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Guiding Principals for the Parish Ministry in our Syncretistic Age

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GUIDING PRINCIPLES
FOR THE PARISH MINISTRY
IN OUR SYNCRETISTIC AGE

TABLE OF CONTENTS
A Thesis Presented to

The Faculty of Concordia Seminary 111
Department of Practical Theology 2
I. Introduction 4
II. The Underlying Principles 40
III. The Specific 70
Bibliography 70

In Partial Fulfillment
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by
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GUIDING PRINCIPLES
FOR THE PARISH MINISTRY
IN OUR DEMOCRATIC AGE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Introduction	
Outline.....	111
I. Introduction.....	1
II. The Underlying Principles.....	4
III. The Specific Principles.....	40
Bibliography.....	70
A. Proper Fellowship	
1. The Roots of Unions	
a. Shown by methods proposed for union	
b. Shown by purely social reasoning	
2. The False Premises of Unions	
3. The Definite Principle	
4. A Word in Carrying out this Principle	
5. A Look to the Future	
B. The Problem of Indifferentism	
1. The Problem stated	
2. The Implication of Indifferentism	
3. The Roots of Indifferentism	
4. The Principle of Scripture	
5. An Appraisal of Churches	
C. The Problem of Separation	
1. The Problem stated	
2. Rightful Separation	
3. Thoughtful Separation	
a. Divisions based on Adversity	
b. A Division without a sincere effort for God-pleasing union	
4. A Helpful Criticism	
5. Let us emphasize Principle of Scripture	

III. Specific Principles which we must observe in our Dealings with heterodox churches

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

FOR THE PARISH MINISTRY

IN OUR SYNCRETISTIC AGE

(Outline)

- I. Introduction
- II. The Underlying Principles which we must observe in our dealings with heterodox churches
 - A. The Problem of Unionism
 1. The Scope of Unionism
 2. The Implication of Unionism
 - a. Pulpit Fellowship
 - b. Altar Fellowship
 - c. Prayer Fellowship
 3. The Roots of Unionism
 - a. Shown by methods proposed for union
 - b. Shown by purely social reasonings
 4. The False Premises of Unionists
 5. The Definite Principle
 6. A Word in Carrying out this Principle
 7. A Look to the Future
 - B. The Problem of Indifferentism
 1. The Problem stated
 2. The Implication of Indifferentism
 3. The Roots of Indifferentism
 4. The Principle of Scripture
 5. An Appraisal of Ourselves
 - C. The Problem of Separatism
 1. The Problem stated
 2. Rightful Separation
 3. Wrongful Separation
 - a. Divisions based on Adiaphora
 - b. A Division without a sincere effort for God-pleasing union
 4. A Hopeful Criticism
 5. Let us emphasize Principle of Scriptures

III. Specific Principles which we must Observe in our Dealings with heterodox churches

A. The Question of Proselytizing among the heterodox faith

1. A Definition
2. The Problems of Proselytizing
 - a. judging the Christianity of a church
 - b. dealing with "Name Christians"
3. Not every Contact Proselytizing
4. The distinction between Proselytizing and Apologetics

B. Dealings with Non-Christian Heterodox churches

1. A Classification
2. The Approach
 - a. example of the Jewish Race
 - b. example of modernistically minded people
3. The Principles brought to light

C. Dealings in Sundry Matters

1. Mixed Marriages
 - a. dangerous to the faith of the entire family
 - b. this danger realized by Catholics
 - c. special difficulties encountered when Catholics involved
2. Problems of heterodox God-parents
 - a. a contradiction
 - b. cause found in indifference to Word
3. The Problem of Burials
4. The Problem of Admissions and Releases
5. Adiaphora
 - a. the underlying principles stated
 - b. Christian liberty supreme
 - c. examples viewed
 - d. the negative to the Principle stated

IV. Conclusion

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR THE PARISH
MINISTRY IN OUR SYNCRETISTIC AGE

I. Introduction

The division in the Christian church today is appalling. Never before in history have there been more denominations, sects, synods and branches of the outward Christian church, each claiming to follow the whole counsel of God, yet each condemning the other because of error. Besides those which call themselves Christians, there are many atheistic groups that proclaim only the teachings of men. The answer for these divisions is found in the words of St. Paul to Timothy: "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils".¹ The sole cause for these divisions is the false doctrines brought into the church thru the workings of Satan and his helpers, for Satan realizes only too well that in unity there is strength. Thus as long as sin and the devil remain in the world there will be divisions among men. Our answer

1. 1 Timothy 4,1.

to this, however, will not be one of futilism. For St. Paul says emphatically: "That ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the Gospel"² To reach that goal of complete unity in the faith of the Gospel will be the sincere prayer of every Christian.

Why then does God allow these divisions today? Here again Paul points out to us: "For there must be also heresies³ among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you".⁴ God allows these divisions in order that we might mark them as being contrary to His Holy Scriptures, and that we in combating error, might strengthen our faith in the truth.

The diversified nature of the ministry will bring us into contact with false teachers, erring churches, and heresies. Each heterodox church in the community influences the work and life of our church in varying degrees. On the North American continent, where numerous denominations and sects exist side by side, and

2. Philippians 1,27.

3. According to Joseph Henry Thayer, Greek-English Lexicon, p.16, *ἀπορίαι* originally meant "ones chosen opinion". However, at times according to the context, it took on the meaning "an opinion varying from the true exposition of the Christian faith". Thus the common connotation "heresy" or "sect" took form. We must be careful in speaking of others as heretics. Only the insistence and perseverance in error stamps one as a heretic and of heterodox faith.

4. 1 Corinthians 11,19.

where new religious bodies spring up almost yearly, a consideration of their relation to us becomes imperative. It is the purpose of this thesis to consider the principles involved in all contacts with the heterodox churches. In order to include the many diverse contacts which the pastor makes in his ordinary parish ministry, it is necessary to divide these principles into two main groups - the one dealing with underlying causes and problems, the other group dealing with specific and personal contacts. In the last analysis it will be seen that all contacts revolve around the one basic principle of Sola Scriptura - all the other principles being parts of it. Yet in order to become conscious of the principles which flow from this main artery of strength, we make the above divisions.

II. The Underlying Principles which we must observe in our Dealings with Heterodox Churches

During this present year the thoughts of our pastors and congregations are turned to the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the founding of our synod. We are thanking God from the bottom of our hearts for preserving the Gospel in its purity among us for so long a time. In prayer we ask Him to protect us against any apostasy in the future. Because of the diversified nature of the Christian church today, however, we know that we shall face dangers in the next 100 years which will affect us in a larger measure than was the case during the 100 years thru which we have just passed. The greatest of these dangers may be classified under three main heads: Unionism, Indifferentism, and Separatism. They gnaw at the very roots of the Christian church, and unless we check them in an organized way, our synod will either sink into modernism or die out. Just now, when these problems are especially headlining our thinking because of the efforts of heterodox churches to unite into one protestant group, it is well to look at the principles which must motivate our thinking. Let us consider each in turn.

A. The Problem of Unionism

1. The Scope of Unionism

Underlying all proposals for closer cooperation among the churches is the thought of unionism - a union of all Christian churches into one large church. The idea is certainly God-pleasing if such a union would not mean a compromise of truth with error. In his Epistle to the Ephesians in speaking of the unity of the church Paul the Apostle says: "Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ".⁵ But if such a union of churches brings about any loss of doctrine, any loss of the pure Word, then it is not in accord with the Bible. For St. Paul also says in his first Epistle to Timothy: "Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth... from such withdraw thyself".⁶ The proposals advocated by most churches today center in cooperation which would combine truth with error to such an extent that the word "unionism" itself has come to mean a working and worshipping together regardless of doctrine. Satan is very anxious to promote such unions, for he knows that they weaken and destroy Christ's church on earth. We see the results of

5. Ephesians 4,13.

6. 1 Timothy 6,5.

his work in the Old Testament when he led the children of Israel to worship the heathen gods. During the New Testament era he has craftily formulated error after error so that the Christian church is divided, and is now trying to effect a union of error with the remaining truth so that also that truth may vanish. Therefore the Christian church must be on its guard, especially today when we find this spirit of false union so strong. The Christian church must guard itself against any loss of the Gospel of Christ. False unionism will bring about such a loss. Let us see why this is true.

2. The Implication of Unionism

In theory, unionism has one goal - the outward joining of all churches into one non-denominational head. However, in practice, this final goal can only be reached by means of preparatory steps. Dr. Fritz gives us a fine summary of these preparatory steps:

Therefore such things as pulpit and altar fellowship, union services, common church work, the merging of church bodies, and the like, on the part of such as are not in doctrinal agreement are forbidden as being unionism, which is contrary to the Word of God; also such things as attending church services of heterodox congregations for the purpose of worship..., receiving members from other denominations without assurance that they agree with us doctrinally, calling in a pastor of another denomination to baptize a child, asking heterodox Christians to be sponsors at Baptism, singing or playing in the church services of the heterodox and thereby uniting with them in common worship, sending children to sectarian Sunday schools,

exchanging delegates with the heterodox church bodies, joining "ministers' unions" or regularly attending their meetings, etc. And also any religious exercises (prayer, religious address or sermon, religious hymns) in connection with school commencements, so-called baccalaureate services, and the like, or religious exercises of any kind in connection with political meetings, or other meetings of civic bodies, whenever members of different denominations take part, is unionism.

