*cooperatio in sacris*) from the outset, and had limited the cooperation to externals (see endnote 8). The chief "selling point" of the new Council were the mandatory theological discussions among the member churches of the Council. It was this that Dr. Behnken stressed in his plea to the delegates of the 1965 Detroit Convention of the LC-MS. That Convention would never have agreed to the Council as an expression of a "level of fellowship."[12] It is also worth noting that shortly before his death a disillusioned Dr. Behnken told Queensland District (Australia) President Emeritus F. W. Noack that, had he known beforehand how the Lutheran Council in the USA would actually turn out, he would never have supported participation in it.[13] "Levels of fellowship" talk, incidentally, is *particularly* unsuited to the present inter-Lutheran situation.[14] When speaking of our common Reformation heritage, and so on, we must make it clear that we are speaking basically of disfranchised "grass roots" individuals and not of the ELCA and its official echelons as such. When the evangelical substance of our Confessions is surrendered and compromised, then the Lutheran name and lip-service actually make matters worse, because more

seductive.[15] To treat such deceptive formalities as establishing some "level of agreement" or grounds for a "level of fellowship" is to foster illusions.

Nor is the "levels" model helped or clarified by the way in which it is contrasted with the Wisconsin Synod's "unit concept." Having cited Wisconsin's definition, "Church fellowship should therefore be treated as a unit concept covering every joint expression, manifestation, and demonstration of a common faith," Dr. Bohlmann comments: "Now in distinction to that point of view, our Missouri Synod has spoken of levels of relationships for some time." Well, yes and no. First of all, "relationships" here must really mean "fellowship," if it is to be relevant. Secondly, not everything said and done by the Missouri Synod on this score in the last few decades has necessarily been sound. Thirdly, while it is perfectly true that the Wisconsin Synod's "unit concept" is open to serious theological objection, such criticism must be "on target." What is wrong with Wisconsin's formulation is not the idea that church fellowship is basically one indivisible "unit"—that is a Confessional Lutheran commonplace—but rather the impossibly broad and all-inclusive definition of this "unit" as "covering every joint expression. . . ." Introducing "levels of fellowship"—that is what "levels of relationships" must mean here—as a cure, really attacks the "unit concept" for the wrong reason and so skews the whole discussion.

Actually the real objection to Wisconsin's "unit concept" applies to "levels of fellowship" as well. To form a fair judgment here, as free as possible of a narrow "Missouri" or "Wisconsin" bias, one should turn to the theological help given on request by our overseas sister churches in the early 1960s, when the Synodical Conference was breaking up. Both the Australian and the European sister churches sent detailed critiques of the four Synodical Conference member churches' official statements on fellowship. The Europeans[16] faulted the Wisconsin definition basically for its orientation to individual, personal faith, rather than to the objective marks of the church. They criticized the two-part (as it then was) "Theology of Fellowship" presented by Missouri's newly formed CTCR even more severely, and basically for the same reason. The first of five "fundamental mistakes" is described thus:

> An individualism which reminds one of the Reformed American type. The document says: "The passages quoted to show the need for refusing to practice fellowship with certain people under certain circumstances are particularly the following:. . ." All comments following deal only with footloose individuals, an almost shocking fact. Christians are treated throughout the study as though they could be seen as Christians and as though the claims of men to be Christian would, irrespective of *notae* (the marks), at once put [us] under obligation to accept that claim *or* to prove that the particular individual is no Christian.[17]

With the stress on individual "Christians," rather than on churches, pure doctrine and the pure marks become fuzzy and recede into the background: "As a result heresy cannot be seen properly as a revolt against God's revelation and the foundation of the one church, and fellowship with heresy is not seen as bringing in a counter-church against the one church."

It is clear that if we must first riddle about the personal spiritual status of individuals, the application of Romans 16:17 and all parallel texts becomes problematical if not impossible. But if the categories are objective (churches, church fellowship, orthodoxy, heterodoxy), then the New Testament condemnations of false teaching and false teachers apply directly and with full force.

Wisconsin's condemnation of "levels of fellowship," be it noted, was not only not criticized but was warmly commended as "perfectly correct." The Wisconsin document had described it as an "untenable position...C. To envision fellowship relations (in a congregation, in a church body, in a federation, in a church agency, in a cooperative church activity) like so many steps of a ladder, each requiring a gradual increasing or decreasing measure of unity in doctrine and practice."[18] Elsewhere it was pointed out that this laudable position—"perhaps the most important sentence of the whole document"—was really jeopardized by Wisconsin's individualistic, subjective starting point in "faith"("every joint expression. . .of a common faith"), rather than in the objective *pure marks*: "Logic asks: why should not always so much public activation of the brotherhood be possible as can at any time

be jointly expressed, if the law of action must be won from the inner dynamic of the believer?"[19]

The final stricture against the CTCR's "Theology of Fellowship" was bafflingly similar: "(e) *Degrees* of church fellowship, such as proposed in the *Gutachten* of von Krause and Kinder. . .and extended to the point of the 'Branch Theory' as generally assumed to constitute the accepted basis for the World Council of Churches, cannot be negated on an individualistic basis which lacks *notae purae* (pure marks) orientation."[20] The official Australian (ELCA) critique put it like this:

> The tendency throughout—and it is intentional—is not to speak of churches, but to speak of individuals. For with them, in accordance with the subjective *roton pseudos* at the basis of the whole presentation, we can. . .distinguish those who are plainly not of Christ. . .and those who are true Christians. . .
>
> Surely one must see that the true counterpart in our day to the false teachers of the New Testament age are the heterodox church bodies themselves. . .The false teachings given a refuge in heterodox bodies are every whit as bad as the false teachings known in the New Testament. . .And the New Testament condemnation of false teachers should be applied to them directly and without any softening of the rebuke.

The preoccupation with individuals, to the relative neglect of the church and of churches as such, is precisely the central problem of the "levels of fellowship" scheme. Regardless of anyone's personal purity of intention, objectively the scheme opens wide doors and windows to the powerful cultural winds of individualism and of a sentimentally tinged pragmatism. Far from counteracting the spirit of the times, it can only reinforce the popular model of a "privatized" religion, in which the individual is supreme, and the church is perceived basically as an emotional "support group," to be joined, used, left, and exchanged for another, according to the felt needs of the sovereign, autonomous individual consumer.

Conclusion

It should be abundantly clear that "levels of fellowship" is so heavily burdened with an alien theological dynamic and thrust[21] that it can serve only to confuse and destroy, but never to advance and clarify the proper understanding of church fellowship among us. This is clearly understood by opponents of our Synod's historic stand, like Southeastern District President Hinz, who welcomes the video as signalling a change of direction—initially simply by reopening the question.[22] Of course, it is "all right," in itself, "to ask questions." It is high time, however, to give clear and sound answers, and therefore to abandon any further attempts to introduce or justify "levels of fellowship" as a serious theological model.

We are well aware that there are indeed grey areas in which judgments will differ. Nor do we advocate a mass of legalistic rules and regulations, or a draconian enforcement of such rules as there are. On the contrary, Evangelical Lutheran practice must follow from Evangelical Lutheran theology. Situations may be ever so complex, but the basic theology of fellowship, in which the pure Gospel and Sacraments are pivotal, is simple and straightforward. If that were clear, and held and respected in common by all, minor variations in application would do no harm. A continuum of "levels," on the other hand, suggests a continuum of principles, till finally every situation is its own principle, so that there really are no principles at all.

None of this is meant in any way to attribute any heretical intent or teaching to Doctors Bohlmann and Nafzger, respected brothers whom the church has honored with the heavy burden and responsibility of high office. Nor, on the other hand, would we trouble the church with a mere squabble about words. We would much rather have settled this whole matter within a more restricted forum, such as that of the CTCR, which is presently working on this very thing. We deeply regret that what we respectfully regard as a serious error of judgment—the video "jumps the gun" with its improvised *ad hoc* "theology in a hurry," before the CTCR has completed its study[23]—compels us to seek a public clarification of the confused situation, beginning with a joint return to first principles.

As a matter of sound policy the Board for Communication Services should also be respectfully urged to refrain from issuing videos on serious theological subjects, when such videos are more likely to inflame passion than to enlighten judgment. We refer to Pastor P. Devantier's 27 September 1988 letter to Dr. Nafzger, in response to the CTCR's request for printed transcripts of the video. Pastor Devantier offered free copies of the video instead, arguing that "a message conveyed through the medium of video is made up of a variety of components such as the set, the style, tone, pacing and inflection of the speakers and the interaction between participants. All of these vital components are absent in a printed transcript. In other words, a printed transcript containing only the words does not do justice to a message conveyed through the video medium." If this is so, then the video medium is clearly inappropriate for controversial material which calls for an informed, impartial judgment not swayed by such things as "the set, the style, tone, pacing and inflection. . . ." If we are to resist that trendy dissolution of Lutheran substance and identity, which the ELCA's Dr. William Lazareth denounced from bitter experience before the 1988 LC-MS Atlantic District Convention, then we must retain clear, sound, and unambiguous theological language.

ENDNOTES

1. S. Nafzger, *Levels of Fellowship: A Missouri Synod Perspective*, ecumenical conference, Puerto Rico, 30 January 1987, and, by the same author, *Inter-Christian Relations*, circuit counselors' conference, August 1987. This paper was also presented to the conference of the seminary faculties and district presidents, autumn 1987, where a comprehensive counter-proposal and critique by K. Marquart, *Church and Church Fellowship: Evangelical Perspectives*, was also distributed but not formally presented.
2. A Christian's "confession" is not simply what he may verbalize, particularly under the time constraints of a brief interview. A major part of his public confession rather is the altar and pulpit with which he regularly identifies

himself: "By his partaking of the Sacrament in a church a Christian declares that the confession of that church is his confession. Since a man cannot at the same time hold two differing confessions, he cannot communicate in two churches of differing confessions. If anyone does this nevertheless, he denies his own confession or has none at all" (W. Elert, *Eucharist and Church Fellowship*, p. 182).

3. S. Nafzger, *Levels of Fellowship*, pp. 1-3, *Inter-Christian Relations*, pp. 13-15.
4. H. Sasse, *Sanctorum Communio* in *This is My Body* (Adelaide, 1976), pp. 352, 353, 355.
5. K. Rahner, *Theological Investigations* (New York: Seabury, 1976), XIV, p. 114.
6. *Synodical Conference Proceedings*, 1961, p. 12.
7. Hans-Lutz Poetsch, "Lutherische Kirche und Lutherischer Weltbund," *Lutherischer Rundblick*, II, 8-9 (August-September 1954), p. 129.
8. Edward C. Fendt, *The Struggle for Lutheran Unity and Consolidation in the U.S.A. from the Late 1930s to the Early 1970s* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1980) p. 279.
9. *Essays on the Lutheran Confessions Basic to Lutheran Cooperation* (LC-MS and NLC, 1961), p. 6.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
11. There is, of course, a broader context: From ecumenical theory as it had developed within the World Council of Churches, the idea of "degrees" and "levels" of unity made its way also into Roman Catholicism at Vatican II (1962-1965). See H. Vorgrimler, gen. ed., *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), II, 68-81; 86; 102-108. Of course, if one mixes "human traditions or rites and ceremonies instituted by men" (AC VII) into church unity, then a "levels" approach makes good sense.
12. M. Franzmann: "There seems to have been a great variety in the organizational manifestations of unity in the New Testament church; but is there any evidence that there was anything like an organizational recognition of fractional obedience to the one Lord?" (*Essays on the Lutheran Confessions*, p. 22).

13. *Lutherischer Rundblick*, XVI, 3 (III. Quarter, 1968), p. 185.

14. Dr. Bohlmann rightly observes that the pastors and church leaders in American Lutheranism are "very sharply divided," and "going in divergent ways that are becoming farther apart rather than closer together." That situation must ultimately be reflected in the laity as well. Already twenty years ago Lawrence K. Kersten's sociological study, *The Lutheran Ethic* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1970), documented significant differences also among the laity and concluded: "Thus, at least in relation to theological beliefs, the Missouri Synod and Wisconsin Synod clergy represent a conservative influence on their laity, and the LCA and ALC clergy a liberalizing influence" (pp. 33-34).

15. C.F.W. Walther: "Just as the Spirit of God [in Jer. 8:8] rejects as an idle boast the Jews' appeal that they had the Holy Scripture, while false doctrine prevailed among them, so also the appeal of the nominal Lutherans to the legally recognized orthodox Symbols among them, is, in view of the false doctrines prevailing among them, to be repudiated as an idle boast" (*True Visible Church*, Thesis XXIII).

16. *European Supporting Documents*, Part III, 31 pp. See also the public letter of 15 July 1961 from Drs. W.Oesch and M. Roentsch to Pres. O. Naumann of the Wisconsin Synod.

17. *Supporting Documents*, pp. 18-19.

18. *Supporting Documents*, p. 6.

19. Oesch and Roentsch, p. 14.

20. *Supporting Documents*, pp. 23-24.

