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KEY 73: A CASE STUDY IN THE DOCTRINE
OF CHURCH FELLOWSHIP

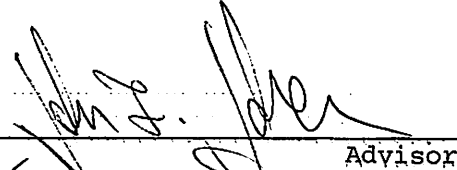
A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Systematic Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Sacred Theology

by

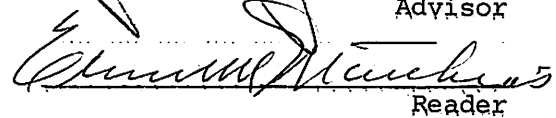
Curtis A. Peterson

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Approved by:



Advisor



Reader

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PREFACE

The long hours of hard work and persistence involved in producing a study of this kind pay off in the personal satisfaction of having the opportunity to extensively treat the intersection of my two great practical and academic interests: confessional Lutheran theology and the practice of evangelism, church growth and missions. At the same time, it provided an opportunity to compare and contrast two theological movements in which this writer has roots: orthodox Lutheranism and the Fundamentalist-Evangelical movement.

Anyone concerned with the fulfillment of our Lord's evangelistic mandate, however, will undertake a study such as this with much fear and trepidation, for no Christian would want to do anything that might hinder the free course of the Gospel. This paper therefore disclaims any attempt to pass judgment on the motivations or intentions of either the founders or participants in Key 73, for they include some of the most zealous and effective evangelists and mission strategists in our Country.

Yet there is always a danger in launching a project which treats people still living that feelings will be hurt, misunderstandings created, and relationships strained. One is almost envious of those whose academic pursuits deal with events of the past whose participants are dead and can write no responses! It is hoped that any such persons reading

this study will appreciate this student's concern for both the preservation of the purity of the Gospel and the mandate to take this Gospel to the ends of the earth. He writes as one who respects and admires the accomplishments and genius of the Evangelical movement, especially in missions and evangelism. Although he disagrees strongly with the implications and consequences of the fellowship position which often shapes their evangelistic and mission practice, he shares their desire to seek the Great Commission fulfilled in our generation.

A work of this scope could not be possible without the cooperation of many people, and we freely acknowledge our indebtedness to many, to an extent impossible even for me to know or list. Most importantly, I owe a debt of gratitude to my dear wife Marilynn, and our four children, whose patience in bearing with my long hours away from home made this paper possible. This study would also not have been completed had not the people of three Lutheran congregations permitted time to take courses and do research in pursuing a graduate degree. Therefore we thank Good Shepherd of Rock Falls, Illinois, Peace of Garland, Texas and especially my current charge, Salem, Gretna, Louisiana, which enabled me to take time off from a large congregation to complete the organization and writing of this study.

Thanks are due also to my hardworking associate, the Reverend Martin W. Friedrich of Salem for willingly taking on extra parish duties during 1982-83 to enable the completion of this paper, and to my loyal secretary, Lois Coyne, for keeping interruptions to a minimum during days set aside for research and writing.

Special thanks are also due to Dr. Ralph A. Bohlmann, who while

President of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, as my first dissertation advisor, encouraged this study during its formative stages. My dependence on his theology of fellowship is also humbly and gratefully acknowledged. Dr. John F. Johnson, Chairman of the Department of Systematic Theology of the St. Louis seminary became my advisor in 1981, and his suggestions have improved the bibliographical, stylistic and scholarly content of this work. Dr. Elmer M. Matthias, who also read the manuscript, provided valuable insights into Church Growth theology and practice.

Among the many other former teachers, and advisors whose assistance and suggestions have been significant for my research are Dr. August R. Suelflow of the Concordia Historical Institute, the late Dr. Roy A. Suelflow, under whom research was conducted on Evangelism-in-Depth, and Professor William J. Schmelder, for whom a term paper on this topic was written while taking his course on Church Fellowship. For his insights into church renewal and evangelistic practice, acknowledgement must also be made to Dr. Gene Getz of Fellowship Bible Church of Dallas, Texas, under whom I was privileged to study Biblical Principles of Church Renewal at Dallas Theological Seminary. He represents the Evangelical movement at its best. We also express our thanks to the librarians of Concordia Seminary of St. Louis, Missouri, Dallas Seminary and the New Orleans Baptist Seminary for permission to use their resources.

This writer also is thankful for the frank expression of opinion and important background information received from Dr. Theodore A. Raedeke, who also sent along a complementary copy of the Key 73 summary volume, Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow.

Finally thanks must be expressed to Ruth Jacobs, Thesis Secretary for Concordia Seminary Graduate School for painstakingly going over the manuscript, making essential and valuable corrections, and to Mrs. Edna Pahl of St. Louis who typed the manuscript as a genuine labor of love.

INTRODUCTION

When He gave His Great Commission to His Church on earth, our Lord Jesus Christ forever linked a concern for sound doctrine to the supreme and irreplaceable purpose of the church, the discipling of the nations:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you: And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age. Matt. 28:19-20.¹

The "going" and "baptizing" cannot be separated from the "teaching them to obey everything: Jesus commanded. Evangelism never takes place in a vacuum; it is always rooted in theology, whether expressed or not, and even whether the evangelist realizes it or not. To separate the practice of evangelism from theology is not only foolish and shortsighted; it is also both impossible and is disobedient to the Word of God. Its disobedience and foolishness consists in the fact that evangelism proclaims doctrine and cannot avoid the content of the message shared with the one evangelized. There is no such thing as an evangelistic method which is uninformed by theological and philosophical presuppositions.