Although many of these points will be discussed in more detail under the heading of "Specific Principles", let us look at the three most common means thru which temptation comes to us now and which form the basis of almost all contacts - namely Pulpit, Altar and Prayer fellowship. A study of these points reveals the principle that rules all unionism.

a. Pulpit fellowship

Pulpit fellowship implies that preachers of the various denominations preach in pulpits outside of their respective denominations. This form of fellowship is rather freely practiced by modernistic churches today. An exchange of pulpits naturally appeals to them and is to their advantage because of their emphasis of purely moral goals. People would rather believe in their worthiness before God than in the words of the Bible which tell them they are corrupt and enemies of God by nature. Pulpit fellowship between a modernistic church

7. John H.C.Fritz, Pastoral Theology, pp. 215-216

and a church which preaches the Gospel would therefore result in an ultimate strengthening of the modernistic church because of the popular rationalistic trends of the modernists.

Yet pulpit fellowship is "per se" a sign of oneness of faith. A pastor preaching in another's church in a regular service would appear to all people as having like faith with that church in which he is preaching. To interpret it to mean that there could still be doctrinal controversial issues between them would be illogical. In any organization one who is accepted as a brother, especially one who is called upon to perform an official function in an official service of the organization, certainly is rightly looked upon as being of the same mind and beliefs as the other members. Therefore, because of its confessional character⁸ pulpit fellowship is wrong when practiced with a heterodox church body.

This, then, is the principle which we must observe in any question of unionism, namely: "Where a confession of faith is involved we cannot worship together with a heterodox group. This principle would stand even if the heterodox preacher would preach a sermon with which we could agree. Nevertheless, by allowing him to preach in

8. see E. Eckhardt, Homiletisches Reallexikon, Vol. 4A p. 657 and Vol. 6A, p. 21 for a detailed discussion.

our church we would be endangering our faith with the constant temptation of indifference to existing error, besides giving others the impression that we agreed with them in all points. We cannot let personalities influence us when God's Word is involved, but must judge every man according to his doctrine. John admonishes us: "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they be of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world".⁹

b. Altar fellowship

This principle of doctrinal unity is seen even more clearly in the case of altar fellowship. That is because the Lord's Supper is a confession of our faith in the teachings of our church. Whenever a Lutheran partakes of the Lord's Supper he is receiving the forgiveness of his sins and strengthening his faith in communion with his fellow Christians. For the Lord's Supper is a blessing God has bestowed upon His church to strengthen them in unity with the bond of peace. Thus by communing at the same altar with his fellow Christians, a person is giving public testimony that he is one in faith with them. Although outsiders may attend the church services, no outsider may partake of the Lord's Supper in a Lutheran church, for to have altar fellowship would require doctrinal unity.

9. 1 John 4,1.

The argument is sometimes raised that Luther himself celebrated the Lord's Supper with Martin Bucer, a Zwinglian. Bucer and his companions came to Luther on May 21, 1536 in an effort to unite Zwinglian and Lutheran theology. Luther and his companions were under the impression, after four days of discussion, that Bucer was in full agreement with them. The next Sunday the Lord's Supper was administered, and Zwinglians and Lutherans ate side by side the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. However, this Wittenberg Concord did not accomplish its purpose. For the agreement was not sincere on the part of Bucer. Both Bucer and Luther accepted the phrase "true presence", but Bucer later interpreted this true presence in spiritual symbolism, contrary to the word. When Luther learned this fact, he could and did no longer retain fellowship with Bucer. Thus Luther followed the principle that there must be unity in doctrine before there can be fellowship in practice.¹⁰

c. Prayer Fellowship¹¹

With the question of prayer fellowship the principle finds quite a bit of difficulty in practice. This is due mainly to a confusion of the universal prayer of all

10. Quoting from Hasting Bells, Martin Bucer, p. 201: "They gave each other the hand of Christian fellowship, recognizing each other as brothers in the Lord, while Bucer and Capito shed tears of joy at a sight that six years before seemed all but impossible". For a detailed account see also Concordia Triglotta, pp. 977-979.

11. Eckhardt, op. cit., Vol. 3A, p. 974.

Christians and prayer fellowship among Christians who have a local membership in a visible church. The one concerns the right of a Christian belonging to the universal invisible church to have fellowship with his members of this "Una Sancta". We would find an example of this in the praying together of individual Christians in cases where no regular service could be held. Certainly no person would deny any Christian this privilege and blessing. The other concerns praying together with people of heterodox faith in a confessional service. In this case it would take on the character of a confession of faith before men and therefore the principle of doctrinal unity before fellowship must be upheld. Perhaps we could draw one of the inferences of this main principle in this individual case and say: "Wherever prayer would create a valid impression in the minds of the people that there is no difference in belief among those who pray, there it would be wrong to pray with heterodox churches -no matter what the occasion."

3. The Roots of Unionism

Let us now turn to the causes of unionism, for from them we will be able to form our general principles clearly. These roots or causes of unionism go far deeper than we at first suppose. Eckhardt in his Real-Lexicon sums them up into four major points:¹²

12. Eckhardt, op. cit., Vol. 6A, p. 14.

1. unbelief
2. indifference to doctrine
3. lack of witnessing
4. the work of the devil

We can readily see that any one of these points is able to bring about a completely liberal and unionistic church. Unbelief with its rejection of the doctrinal points; indifference to doctrine with its inevitable result of impurity and error; lack of witnessing with its deadening effect on faith and resultant indifference and unbelief; and the work of Satan constantly seeking to destroy the Christian church - all work together to bring about the modernistic, unionistic, syncretistic church.

Yet we may feel that another cause plays into the picture. If we consider the social pressure on the American mind today, perhaps we can answer the question: "Why is this unionistic spirit so common in America?" From history we learn that man has always looked for unity and its resultant power. Before the Reformation the church was united and presented a strong outward front to the surrounding heathen world. Today America is among the leaders of the world in social, economic, political, recreational, scientific, and almost every other major field of concentration. This fact is often pointedly expressed in the phrase; "world champion". To an American boy growing up in America, unity is the source of strength. However, one of the big problems

in this unified strength is the great amount of religious segregation. Although the American prides himself in religious liberty and complete toleration, his mind is continually seeking a way for unity, also in the religious field. The viewpoint is not from a doctrinal, but from a nationalistic angle. He would like to see America the dominating power also in the religious field, an impossibility without union of some sort. This then becomes a goal to be achieved thru church negotiations. To quote Rev. Wm. Brenner: "In many of the denominations around us the supreme question is not what does the Bible teach (who cares about these theological problems?), but how can we reform society and make a showing in the world so that all men will bow in submission to the teaching of the "Man of Nazareth" and the "Kingdom of God" be established on the earth?"¹³ Thus creeds are belittled, in order that social service and nationalism may be exalted.

That these causes make up the real roots of unionism can be seen by the methods proposed by various churches for union. Soederblom in his book on "Christian Fellowship"¹⁴ presents three ways for the churches of Christendom to join together. They are:

1. the method of absorption
2. the method of faith
3. the method of love

13. See Wm. Brenner, "Dangerous Alliances", Pamphlets on Unionism, pp. 45-46.

14. Nathan Soederblom, Christian Fellowship, p. 115

1. The method of absorption is the method Rome uses. Rome would have all other denominations abolish their doctrines and ceremonies and join Rome as the only saving church. Even Soederblom states this would get us nowhere.
2. The method of faith, ascribed to Luther, is the method in which creeds and doctrines of the Bible must form the basis of union. Soederblom, however, does not accept this method because the actual thoughts of faith are supposed to have freedom of range.
3. Soederblom's solution is the method of love. He believes that Christian cooperation without regard to creeds or deeds will result in a united front against evil. Practically 100% of false unionism today is based on this method of love.

Furthermore, we can see the purely social reasoning in the arguments advanced by those who wish a syncretistic union. Some of these arguments are:¹⁵

1. "We don't let brotherly love rule our thinking when we deny fellowship to others. We must have patience with the weak who cannot understand the great truths of Scripture". Ans: It is God's Word which determines what is required by and involved in Christian love. The God-pleasing way to treat the Christian's weaknesses in doctrine is to teach them patiently the whole truth of

15. For a detailed summary see Eokhardt, op. cit., Vol. 6A, p. 14. Also F. Pieper, "Unionism", Pamphlets on Unionism.

Scripture. Actually the greatest show of brotherly love is not to overlook error, but to expose it.

2. "The one who is of heterodox faith can be just as faithful a Christian as the pastor who abides by all the doctrines of the Bible. He is merely confused in one or two minor points". Ans: Christ thru the Apostle Paul tells us that a little leaven leaveneth the whole loaf.¹⁶

Small errors will tend to vitiate the entire body of doctrine. One who will not correct an error which is clearly against the Word cannot be as faithful a Christian as the person who holds to all Biblical doctrines.