21. Dr. Nafzger himself seems strangely unaware of the far-reaching import of his own reference in footnote 5 of his *Levels of Fellowship* (30 January 1987): "See also Tuomo Mannermaa's treatment of the qualitative and quantitative bases for church fellowship in *Von Preussen Nach Leuenberg* (Hamburg: *Lutherisches Verlagshaus,* 1981), pp. 103 ff." Mannermaa, in fact, meticulously documents the methodological self-contradictions of the Leuenberg Concord, which radically abrogate the Lutheran Confessions, whether with qualitative or quantitative conceptions of church fellowship. The note is intended to support Dr. Nafzger's statement in the text that "it becomes not

only possible, but also perhaps even necessary, to talk about 'Levels of Fellowship' as a possible response to the 'basic challenge of Fundamental Consensus and Fundamental Differences.' " The Mannermaa reference proves exactly the opposite, namely, how baneful and destructive a "levels of fellowship" approach would be. In the same footnote 5, Dr. Nafzger also tries to cite Sasse in support of "levels of fellowship," because Sasse "delineates the various ways the word fellowship is used. . ." But, in the first place, various uses and meanings of the word "fellowship" have no more to do with "levels of fellowship" than the Dog Star has with "levels of dogs." Secondly, in the very book from which Dr. Nafzger is quoting, Sasse argues vigorously not for but against "levels of fellowship" (*We Confess the Church*, p. 67; see above).

22. *By the Way*, October 1988, pp.1-2.

23. It is especially deplorable that the video, although repeatedly identifying Dr. Nafzger as Executive Director of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations, never mentions the important fact that in this matter Dr. Nafzger is expressing only his personal opinion—to which there is strong opposition in the CTCR—and by no means the position of the Commission. In response to protests and concerns the Commission, in fact, resolved in February 1988:

> We continue to recognize the present situation in regard to fellowship practices within the Synod as a crisis in our Synod's confessional unity, and
>
> We continue to support the biblical and confessional commitments of the Synod, and
>
> We continue to presume, as we did when we encouraged Dr. Nafzger to present his paper at the Circuit Counselors' Conference, that he speaks as an individual, and not as a representative of the Commission (as is the case with all members of the Commission) when he is presenting his "Levels of Fellowship" essay.

The video exploits the prestige of the CTCR in the interests of a position which is not that of the Commission.

Theological Observer

THE LENGTH OF THE DAYS OF CREATION

Some theologians of the early church taught that the days of creation were equivalent to moments since God's omnipotence did not require a full day to accomplish His creative purpose in each case cited in Genesis 1. In the nineteenth century, on the other hand, some exegetes proposed the opposite extreme, interpreting the days of creation in Genesis 1 as long periods of time—embracing, indeed, millions of years. Although few living Old Testament scholars adhere to the age-day theory, laymen frequently propose the idea or ask whether such an interpretation be possible. When the age-day theory does resurface in contemporary scholarship, it is not in critical circles (where the presumption of biblical fallibility makes any accommodation of Genesis to modern "'science" unnecessary), but rather among more conservative scholars (such as Gleason Archer and Derek Kidner).

Frequently the age-day theory serves as a transitory bridge to more consistent interpretations of Genesis 1 which see the whole chronology of Genesis as a mere literary device. (Especially fashionable now is the liturgical theory, which sees the author of Genesis 1 imposing on divine creation the anthropomorphic pattern of the Jewish week—six days of work yielding to one day of rest.) A case in point is the new attitude of Calvin College, an institution of the Christian Reformed Church, which used to confess a literal interpretation of Genesis 1 with one voice. Davis Young opened his attack on the traditional view with the age-day theory (claiming to have inherited it from the late Edward J. Young, the most famous conservative Old Testament scholar of this century), but over the course of the years he has espoused much more general reinterpretations of the early chapters of Genesis. Meanwhile, his colleague Howard Van Till has in recent research (*The Fourth Day*) classified these chapters as a form of literature treating the creation of the world in an artistic, rather than a scientific, manner. Young, Van Till, and a like-minded colleague, Clarence Menninga, have, to be sure, encountered considerable resistance in the Christian Reformed Church. Nevertheless, when the Board of Trustees of Calvin College published the results of a year-long investigation of these professors, the verdict was predictable: no problem! Finding that the thinking of all three fell within the bounds of denominational doctrine, the board contented itself with warning Van Till against calling "into question either the event character or the revelational meaning of biblical history" (February 12, 1988).

In conservative Lutheran circles, too, the interpretation of Genesis 1 continues to concern people. In particular, most pastors have to answer questions about the length of the creative days with some frequency. Indeed, in the last issue of the *Lutheran Witness* (107:9) [September 1988], p. 22) a query of this nature appeared in the question-and-answer box. Requesting "the current stand of the LCMS," the questioner asked what "the church" says about the six days of creation. The answer consisted in a citation of the relevant article of the *Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod*, which begins with this affirmation: "We teach that God has created heaven and earth, and that in the manner and in the space of time recorded in the Holy Scriptures, especially Genesis 1 and 2, namely, by His almighty creative word and in six days." A true Lutheran, of course, wants to know not only what his church teaches, but also why—in other words, what Scripture teaches. The *Brief Statement* itself proceeds to this telling point: "Since no man was present when it pleased God to create the world, we must look for a reliable account of creation to God's own book, the Bible." In the face of continuing questions concerning the duration of the hexaemeron, we must be "ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh. . .a reason" of the faith within us. In actuality, the Word of God requires us to interpret the days of creation as days of ordinary length and, correspondingly, to repudiate all contrary views, whether they shorten these days or lengthen them.

(1) There is no doubt that the word *yōm*, which Genesis 1 uses to denote each of the six days of creation (verses 5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31), ordinarily means a day of what we should call twenty-four hours. But it is a basic rule essential to the understanding of Scripture that the meaning of a word in a certain passage of Scripture must be equated with the common meaning of the word unless the context or the analogy of faith compel the exegete to accept a different meaning. Some have, indeed, contended that the context indicates a deviation from the normal usage of *yōm* (a) by using the word also for the days prior to the creation of the sun, (b) by using the word also for the "seventh day" of Genesis 2 (verses 3-4), which is supposedly still in progress, and (c) by ascribing to the sixth day events which supposedly could not fit into twenty-four hours (1:24-31; 2).

These arguments, however, are invalidated by the following considerations: (a) The first assertion is simply a *non sequitur*. It is true that God waited until the fourth day (1:14-18) to form distinct bodies (sun, moon, and stars) from the previously formless mass of heavenly matter from which light had been emanating since the first day (1:3). This fact, however, has no bearing upon the question of the

length of the days of creation. The point is that the context does not require us to think that the duration of the first three days was any different than the duration of any day since the creation of the sun as a distinct entity. The first three days are described in exactly the same way as the latter three, including the specification that in the course of each day dusk came to the part on the globe which the light first illuminated and, after a period of darkness, a dawn came which provided the transition to the following day (verses 5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31). There is nothing in the context of Genesis 1 that would require us to lengthen either the first three days in particular or any of the six days in general.

(b) As to the appeal to the "seventh day" of Genesis 2 to justify a metaphorical interpretation of "day" in Genesis 1, we should deny the premise that the seventh day lasted longer than a solar day. The idea that the "seventh day" continues throughout history is quite specious. The seventh day is not wrapped up with the same formula as the preceding six days for the simple reason that the seventh day was not one of the days of creation. The Hebrew of Genesis 2:3 uses the perfect form *shābhath* to indicate (in the context of a historical narrative) that God's rest was a distinct act completed in the past, not the imperfect form to indicate a continuous resting.

(c) As to the events ascribed by the first two chapters of Genesis to the sixth day of creation, we see no problem. There is no necessity of assuming that the various events consumed more than a few minutes in each case (although, of course, some may have taken more time). The only exception to this assertion would be the naming of animals by Adam (2:19-20). Not every kind of animal, however, much less every species, received a name from Adam at this time, but only "the birds of the heavens" and "the beasts of the field" (which is only one category of "the beasts of the earth," 1:25) and presumably only their various general *mīnīm* (cf. 1:25) as opposed to individual species. Adam at this time was in communion with God, in harmony with the creatures which he was to name, and in possession of powers of reason which far surpass our own. The choice, therefore, of suitable names for the various kinds of animals brought to him by God need not have consumed much time.

(2) Although *yōm* is frequently modified by an ordinal numeral in the Old Testament, in no such instance is there any reason at all to think that *yōm* means anything but a day of ordinary length. But the word *yōm* is modified by an ordinal numeral five times in Genesis 1 to enumerate the days of creation (verses 8, 13, 19, 23, 31). Likewise, the cardinal numeral *eḥād* ("one") is ordinarily attached to the word

yōm in order to emphasize the reference to a distinct period of twenty-four hours (e.g., Numbers 11:19; 1 Samuel 9:15). But in the one case in which an ordinal numeral is not used to enumerate one of the days of creation in Genesis 1 (namely, the first day) the word *eḥād* serves this purpose. If, therefore, we interpret Genesis 1 in accord with the ordinary grammatical usage of Old Testament Hebrew as one ought to do, we must understand the days of creation as days of ordinary length.

(3) There is no evidence that *yōm* ever means an era. Such a meaning is not recognized by Hebrew lexicographers (cf. F. Brown, S.R. Driver, and C.A. Briggs, eds., *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907, pp. 398-401). Therefore, even critical scholars would agree that the author of Genesis meant to teach his readers that the universe was created in six days of ordinary length—although such critics would, of course, feel free to regard the testimony of Genesis 1 as fallacious in this respect.

It is true that *yōm* may be used to denote the light part of a twenty-four hour period ("day" as opposed to "night"; Gen. 1:5, 14, 16, 18) and it is used in certain phrases to denote a specific point in time. Thus, when prefixed with the prepositional *beth* (b^e*yōm*) and used with a demonstrative pronoun or in a construct chain, it means idiomatically "at the time," "when" (e.g., Gen. 2:4). When used in a construct chain with an entity or abstraction, *yōm* denotes a specific time (not necessarily the same time in each passage) in which the entity or abstraction or something connected with it comes into prominence in a special way or degree. Thus, the "day of trouble" (Ps. 20:1) is any particularly troublous time in a person's life. The phrase "the day of the Lord" refers to a particular time (the particular point in time differing from passage to passage) when the wrath or the grace of God comes into more prominence (at least to believers) than at other times. In all such phrases, however, *yōm*, if not meaning a twenty-four hour day, is used to designate "time at which," or "time when," rather than "time during which." Therefore, *yōm* never assumes the sense of "era." If God and Moses had wished to describe each act of creation as consuming an era, they would have used either *yāmīm* with suitable modification (e.g., the adjective *rabbīm*) or, more likely, a completely different word (e.g., *dōr*).

The appeal which some unfamiliar with literary usage have made to Psalm 90:4 and 2 Peter 3:8 in no way invalidates the position taken on the meaning of *yōm* in general (much less in Genesis 1 in

particular). Conceding only for the sake of argument the bearing of 2 Peter 3:8 (which, of course, uses the Greek word *hēmera*) on the usage of a Hebrew word, both it and Psalm 90 are obviously similes. In Psalm 90 *yōm* is prefixed with a prepositional *kaph*, meaning "like"; and Peter twice uses the corresponding Greek word, *hōs* (the figurative nature of the assertion being underlined in this latter case by the use of *hōs* in the converse statement in the last part of the verse: "and a thousand years is like one day"). The point of 2 Peter 3:8 is that God chooses exactly the right time (*kairos*) for the accomplishment of His purposes, whether it be tomorrow or in another millennium or whenever. In Genesis 1, however, the prefix *kaph* does not occur with *yōm*, and so there can be no question of the pertinent phrases being similes. Nor is there any justification for positing any other figure of speech in these phrases. The fact, moreover, that Psalm 90:4 and 2 Peter 3:8 are similes means, of course, that they cannot be used as proof that *yōm* can mean a thousand years (much less an era of millions of years) any more than one could argue from the clause "though your sins be like scarlet" (Isaiah 1:18) that the word *ḥaṭṭā'th* ("sin") could mean "scarlet." The point of Psalm 90:4 is that even a millennium is an insignificant amount of time in comparison with the eternity of God's existence.

(4) In each case the days of Genesis 1 consisted in a period of light and a period of darkness. Verse 5 states that, after the initial creation of light in the course of the first day of time, dusk came ("and there was darkness," *'erebh*) to the part of the globe which the light first illuminated. Then, after a period of darkness, dawn came ("and there was morning"—*bhōqer*, the point at which light penetrates the darkness), which brought an end to "one day" and began the second day. The same occurrence of a new dawn provides the transition to each of the following days of the creation week (verses 8, 13, 19, 23, 31).

(5) The framework of Genesis 1 is intensely chronological, marked by a methodical sequence of time periods and punctuated by the same recurring phrases defining these periods (verses 5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31). The chronological interest of the account is likewise evident from verse 14, which states that the sun was created on the fourth day "for signs and for seasons and for days and for years," in which *yāmīm* obviously refers to solar days. But the interpretation of any word or assertion must accord with its context unless the analogy of faith compels the exegete to accept a different interpretation. Consequently, the word *yōm*, when used to denote the days of creation in Genesis 1, must be understood in the strict chronological sense of a twenty-four hour period.