3. "There are many non-fundamental doctrines found in the Bible. To make church union depend on agreement in these doctrines also, is foolish". Ans: Although non-fundamental doctrines do not create saving faith in Christ, they may not be dispensed with in an effort for union. St. Paul tells us: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness"¹⁷ Whoever dispenses with any doctrine of the Bible, fundamental or non-fundamental, denies both the divine authority and the perfection of Holy Scriptures.¹⁸ Although we strive for union, we cannot condone error.

16. 1 Corinthians 5,6.

17. 2 Timothy 3,16.

18. Baier's Compendium, Vol I, p. 65, quoted in Pieper, Christliche Dogmatik, Vol.1, p. 103.

4. "The churches, including the Lutheran church, would certainly receive much benefit and strength thru unity".
 Ans: God warns us not to be led away by false teachings.¹⁹

An outward union does not necessarily mean strength as history so often has shown, but can, as in the case of the churches of Germany before this last war, mean weakness.

5. "If we admit that there are Christians in other churches, why do we refuse to participate with them?" Ans: We cannot tell who the Christians are, and if we should know, we cannot condone the error which they tolerate. It is the error and not the Christians against which we are contending. These Christians are Christians in spite of the error, and it is up to them to realize the error and either correct it or join a church which has no error. Wrong is never made right by the fact that good people thru heedlessness or ignorance are identified with it.

6. "We are causing splits in the unity of the church and hindering the Kingdom of God". Ans: We are following the Word of God. God is building His church on earth. As believers in God's Word we are God's children in faith. It is those who reject the pure Word of our Lord who are causing divisions in the visible church of our Lord.

7. "I still keep my Lutheran faith, even though I might participate outwardly in a service in another church.

19. Matthew 24, 4.5.11.

Then too, I can find no error in the teaching. Many of their songs are the same as ours." Ans: To participate outwardly in a service of another congregation is deceit. Most ceremonies are expressions of faith. Even though a song may be the same as ours, singing is part of the worship and God has forbidden us to worship with those who are not in faith with us.²⁰

8. "If only those Christians can hold fellowship who are agreed in all articles of doctrine, there will never be unity". Ans: History itself disproves this. We have seen, even in America, that every union in agreement with doctrine has strengthened the churches. Our synod is a good example of this, rising from the small colony of Saxon immigrants to its place in the Synodical Conference today.

9. "You are being exclusive, narrow minded, arrogant and proud to say that you have the truth and others are in error". Ans: We place our hope in the Bible as the only basis for our faith, following the words of St. Paul:

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth"²¹ Whoever will not accept the words of the

Bible is not following the will of God expressed further:

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom."²²

20. 2 Thessalonians 3,6.

21. Romans 1,16.

22. Colossians 3,16.

4. The False Premises of Unionism

In examining these arguments, three false premises of unionists come to our minds. They are:

a. All false doctrine is due to misunderstanding.

But this is not the case. In every issue there must be a clear understanding of doctrines. The fundamental purpose of unionists however, is not to obtain clarity and unity in doctrine, but social benefits. Doctrine thus becomes a side-issue.

b. The premise set forth by Barthianism, advocated by Keller,²³ showing that unionism is desirable in that each body would differently present the truth. According to his view, the Lutherans would show forth the gracious God, the Presbyterians would stress the sovereignty of God, the Catholics would lay emphasis on the just God and his church, and so on. By bringing all these views together you would get a clearer view of the "whole truth". However, such a union would be impossible since these different views show entirely contrary opinions which could not possibly work together.

c. Perhaps the most illogical premise of unionists is that a united Christendom can more successfully overcome atheism. That would be true if the union would be truly Christian. However, many unions are effected today with little or no regard to doctrine, and produce a

23. Adolf Keller, Karl Barth and Christian Unity, p. 8.

a looser and more modernistic theology. Even without the proposed national unions the American churches were heading toward liberalism. The answer to this is not more and looser unions, but unions which bring Christ back to the pulpits, which replace human reason with the Word of God.

The fundamental reason behind all these arguments is that it places social reasonings before the Word of God. Yet we remember the words of St. Paul to the Corinthians: "For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God."²⁴ So in spite of the efforts of men to the contrary, the Word of God will remain supreme.

5. The Definite Principle

But with Scripture as our guide there can be no slipping to and fro; no arguing which man's opinions will work out best. God's opinion and wisdom rule. Paul's letter to the Ephesians beautifully portrays the development of true unity. In chapter 1 Paul points out the power of the church's unity with Christ as the Head of His living church. In chapter 2 he brings out the source of this unity, pointing out that it is the result of the suffering and death of Christ for us. In chapter 3 he shows us the development of this unity thru revelation thru the Word of God. The first step towards union must

24. 1 Corinthians 3,18.

always be oneness in faith in the Word of our Lord. Unity in faith comes first, Christian fellowship follows. This has been the basic principle of all true unions that have taken place throughout the years and must continue to be the basis also for us. We have the examples of the "Wittenberger Concordia" and the synodical Conference which followed this principle and received the blessings of God. And with this principle as a basis for all unions, all secondary rules and principles easily follow.²⁵ We name the following:

1. to base all unity in our church on the doctrine of Scripture
2. to depart from all unionistic organizations which would endanger our faith
3. to strive for union with heterodox churches only on the basis of the doctrine of Scripture.

6. A Word in Carrying out this Principle

The road in following this main principle of unity in doctrine before fellowship has been slow and hard. The Akron-Galesburg rule,²⁶ formulated in 1875, expressed the principle which the Lutheran church still upholds today in the following words: "Lutheran pulpits for Lutheran ministers only; Lutheran Altars for Lutheran communicants only".²⁷ This principle is in full accord with God's Word. It involves the rejection of all

25. Eckhardt, *op. cit.*, Vol. 6A, p. 19

26. Neve-Allbeck, History of Lutheran Church in America, p. 160

27. The same conviction was also expressed in the Minneapolis Thesis of 1925.

false unionism and syncretism. Although the U.L.C.²⁷ in 1920 sanctioned this Galesburg rule in the Washington Declaration, today many of their congregations ignore it. Therefore it is necessary for us not only to examine the official statements of a church, but also to look at what is actually taught in their churches before we can think of church fellowship. We find more examples of this. According to the "Confessional Resolution" of 1929 we must admit that the Lutheran World Convention is soundly Lutheran. To quote from their confession:

The Lutheran World Convention acknowledges the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the only source and infallible norm of all church doctrine and practice, and sees in the confession of the Lutheran church, especially in the Unaltered Augsburg Confession and Luther's Small Catechism a pure exposition of the Word of God.²⁸

But it must be kept in mind that the Scandinavian Lutherans are ecumenically minded, having religious negotiations with the Anglicans. Furthermore, more conservative Lutherans consider as a difficulty the work of the United Lutheran Council of America in the Federal Council.

27. United Lutheran Church.

28. Neve-Allbeck, op. cit., pp. 364-365.

7. A Look to the Future

As we consider the pro's and con's of unionism, thoughts of the future come into our minds. What will be the situation 10, 20, 50 years from now? Although we cannot look into the future, we know the trends of our day. We know that union is proposed on every side. It would be a great blessing to the church if the many sections of the church could be brought together in a true union. The cause of the Bible would be greatly helped if a strong union could be effected. However, history as well as the Bible shows us that this cannot be brought about by syncretism. The syncretistic unions of the past only weakened instead of strengthened the church. In this day of divisions and schisms, however, our minds become cluttered up with thoughts of disagreements and bickering so that the clear concept of the church's unity in Christ as an actuality seems vague and clouded. If we would bear in mind that there is a union of all Christians in one Holy Christian Church, we would not grieve over the apparent universal division of Christendom which we see. In our dealings with others we ought never let our well-meant efforts degenerate into a striving for an outward unity or a sign of inward unity when we have no tangible evidence to disprove a union with the "Una Sancta".²⁹ The church must not

29. F. H. Knobel, "That They all may be One", Pamphlets on Unionism.

permit itself to be tempted into an effort to make a shallow display of strength before the world by a supposed "united front" when actually that unity does not exist. But if we do unite on a doctrinal basis, we can be sure that God will bless us with outward union also.

of our faith without wavering. For to be divided that
 ground of indifference, however, between a
 lack of interest towards the Word of God, with the pur-
 pose of avoiding any difficulties. Indifference
 can develop from smaller points of doctrine not essential
 to the whole. Indifference may be a result of
 religious apathy, either as a result of the
 suffering of Christianity. The indifference that
 is seen in all directions is found to be a result of
 does not follow the Bible fully, and always leads to
 a lesser and more liberal theology. In our country
 with heterodox answers, this indifference is justified
 will usually be one of the first obstacles to contact
 us. Therefore a short discussion of indifference is
 justified.

2. The Implication of Indifference

Indifference is the independence of false doctrine

20. Cf. Nathardt, *op. cit.*, Vol. 4, p. 27.
 21. Hebrews 10, 28.

B. The Problem of Indifferentism

1. The Problem stated³⁰

Indifferentism can be defined as a disregard of the words of Scripture. Paul tells us we are to prize the Bible with the words: "Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering, for He is faithful that promised."³¹ Indifferentism, however, fosters an attitude of neglect towards the Word of God, with the purpose of by-passing any difficulties. Indifferentism can develop from smaller points of doctrine and practice to the major indifferentism whose premise regards all religions as equal, setting up moral standards as the criterion of Christianity. The indifferentistic view to some or all doctrines is found in every church which does not follow the Bible fully, and always leads to a looser and more liberal theology. In our dealings with heterodox churches, this indifference to doctrine will usually be one of the first obstacles to confront us. Therefore a short discussion of indifferentism is justified.