(6) Exodus 20:8-11 lays this injunction upon the Israelites: "(8) Remember the sabbath day to keep it holy. (9) Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work. (10) But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God; in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates. (11) For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day; wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it." These verses clearly treat the days of creation as days of ordinary length. In the first place, it would be a gross violation of the contextual principle of exegesis to assign a different meaning to the word *yāmīm* in verse 11 than in the preceding verse unless the analogy of faith were to require such a change (which, of course, it does not do). Secondly, the "day of the Sabbath" (v. 8) or "seventh day" (v. 10) or "Sabbath" (v. 10) which the Israelites are to treat as holy (v. 8), dedicating it to the Lord and doing no work on it (v. 10), is clearly identified with the "seventh day" or "day of the Sabbath" on which the Lord rested from the work of creation and which He therefore blessed and treated as holy (referring back to Genesis 2:2-3). Thirdly, this passage occurs as a commandment in the prime locus of legislation in all of Scripture, the decalogue. In such a legal context, a figurative use of the word *yōm* is especially unlikely. As previously stated, then, Exodus 20 clearly treats the days of creation as days of ordinary length; and since the same God is the primary author of Genesis 1 and Exodus 20 and, indeed, since the same prophet, Moses, is the secondary author of both chapters, we must accept the exegesis of Exodus 20 as infallible, admitting of no appeal.

(7) Those who propose to interpret the days of creation in Genesis 1 as eras admit that this idea would not have occurred to the author and original audience of Genesis. Such a position, however, negates the essential hermeneutical rule that the one meaning of a given word in any one grammatical connection is the signification intended by the author and, indeed, this one meaning is the signification understood by the original audience unless the context or the analogy of faith require the exegete to accept a different meaning (which, of course, neither does in this case).

(8) Even those who propose to interpret the days of creation in Genesis 1 as eras often admit that this interpretation springs not from any testimony of Scripture but rather from an evolutionary theory of origins. In the first place, however, the interpretation of *yōm* as "era" fails to harmonize evolutionary thought with Scripture since evolutionists do not accept the same order of origin as Genesis 1 records (e.g., birds in an era before land animals or plants in an era

before the formation of the sun). Secondly, Genesis 1 excludes the evolution of one *mîn* ("kind") of plant or animal into another (vv. 11-12, 21, 24-25). Thirdly, to interpret Genesis 1 on the basis of modern evolutionary theory is to overthrow the *sola scriptura* principle of theology. For, by virtue of its divine authorship (*suggestio verborum*), Holy Scripture constitutes the sole legitimate source and norm of doctrine; consequently, no external evidence may be used to change the otherwise apparent understanding of any assertion of Scripture.

Douglas McC. Lindsay Judisch

Homiletical Studies
Gospel Series C

THE THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Luke 12:49-53

August 13, 1989

The "fire" and the "baptism" of which Jesus speaks (vv. 49, 50) must refer to His work of salvation on earth, especially as that work culminates on the cross. The cross is God's symbol of judgment (hence Jesus' metaphorical use of "fire" and "baptism"; cf. Mark 9:43, 48-49; 10:38). That judgment first came upon Christ, and then, when the cross becomes an offense and is rejected, it falls on those who are unbelieving. Rejection of Christ and His scandalous cross not only condemns individual sinners; it also tears people apart from each other in this world in a way that nothing else does. Ironically, that which brings God's greatest blessing to mankind has the potential to produce that greatest heartache here on earth. The most intimate of relationships, those within households, have experienced division and even hostility because of Christ.

Jesus is waking His hearers to the harsher side of the reality of His presence on earth. The impression is often given today that Christianity is a benign, tolerant religion whose sole purpose is to keep the peace at all costs. After all, Jesus came to bring "peace on earth." By the very nature of the conflict, however, true peace requires division. Nothing is so contradictory and, therefore, divisive as God's supernatural grace and man's natural self-righteousness. Being forewarned and even expecting the division of which Jesus speaks brings to light more clearly the true peace which we have with Christ and all true Christians. In that awareness, we are comforted.

Introduction: "Don't argue politics or religion!" This advice is given because of the deep convictions people generally have in these two matters, convictions which are not easily changed through argument and which, if pressed, can cause deep hurt and division even among family and friends. Jesus did not come into the world to argue religion. He came to win and then to offer mankind the only way of salvation. But, in doing so, He ignited a controversy which divides the world into two hostile camps. Indeed, His death on the cross has created

A WORLD ON FIRE

I. Jesus started the fire by bringing God's judgment to earth.
   A. The judgment was brought against Him for the world's sin.
      1. The world would have continued in its blissful darkness on the road to destruction.
      2. Christ's death on the cross makes possible the salvation of every person.
         a. The cross was the baptism He was to endure (v. 50).
         b. He longed to complete it for us.
   B. The judgment proceeds to all who are offended at the cross.
      1. Unbelief rejects salvation through the cross for any number of reasons—as being too simple, too exclusive, unreasonable, or unnecessary.
      2. The consequence is eternal fire (Matthew 3:12; 25:41).
II. The fire continues to burn as the Gospel of the cross is proclaimed.
   A. The great paradox is that peace on earth (Luke 2:14) requires division among men.
      1. The Gospel call to believe unites us with total strangers and divides us from those with whom we have intimate relationships.
      2. No amount of watered-down sentiment or cover-up can extinguish the fire.
   B. In the midst of our disunity Christ would have us find comfort and hope in the cross.
      1. As Christians, the division we experience from close acquaintances over the cross causes us great hurt (cf. Paul's sorrow in Romans 9).
      2. Knowing that Jesus Himself suffered this division and that He told us to expect it enables us to glory in the cross of Christ.

Conclusion: The message of the cross to which our Lord was condemned continues to condemn all those who brush it aside and refuse to see in it God's only offer of life. But the cross remains the only hope for a divided world.

Paul E. Cloeter
Bessemer, Michigan

THE FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Luke 13:22-30

August 20, 1989

The verses of the text will be most powerful when seen in their immediate context. Jesus has been on His way to Jerusalem (9:51). This theme is renewed and intensified in 13:22. The thought that is conveyed is that Jesus is on His way to establish the kingdom of God. References to the kingdom occur in 13:18,20,28,29. The expectations of the people led to speculation regarding the number of people who would be saved. Jesus is not drawn into such speculation but rather stresses a recurring theme of the chapter, "Repent, turn from your false securities" (13:3, 5, 9, 15, 27, 34).

Introduction: As was often the case when Jesus was drawn into a discussion with people, He issued stern warnings along with prophetic insight into the coming kingdom of God. The warnings are usually followed by a call to repentance. The full impact of His call is often missed by us. We tend to concentrate on the hypocrites of Jesus' day without becoming personally involved. We see them, but not ourselves. Today we will concentrate on our own entrance into the kingdom of God. Picture yourself as moving toward the entrance of the kingdom, observing those who are trying to get in

THE OPEN DOOR

I. The kingdom has four doors.
   A. One door faces east.
      1. The East is the Orient where many heathen live.
      2. Many trying to enter were at one time Buddhist or Hindu.
      3. Those approaching have different colors of skin and different languages.
   B. One door faces west.
      1. Masses are coming from Africa, Europe, and North America.
      2. Some are ancient Christians; others are new Christians; some were once Moslem.
      3. There are all varieties of people; some are very hungry.

C. One door faces south.
   1. Large numbers are coming from South America.
   2. Some are like ourselves, but many are poor.
D. One door faces north.
   1. These people are from the developed nations of the earth.
   2. Every Christian denomination is represented.
   3. Most of these people are familiar.
   4. It is the door most of us might try.

II. The doors are narrow.
   A. Many who are trying to enter are wearing badges.
      1. Some badges carry a denominational label.
      2. Some badges carry the label of a country or nationality.
      3. Some badges denote social status.
   B. Those who wear badges are being turned away.

III. The door is shut.
   A. No mere password is enough to open the door ("Lord, Lord").
      1. Religious name-dropping will not open the door.
      2. Religious knowledge (on its own) will not open the door.
   B. Not even the most impressive performance in the church will open the door.
      1. Not even church attendance.
      2. Not even church activity.

IV. The door is opened.
   A. The banquet hall is filled with people who have faith in Jesus.
   B. People of faith from every land and background find the door open.

Conclusion: A personal question must be asked by each one of us: "Will the door be opened to me?" Faith is too easily placed in the externals of religion. Faith must be in Christ alone. True faith is "faith active in love." The blessed are still "those who hear the Word of God and keep it."

David Schlie
Fort Wayne, Indiana

THE FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Luke 14:1, 7-14

August 27, 1989

Some things are easier said than done. Resolving to live life God's way is the prime example. The word constantly calls forth from us a new mind, a change of mind (*metanoia*—because God's thoughts are so different than those of sinful man; cf. Isaiah 55:8-9; Romans 11:33). This pericope forces us to realize this truth anew. Our thoughts, habits, patterns of behavior—even those deemed socially acceptable by all—need to be reexamined in the light of God's Law and Gospel. Living life God's way does not mean doing business as usual. The objective of the sermon suggested below is to bring the hearer to assume God's call to humble service. The problem is our tendency toward the worldly standards of prideful self-service. The means to the goal stated is the empowering presence of Him who came to serve and save us from sin's self-centeredness.

Introduction: I am sure not revealing some great secret when I say that being a Christian is not easy. Sometimes I think fitting a round peg into a square hole is easier than living a life as a disciple of Christ. Sinful man does not easily gravitate toward the mind and values of God. Yet we are all people who like to think of ourselves as being Christians. Indeed, I am certain we all want to be Christians. So today's text is a welcome one. By it we are again forced to rethink what it means to be a Christian. In the process we find ourselves being issued the daily challenge to live like Jesus.

THE DAILY CHALLENGE

I. The world challenges us daily to live life its way.
   A. One such challenge is this one: "Do yourself a favor!" (vv. 7-11).
      1. How clearly Jesus perceived that selfish value in those with whom He ate. They proudly maneuvered to obtain the choicest seats, each one vying for a position of greater honor and importance.
      2. The world challenges us to do the same because "everyone else is!" Even the disciples knew how to play the game (James and John wanted the choice seats next to Jesus; we note the others' response, Mark 10:35-45).

Summary: The world challenges us: "If you try to live by the Golden Rule, sooner or later you will realize that many others are getting ahead of you. Do yourself a favor!"

B. Another such challenge is this one: "You scratch my back and I'll scratch yours!" (vv. 12-14).
   1. Jesus accused His host of playing life that way—turning the Golden Rule into this principle: "Do good to others so they will do good to you in return."
   2. Again the world challenges us to see how sensible its way is. " 'Tit for tat' is the way the 'real' world operates," we are told.

Transition: Like it or not we all need to realize and admit this fact:

C. We have bought the world's arguments lock, stock, and barrel.
   1. Because of our sinful nature we are proud and jealous of our positions.
   2. Like fallen Adam we are self-centered, selfish, and self-serving people.

Illustration: Consider the way many trim their Christmas card lists: "Did they send me a card last year? If not—drop them!" One begins to wonder what those cards and Christmas itself are all about! Or consider how obligated we feel to reciprocate dinner invitations and what we will serve when we do. How silly we are! How self-centered!

II. Jesus challenges us daily to live life His way.
   A. His way would not render Him a very good businessman by our worldly standards.
      1. He never showed any material success for His efforts.
      2. The people He chose to fill "top positions" (the twelve) were laughable candidates by worldly standards.
      3. Most people He tried to help responded indifferently at best.
   B. He says, "True living comes in humbly giving yourself to others."
      1. Paul wrote the classic statement on this point in Philippians 2:1-11. Because of our sinful self-centeredness Jesus "humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross"!

2. Jesus gave Himself into death for *all* people—a service none could repay, a service most, he knew, would disdain. To the world His conduct is ridiculous since He would get so little return on His investment.

Summary: Do you see how poor, cripple, lame, and blind (v. 13) you are without Jesus? Have you humbly answered His invitation to receive all His undeserved, cross-won riches in faith?

Transition: If so, then get set for a new, otherworldly challenge:

C. Jesus challenges His Christians to live life His way every day.
   1. We are challenged to give Him and the world our best; He pleads, "Stop aping the world. Think and give like Me, just as I continue to love and give to you."
   2. He says, "Trust My Father to reward you in His time and way." While everything we have is given completely by God's grace (undeserved on our part), Jesus does talk of rewards. Whatever we do for those who cannot repay us in turn, the Father does see. One day we will hear these words: "well done, good and faithful servant" (cf. Matthew 25:21).

Conclusion: Jesus lived a life of humble service. That is what He challenges us to do too. On our own we could never answer that call. But He empowers us with the Spirit of His presence, forgiveness, peace, and joy through His Word. With all those spiritual resources, let us answer His challenge every day with a hearty "yes!" Amen.

Ronald W. Weidler
Tampa, Florida

THE SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Luke 14:25-33

September 3, 1989

The theme of the sermon suggested below is that the follower of Christ must be willing to count the cost of discipleship and determine to pay it. There are three parts to this sermon (1.) the call to discipleship, (2.) the cost of discipleship, and (3.) the way of discipleship.