2. The Implication of Indifferentism

Indifferentism is the indulgence of false doctrines

30. Cf. Eckhardt, op. cit., Vol. 4A, p. 579.

31. Hebrews 10, 23.

in the church. The argument is raised by those who are indifferent that brotherly love should overlook the faults of brethren, and therefore we have no right to deny fellowship to a heterodox church on the grounds of indifference to doctrine, since we are thereby creating schisms and splits in the church. Yet such an argument cannot stand. God wants us to forgive our brethren when they sin against us, but nowhere does He say that we can forgive them for sins committed against God Himself. For this is actually what indifferentism means. God has given us His Word - told us to guard and follow it. Paul says: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness".³² If some then say: "This is not an important doctrine, and we can overlook that one", they are disobeying the command of God, and are responsible not to us or any other man, but to God. Thus it is not in our right to forgive and overlook their sin. And one step leads to another. The indulgence of false doctrine is accompanied by the lack of witnessing against error. If we don't witness against the other's errors, it means that we agree with them, and so fellowship and unions indifferent to doctrine originate and are in vogue. With man's reasonings supplanting the Bible, modernism takes hold and soon

32. 2 Timothy 3, 16.

every semblance of Christianity disappears from the church.

It is strange that thinking people could not see the importance of the warning Christ gives us to hold fast the doctrine we have learned.³³ Indifferentism is not practiced in the world otherwise. For example, a business man is not indifferent to the terms of a business contract. Why should we, then, be indifferent to the terms of God's Word?

3. Roots of Indifferentism

The real roots of indifferentism lies in unbelief. Indifferentism springs from a disbelief of doctrine and goes deeper and deeper in this direction until the church is only considered a moral agent in the community. God's Word is displaced by man's reason. Perhaps it is the enmity of the world that brings about this laxity. In dealing with others we often run up against many problems and set-backs and man, being a social being, likes to follow the crowd. We could not say, however, that every one who is indifferent to doctrine is an unbeliever. It may be that such a person might not realize the danger to which he is subjecting his faith. But what I would like to bring out is that the final outcome of indifferentism leads to a complete rejection of God's Word.

33. Hebrews 10, 23.

For essentially indifferentism is opposition to the Bible. Jesus tells us: "Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you".³⁴ We are to hold fast to the whole Word, for the Bible is not ours but God's. The doctrines are all linked together as a chain, and we cannot become lax on one point without losing a great deal in others. We are not to be on the side of error and also on the side of truth. John tells us emphatically: "So then, because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth".³⁵ St. John is speaking of the church on earth. God will reject all those who will not confess Him with positive words. Hence, those who remain indifferent to the doctrines of the Bible either do not believe or have not come to an understanding of God's Word. However, a church that insists on remaining indifferent can only be an unbelieving church.

4. The Principle of Scripture

The principle is the basic underlying principle of all contacts: "Sola Scriptura". The church must be shown the God of the Bible, shown that Scriptures are the very words of this God, and that it has no right to be careless with this Word. The church that accepts

34. Matthew 28,20.

35. Revelations 3,16.

36. Isaiah 55,11.

this principle of Scripture above all else, cannot look upon the doctrines of the Bible in anything but a Christian way. Every doctrine will become the "Norma Normans" of its life.

A right understanding of this principle will make all arguments of indifferentists seem foolish. For example, the argument is heard: "yield to the small differences so that you may gain more people." But as we have seen in history, the opposite is the case. Yield to false doctrines and we will lose those Christians we have. If we instead indoctrinate ourselves in the full Word of God and then follow, confess and spread it, we will gain people for Christ. For God gives us the encouraging words: "So shall my word be that goeth forth out of My mouth; it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it".³⁶ By our unconditional stand we will be inviting the criticism of others, but the honor of God and His Word demand that we follow the principle. We must obey God rather than man.

5. An Appraisal of Ourselves

Before we apply the principles of indifferentism to a heterodox church, it would be well that we first apply them to ourselves. This is sometimes done for us when other groups raise questions concerning the

36. Isaiah 55,11.

apparent differences in the Synodical Conference in such points as the church and ministry, the chaplaincy, or the boy scouts. We are charged with being indifferent to these points of difference ourselves, and for that reason have no right to criticize others for being indifferent towards their religious failings. It is true that differences ought not to exist among the congregations of the Synodical Conference. However, the differences in these points are not divisive of church fellowship. Therefore the congregations of the Synodical Conference are justified in remaining together in a body, and they are also justified in combating the indifference towards errors which are divisive of church fellowship.

C. The Problem of Separation

1. The Problem Stated

Here we come to an attitude which is just as dangerous to our faith as unionism or indifferentism, but because of its subtle character, it is sometimes regarded as right, even in our own circles. Separatism is primarily a defense against unionism - is a conservative extreme in theology. Unionism, the other extreme, with its indifference towards doctrine, stands forth as a great threat to those who want to keep the Word of God pure. To counteract this liberal theology, there is the danger on the part of those who have the pure doctrine to sin against brotherly love in undue separation, to avoid sinning against brotherly love in undue union. Although we must stress these dangers at all times, we must never allow a fear of them to progress so far as to dominate our entire thinking and actions. We saw the great stress and emphasis put on the dangers of false union by our church fathers in America. They had come from a country where unions were not brought about in a God-pleasing fashion, and had left the land to escape these dangers to their religious life. Coming to America they then rightly stressed the Scriptural doctrines so that unionistic or separatistic endeavors might find no foothold among them. True obedience to the Word is the one sure defense against all errors, and we can

learn from the past how a sincere adherence to the teachings of the Bible has saved the church from just such a danger as separation.³⁷

That separation for a valid cause is right presents no problem. However, the problem arises in determining the valid cause. Here again let Scripture show us which road God wants us to follow.

2. Rightful Separation³⁸

Scripture tells us that we are not to have fellowship with devils or with unrighteousness, nor with unfruitful works of darkness, and we are to withdraw from men who consent not to the wholesome words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness, men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth.³⁹ We are also commanded to withdraw ourselves from every brother that walks disorderly, contrary to the instructions and requirements of the Gospel, and to have no company with them.⁴⁰ We see that the only God-pleasing separation with another church is where false doctrine is persistently upheld.⁴¹

This is the principle to be observed. We must try to convince errorists according to the Bible, but when our efforts fail, we finally reach a point where we must

37. Neve-Allbeck, *op. cit.*, pp. 185-186.

38. Cf. L.C.Thomas, "Fellowship", Unionism, pamphlet 6.

39. 1 Timothy 6, 3-5.

40. 2 Thessalonians 3, 6-15.

41. Romans 16,17; 2 John 10,11.

openly renounce them. While the issue is still in the balance, we worship with them, if we have no reason to believe they are not Christians. However, when a church differs with the plain teachings of the Bible, and cannot be shown the truth, then we must break off our fellowship with that group. The incident between Luther and Zwingli at Marburg in 1529 is a good example of this principle. Luther worshipped together with Zwingli, for till then they both agreed in the doctrines of the Bible as far as human ability could judge. However, later it became clear that they were not in agreement on the doctrine of the real presence in the Lord's Supper, a doctrine which is not fundamental, that is, not necessary for salvation, even though it is a major doctrine. When all efforts failed, and Zwingli remained with his error, Luther denied him the hand of fellowship, not because of the relative importance of the doctrine, but on the principle that where a doctrine of the Bible is persistently denied, there separation must take place. To argue that because Luther had fellowship with Zwingli before he discovered his error, we also can and should have fellowship with others who do not agree with us in doctrine, simply beclouds the issue.

We have another example in the early history of our church fathers in America. Our fathers attended free, intersynodical conferences, where representatives of

other churches were present, with whom they could not be sure that unity of doctrine existed. Yet they worshipped with them in devotional services because they could not know that the others were not in agreement with Scriptures until they had settled that in the meeting, and until that time they accepted them as true Christians.^{41a} When, however, the other churches unconditionally upheld Anti-Biblical doctrines, they determined to remain separate. Today cleavage among churches is definite. It has been fixed for many years. Although we can and will discuss any differences with other churches with a view to full agreement, we cannot ignore the differences that exist today. As long as these bodies uphold and defend their error, we cannot have fellowship with them.

3. Wrongful Separation

Yet some differences which we meet are only schisms, that is, divisions based on adiaphora or open questions, such as questions of ceremony, the life or practices of a congregation, the Anti-Christ,⁴² the gifts of a pastor, or any such point outside of doctrine. Divisions based on such questions are not God-pleasing, and to separate on such points would be sin.

41a. Cf. Lueker, "Walther and the Free Lutheran Conferences of 1856-1859", C.T.M., 1944, p. 543. Also cf. Koehler, "An Analysis of a Statement".