Introduction: At first glance some verses in the Bible strike one as confusing, overdone, even fanatical. Take Psalm 137:9: "How blessed will be the one who seizes and dashes your little ones against the rock." The Christian may react to this verse with a sense of horror: "Surely, God would never say anything like that!" Yet look at other examples in Scripture: Jericho, Sodom and Gomorrah, etc. God presents His people with some breathtaking observations and shocking commands: "Put it all to the sword!" If nothing else, the Christian (or unbeliever) concludes that God's invitation to faith and discipleship is most serious. It is a call to serve the living God—or die!

ON COUNTING COSTS

I. The Call to Discipleship
   A. The religious zeal and ignorance of the multitude are apparent (v. 25). So often people want a "Bread King" as a Savior. God is the Great Treasurer on high dispensing favors to His faithful followers and preventing any harm from touching their lives. The electronic church is evidence enough. So often the people flocked to Jesus for free medical help and food; the faith was ignored. Natural man always rebuilds God in his own (man's) image. We face the question: Why do we seek to follow Him?
   B. Sin is the primary stumbling-block to discipleship (v. 26). Sin warps man's understanding of faith in God. Sin focuses man on himself. Sin perverts every call, every invitation, every command that God addresses to man. Sin places man under God's judgment, temporal and eternal. Unbelief, like cancer, consumes man and destroys his communion with God.
   C. Christ came to destroy sin and reconcile man to God (2 Corinthians 5:19). Christ in the flesh carried man's guilt, sin, and death. By His sacrifice on the cross, Christ made peace between God and the world. His redemptive life and death opens up communion with God and eternal life.
   D. On this atonement Christ also based His call to all men to follow Him (v. 26). Christ calls all men to become His believers and His followers.

II. The Cost of Discipleship
   A. Christ compares His love and worldly love (v. 26). No one, nothing can claim primacy in my life over Christ. Discipleship to Him is complete and permanent. Faith in Him accepts the blessings He won for us and sets us on

the road to discipleship, but there is a cost! He must be first in life. His follower must say "yes" to all His claims and promises.

B. We must understand the total cost of this discipleship (vv. 28-30). Here a tower is to be built! Workers, salaries, material are all calculated for the projected task. Here every nail, screw, and hourly wage must be taken into account. Thoroughness is demanded. The demand is no less for the disciple of Christ. We need to see what is involved in the call to discipleship. Membership in the kingdom is not a nominal thing.

C. We must understand the commitment involved in discipleship (vv. 31-32). The analogy of the military operations stresses the seriousness of the call. Danger, warning, combat is indicated. A college professor once complained: "The trouble with you orthodox Christians is you play for keeps; you play hard ball!" The professor was right. The call to discipleship and renewal is for keeps, forever.

III. The Way of Discipleship

A. Trust in Christ as Redeemer is the first step in discipleship (v. 26). The calling begins with saving faith in the Redeemer, the only Redeemer! There is no discipleship without saving faith in the Christ of the cross. Faith in Christ makes one His disciple forever. This love excludes all others; He alone is first in heart, head, and life. Only then does one "qualify" for discipleship and serve in the kingdom.

B. The disciple places all at the service of Christ (v. 33). There is no corner of life that can be excluded from service to Him. The Christian's lifestyle reflects the call of the Savior; it is renewal under grace. The disciple is God's new man with new goals in his life.

C. The disciple takes up even the cross to follow Christ (v. 27). The disciple of Christ faces the sure enmity of the world and the devil. The wrath of the Evil One is directed against the follower of Christ. He must suffer in this world *because* he is a Christian. The war is not make-believe; Satan will bring his heavy guns to bear on the soldier of Christ. He will dog our steps until the last breath we take.

D. The disciples of Christ follow Him until the end (v. 33). Does all this talk mean that salvation, redemption, and discipleship is a good work that God's people must do in

order to earn their way to heaven? Of course not—the gift of life and discipleship itself is absolutely free! But the world, the devil, and the flesh will do all they can to pull us from the Savior. Here is the "cost" to God's people—pressure, pressure, pressure! We are pilgrims in a foreign land; we have a long way to travel before the darkness falls and we stand in His bright presence. "He that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved."

THE SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Luke 15:1-10

September 10, 1989

With opposition mounting from the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, Jesus continues to welcome tax collectors and sinners into the kingdom. He leaves the flock to seek the lost sheep and after much searching rejoices at finding the lost coin. On the road to Jerusalem Jesus prepares to lose His life so that the lost will find life forever.

Introduction: In today's world we are surrounded by the lost—the homeless in our cities, illegal aliens across our borders, yuppies bound only for success, wealth, and pleasure, language groups worldwide without the saving Gospel. It is much more comfortable to ignore their cries and go our separate ways. Jesus startles our complacency with not one but two

PARABLES FOR THE LOST

I. We need parables for the lost.
   A. The Pharisees despised sinners (vv. 1-2).
      1. They did not seek them out but avoided them.
      2. They did not find them because they themselves were lost.
      3. They did not rejoice over sinners found but muttered against Jesus' actions.
   B. We often despise sinners too.
      1. We do not seek the lost but avoid them in our homes, community, job, and world.
      2. We do not find them because of our own hard hearts.
      3. We do not rejoice over sinners found but mutter about having our comfortable setting disrupted by "new" people who do not understand our ways.

II. We hear parables for the lost.
   A. The shepherd leaves the flock for a lost sheep (vv. 3-7).
      1. He diligently seeks out the sheep.
      2. He finds the lost sheep and puts it on his shoulders.
      3. He rejoices along with his friends and neighbors.
   B. The woman with ten silver coins goes after the lost one (vv. 8-10).
      1. She diligently sweeps the floor to seek that coin.
      2. She finds it after exhausting effort.
      3. She rejoices with her friends and neighbors.
   C. Jesus reaches out to the lost in a similar fashion (v. 7, 10).
      1. He diligently seeks us out in our Pharisaic sin and goes to the cross for us.
      2. He finds us repentant and forgives us our sin.
      3. He rejoices with the angels in heaven over our salvation and the world's.

III. We live parables for the lost.
   A. Found like the lost sheep and the lost coin, we diligently seek others around us.
   B. By God's grace through the Word and Sacraments, we find the lost as Jesus saves them from their sins.
   C. With the angels in heaven we rejoice over one sinner who repents.

Stephen J. Carter
St. Louis, Missouri

THE EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Luke 16:1-13

September 17, 1989

This is perhaps the most controversial of all the parables. Jesus uses an unrighteous man with unrighteous acts pursuing unrighteous ends to teach a lesson. Conversely, God's people (this is addressed to Jesus' disciples) strive to do what is right before God—including use of the possessions for righteous ends.

Verse 9 does not advocate some sort of works-righteous "back-up" plan in case of failure to reach heaven otherwise. "When it fails" appears to refer to the end of one's ability to use his money, to his death. When I die my wealth is gone; even my bodily

remains are controlled by another. Verse 9 expresses the joy God's people will share in heaven with those who have been eternally blessed by our sharing here on earth.

The problem is that we tend to get all caught up in our possessions; they easily dominate and dictate our lifestyle. The solution is to serve God wholeheartedly as those redeemed by His Son's blood. In His service we are stewards of all our possessions.

Introduction: Even Christians who believe their pastors should preach the "whole counsel of God" sometimes get a bit squeamish when his sermon has much to say about money. For some reason the subject of money—wealth, possessions—raises a red flag. Yet Jesus talked a great deal about money. The text presents us with the Parable of the Unjust Steward and its interpretation. It shows

WHAT YOUR USE OF MONEY REVEALS ABOUT YOU

I. It reveals your goals.
   A. The unjust manager's goals were these:
      1. To enjoy life—if at the expense of his employer.
      2. To continue to enjoy life at the expense of his employer, even after his crookedness was exposed.
   B. The Christian's goals are these:
      1. To enjoy Christ and His love.
      2. To share His love for the salvation of others.
II. It reveals your resources.
   A. The unjust manager creatively used his last official act to further cheat his employer and create a future safe refuge for himself.
   B. The Christian seeks creative ways to serve God and other people (one might note the uniqueness of "The Lutheran Hour," "This Is the Life," or the LLL Rose Parade float when they were first introduced).
III. It reveals your wisdom.
   A. The unjust manager's investments were foolish.
      1. They were self-centered.
      2. They were short-lived in value.
   B. The Christian uses his God-given wealth wisely.
      1. He cares for others and shares with others in many ways—especially sharing the Gospel.
      2. There are eternal dimensions to his sharing (v. 9).
IV. It reveals your values.
   A. It is axiomatic that, if you can trust someone with unimportant things, you can trust him with valuable things (v. 10).

B. If you cannot manage your money well (which belongs to someone else—God), how can you responsibly handle the precious Gospel (vv. 11-12)?

V. It reveals your master.
   A. Everyone has one—and only one—master. The question is this: who or what is your master (v. 13)?
   B. If money is your master, then your religion is really a sham.
   C. If God is your master, then your use of money will be important to serve Him who died for you and rose again.

Conclusion: It is frightening to look at yourself in the mirror of your use of your money. But remember that you are forgiven through Christ. With God as your master, money becomes one means of effectively serving Him and other people.

Lloyd Strelow
Tustin, California

THE NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Luke 16:19-31

September 24, 1989

The account found in Luke 16:19-31 has often been classified as a parable. There is, however, no introductory statement in the text or context which would lead to that conclusion. There is no statement to this effect: "The kingdom of heaven is like unto..." What Jesus relates about the rich man (in Latin called *Dives*) and Lazarus could be a historical account of the lives and ends of two men who lived in Palestine during Christ's time. The similarities between parables and historical accounts are so many that there may be times when an interpreter will not know precisely how to classify them. Luther held that this pericope could be either a parable or a historical happening. P.E. Kretzmann believed that the account about Dives and Lazarus was relating historical events. The latter approach will be taken in this study.

Introduction: Thinking people in all ages have asked questions about three concerns: "Where did I come from? Why am I living?" "What will be my end?" Does the grave write *finis* to my life? The account of Dives and Lazarus deals with the third of these great

questions. Let us consider Jesus teaching about life's most important question:

"WHERE WILL I SPEND ETERNITY?"

I. A man's worldly existence does not indicate where he will spend eternity.
   A. There were great differences between Dives and Lazarus.
      1. Dives lived sumptuously each day of his life.
      2. His sumptuous life-style, however, did not guarantee him a happy eternity.
      3. Lazarus was a beggar and sick man who lived a miserable existence, which did not deter him from spending a blessed eternity.
      4. His poverty and sickness, however, did not guarantee him eternal happiness in heaven.
   B. There was a spiritual difference involved in the ultimate destinies of Dives and Lazarus.
      1. Dives was heedless of God and His Word.
      2. Lazarus feared God and believed the promises of God contained in the Old Testament.

Application: Let no one think that he will be judged according to his income, education, or social status; because all men are sinners before God and share the same plight, needing of repentance and faith in Christ for their salvation.

II. Death is common to all classes of mankind; it ends the lives of rich and poor, educated and illiterate.
   A. Death is the "Great Equalizer." It shows no partiality.
      1. Against the inequalities of life, death is the great antidote.
      2. In death the respective fortunes and misfortunes of Dives and Lazarus were reversed.
   B. Many individuals live as if death will never come to them, and they make no preparation to meet the final enemy.

Application: Human beings need to realize that death can occur at any age in life, and so it is important to be prepared for it.

III. The souls of believers are taken to God in the hour of death.
   A. When Lazarus died, he was carried by angels to Abraham's bosom, that is, to heaven.
      1. While much about death and what follows is a mystery, yet Christians are not alone when they

embark on this journey to a place they have never seen; as Christ said, He has prepared a place for them.

2. God's angels, His messengers, take Christians to their eternal home.

B. This glorious experience was not accorded Dives when his life ended; instead he went to a place where God was not, a place of condemnation.

Application: The knowledge that God sends His angels to take the souls of believers to heaven is a great source of comfort in the hour of death.

IV. Jesus teaches the reality of heaven and hell (heaven is being in the presence of the Lord; hell is the absence of the Lord and being in the company of the devil and his cohorts).

A. Jesus says that Dives' destination was hell.

1. Dives is in great agony.
2. Dives can never escape.

B. Jesus says that Lazarus went to heaven.

V. Unconverted individuals in hell will discover too late the necessity, while living, to prepare for their ultimate destination.

A. In hell Dives was concerned about his relatives whose life-style was the same as he had lived.

1. Dives realized that they would eventually join him in hell if their way of life was not radically changed.
2. Dives asked Abraham to send a messenger to warn them.

B. Not even a messenger from the dead, however, would have convinced them.

1. Dives sought help for his brothers in a wrong, sensational way.
2. Dives' brothers had the "law and the prophet" (i.e., Holy Writ) to show them how to escape damnation.

Conclusion: God does not desire the destruction of the wicked but that they repent. It is God's will "that all men should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth." Faith saved Lazarus; unbelief condemned Dives. God grant us all the one thing needful—faith in Christ!