42. Synodalbericht, Central District, 1867, p.19: "If members would separate themselves from us, because they no longer believe that the pope is the Anti-Christ, they would thereby cause a schism. For that does not belong to the foundation of our faith, that the pope is the Anti-Christ."

Then too, any division which would take place without a previous sincere effort at affecting a union pleasing to God is sin. We are not to approach the question of union with biased hoplessness, for then we would be sinning against Christian love. For example, in inter-synodical meetings, held for the purpose of bringing about true union, we must keep in mind that the official status of the synods represented is not involved.⁴³ The meetings are held to reach an agreement on the basis of God's Word in the doctrines of the Bible. Thus, as in the case of Luther and Zwingli at Marburg, or of the early church fathers in America, if we have reason to believe the others are Christians,⁴⁴ and if no error has been persistently upheld, we should sincerely strive for union.

Another example of separatism would be to separate because of an interpretation in a non-fundamental point of Scripture. We know that all knowledge given us in the Bible is not of equal importance for our salvation. Some doctrines are fundamental to our faith, yet other doctrines may be unknown to a person, who still remains a good

43. In any other meeting between groups of heterodox faith, where true unity of doctrine is not being sought, the official position of the church on doctrine would hold, and would have to become the basis on which we judge fellowship.

44. If the Gospel is preached in a church, no matter what the official position may be on some doctrines, we must consider the church as being a Christian church, with a Christian membership.

Christian. We find incidental points in Scripture which seem to have no bearing on the faith and life of a Christian. An example would be the doctrine of the angels, or the exact method of creation. Now the problem confronts us: "Dare we discontinue church fellowship with others on every difference, even in such subordinate points?" If such were the case there would be no end to schisms and divisions in the church. It happens again and again that even with Christians who are agreed in all fundamental doctrines, small disputes arise over points which have no bearing on their faith or the saving Gospel. To deny church fellowship to our brethren over such subordinate points would not be in accordance with brotherly love, since Christ tells us to strive for unity,⁴⁵ thru His Apostle Paul.⁴⁶

45. However, two principles in this example must be kept in mind. The one deals with the non-fundamental doctrine, the other with the motive behind the difference. If the non-fundamental doctrine is not clearly expressed in Scripture - that is - if the point of difference is on the application or interpretation of the doctrine, and not against any clear presentation of Scriptures, there would be no cause for separation. Then secondly, if the non-fundamental doctrine is a clearly presented truth of the Bible, and if the denial by one party is persistently upheld, this places the denial into a different category, for it is no longer a denial of the Word of God. For example, if a person would have a false view of the angels, and be confused over the Biblical teaching concerning these creatures, it would not necessarily mean that he would be willfully denying the inspiration of the Bible. Thus this false view alone would not constitute a valid reason for denying him church fellowship. (continued next page.)

It is a great temptation to make the same mistake Diotrephes made: "Who loved to have the preeminence and refused to receive the brethren".⁴⁷ Or we can very easily fall into the error of wrongfully withdrawing ourselves from worthy brethren as Peter did when he refused to eat with his Gentile brethren for fear of the ignorant Jews. Paul, in speaking of this fault, blamed Peter and not the Gentile brethren.⁴⁸ Therefore we must be very careful in our contacts with other churches, that we also do not sin in these things.

4. A Hopeful Criticism

In many of our congregations, rightful separation has been confused with separatism, which is entirely different in essence. Separatism means isolationism, a complete withdrawal of ourselves, ignoring others and hoping to be ignored by them. Although we cannot have union in some cases, we nevertheless cannot simply withdraw. We must combat error. If someone is wrong, we must tell him about it, and if he persists in his error,

And by tolerating him, we would have much better opportunity to bring him to the truth. If, however, such a view of the angels would lead to a denial of a fundamental doctrine, if he for example would consider the angels as helpers in his salvation and thus detract from the justification which Christ wrought for him, he would be substituting his reasonings for other clear passages of the Word, and thus finally give a valid reason for separation.

46. Ephesians 4,3.

47. 3 John, 9-10.

48. Galatians, 2,11-14.

we must let others know where he is wrong, so that they also will not fall into that error. We must make our stand so definite and clear that all can see that we are basing our opinions on Scripture alone.

If union is possible, however, let us by all means unite. The separatist robs himself of the great blessings of fellowship with Christians who are one in mind with him. He robs himself of inner peace with others when he could have that peace. And the worst result is that he leaves himself weak in times of temptation. One of the greatest blessings of Christian fellowship is that each strengthens the other in faith. Solomon states in beautiful language:

Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow; but woe to him that is alone when he falleth, for he hath not another to help him up... and if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.⁴⁹

The Lutheran church is strong in principle, but because of the many diverse circumstances today, we at times find difficulty in carrying this principle thru. We are lacking in part the proper zeal and readiness to bear witness of our faith. Bodies with far less to offer the people in doctrine, but with an aggressive, witnessing spirit, are increasing many times faster than we who are basing ourselves on the doctrines of the

49. Ecclesiastes 4, 9-12.

Bible. What is the cause of this? It is not a lack of sincerity on our part, but rather the fear of involving ourselves in a situation which would weaken our Scriptural position. Our fathers in the organization of the Synodical Conference set us a good example. They formed this union in the firm faith that the Word of God would prevail in its truth and purity, that any remnants of error present at the organization would be eliminated in time, and that the organization would be able to go forward fully one in the faith, and do the Lord's work effectively.

Therefore let us emphasize the principle involved in separatism. Where false doctrine is persistently taught and defended, we must separate. But where there is a confusion of doctrine and where we could possibly help that body to regain the truth, let us not hesitate to proclaim the truth to them. Let us not make the mistake of separating ourselves from others without having tried everything in our power and exercised all patience to avoid such a separation. As St. Paul says: "Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."⁵¹ We are to strive for unity. That

50. Neve-Allbeck, op. cit., p. 158. At the organization of the General Council, November 20, 1867, Missouri Synod was not represented. Although Missouri admitted that there were no doctrinal differences existing between the two bodies, they nevertheless declined the invitations to hold conferences. Finally correspondence with the Missouri Synod ceased after 1869.

51. Ephesians 4,3.

does not mean a half-hearted negotiation with a great deal of hesitation and argumentation about procedure etc., but it means that we be the leaders in bringing about God-pleasing union among the churches.

In this subject we shall deal with the specific and practical principles involved in our contacts with other churches. Here we shall look at the heterodox not so much from the standpoint of denominations and organizations, but from the standpoint of personal relationships; personal contacts with individual churches and their members. Such contacts often involve difficulties.⁵² Because of questions of principles and unwarranted conclusions, a pastor may reject a wonderful chance to bring the gospel to others or clear up difficulties which would greatly help him and his work. The questions of "How far may I go?" or "What can I do, or not do?" may be answered in principle.

52. Cf. Thomas Murphy, Pastoral Theology, p. 405.

III. Specific Principles Which We Must Observe In Our Dealings With Heterodox Churches

In this section we shall deal with the specific and practical principles involved in our contacts with other churches. Here we shall look at the heterodox not so much from the standpoint of denominations and organizations, but from the standpoint of personal relationships; personal contacts with individual churches and their members. Such contacts often involve difficulties.⁵² Because of haziness of principles and unwarranted conclusions, a pastor may reject a wonderful chance to bring the Gospel to others or clear up difficulties which would greatly help him and his work. The questions of "How far may I go?" or "What can I do, or not do?" may be answered in principle.

⁵². Cf. Thomas Murphy, Pastoral Theology, p. 495.

A. The Question of Proselytizing among the Heterodox

1. A Definition

Proselytizing in the days of the Apostles had a slightly different connotation from the one that is usually accepted today. In Acts 13,43 we read: "Now when the congregation was broken up, many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas; who speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God." Here it had the meaning of a devout non-Jew, who became circumcised and adopted the Jew's religion. Paul and Barnabas, speaking to them, made them proselytes, or converts to the Christian religion. Today, by proselytizing we usually mean working and teaching among other Christian churches, who already have the Gospel, in order to win their membership for ourselves. Such proselytizing would have been condemned also by the apostles, for Peter says: "Feed the flock which is among you".⁵³ Thus we will have to keep two concepts of proselytizing clear in our minds if we would not confuse proselytizing with valid mission work. These two concepts center in the official teaching of the church to which the individual belongs, and we can state our principles accordingly.

a) If a church teaches the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and the person holds membership in that church,

53. 1 Peter 5,2.

we have no right to try to win him over to membership in our church, no matter how many errors are present, unless the person himself comes to us. Otherwise we must look upon him as a co-member with us in the "Una Sancta".

b) However, where a church does not teach the Gospel of Jesus Christ, we are to be a leaven for good and bring the light of the Gospel to them. In our contacts with the individuals of such a church we may find great success.

Upon these two principles we must base our contacts.

2. The Problems of Proselytizing

A problem arises when we are called upon to judge whether a church is Christian or not. Because of the looseness of doctrinal principles prevalent in most protestant circles, we find denominations Christian in principle yet modernistic in practice. Because of this discrepancy there is a tendency to judge each individual congregation, or rather, each individual pastor, for "as the shepherd, so the flock". The judging of such a congregation must in the last analysis be left to the individual pastor, for he knows the circumstances, conditions, trends, and leanings of the congregations in his district. However, it is well to point to a few principles that will help us to judge the congregations better.

We know that even among Christian churches of heterodox faith Christians are found. Wherever the Word of God

is preached it will bring forth fruit. Although many errors may be mixed in with the Word, yet if the Bible is read and taught, there will also be Christians who will believe in Christ as their Savior from sin in spite of the errors.⁵⁴ God says thru his prophet: "So shall my Word be that goeth forth out of my mouth; it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it."⁵⁵ If we should maintain that only those churches which teach the Word of God in its entire purity, are able to convert people and win sinners for Jesus, we would have to say that the church during the period preceeding the Reformation did not have Christians in it. And yet, God tells us that He will not let His church die out. Thus we can say:

1) A meagre knowledge of God's plan of salvation can also save. This is of great comfort to us when we ponder over the many heterodox churches existing in our communities today. Christians need not know the entire counsel of God to be saved. We are reminded how little the penitent thief on the cross knew of the Bible, and yet thru acknowledging Christ and clinging to Christ as his Redeemer, he was able to gain the reward of heaven which Jesus promised him. Thus wherever passages of the Bible are used in a church, there also some Christians

54. Cf. Eckhardt, op. cit., Vol. 4A, p. 700.

55. Isaiah 55, 11.

will be found.

2) Many persons who have only the fundamental doctrine of salvation and believe, do not have the full knowledge of salvation because their church failed them and left them in ignorance on a number of points.

3) In theory, such people cling to error, yet they trust in the grace of God. They may be said to err in mind, but cling to Christ in their heart.

4) Although the truth is mixed with error, yet truth remains truth just as gold remains gold in the hands of a just man or an evil man.

In view of these truths, we must follow the main principle stated before: "That where the Gospel is preached, we have no right to proselytize."

Another problem arises when we deal with the individual members of heterodox congregations. We find, especially in our canvasses, two classes of people who use the name of a heterodox church. First, there are the actual members, who not only profess their allegiance to the church to which they belong, but show this allegiance in outward form. Such people we can and should only encourage to remain true to the Gospel which they have learned and remain good members of their church. However, we find another class of people who use the name of a heterodox church body only as a mask, who

actually know no more about religion and what it means than the heathen in Africa. They claim to belong to a church for the apparent reason of avoiding any further questioning and discussion about religion. Often we find that these people are unknown to the pastor of the church to which they claim allegiance. It is our duty to follow up any such questionable cases, and make certain they are not mere "Name Christians". We know that it is often hard to determine the sincerity of a person. Yet we have the duty to bring the Gospel to all people. In any such doubtful cases, the pastor of the heterodox church in question should be contacted and the person discussed with him. If such a person is listed as a member with the heterodox pastor, then we must necessarily drop him from our list of prospective members. If however, such a person is not a signed or stated member of that church, we have the right to try to win him for the Lutheran faith. There cannot be too much of this kind of proselytizing. Its mission is to bring men from irreligion to the fold of Christ. In every community we find more than a few neglecting religion, who find in Christianity nothing greater than a moral religion, yet use the name of a church in order to gain social or moral influences. With such we must deal in real sincerity, so that they will find the value of Jesus' work for themselves and receive the prize of

true faith. They are name-Christians who must be won over to Christianity as much as the most fervent Moham-
medan in darkest India.

3. Not Every Contact Proselytizing

We cannot regard every spiritual contact between Christians of different denominations as proselytizing.⁵⁶ Many of the contacts may be of a personal and private nature, others of an inquiring nature. We can certainly not refuse a Baptist, lying in a hospital bed, who asks us to say a brief prayer with him in order to comfort him. Or if a Catholic person, much depressed with his sins unburdens himself to a Lutheran Christian, the Christian certainly will comfort him and point him to the grace of God. This would be the duty of every Christ-⁵⁶ian acting as a royal priest of God and not as the representative of a local church. However, every effort to win a person over to the Lutheran church would be wrong, as long as his church preaches the Gospel. The only case where it would not be wrong is where the person asks the Pastor to minister to him, and where his own pastor cannot or will not attend him. Then we must consider the passage of Peter: "Be ready to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you".⁵⁷ We are to let the light of the Gospel

56. Cf. E.W.A. Koehler, An Analysis of a Statement.

57. 1 Peter 3, 15.

shine among all people, especially when they ask us. However, such a person must make up his mind to which church he wants to belong. No man can belong to two churches. Dean R. A. Jesse brings this principle forth very beautifully in the words:

Every man has the right to the pure Gospel - indeed it is his duty to seek it - but no man can be a member of two churches at the same time. He cannot halt between two opinions.⁵⁸

Behind all these actions must be the principle and motive given by Christ in His great commission that the Gospel should be preached unto all the world. Every man has therefore the right to hear the Gospel of our Lord, and we have the solemn duty to bring the Gospel to him. Thus where a minister or Christian layman is asked to testify to the truth, no charge of proselytizing can be preferred.

4. The Distinction between Proselytizing and Apologetics

We must also keep in mind that we as individuals and as a church have the obligation to witness publically before others the truths of the Gospel. At times we may be accused of proselytizing. Where can we draw the line between the two? The difference lies in motive. In our contacts with individuals of heterodox churches we may often find ourselves forced to discuss the differences of doctrine and practice between the Lutheran and heterodox faiths. If we go about this with the idea of

58. Cf. Richard A. Jesse, "What about Proselytizing?". Today, Vol. 2, No. 2, Feb. 1947, p. 18.

convincing the brother that he should join the Lutheran church, although we know that his church is a Gospel church, we of course are sinning against brotherly love. However, we have the command: "be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you".⁵⁹ We must point out errors where we see them. It is our Christian duty in charity towards an erring brother of another denomination to point out the error to which he is exposing himself or which he holds, not to gain him for our flock, but so that he may perfect and strengthen his or her personal faith. When we have shown him the truth, our responsibility ends. In these dealings there are also important principles which we should observe. They are the following:

1) We must find the chief doctrine of the heterodox group.

Before we can point out the error to another, we must find out what the error of the church body is ourselves. Although this seems to be an insignificant point, it is sometimes hard to do, since many denominations are partly modernistic, and the exact stand on any doctrinal matter is difficult to determine.

2) Then we must compare this doctrine with Scripture.

We are to prove all things with Scripture. Scripture is to be our guiding light. We will not have the right to advance any arguments against the other which come from

59. 1 Peter 3,15.

ourselves. Matters in which Scripture is silent fall into the domain of Christian liberty, and there we can only use our own judgment.

3) We must then contrast truth and error in order to bring out the truth more clearly.

Yet we should note that we are not to become involved in unnecessary disputations over certain beliefs as St. Paul tells us: "Charging them before the Lord that they strive not about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers."⁶⁰ We are not to let our discussions degenerate into a bickering over points which Scripture clearly satisfies. However, our whole testimony must be motivated by the whole Word of God. Then we can be certain that we shall not sin in this problem of proselytizing.

3. The Approach

When we consider the great number of such people, we must realize the immense missed opportunities which lie before us. They are the heathen in our land who are to be religiously sought and won for Christ. To win them, however, we must show them that the Christian religion can give them something greater and better than the world can offer them. Only as the pastor understands the religious needs of these people will he be able to discuss religious topics intelligently and effectively with them. With each

60. 2 Timothy 2, 14.

B. Dealings With Non-Christian Heterodox Churches

1. A Classification

Ordinarily we consider the United States and Canada as Christian countries, and in comparison with most other countries of the world, this is correct. Yet we know that there are still large numbers of people living among the Christians of these lands who know nothing of the way to salvation thru Jesus Christ. Since every man has a religion, atheists included, whether he bases his belief in himself, his wealth, or his God, all those who do not accept Jesus Christ as their Savior come under this heading of non-Christian heterodox faith.

2. The Approach

When we consider the great number of such people, we must realize the immense mission opportunities which lie before us. They are the heathen in our land who are to be zealously sought and won for Christ. To win them, however, we must show them that the Christian religion can give them something greater and better than the world can offer them. Only as the pastor understands the religious ideals of these people will he be able to discuss religious topics intelligently and effectively with them. With each person or group of persons this ideal will be different.

Perhaps this can be shown more clearly by means of an example. Let us see how we would deal with a person of Jewish descent.

One of the basic concepts we would first have to recognize is that the non-Christian Jew today is a total heathen. Although he has the Old Testament, he does not, as will be shown, look upon the Old Testament as the highest authority, but places the Talmud above it. For this reason Jesus says: "And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me".⁶¹ The Jew today is workrighteous, having the legalistic attitude towards the law. For this reason we will find a pharisaical attitude prevailing thruout his entire thinking. His is the hope of a future where he will be the dominating force in the world, and where all men will be forced to obey and serve him. To have such an individual admit that he is among the worst of sinners, and to have him subject himself completely under the mercy of a Jesus whom his ancestors despised, will be a difficult task. Yet we must never lose sight of the fact that God has His elect among the Jews also. We read in Romans where Paul is speaking of a remnant of Israel to be saved by grace: "Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace."⁶²

61. John 16,3.

62. Romans 11,5.

Because Christ and His apostles started the mission among the Jews, and because Christ commanded us to preach the Gospel to all nations, we will certainly not disregard them.