Raymond F. Surburg

THE TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Luke 17:1-10

October 1, 1989

The text seems to be a collection of Christ's sayings. Matthew reports much of the same wisdom of Christ, elaborating extensively and ordering the words differently. There are three parts to the text: verses 1-2, verses 3-4 and verses 5-10. Each section speaks of danger to disciples. In each section a caution is given. In the first we find the word "woe," in the second the expression "take heed," and in the third a series of rhetorical questions. A fairly tight deductive approach would be to discuss the dangers to faith which accompany discipleship.

A couple of points are worthy of note. First, the word "shame" or "offense" is relatively rare in the synoptics. It always refers to that which detracts from Christ. In Paul and Peter its use is the opposite. Christ becomes the "scandal" which trips up pride and glory. Secondly, verse 2 and its parallels in Matthew and Mark prove the possibility of infant faith, since the "little ones" certainly do believe in Jesus. Thirdly, the word "disciple" in verse 1 is changed to "apostle" in verse 5. Which means that the audience is changed by Christ.

Introduction: Faith is endangered at all times. In accord, certainly, with the popular conception, sins of passion are the ruin of many believers. But Satan is often more subtle. More often he attacks faith at its center, trying to destroy our faith by making us deny the Gospel.

THE DANGERS OF DISCIPLESHIP

I. The Danger of Giving Offense.
   A. Giving offense means destroying faith.
      1. Jesus does not refer to offending the unbiblical and sometimes silly sensitivities of others.
      2. The "stumbling block" was like a rabbit trap or the baited stick which lead to a rabbit's destruction.
      3. So many temptations can destroy faith.
         a. Like the temptation to live without the Word (without Bible class or worship).
         b. Like the temptation to disparage faith alone.

B. Giving offense is damnable.
   1. Others are destroyed.
   2. It is like taking candy from children.
   3. God takes a "soul for a soul."
C. But Jesus is an offense.
   1. He is an offense to those who threaten faith (Peter 2:8, 1 Corinthians 1:23).
   2. Accepting His offense protects us from faith-destroying offense.

II. The Danger of Being Unforgiving
A. To deny forgiveness implies certain things.
   1. It implies that we deny universal grace.
   2. It implies that we are better than others.
   3. It implies that there is a limit to God's grace.
B. If we refuse absolution, we deny the Gospel.
C. God's love is unlimited. (Illustration: In the Book of Judges God forgave the people many times.)
D. Disciples dare not forbid forgiveness.

III. The Danger of Pride in Oneself
A. We court this danger when we argue our worth.
   1. Active Christians must be especially careful.
   2. When we compare ourselves to others, we must be especially careful.
B. But the joy of serving Christ protects us.
   1. When we value Him, we cannot value ourselves.
   2. Serving him shows how much we value Him.

Conclusion: The dangers of discipleship are giving offense, being unforgiving, and being proud. God through the Gospel protects us from these dangers by the offense of Christ, the forgiveness of Christ, and the humility of Christ.

Klemet Preus
Woodland, California

THE TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Luke 17:11-19

October 8, 1989

Introduction: Whenever I read the account of the healing of the ten lepers, my mind immediately jumps to the topic of thanksgiving, not only because this text addresses the issue of gratitude and ingratitude, but primarily because this is the traditional gospel lesson for Thanksgiving Day. After years of reading this text on Thanksgiving, one goes with the other, like turkey with all the trimmings. So I must admit that it feels a bit awkward to consider this text on an ordinary Sunday of the church year. Yet perhaps there is a message here for all of us that gratitude is an attitude worth cultivating all year long. Today we can learn much about

DEVELOPING A GRATEFUL HEART

I. A grateful heart comes as we stop to consider where we have been.
   A. For the nine thankless lepers the duty of giving thanks was lost in the excitement of getting on with their lives.
   B. Human nature acts in this way. We are so quickly caught up in new endeavors that we forget where we have been and how God has blessed us in the past.
   C. We must take time to look back and review where we have been as the Samaritan did. Paul never lost sight of the grace shown him (1 Corinthians 15:9ff.).

II. Developing a grateful heart requires humility.
   A. The nine who failed to give thank were Jews. It is quite possible that they were presumptuous about their healing because of their privileged background and status (Romans 9:4).
   B. Pride can enter our hearts, too, because of our privileged status as God's chosen ones. As baptized and confirmed Lutherans who have faithfully and sacrificially given of ourselves to the Lord over the years, do we presume to think that God owes us something? Do we deserve a break today?

C. The Samaritan, perhaps because of his lowly status in society, knew he was not worthy of the least of all the mercies the Lord has showered upon him (Genesis 32:10). Because of his humility he was mindful of God's grace.

III. A grateful heart comes as a gift of God's grace.

A. The Holy Spirit worked faith in the Samaritan's heart, so that he recognized the healing *and* the healer.

B. It is only by the power of the Holy Spirit that we are moved to be truly grateful and to see that every good and perfect gift is from above.

Conclusion: Jesus is looking for grateful recognition every day, not just on Thanksgiving. He asks, "Where are the nine?" We will be at His feet offering thanks when we, with the Samaritan, take time to review where we have been, as we in all humility have proper understanding of ourselves before God, but, above all else, as He Himself grants us grace by His Holy Spirit through His Word to see Him as the source of every blessing

Dennis S. Perryman
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THE TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Luke 18:1-8a

October 15, 1989

Luke 11:5-8 and Luke 18:1-8 are unique to Luke and typical of his emphasis on prayer. Worthy of note is the imperfect tense of "kept coming" in verse 3. In verse 5 "wear me out" is a weak translation of a Greek word which has the literal sense of "pounding with a fist to inflict a black eye" (cf. 1 Corinthians 9:27). Here we see what motivates a man who admits that he gives not a fig for God or man. Noteworthy also is the grammar of verse 7 where the subject is placed in the emphatic position and is followed by a double negative expression introducing a question and thus demanding a positive answer. Normally we preach a parable and its application as a unit. In this case Jesus provides an interpretation which is not parallel, but in contrast, to the parable. We want to contrast the unjust judge (v. 6) with the God of righteousness. In any parable we look for *one* point of comparison, and Jesus clearly identifies what we are to learn in the first verse. Thus He gives us the theme.

Introduction: In the gospel a few weeks ago (Luke 11:1-13; Tenth Sunday after Pentecost) Jesus taught us that prayer is an act of stewardship, a response. Today the Holy Spirit teaches us two more lessons about prayer. We learn the answer to this question:

WHAT IS PROPER PRAYER?

I. Proper prayer is persistent (vv. 1-5).
   A. In today's Old Testament reading, Jacob-Israel was persistent in his wrestling with the Lord (Genesis 32:22-31).
   B. The widow was persistent in coming repeatedly (v. 3).
   C. Proper prayer is even more persistent in that it is continual.
      1. Jesus says that we "should always pray and not give up" (v.1).
      2. Paul uses the word rendered "not give up" in Galatians 6:9
      3. Paul uses the same word again in 2 Thessalonians 3:13.
   D. We "cry out to Him day and night" (v. 7; Psalm 35:28; Psalm 44:8; Psalm 71:8, 15;Psalm 88:1-2). Our prayer is proper and persistent when our praying cannot be distinguished from our living, when our whole life is a prayer (1 Thessaloanians 5:17).

II. Proper prayer is confident (vv.6-8).
   A. The justice of this world serves special interests; sometimes the special interest of an unjust judge (vv. 2,6).
   B. We are confident in our God of true justice (v. 7).
      1. True justice finds us guilty—not least of inconsistent and faithless prayer (Mark 14:37-38).
      2. But for the sake of Jesus' death and resurrection we are declared innocent before the Judge (Romans 3:22-26).
   C. We are confident because we live in a marvelous fellowship with God as His chosen ones (v.7).
      1. We know that, even when He keeps putting us off, He is always wise in accord with His own purpose.
      2. We approach Him "with all boldness and confidence as dear children ask their dear father" (Hebrews 4:16; Luther's introduction to the Lord's Prayer).
   D. We are confident because we have Jesus' specific promise of swift and true justice (v. 8).

Conclusion: Proper prayer is a response to the love of our just Father in heaven as shown in Jesus. Proper prayer is persistent and confident.

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THE TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Luke 18:19-14

October 22, 1989

In Luke 19:10 we have the theme of this gospel: "The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." The Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican in the Temple has a surprise element. The "lost" are not those we think are lost, the terrible tax collectors or coarse sinners, but the "lost" are instead the proud Pharisees. The preacher ought to use great diligence in stressing this surprise element in this parable. It is the point of comparison as is stated in verses 9 and 14b of the text. It is at the center of man's relationship with God. Who is justified or forgiven? It is the churchgoer who humbly confesses his sin and who looks to Jesus Christ.

LOOK WHO IS JUSTIFIED TODAY!

I. The man whom everybody judged was righteous is not justified.
   A. Though he had a high pedigree and enjoyed material blessings, he lacked true righteousness.
      1. The Pharisees were the spiritual leaders of the day.
      2. His "standing in Front" or "with himself" sets him forth as seeking only his own honor. The Pharisees could not believe in Jesus because they were seeking personal glory (John 5:44).
   B. Though he had works of which he could boast—even before God—yet he was not righteous.
      1. His pride in not being guilty of the coarse sins of the publican show how futile his works were.
      2. There is no repentant humility, no broken heart or spirit in him (cf. Psalm 51:17).

C. The real fault in the Pharisee is his spiritual pride—the worst kind (cf. Luke 5:30-32; 15:2-16:15; John 9:40-41).
   1. His boast is negative—that he is not like the rest of the people, that is, average people. Hence, he exulted in his own pretended superiority.
   2. His boast is positive.
      a. Fasting beyond the Old Testament requirements (Leviticus 16:29-31; cf. 1 Samuel 15:22; Mark 7:7).
      b. Tithing heavier than required, that is, a tenth of everything, not just grain, wine, oil, and herd (Leviticus 27:30-32 cf. Luke 11:42; Matthew 23:23).
      c. He says nothing of his sins and imperfections or of sins he has been forgiven (Luke 7:47). He is confident that he is righteous (v. 9) and thus feels entitled to God's blessings in the world and the next.

D. Others saw him as the "model Israelite, citizen, and leader."

II. The man whom everybody judged a loser is justified.
   A. We look at the publican on the outside.
      1. He stands "afar off," at a distance, and especially far from the "saintly" Pharisee (v. 13).
      2. He does not lift his eyes to heaven since he keenly feels the weight of his sin against God (v. 13).
      3. He beats his breast, again and again, to indicate his profound sorrow.
   B. Jesus looks at the publican on the inside.
      1. A prayer arises from a heart that is broken (Psalm 51:17; 66:18; 102:17; Job 36:21).
      2. The prayer of this sinner is "pleasing" to God (v. 13d).
         a. His prayer recognizes and confesses his sin.
         b. He expresses a firm faith in God's mercy to forgive sin. The aorist passive imperative, *hilastheti*, asks God "to be reconciled" or "to be merciful" to him. This verb always implies a sacrificial offering as necessary to render God reconciled with sinners. The sacrifice, of course, is Jesus Christ the Righteous, who is "the propitiation for the sins of the whole world", (1 John 2:3; 4:10).
      3. Surprise! The publican is justified, that is, forgiven.
         a. By his own confession he is a great sinner.
         b. A divine pardon is declared in the death and

resurrection of Jesus (Romans 4:23-25). This pardon is a gift of forgiveness that cannot be earned.

III. *Conclusion:* Look who is justified today! It is whoever confesses his sin from a repentant heart "O God, be merciful (reconciled)," whoever by faith accepts the proffered absolution, in Christ our justification is already accomplished. Therefore, "let him who boasts boast in the Lord!" (1 Corinthians 1:30-31; cf. Jeremiah 9:23- 24).

Waldemar Degner

THE TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Luke 19:1-10

October 29, 1989

Zaccheus was a big man in terms of power, ability to intimidate, and wealth. He was a little man in spiritual terms; a tax collector was a "sinner" in the eyes of the Jews. People, therefore, looked down on him; almost anyone would think of himself as better than he. He was also a short man. Injury was added to insult in this case. This fact, no doubt, hardened him.

Jesus' use of *dei* announces the necessity of His messianic mission. It is to Zaccheus' house that Jesus "must go." If Jesus is to fulfill the mission the Father has given Him, He must consort with sinners. I.H. Marshall notes that, in the minds of the Jews of His day, Jesus was sharing in the sin of Zaccheus by staying in his home.

Zaccheus' response to Jesus' gracious visitation is extravagant. There is no reason to make the conditional sentence of verse 8 suggest that Zaccheus may not have defrauded others. He is simply showing that he has now left behind a life of corruption. The usual prescribed restitution for ill-gotten gain (the amount plus twenty percent) was far less than the fifty percent Zaccheus gave to charity and the four times as much he pledged to return to those whom he had defrauded. He shows beyond all doubt that he realized the deep impact Jesus' visit in his house. The objective of the sermon outlined below is that the hearer humble himself before God, being moved by God to use his influence for

God's purposes. The problem is that we too often use our influence for our own good. The means to the proposed goal is the news that the great God has become a little man, taking our sins upon Himself and bringing us salvation through his death and resurrection.