But seeing and knowing their religious views and hopes, we will have to stress certain points with them.

We shall sum them up as follows:

- 1) We must show them that they are no longer the chosen people of God. Instead, the curse of God rests upon them, a curse which they can overthrow by accepting Jesus as their Savior.
- 2) We must point out that their hope for a restoration of the temple has no foundation in Scripture.
- 3) We must make them realize that the ceremonial law is abolished, that Christ has taken this legalistic character of the law away.
- 4) We must show them that their hope for a coming Messiah is vain. The Scepter has passed from Judah a long time ago. Furthermore, it would also be impossible to determine from which tribe a person comes today. This point is causing the Jews themselves most concern.
- 5) We must point out that the Talmud, which they place above Scriptures, has many contradictions and is at variance with the Old Testament itself in several points. The Talmud, for example, proclaims that man is able to gain heaven thru good works. Abraham is viewed as standing in

front of the gates of hell and not allowing a Jew to enter.

6) Then we must point them to the Triune God of the Bible, showing them Jesus Christ as their Savior from sin. Thru Jesus' merciful suffering and death on the cross, all sins, including every sin of the Jewish race has been forgiven, and all who accept this forgiveness will enter the heaven prepared for him by Jesus Himself.

Thus we must take special steps in order to approach the Jewish people and win them for the church. We know that the Jewish population in this country is large, and yet there are very few Jewish converts. Although the work is admittedly hard, we must not let any obstacles deter us from winning souls. As a missionary once remarked: "I've spent my entire life and can see but one convert to Christ. And yet I'm thankful to God for making me the instrument for this soul's salvation." That is to be our attitude here also. Jesus Himself tells us: "I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth."⁶³

Another example is found in the modernistic concept of religion. The modernists differ from the Jews in that they speak a great deal of Christ. And when our people hear them speak, they put the right construction into their words. But the modernists are actually the same as the Jews in their denial of Christ as the Savior. When they

63. Luke 15,7.

speak of Christ and His work, they put their own meaning into the words of the Bible.⁶⁴ Thus in dealing with them as individuals, we must first deal with the most fundamental doctrines, and clear our concepts and thoughts with them, rather than our words. The Unitarians confess "Christ as the Son of God". This means however, that He is the adopted Son of God - not equal to God as the Bible tells us.

3. The Principle brought to Light

We could bring in other examples of lodges, Mormons, etc., but by laying down basic principles we shall accomplish more. These principles are:

- a) start with basic concepts of religion. Unless we can agree on fundamental things, we shall not get far.
- b) draw on past history of the individual, if possible - his background, the background of his race, former religion if any, environment.
- c) show him that he has sinned, that this sin cannot be atoned for by human powers.
- d) bring him the message of the Gospel with its soul-winning powers.

We find that all people are religious, serving a god, even though some will not admit it. Many are dishonest with themselves, knowing of the Gospel, but in their pride

⁶⁴ Phillip Brookes, "A Good Friday Sermon", Sermons, p. 201, gives us a good example of modernistic views. In his conception of Jesus's suffering, he uses Biblical language to bring over his rationalistic Gospel.

making themselves believe that they can themselves do the work which Christ did for them. Others are sincere, but are ignorant of the truth. All are a challenge to us. With a willingness to reach others, an optimistic view as to outcome, and a full and humble dependence on the true Word with the help of the Holy Spirit we shall be successful. For Christ Himself has promised us success with the words:

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.⁶⁵

With such a promise we need have no fear of dealing with persons of non-Christian heterodox faith.

65. 1 Corinthians 15,58.

C Dealings in Sundry Matters

1. Mixed Marriages

It has been correctly said that the pastor has the care of the spiritual life of his people from the cradle to the grave. The pastor has a great responsibility towards the lives of his people, a responsibility which consists in keeping them in true faith by applying the Word of God to them in every way. Yet as has been shown earlier in this thesis, the past years show a distinct tendency to become indifferent to this Word, perhaps the outgrowth of many different causes. One of these causes can be shown to be the intermarriage of Christians with those of different Christian belief, or with those professing no Christian belief at all. Although the pastor cannot or would not stop a marriage between two persons of differing faith, he can do much to warn his people of the dangers to which they are subjecting themselves in such marriages.

Where a Christian is contemplating marriage, or better still, in our confirmation classes, young people's groups, etc., we should bring out the following fact and discuss it with our young people - that although not forbidden, marriage with a person of heterodox faith presents a serious danger to the entire family's faith. In Old Testament

66

66. Genesis 24,3. Nehemiah 13,25.

days a marriage with a heathen was forbidden. While this law does not hold today, it nevertheless shows us that such a marriage has many dangers. And these dangers are not primarily concerned with the outward success of such a marriage, but with the danger to our soul's salvation. An illustration will make these dangers clearer to us. One of the difficulties arises over the question of Baptism. Fictitious names are used for the following paragraph.

Dr. James Burns, a faithful Baptist, married Betty Boswell, a girl reared in a Lutheran church. When a baby girl was born, the question naturally arose: "Shall the baby be baptized or not?" Betty's parents, anticipating such problems, had warned Betty against the marriage while the couple were engaged, but at the time logic did not have much weight. Dr. Burns had said: "We both know the other's religious views, and have discussed them. I hold her under no obligation to become a Baptist, and she can hold me under no obligation to become a Lutheran." For a time that had solved any seeming difficulty which might arise between them concerning religion. But now Betty went to a Lutheran pastor for advice. What can he say? Must he say that the husband is head of the house - obey him - and allow the child to go unbaptized, risking the soul's salvation of the child? Or should he advise her to insist on its baptism, even though it might mean a

disruption of the family, and perhaps a consequent loss to the church of Betty herself? This is of course, in the last analysis a case of casuistry, for circumstances must decide here. But then, is there not a way to prevent these problems from arising? If we would stress the principles of marriage itself, we could reasonably avoid such strained issues.

Marriage was instituted by God to be the closest possible union of persons on earth. The very intimacy of this union ought to rest on an agreement in religious views. This union ought to be free from all defects and obstacles. Yet we are putting a barrier in the way of this union if we don't agree in faith. What is a very holy doctrine to one partner, is of no importance to the other. The result can only be a gradual losing of all close ties with the church, and supplanting these ties with indifference to religion. And worse yet, this indifference is not only brought into their own lives, but also into the lives of their children. With the religious atmosphere of a Christian home gone, the religious education of the children will certainly not receive any stress. What a barrier to the faith of a child to have its parents divided!

Perhaps I am painting a grim picture, yet no picture can be too grim if it will help in the saving of a soul. Although we cannot subscribe to their principles or methods,

we can see that the Catholics realize the seriousness of mixed marriages by their principles in this matter. They forbid all marriages between Catholics and Protestants unless the Protestant party will accept the Catholic faith. Even those which are allowed have impediments connected with them.⁶⁷ This is borne out by Danial A. Lord with the words:

Before you go, my child, be sure to whom else you can go. There is no one else. There had never been another. There can be none now or at any time. Christ and the Church to which He committed them alone have the words of eternal life.⁶⁸

In connection with mixed marriages with Catholics, another special danger arises. This danger was increased when the Catholic church added a new rule governing mixed marriages. That rule states to the effect that before the priest can solemnize a mixed marriage, the Protestant party must receive instruction from the priest five times.⁶⁹

67. The Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. IX, p. 698. Catholics made impediments to a marriage with a heretic, (mixta religio) and with an infidel (disparitas cultus). When the "Decretum" of Gratian was published in the 12th century, the Disparitas Cultus became part of the canon law of the church. From that time forward, all marriages contracted between Catholics and Infidels were held to be invalid, unless a dispensation for such a union had been obtained from an ecclesiastical authority. Marriages between Catholics and heretics were not subject to the same impediment. They were held as valid, though illicit if a dispensation (mixta religionis) had not been obtained. Although a later impediment, the impediment of Clandestinity, that all marriages not performed by the Catholic church were null and void, was enacted by the Council of Trent, it was not stressed, and today these marriages outside of the Catholic church are normally considered valid.

68. Danial A. Lord, A letter to one about to leave the church, p. 32.

69. Th. Laetsch, Marriage, p. 17.

Even before this rule was introduced the Catholic priest insisted that the Protestant party promise (in writing, or before witnesses) that all the children would be reared in the Catholic faith. Otherwise, no Catholic priest would perform such a marriage ceremony. To counteract this unjust practice, a number of churches ask the Protestant party who complies with such conditions to declare his position to the church where he holds membership. An example of such a declaration follows:

- a) I recognize that it was wrong for me to receive instruction regarding religious (church) matters from a Roman Catholic priest.
- b) I recognize that it was wrong for me to be married by a Roman Catholic priest instead of my own pastor, or by someone approved by him.
- c) I recognize that it was wrong and a very great sin to promise that my children would be baptized and reared in the Roman Catholic church instead of my own church.
- d) I am very sorry that I have done this wrong.
- e) I declare that, instead of keeping this sinful promise, I now break it and shall have my children baptized and reared in the Lutheran church.
- f) I declare that this sinful promise is null and void and that I do not consider myself bound by it in any way.
- g) I declare that my husband (wife) has read this entire declaration and knows that I am signing it and giving it to my pastor.
- h) If subsequent events in my life show that I am not sincere in this my confession, I can no longer be considered a communicant member of the congregation. (after admonition proves futile).⁷⁰

By following the proverb: "Forewarned is forarmed", we can prevent many heartaches by showing our children the blessedness of a united, truly Christian home. Such an ideal Christian home is almost impossible where there is not complete spiritual union.