Introduction: In the minds of many, little Zaccheus was not so little. He had influence and power far beyond his short stature. He could impose taxes, seize property, and make life miserable for anyone who crossed him. He was also wealthy, this little big man. But when Jesus comes along, Zaccheus' world was turned upside-down. Jesus is willing to become small in other peoples' eyes so that He can do a big work—to bring salvation to every home. In this familiar story we can see through Jesus

WHEN BIG IS LITTLE AND SMALL IS LARGE

I. Being big is little when we try to "throw our weight around."
   A. Zaccheus was a man with much influence and power, bigger than his short stature would suggest.
      1. Tax collectors were fearsome people. He was more to be feared and heeded than the most fearsome IRS auditor. He had broad and virtually unchecked powers to seize, hold, and tax.
      2. He was also wealthy. This, allowed him to influence people who made decisions and deal with leaders and other important people.
      3. He was also little in ways other than his small frame would suggest. He was willing to use his power and influence for his own good, defrauding people and seizing whatever he could for his own good.
   B. Sometimes we act in the manner of Zaccheus.
      1. When we claim a special privilege because of our work, position in the community, or money, we really become rather petty and small.
      2. Even if we do not have much influence, it is all too real a temptation to look up to those who can pull the right strings—even trying to get them to pull some strings for us.
      3. Sometimes we puff ourselves up like a frightened cat in an effort to protect our own interests apart from the good of others.

C. God has a word of warning for us in such a case.
   1. "Pride goes before destruction" (Proverbs 16:18) "let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12).
   2. Unchecked pride will eventually be a person's downfall. God exalts the humble and brings down the mighty.

Transition: Being a big man or a great woman may really cause us to be quite small in the sight of God. Left to ourselves, we would bring on our own destruction with this pettiness.

II. Small is large when Jesus is at work in us.
   A. We see how small and insignificant God was willing to become for our sakes.
      1. Born in a stable, living in humility and cast aside by the Jewish leaders of His day, Jesus came to this earth. He so for one reason—to save the lost.
      2. For this cause He went to the home of Zaccheus. He *had* to go there. It was His mission to identify with sinners, take their sins upon Himself, announce the good news of salvation to them, lift up the lowly, make little people big in God's eyes.
   B. We see what a large work He accomplished.
      1. In identifying with sinners, bringing salvation to their homes, healing diseases, and fulfilling His earthly ministry, Jesus accomplished so much—effecting the salvation of the whole world!
      2. Zaccheus was changed dramatically. What brought on this change? Jesus' visit and the Holy Spirit's work in Zaccheus' heart made the difference.
      3. What about you and me? Has God changed us? We are, indeed new creatures in Jesus Christ; so the Bible says of all those who believe in Jesus Christ.
   C. We become truly large through Jesus Christ.
      1. Counting ourselves as nothing as far as our own righteousness or ability to save ourselves, we find that Christ becomes all that we need to stand before God.
      2. Giving ourselves completely to His calling—letting His grace make a difference in our lives in big ways—we find the greatest and largest joy in living.
      3. Being small in our own and others' eyes so that we can be a blessing to them and others, we find large rewards.

Conclusion: Sometimes we may feel small. At other times we may overestimate our importance. We may be tempted to believe that we have more power than we actually have. Or we may believe that we have nothing to give. At such times we need to recall God's great glory in becoming as nothing to save us. Through Jesus we who are small can become truly large through His grace.

David L. Bahn
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THE TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Luke 20:27-38

November 5, 1989

Most of what is known of the Sadducees comes from New Testament references. It is clear that they were influential, controlling most of the priesthood (Acts 4:1;5:17) and basically rationalistic in their theology (v. 27; Acts 23:8). Josephus mentions that they did reject strict adherence to the elders' oral tradition, but the claim that they accepted only the Pentateuch appears to be of dubious origin. They came to Jesus addressing Him as "teacher," but their real intention was to prove that He was no teacher at all, or at best a poor one. The conundrum which they present is intended not only to confuse, but also ridicule Christ and His teaching. However, it is based on false premise and a misunderstanding of the biblical concepts of marriage and the resurrection. Levirite marriage had been commanded in Deuteronomy 25:5-10, but it is reported that it had almost fallen into disuse by Jesus' time. The question was purely academic and really a *reductio ad absurdum.*

Jesus first attempts to correct the Sadducean concept of marriage and the offers a biblical proof for the resurrection. In the first place, as Jesus explains, marriage presupposes a mortal race and was instituted for a specific purpose, that is, the propagation of the human race (Genesis 1:27-28). Christ points out that those deemed worthy *(kataxiothentes)* of attaining the resurrection (note: *tes anastaseos tes ek nekron*, and not *tes anastaseos nekron*) would have no need for marriage or propagation, since they would be *isaggeloi* ("like the angels," not "equal to angels" here). The likeness meant is chiefly immortal-

ity. Jesus also points out from Scripture that God would be a God of dead men. Since He said He was ("is") the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, these men must be living (Ex. 3:6). Edersheim remarked: "More grand or noble evidence of the resurrection has never been found."

Although Christ's teaching regarding marriage and the resurrection is instructive and insightful, one must remember that the text is an account of being "delivered from wicked and evil men," as Paul prayed in the epistle (2 Thessalonians 3:2). It shows to what extent some will go to pervert and discredit the Gospel. The teaching regarding the afterlife is secondary.

Introduction: A college professor, in order to prove his wisdom, would often propose seemingly unsolved questions to his class. Sometimes the answer to the riddles would be so simple that none of the students could figure them out. Or other times the question simply had no correct answer. The cry was often heard: "That was a trick question." In the text some people came to Jesus with such a question—a question for which there seemed to be no correct answer. The text concerns

THE TRICK QUESTION OF THE SADDUCEES

I. It was made with evil intent.
   A. The Sadduccees did not care about the resurrection (v. 27).
      1. They did not believe in it.
      2. They sought to prove it ridiculous (vv. 29- 33).
   B. The Sadducees wished to discredit Jesus.
      1. Others had tried (chief priests, scribes, v. 19).
      2. They saw Christ as a threat.
   C. Today also there are those who seek to tear down God's truth.
      1. Human reason is elevated above revelation.
      2. Some are threatened by Christ's message (2 Thessalonians 3:2).
II. Jesus turned it to good.
   A. He used an opportunity to set fourth God's truth (vv. 34-38).
      1. We can be faced with someone who wishes to discredit our beliefs (Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, etc.).
      2. Unfortunately we sometimes cower when presented with an attack on God's Word.
      3. Jesus calmly but forcefully refuted the Sadducean reasoning.

B. He was prepared to answer on the basis of Scripture (vv. 37-38).
   1. We also should be prepared to defend our faith based on Scripture.
   2. For this reason study of Scripture is important.

C. Perhaps some were saved through Christ's clear instruction (v. 39).

Conclusion: At first the Sadducess thought that they would be able to trick Jesus and have a good laugh at His expense. But when they twisted God's truth to prove a point, Jesus was ready to refute them with the Word of God. We, too, can defend our faith, for it is sound. It is based on the Word. We can, as Paul says in the epistle,". . .stand firm and hold to the teachings passed" on to us (2 Thessalonians 2:15).

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THE THIRD LAST SUNDAY IN THE CHURCH YEAR

Luke 17:20-30

November 12, 1989

Like most of the pericopes in use at this point in the twilight of the church year, Luke 17:20-30 has an eschatological emphasis. Verses 20-23 speak of the church throughout the course of the New Testament era, while verses 24 and 26-30 describe the end of the era in which we live. We have no reason to attribute any nefarious motive to the question of the Pharisees (v. 20), but it does, of course, assume the exclusive futurity of the messianic kingdom of God predicted in the Old Testament (as if it were not then already in existence by virtue of the incarnation and, as to the kingdom of grace, then already in operation during the public ministry of Jesus). The question, therefore, although not intentional defiance of Jesus, betrays a false conception which most of His countrymen, even most of His own disciples (cf. v. 22), were attaching to "the kingdom of God"—as the millennialists, indeed (especially the dispensationalists), continue to do down to the present day. For the Old Testament prophecies had ascribed to the Messiah a threefold kingdom: (1.) In the kingdom of

power He was to rule all creatures—not only as God, but also as man (cf. Matthew 28:18). (2.) In the kingdom of grace He, as God and man, was to rule, specifically through His Word, those in this world who trust in Him—in other words, the church on earth (cf. John 18:36-37). (3.) In the kingdom of glory He was to rule, as God and man, in glory visible to all (cf. 2 Timothy 4:10; Luke 21:31). Jewish contemporaries of Jesus, however, like the modern millennialists, wished to ignore the kingdom of grace altogether and to jumble up the kingdom of power with the kingdom of glory in an imaginary political empire which the Messiah would rule within the course of history. To correct this popular misinterpretation of the kingdom of God Jesus, in answering the question of verse 20, first describes the kingdom of grace (vv. 20b-23) before speaking of the prime interest of His countrymen (and unfortunately of His fellowmen in general, including ourselves), namely, the kingdom of glory (v. 24). Verse 25 underlines the temporal relationship between these two kingdoms ("first" the way of the cross), and verses 26-37 proceed to speak of the transition from the time of grace to the eternity of glory (cf. my study of the passage from Luke 21 assigned to the First Sunday in Advent).

Of the kingdom of grace, then, Jesus describes it as invisible to human eyes (*paratēreseōs*, "accompanied by observation"). The NASB paraphrase, "The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed," is erroneous, because (1.) Jesus and the apostles provided many miraculous signs of its arrival (although significantly, to be sure, these signs were restricted to the apostolic period) and (2.) the kingdom of grace, although invisible itself, does have visible signs, or "marks," of its presence, namely, Word and Sacrament. Verse 21a reiterates this point, and 21b states the reason why. The kingdom of grace lies within the hearts of people (*entos hymōn*, "within you"), so that only God can draw its compass; although we must relate to people in this world on the basis of profession and conduct, we cannot see into the hearts of others to descry faith in Christ or the lack thereof (cf. C.F.W. Walther's Altenburg Theses, especially I, and his Theses on Church and Ministry, especially I:3).

Millennialists, to be sure, attempt to escape from the usual meaning of *entos* and the weight of the context (translating, not "within you," but rather "within your midst," referring the statement to the presence of Jesus Himself, the Divine King, in the midst of the Pharisees) by arguing that "the kingdom certainly was completely unconnected with the Pharisees to whom Jesus was speaking" (*Ryrie Study Bible*). In the first place, however, Jesus is addressing not just the Pharisees but His audience in general, including His disciples (v.

20). At this time, secondly, the Pharisees as a general group had not yet rejected the messianic doctrine of the Old Testament or even the claim of Jesus to be the Messiah (the Pharisaic response being much less predictable than the Sadducean).

Verse 22 assumes the *theologia crucis* ("theology of the cross") which Jesus states explicitly elsewhere. The church, which rests upon the vicarious suffering of Jesus (v. 25), must itself lead a life of suffering throughout the remaining course of its history (cf. Luther's Heidelberg Theses). The reference to "one of the days of the Son of Man" arises from the Old Testament usage of *yōm-Yahweh* ("the day of the Lord"). The prophets employ this phrase to denominate a particular time in which the glory of God (in wrath or grace) comes into special prominence—as God, in fulfilment of prophecy, directly intervenes in history. The particular time intended varies from passage to passage and can be identified only from an examination of the context (whether it be a unique locust plague, the destruction of a city or country, the first coming, or the second coming). The point here is that the New Testament era would soon expend its share of such occasions (indeed, with the destruction of Jerusalem, which was to come within the apostolic generation). There would come a long period (the "days" to come, in which we still live) in which people would erroneously point to certain events as signs of the arrival of the only "day of the Lord" predicted in prophecy still unfulfilled (v. 23). This final day of the Lord, however, the second coming of Christ ("His day," "the day in which the Son of Man is revealed"), will, in fact, come suddenly without further ado (v. 24) and, indeed, at a time when people are carrying on "business as usual" in a spirit of security (vv. 26-30). These considerations dispense with all the wild and wonderful phenomena which the chiliasts imagine as paving the way for the return of Christ.

Introduction: Francis Scott Key composed the poem which became America's national anthem as the lingering darkness prevented him from seeing whether the star-spangled banner was still waving aloft the ramparts of Fort McHenry—that is, whether the fort had survived the British bombardment throughout the course of the night. "Oh, say can you see," he asked, "by the dawn's early light, what so proudly we hailed at the twilight's last gleaming?" The flag was there, of course, even when he could not see it; the morning light revealed its presence. It has been a long time since anyone on earth has seen Jesus Christ. How should we answer if anyone were to ask us this question about Jesus:

OH, SAY CAN YOU SEE?

I. We cannot see Him now.
   A. Once people saw Him in a state of humiliation (v. 25).
      1. We deserved the rejection of God.
      2. He suffered the rejection of men because of His faithfulness to God.
      3. He suffered the rejection of God, in our place, on the cross.
   B. Now we see Him no longer (v. 22).
      1. Except by the faith which He has created in us (v. 21).
      2. Except in His Word and sacraments.
II. We shall see Him soon.
   A. It is useless, yes dangerous, to guess how soon He will reappear (v. 23).
      1. The prophecies of preceding events have all seen fulfilment (v.22).
      2. The identification of more signs of the end is, therefore, counterproductive (v. 23).
   B. It is certain that He will reappear.
      1. Without warning (vv. 24-29).
      2. With a final judgment of all men (Luke 21:34-36; Matthew 25:31-33).
         a. To condemn unbelievers to eternal damnation (vv. 24-29).
         b. To translate believers from the kingdom of grace (v. 20) to the kingdom of glory (Luke 21:31).

Douglas MacCallum Lindsay Judisch

THE SECOND LAST SUNDAY IN THE CHURCH YEAR

Luke 19:11-27

November 19, 1989

Our people are being bombarded by media "evangelists" with descriptions of Christ's return to rule. Lutherans prefer to concentrate on the objective, biblical facts of how Christ set up His rule at His first coming. This text allows us to bridge the gap between the two with sanity. Arndt calls the story "an allegorical

parable" (*Luke*, p.392) because so many details correspond to the reality of Christ's departure, commission to His disciples, and return to judgment. Any number of doctrines could be highlighted in this text: Christ is to receive a kingdom (v. 12; cf. John 14:2-4) through His impending (v. 11) death, resurrection, and ascension; Christ is Lord (v. 12) as the Son of God (looking ahead to Advent; cf. Mark 11:10); our faith is shown by our works ("do business," v. 13 NKJV; cf. James 2:22) through faith in Christ we are His servants (v. 13; cf. 16:13; Romans 6:16-23); the "citizens' who are unwilling to have Christ as ruler "deny the Lord who bought them" (2 Peter 2:1); final judgment is according to works (v.15;cf. 2 Corinthians 5:10 and Revelation 20:12); Christ will reward good works (vv. 17,19; cf Matthew 16:27 and Deuteronomy 12:3); these rewards consist in "authority" (v. 17; cf. Luke 22:29-30); the unfaithful slave's fear shows a lack of love (v. 17, cf. 1 John 4:17-18); sins of omission are truly sin (vv. 22-26; cf. James 4:17); God's judgment condemns even on the basis of limited knowledge of God's ways (v. 22, cf. Romans 1:20-21, 32;14:23); God expects us to use the gifts He has given (vv. 13, 15, 26; cf. 1 Peter 4:10-11 in context)

Christ's purpose in telling this parable (that His kingdom would not appear "immediately" v. 11) needs to be modified in preaching today, since "the end of all things is at hand" (1 Peter 4:7). Yet our commission remains the same as that of the disciples: "Do business till I come" (v. 13). The emphasis of the text is not on the type of business to be done. (Lenski, wrongly, limits this business to the use of the Word of God.) The business we are to do includes our use of all gifts of God, including "that by His grace we believe His holy word and lead a godly life," according to Luther. A part of the godly life will be teaching the Word, but it includes all that we do to serve God and our fellow man—our "calling"). The emphasis here is on our motivation for doing Christ's business, namely: our identity as His servants (by grace), Christ's bestowal of His gifts on us, Christ's command, the promise of rewards for faithful service, and the proper fear of God (to avoid the punishments which are depicted here).

The sermon suggested below begins with basic Gospel and moves on to good works. Otherwise the mention of rewards for service may be misunderstood as "works-righteousness." The objective of the sermon is to motivate Christ's people to serve Him in this life and not wait idly for His return.

Introduction: People do not enjoy taking orders. They also do not enjoy working to carry out orders. "While the cat's away, the

mice will play." Yet Christ has given us orders and then went away.

WHY SHOULD WE "DO BUSINESS" UNTIL CHRIST RETURNS?

I. Christ is our King.
   A. He is the "nobleman" of verse 12 (Sons of God)
   B. He went to receive the kingdom (v. 12 death, resurrection, ascension).
   C. He reigns over all, even His enemies ("*his* citizens," vv. 14, 27; 2 Peter 2:1).

Transition: We need not be among His enemies.

II. Christ, by grace, makes us His servants.
   A. Those who trust Him as King are His servants (v. 13; 2 Corinthians 5:15).
   B. God's servants have the gift of eternal life (Romans 6:22-23).
   C. He gives us all we need to do His business (v. 13; 1 Peter 4:10-11).
      1. He gives the ability to speak God's Word.
      2. He gives the ability to serve God with all of life.

III. Christ will "reward" His servants at His return. (2 Corinthians 5:9-10 may be used here if it is chosen as the epistle for the day.)
   A. Faithful servants will receive unmerited blessings.
      1. They use God's gifts to earn profits for God (vv. 15-16, 18).
      2. God blesses such faithfulness beyond what it deserves (vv. 17,19).
   B. Fearful, wicked, lazy "servants" lose all blessings (vv. 20-26).
   C. Each of us must ask himself, "which kind of servant am I?"

Conclusion: We "do business" for Christ until He returns because He, as Savior and King, deserves our obedience. We "do business" for Christ because He graciously converted us from slaves of sin into His gifted servants. And we look forward to His blessing of our "business" with eternal rewards (1 Corinthians 15:58, the day epistle).

Mark Eddy
Shumway, Illinois

THE LAST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST (CHRIST THE KING)

Luke 12:42-48

November 26, 1989

This gospel fits between the gospels of the twelfth and thirteenth Sundays after Pentecost. In Luke 12:35- 40 Jesus told two parables urging watchfulness. In verse 41 Peter asked whether He was speaking to the Twelve or "everyone." In response Jesus not only requires watchfulness of all Christians, but also assigns us stewardship responsibility. The Old Testament reading assures that the distinction of faithful and unfaithful shall become clear. A parallel passage is Matthew 24:45-51. In verse 42 the Lord merges stewardship into watchfulness. The *en kairo* combines the themes. The word *makarios* in verse 43 is used often in the New Testament; the form of *poiounta* is present tense. Verse 44 begins with Jesus' authoritative *alethos lego.* Most translations retain the juxtaposition of *polu-polu* in verse 48; *perissoteron* is emphatic.

Commentators apply this parable to pastors, perhaps beyond the intended point of comparison. We dare not underestimate the gifts of some lay people. Jesus' answer may be paraphrased: "What I said applies to all—and to you in a very special way" (cf. 1 Corinthians 4:2.)

Introduction: While standing watch on board ship, an officer of the deck has more to do than watch clouds and waves. He is responsible for the ship and for the well-being of all hands. We, too, as watchers aboard the ship of the church, are to be more than spectators. On this last Sunday of the church year, Jesus exhorts us to

STAND A WISE AND FAITHFUL WATCH!

I. A faithful watch is more than observing.
   A. A sailor standing watch must steer a true course, keep a good log, and raise the alarm when an iceberg threatens.
   B. The servant in the parable is expected to manage his master's goods in a wise manner and provide for other servants (v. 42).

C. We are to stand a faithful watch in these last days.
   1. We are surrounded by a most needy world.
   2. We are entrusted with ample material wealth.
   3. We are entrusted with God's good news in Jesus.

II. A careless watchman will be harshly punished.
   A. By nature we humans are not good watchmen.
      1. Human arrogance and indifference were more responsible than an iceberg for the sinking of the Titanic.
      2. The servant in the parable not only misused his master's property, but also abused the other servants (v. 45).
      3. Some church members are not standing a faithful watch.
         a. Many church members, the majority in most congregations, are uninvolved in weekly or daily Bible study.
         b. Many church members are poor stewards of material wealth; they fail to use it for the welfare of the needy and glory of God.
         c. Many church members, the majority in some congregations, are little more than spectators at worship services.
   B. The Lord's warnings are not idle threats (vv. 46-47).
      1. He is coming again and, we do not know when (v. 46a).
      2. The punishment for unfaithful servants is terrible.
         a. The loss of the Titanic was small as compared to the loss of lives from it.
         b. One translation describes the faithless servant as being drawn and quartered (v. 46b).
         c. Jesus warns us of the pains of hell more than any other biblical character.
   C. The punishment for unfaithful servants will be proportional to the gifts with which they were entrusted (vv. 47-48).
      1. The punishment of the servant in the parable was proper considering that he had charge of all his master's goods.
      2. We who are so greatly blessed risk terrible punishment if we stand a careless watch.

III. A wise watchman is faithfully obedient.
   A. Lessons learned in the sinking of the Titanic have made the seaways much safer today.

B. The blessed Servant in the parable is the one who continually tended the property and people placed in his care (vv. 43,44).
C. Jesus promises us great joy in this life and eternal life with Him as reward for standing a faithful watch.

Conclusion: We know our Master's will while we wait for His return. Let us stand a faithful watch. We have been given much. Let us stand a faithful watch. We have been entrusted with much. Let us stand a faithful watch.

Warren E. Messmann
Plain City, Ohio

Book Reviews

C.F.W. WALTHER: THE AMERICAN LUTHER. Essays in Commemoration of the One Hundredth Anniversary of Carl Walther's Death. Edited by Arthur Drevlow, John Drickamer, and Glenn Reichwald. Mankato, Minnesota: Walther Press, 1987. xxix and 199 pages (212 pages including bibliography). Cloth, $17.95.

This engaging volume of essays assembles in a very readable manner the salient facts pertaining to the career, theology, and influence of the first president of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, Dr. C.F.W. Walther (1811-1887), who was in addition the leading figure of confessional Lutheran theology in America in his generation. It also reviews significant events in the early history of the Missouri Synod, which traces its beginning to the arrival of several hundred Saxon German immigrants to the American Midwest in January 1839. The contributors of the foreword and thirteen chapters are chiefly confessional Lutheran seminary professors and parish pastors (active or retired), who evaluate the professional ministry and literary output of Walther from the vantage point of their various areas of theological specialization and expertise. One essay included was written in 1897 by a now sainted author.

A multi-talented individual, Walther is presented in his role within the young synod as scholar, professor, dogmatician, debater, defender of the faith, magazine editor, pastor and preacher, liturgiologist, seminary and synodical president, and promoter of the cause of integrated Christian and secular education on all levels. He was an avid student of the Scriptures and of the Lutheran Confessions, Luther, and the orthodox Lutheran Theologians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Friends and foes alike have referred to him as a "repristination" theologian, because he profusely quoted the Lutheran sources in his sermons, lectures, and writings, as he used every opportunity to inculcate classical Lutheran teaching. Walther never apologized for this procedure, since he held that in most cases the Reformation era theologians had expressed the great truths of God's Word in such a clear, succinct, and persuasive way that little could be said to improve upon what they had written.

Several of the essayists stress Walther's dependence especially on Luther's writings in the development of his own theological thought. The reformer's influence is reflected in Walther's setting the doctrine of justification by grace through faith on account of the completed redeeming work of Christ at the heart of his theological system and relating all other biblical teachings to this core truth of divine revelation. Like Luther, Walther himself distinguished carefully

between Law and Gospel in presenting the faith and taught his ministerial students and other to do so also. He imitated his German mentor in pointing to the use of the means of grace, which he regarded to be the exclusive channel of the Holy Spirit's operation among men, as absolutely essential for the maintenance and extension of the church.

The concerns which troubled the pioneer Lutheran settlers in Perry County, Missouri, who questioned their status in the church of God and the validity of the pastoral ministry serving in the midst, Walther set about to answer by researching Luther's biblical teaching on the subjects of church and ministry. He shared his findings with the people. He assured them of their membership in the church universal and invisible through faith, held before them the privileges and responsibilities of their priesthood before God as believers and members of local Christian congregations, and showed them the divinely established relationship of the laity to its called pastors. Grateful for the religious liberty found in America, Walther set up for Missouri Synod Lutherans a unique form of church polity, an ecclesiastical government which placed the people and their pastors in charge of the affairs of their church body, as Luther (who belonged to a state church) envisaged the situation would be under an ideal arrangement in which church and state were separate.

Walther and his theology were chiefly responsible for keeping the Missouri Synod the soundly Lutheran church that it was in the early decades of its history. Though dead he still speaks through his prodigious writings, the authors of this book remind us. His clear, practical patterns of theological thought, timely and relevant yet today, are a lasting legacy to the church—and particularly to the members of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in the present generation. They, can be greatly edified and encouraged by considering his theological insights and vision, his example of zealous dedication to the cause of Christ and fidelity to the Word of God. An expression of thanks is due the editors of and contributors to *C.F.W. Walther: The American Luther* for preparing this anniversary memorial book. It offers a compact and fresh look at the life and work of the renowned founding father of the Missouri Synod, through whose labors thousands in and outside our Lutheran Church, both in Walther's time and since, have under God been richly blessed.

Walter A. Maier

CHURCH AND MINISTRY. By C.F.W. Walther. Translated by J.T. Mueller. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1987. 366 pages.

The publication in English, at last, of Walther's great classic is perhaps the most fitting and the most important event of the entire Walther centenary celebration. Its theses on the church and the ministry expressed our synod's self-understanding from the beginning and were absorbed into its very flesh and bone by generations of theological students whose ministry was so influenced by Walther's work.

Later, especially after the switch from German to English, Walther's theses became less and less self-evident. Or perhaps, since their full context never appeared in English until now, the theses seemed too self-evident; and so their true import came to be oversimplified, was sidetracked to cliché status, and thus was unable to shape decisively the enormous external expansion of the synodical structure, especially since World War II.