70. Th. Laetsch, op. cit., p. 17.

2. The Problem of Heterodox God-parents

The situation will also arise that our people may want to bring in God-parents of heterodox faith as sponsors for their children. How are we to deal with this situation? Here again the principle must be to forewarn our people, for if they realized the dangers to which they are subjecting their children, they would not ask those of heterodox faith to perform this function. If we would look a bit closer, we would see a contradiction in asking others to be God-parents who do not believe as we do. We want to keep the pure doctrine in our midst, and yet we invite those who we believe have not the Word in all its truth and purity to rear our children in religious instruction in case we should die. Could we in all sincerity expect them to rear our children in a faith which they do not espouse? Our only course to pursue if persons of heterodox faith must be accepted is to have them act as witnesses to the Baptism, testifying that the child was baptized in a Christian manner.

Conversely, our people should not become sponsors to children of a heterodox faith. For then they would have to promise to do a thing which is against their own conscience - instruct others in error.

The chief cause behind this problem is not the close relation between friendships or relatives, but indifference

towards the Word of God springing from a weak or ignorant faith. It is undoubtedly the result of the modernistic trend of our world today, where outward unity is considered success, and doctrinal agreement merely a by-product.

3. The Problem of Burials

This liberalistic trend shows itself also in the field of burials.⁷¹ Here the pastor will meet with much grief and be the subject of unjust criticism. Because of the lax doctrinal position of most Protestant churches today, almost all people are given "Christian" burials in these churches, regardless of the life they led. For this reason heterodox people find it strange when we refuse to give a person a Christian burial who does not belong to our Lutheran church. Yet under ordinary circumstances we must abide by the principle of according only those a Christian burial of whom we have valid reason to believe that they were Christians. This is not only proper procedure, but above all honest, without any hypocritical show of righteousness. For this reason we will carry thru the principle of refusing to bury any person who is a member of a heterodox congregation at the time of his or her death.

71. Cf. Eckhardt, op. cit., Vol. A-B, p. 285.

4. Problem of Admissions and Releases

On the one hand, the Lutheran church will certainly welcome any person who seeks membership in it, though he comes from another church body. Yet here also, certain principles must be upheld and precautions must be taken. First of all one must ascertain why he left or wants to leave his former church. Much will depend on that. If he left his former church or is contemplating leaving it because of false doctrine, we will certainly accept him with joyous hearts. However, we must be on our guard that a non-doctrinal cause does not bring him to us.⁷² We cannot rightly accept him who has left a Gospel church because of Adiaphora.⁷³ Instead, we must show him that it is wrong for him to separate himself from the church on such insignificant points.

On the other hand, the Lutheran church may not grant any of its members a release to join a heterodox group. If we consider what such a release would imply, we shall see the validity of this position. Following the pure Word of God, the Lutheran church is the true visible church of God. Following the command of Paul: "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the

⁷². Of course, in dealing with this non-doctrinal cause, we must keep in mind that it pertains only to such heterodox churches as are Christian in character. We must be ready to accept any person coming from a non-Christian heterodox church for future membership no matter what his reason for leaving that church was.

⁷³. such things as ceremonies, personal grudges or faults in the congregation.

manner of some is",⁷⁴ every Christian will join and remain with the visible church, serving the Lord with his talents. The question will arise to grant releases to sister congregations within the true visible church, but no sincere Christian would ask for a release outside of the visible church. For then he would be cutting himself off from the blessings which God has bestowed on his visible church on earth. For this reason we cannot grant any member of our church a release to a heterodox congregation.

5. Adiaphora

By adiaphora we mean such things as are neither commanded nor forbidden in the Bible. All our dealings with heterodox churches which do not involve doctrine can be classified as adiaphora and are to be judged by our Christian conscience. The main difficulty which will always confront us will be to judge whether such adiaphora in connection with the heterodox churches trespass Biblical grounds. And yet even here the difficulty will not be insurmountable - for a Christian who has grounded himself well in the great truths of the Bible. The point to observe is that we must not lean in the pietistic nor in the liberal direction, but take a sober attitude in all things as the Bible tells us:

74. Hebrews 10,25.

See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.⁷⁵

The principles involved in Adiaphora can be summed up in two points:

- a) Adiaphora do not constitute Christian worship in any sense.
- b) Adiaphora nevertheless must be judged soberly by the Christian.

The manner in which we deal with such adiaphora is left to Christian liberty. Rules may be formulated about them or they can be left free from rules of any sort. However, where such adiaphora are made a symbol of faith, there our Christian liberty to participate in such adiaphora is nullified. God's Word is the supreme judge. We must follow His Word in all things which He has commanded us. However, where man-made laws are forced upon us in the guise of God-made laws, there we are free to disobey. Let us view a few examples in both the doctrinal and practical field.

a. The use of unleavened bread in the Lord's Supper. This is an adiaphoron. If the Reformed groups would say that we must use unleavened bread, they would be infringing on the rights of our Christian liberty. If a congregation wishes, it may use plain bread, as long as it does not give offense.

b. The breaking of bread. The Reformed use this to emphasize their symbolic conception of the Sacrament, and

75. Ephesians 5, 15-17.

therefore we cannot use it.

c. Immersion in Baptism. Since others lay a must on this adiaphoron, we do not practice it.

In the practical field we consider as adiaphora the use of a heterodox church building, the form of the liturgy, and so on. Let us consider briefly the use of a heterodox church building as an example. Some would say we cannot use such a building for our services. However, under certain conditions this is perfectly justified.

If the pastor uses the building for a Lutheran service, we are very grateful for the use of such a building. Out of necessity we often find Lutheran services being conducted in many buildings such as schools, halls, and homes. The community church which is more common in smaller communities where a few members of many different denominations are found, could also be used by a Lutheran congregation to advantage until their own church building could be built. The principle is not the place, but what is taught, which is so important in a God-pleasing service.

In this connection the question might also arise: "Can a heterodox congregation make use of a Lutheran church building for one of its services?" Would that still constitute an adiaphoron? The answer is yes. The congregation, however, could not allow this, not on Biblical grounds, but because of the words of dedication. The Lutheran congregations dedicate their churches to the

teaching of the pure Word of God. Because of such a dedication, we could not with a clear conscience allow a congregation of heterodox faith to conduct a service in one of our church buildings. Thus, although we would not allow a heterodox church body to conduct a service in one of our churches, we still must realize that the entire matter is still an adiaphoron - that is, if we would want to change this ruling, we could do so. Conversely, if anyone would say that we have no right to make that ruling, we need not listen unless Scripture is cited.

Thus we can formulate the negative to the main principles stated at the beginning of this section. "If anyone would deny us the privilege of doing a thing which the Bible has left to our Christian liberty, we need not follow. If anyone would make this matter a question of conscience, we must not follow". If such would not be our principle we would lose our Christian liberty and bind ourselves to man-made laws, which Christ has not demanded of us. This principle is not of recent origin, but was already brought into use by Christians of the early church. We are told that the heathen who worship the sun as a god, pray to their god by facing the sun. The Jews, noticing this, always faced Jerusalem in praying, so as not to give the false impression that they also were praying to the sun god.

Such things are no longer adiaphora. As soon as the ceremony becomes a sign of faith, we must hold fast to the Words of Scripture.

However, where no confession of faith is involved, and for the sake of a weak brother, we may set aside our liberty in an adiaphoron. It may be that a prospective member takes offence because the pastor smokes. The pastor has the right to smoke, but since another person is taking offence at his smoking, he may give up smoking for a limited time until the weak brother is instructed in the matter. St. Paul gives us good advice with the words: "But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak."⁷⁶ Like Paul we must become all things to all men in order that we might win some for Christ.

76. 1 Corinthians 8,9.

IV

Conclusion

As the concluding thought I want to point the reader to the law of love. Although there are dangers involved in our contacts with the heterodox churches of the community, we must not let them rob us of the great blessings of Christian love. We all realize that the fight against error is a hard and tedious task. And we must not lose sight of the underlying principle which pervades every contact with the heterodox church- that we do not lose our own faith. Nevertheless, our caution must not drown out the command of our Lord to go out and teach all nations, to be a leaven for good in the world. It must not drown out the brotherly love which we as Christians are to show to these heterodox churches. For if we approach the heterodox with the right attitude we will receive a strengthening rather than a weakening of our faith. Let us then not neglect the great field of missions in our home territories, not keep the Word to ourselves, but spread it among these heterodox bodies, so that they may finally accept the full truth of the Bible. We cannot hold our light under a bushel when the world, darkened by sin, needs this light so badly. May our people and pastors in the coming years become ever more aware of their opportunities among the heathen of this land, especially among those who are in the guise of Christians, and bring them to their soul's salvation in the Lord.

- Finis -

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