Church and Ministry consists of two sets of theses, nine on the church and ten on the ministry. Each thesis is followed by three sections, of which the first provides the Scripture proof, the second attestation from the Symbolical Books, and the third attestation from the private writings of various recognized teachers of the church, beginning with Luther, but often including also short patristic citations. The German original was entitled "The Voice of Our Church in the Question of Church and Ministry"—"our church" clearly being the orthodox church of the Augsburg Confession. The book was published by unanimous decision of the synod, and thus has a standing rivaled by few other statements on the subject.

In our "ecumenical" age, when even Lutherans take for granted the externalistic notions enshrined in the Lima Statement on *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*, (of the faith and order commission of the WCC), perhaps the greatest service Walther's book can render is to recall us to that grand, truly spiritual and evangelical vision of Christ's Church as His holy, mystical body, consisting only of His own believers, deeply hidden under the cross in this world, and accessible only through the pure Gospel and sacraments. The centrality and all-decisiveness of the Gospel and sacraments for all questions of the church's life and well-being is precisely what we need to hear—we who live in deserts of pragmatism, decaying secularism, and relativism.

There are so many quotable gems on virtually every page that the reviewer is tempted to "give away" the whole book. One or two things, however, simply must be mentioned. Very helpful for our time is the sober, churchly treatment of what some now call New Testament "gift

lists" (see pp.293 ff.; also 183 ff.; and on 1 Corinthians 14:30, p. 169). In the theses on the ministry, it would have been helpful to render the central term, *Predigtamt* (literally, preaching office) with one single, standard expression, instead of using four different phrases in different theses.

Many are accustomed—either in praise or in blame!—to identify with some sort of pop-democratism, Walther's thoroughly spiritual stress on the priestly role of evangelically instructed and responsible congregations. Such readers will be surprised by his comments on pages 219-220. Walther says quite bluntly here that if the regularly called ministers of a congregation were to be bypassed in the issuing of a call to yet another minister, such a "call" would be null and void. It is regrettable, however, that the translator has failed to convey the full force of the original here. He translates: ". . . then there is no longer any call of the 'multitude.' " What Walther actually says *verbatim* is this: ". . .in such a case the call of the 'multitude' has no validity." In other words, Walther says, not that the "multitude" has not really acted, but that it has acted and that its action is not valid. There is a difference. And this point has profound implications for the summary and secular ways in which pastors and congregations sometimes deal with one another nowadays.

There are other flaws in this, as in any, translation. This reviewer has not made a systematic search, but again one or two examples ought to be given, so that future editions may correct them. In Thesis III of the second part, on the ministry (p. 191), it makes little sense to say that the "ministry is not an *arbitrary* office." The German word Walther used should be translated as "optional." On page 258, in the second paragraph, a sentence is missing, resulting in a strange combination of baptism with the real presence.

More serious is the translator's misunderstanding of the Gerhard quotation on page 105. He translates the contrast as "either exclusively. . .or privately." No wonder he adds this footnote: "This quotation lacks clarity in both the original and Walther's translation" (p. 365). Gerhard's real point is perfectly clear. He is saying that the "true church" may be opposed to a "false church" either in the sense of "non-church" or else in the sense of "impure or heterodox church." In the first case the contrast is exclusive, in the second privative—not private.

Perhaps most worrisome is the mistranslation of Theses VII (on the church) as concerning "visible congregations" rather than "visible communions." Walther's word *Gemeinschaften* means fellowships, communions, which are not to be confused with *Gemeinden*, or congregations. The same theological blinkers, which can no longer imagine anything but individual congregations as churches, bring about, on the same page (87), the anxious addition of "(individual

congregation)" after "every visible particular church." The context may well favor this meaning here, but the impression should not be given that "particular church" is simply equivalent to "local congregation." On page 111, for instance, "the Lutheran church" is expressly called "a particular church." The same translator incidentally also mistranslated Theses XXIII in Walther's *True Visible Church* as referring to "true. . .particular *or* local churches or congregations" when Walther spoke very precisely of "true Evangelical Lutheran particular [churches] *and* local churches or congregations." In other words, "congregations" stands in apposition to "local churches" but *not* to "particular churches." The richness and fidelity of Walther's transmission of the precious evangelical ecclesiology of the Reformation are obscure when such distinctions are lost.

Despite such relatively minor blemishes, the book as a whole is overwhelmingly valuable, and will result in great benefits to the church if taken seriously, especially by our public ministry today. Conscientious study of these treasures by pastors and people will be amply repaid, as joyful faith and conviction deepen, ripen, grow sturdy, and bear the precious fruit of confession. In tandem with Hermann Sasse's recently published *We Confess the Church*, Walther's great work summons Lutherans back to the Gospel bedrock whence they were hewn.

Kurt Marquart

JESUS IN HIS OWN PERSPECTIVE: AN EXAMINATION OF HIS SAYINGS, ACTIONS, AND ESCHATOLOGICAL TITLES. By Ragnar Leivestad. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1987. Paperback, 192 pages.

This Volume is another study in the so-called "new" quest for the historical Jesus. Unlike the radical criticism of the "old" quest, spokesman for the "new" quest seek to restore some historical credibility to the gospels. Ragnar Leivestad, professor emeritus of New Testament at the University of Oslo and widely known for his "Son of Man" studies, probes the classical theme of Jesus' messianic consciousness in order to "answer the question of whether he was consciously playing a particular [messianic] role" (p.12).

Leivestad begins with an important caveat: "Traditions are to be accepted as authentic as long as there are no pressing reasons for placing them in doubt" (p. 17). Unfortunately, this valid principle gives the confessional Lutheran a false hope about the conclusions of this study. It must be said that Leivestad goes much further than most critical scholars in affirming the authenticity of New Testament

Christology as the following examples illustrate: Jesus understood His baptism as a divine calling; Jesus projects a confidence of understanding God's will; Jesus' word carried an unconditional authority; some of His deeds had a clear messianic flavor; His mission was shaped by the suffering servant of Isaiah 53; and the "messianic Secret" motif of Mark may demonstrate that, although Jesus had a messianic consciousness, He did not make messianic claims because He would not be understood until after His death and resurrection. However, Leivestad's caution allows him to go no further. In doing so, he appears to violate the caveat quoted above over and over: many traditions, such as the Son of Man as judge (p. 46), are declared inauthentic without good reason; the baptism account is a "legendary story replete with symbolism" (p. 39); Jesus' words about the resurrection are open to doubt (p. 94); "Jesus often tried to perform healings without much success" (p. 124); Jesus' attitude towards the dispossessed may have been the spontaneous product of His background in Nazareth (p. 132); Jesus' messianic understanding "developed in stages" (p. 150); it is "completely uncertain if Jesus spoke of his own return" (p. 168); martyrdom "was not part of his original expectation" (p. 170). What suffers is central to the Christian faith—historical and biblical Christology. While Leivestad's quest moves in the correct direction, it does not go nearly far enough. The historical Jesus of the gospels remains lost in the pages of critical analysis.

Charles A. Gieschen
Traverse City, Michigan

LOLLARD THEMES IN THE REFORMATION THEOLOGY OF WILLIAM TYNDALE. By Donald Dean Smeeton. Kirksville, Missouri: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1986.

Have we come full circle? Sixteenth-century English Protestants, eager to find historical validation for their point of view, latched on to John Wycliffe and the Lollards as their late medieval prototypes; but modern historians until recently have tended to "pooh-pooh" any but remote connections between medieval heretical movements like the Lollards and the Protestant Reformation. In the early decades of the century, for example, James Gairdner concluded that little was left of Lollardy by the sixteenth century, and in 1952 K.B. McFarlane argued that Wycliffe himself had but slight personal involvement with Lollardy. Thus, the connection to the Reformation was severed at two points.

Now, however, the link is being sewn up again by historians like Anne Hudson rediscovering the impact of Wycliffe upon the Lollard cells and by still others like J.A.F. Thomason and A.G. Dickens documenting the persistence of Lollardy until well into the reformation period. But Donald Smeeton's book is probably the strongest statement of the revisionist point of view yet, for he maintains that William Tyndale, England's greatest first-generation Protestant theologian, was a Lollard! Although he states his conclusion circumspectly ("I do not claim the Tyndale was 'only' a Lollard," p. 251) and argues tentatively ("What Lollard tracts and sermons he may have read, heard, or even used cannot now be determined"), his position is clear: "Tyndale seems to have been very much aware of the general concepts, values, ideas, arguments, and vocabulary of the English heresy" (p. 251) and "The major outlines of his [Tyndale's] thought. . .fit into the parameters already established by the persecuted followers of John Wycliffe" (p. 15).

But how does Smeeton make his case? First of all, he reminds us that Tyndale's theology is not exact duplicate of any continental Protestant's. Furthermore, he shows that Tyndale came from an area of England where Lollardy survived until the sixteenth century. Finally—and this is the heart of his argument—he compares the motifs, ideas, and even terminology of Tyndale with those of Wycliffe and the Lollards and finds them strikingly similar. Ergo, Tyndale was familiar with and influenced by Lollardy.

I remain unconvinced. Not that Smeeton's work is poorly done. Quite the contrary, for Smeeton is a very careful and thorough scholar who has read his Lollard and Tyndale texts closely, It is just that so many of the ostensible points of contact between Tyndale and the Lollards need not demonstrate dependency or even acquaintance with the latter by the former, since such elements in Tyndale's program as anticlericalism, iconoclasm, stressing the Word in vernacular preaching and translations, and even the necessity of good works as the fruit of faith were certainly as much a part of the Protestant agenda as they were of Wycliffe's. Furthermore, Tyndale's emphasis upon justification and soteriology is much more characteristic of sixteenth century reform than of the earlier Lollard movement.

Therefore, Smeeton's book is valuable as an analysis of Tyndale's theology and as a demonstration of many similarities between early English Protestantism and late medieval English heresy. Without, however, some kind of smoking gun, such as actual citations of Lollard literature in Tyndale's work it still seems best to explain Tyndale's thought in terms of Protestantism, humanism, and the cross-currents of sixteenth-century theology rather than the back eddies of fourteenth-century thought.

Cameron A. MacKenzie

JESUS FOR JEWS. A Messianic Jewish Perspective. By Ruth Rosen. San Francisco: Jews For Jesus, 1987. 320 pages. Paperback, $5.95. Hardback, $17.95.

This book of testimonies was put together by the daughter of the founder and director of Jews for Jesus, Moishe Rosen, and his wife, Ceil. Ruth is a commissioned staff-worker of Jews for Jesus who has done considerable writing of articles and pamphlets. In this book Ruth gathers together detailed personal testimonies of fifteen Jewish people who came to know Jesus as their personal Messiah. They are well written and edited and thus make interesting and easy reading. There are testimonies by a doctor, a lawyer, a scientist, a holocaust survivor, business executives, and others. Each of the biographical sketches is different, but all of the people have one thing in common; they are Jews who came to know what Jesus means to them. These testimonies are not intended as proof that Jesus is the Messiah, but they give evidence that all kinds of Jewish people have come to believe in Him.

In the introduction, written by Moishe Rosen, the question is asked, "Why don't Jews believe in Jesus?" He provides an interesting answer with these three points:

1. Most Jewish people have never really seriously contemplated whether or not Jesus might possibly be the Messiah. It is simply not a question for them.
2. There seems to be a commitment to believe that He is not the Messiah. Jewish people have been taught so and it seems to be a commitment to the survival of the Jewish people.
3. The commitment not to believe in Jesus is a negative corollary to the commitment to maintaining one's Jewish identity, as if being Jewish and believing in Jesus were antithetical to one another. Most Jewish people are brought up to believe that one is either a Jew or a Christian. If one comes to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, one is no longer a Jew.

The book also contains a section called "Continuations of the Case" in which there are chapters on the Jewishness of the New Testament, the Messianic timetable according to Daniel, and Christian anti-Semitism. A glossary in the back helps to explain terms that are used by the various people in their testimonies, and a list of suggested additional readings is provided.

In a brief conclusion of six pages, Ruth Rosen, with a parable of two brothers, makes a plea for understanding Jesus as being not only Jewish but also the older brother who continues to seek the younger

brother, the Jewish people. For Jewish people to turn their back on Him, the most celebrated Jew in all history, is, according to Ruth Rosen, a paradox. She says, "We Jews have lost that which is most Jewish, our own Messiah, Jesus. He is the older brother who is seeking us, wanting to enrich our lives, imploring us to be reconciled to Him. Jesus is for Jews; so we are Jews for Him."

Erwin J. Kolb
St. Louis

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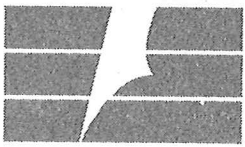

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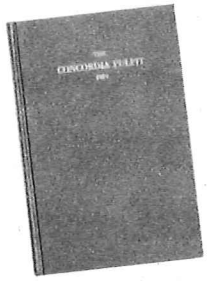

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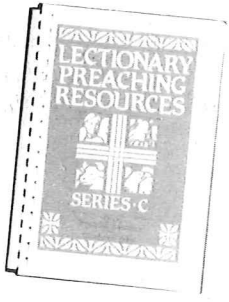

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