¹All Bible quotations are from the New International Bible (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978) unless otherwise indicated.

As William F. Buckley put it, "Method is the fleshpot of people who live in metaphysical deserts."²

Sadly for both theology and evangelism, concern for theological purity and integrity and evangelistic zeal are sometimes not only divorced from one another, but are even placed in antithesis to one another. It is wrong to either be concerned about doctrine for its own sake or to attempt to build an evangelistic strategy without reference to sound doctrine. Without a solid Biblical footing, evangelism is shallow at best and heretical at worst. "Good Theology produces, maintains and sustains love for Jesus Christ, lost men and church growth (II Cor. 5:14-21)," asserts Arthur P. Johnson. He forcefully argues that

Evangelicals must learn to look beneath the exposed iceberg tip of missiology and recognize the theological foundations that sustain or stifle mission. Good missiology [and, he might have added, good evangelism] grows out of good, biblical theology; bad missiology grows out of bad, extrabiblical theology. Sound and deep theology is essential for the true growth of the church.³

If we fail to form our methods and strategies by our theology, our methods may indeed form our theology!

This study is presented with the hope that it can help establish confessional Lutheran evangelistic and missiological practice on the bedrock of sound, Biblical and Confessional doctrine. The specific

²Quoted by Kurt Marquart, "The Two Kingdoms Today" tape of lecture delivered at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO. n.d.

³

Arthur P. Johnston, "A Reply," in a defense of his essay "Church Growth Theology and World Evangelization," in Theology and Mission, ed. David J. Hesselgrave (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978) pp. 220-21.

theological concern of this presentation is the doctrine of church fellowship. Key 73 is an excellent place to begin such a study because it is especially in evangelism and mission practice that the pressure to unite without prior doctrinal agreement is the greatest. "Conservatives" are particularly vulnerable to these temptations, because of their zeal for reaching the lost with the Gospel. Those who believe that there is salvation in no other name than Christ's (Acts 4:12) and that those "who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus . . . will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power on the day he comes" (2 Thess. 1:8-10), the feeling may persist that we ought not take the time to test the spirits in matters of evangelism, church growth and world missions.

Indeed, for such people, complaints about "unionism" or concerns for orthodoxy may seem petty at best and demonic at worst. In simplified form the argument goes something like this: "With so many souls going to hell, how dare we nit-pick about secondary doctrines and in-house matters. Let's unite on the simple gospel and get on with the work of the Lord." Certainly our concern for the truth dare never weaken our desire to share that truth in love with the whole church and especially with those still outside the family of God.

Dare we not, however, ask questions about the content of this "simple gospel" or for a definition of "Gospel" and "Evangelism"? As Gerhard O. Forde maintains,

"Evangelism" has been far too much of a sacred cow to be allowed to wander about unattended, before which we are supposed to tremble and

obediently make way. The issues involved are basically theological ones. The time has come to settle some theological accounts.⁴

In a similar mood, Kenneth Korby discussed the dangers involved in questioning an evangelistic understanding, which may be interpreted as being against the Lord's work. He writes:

Furthermore, that will of the Lord is amply reflected in the nature of the church, for missions is nothing else than the one, holy church in motion. Hence, to raise the voice against certain evangelism programs or techniques makes one an easy target for those who, in order to avoid God's will in the use of the Office of the Keys, surely know that God is in favor of these programs or techniques. As one woman once said to me: "How many people have you converted? Until you have converted as many as _____ has, you had better say nothing." As if the whole business of the Father were competition for top salesman.⁵

From both a practical and a theological point of view, of course, there are ways of evangelizing that are, in fact, worse than none at all. Emory Griffin's study on The Art of Christian Persuasion has a section on how people may be inoculated against the truth of the Gospel by giving them just enough to make them immune next time.

Inoculation occurs whenever we try to mold someone's opinion without melting them first -- making certain that they are at least open to our influence. The high-pressure soul-winner who accosts all the people he meets on a plane or bus does so believing that this may be the only time in their lives that they will consider Jesus. Unfortunately, because of inoculation, he may be right. His very act induces a resistance to Christian persuasion in many people. This renders them immune to a more comprehensive and sympathetic presentation of the gospel later on.⁶

⁴Gerhard O. Forde, "Once More Into the Breach: Some Questions about Key 73," *Dialog*, Winter 1973, p. 10.

⁵Kenneth Korby, "What Happened to the Other Key?" The Cresset, April 1974, p. 3.

⁶Emory A. Griffin, The Mindchangers: The Art of Christian Persuasion, (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1976) p. 178.

Theologically, evangelism may do more harm than good when what is proclaimed is not the Gospel, but rather an appeal to trust one's feelings, experience, good works or something else inside himself rather than the external word and promises of God in Christ. Such a gospel will not convert, for only the pure Gospel based on the finished work of Christ saves.

An analysis of Key 73 also illustrates the intersection of theology and evangelism, which has always been this writer's primary academic and practical interest. We shall see this intersection particularly in the practice of church fellowship as we compare and contrast its application by Lutheran and Reformed churches.

Specifically, this study will be a case study of the theology of fellowship among what might be called "Reformed Evangelicals." Key 73 was designed "to be an effort to reach the North American Continent for Christ on a scale which promises to surpass in scope any previous Christian enterprise on this continent,"⁷ and therefore it makes a significant and instructive illustration of the theology of evangelistic cooperation which informs the practice of most protestants who stand to the right of center on the theological spectrum in America today.⁸

⁷ David E. Kucharsky, "Getting It Together for Jesus," Christianity Today, July 7, 1972, p. 16.

⁸ It is significant that James DeForest Murch begins his Cooperation Without Compromise: A History of the National Association of Evangelicals (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956), with this statement: "Unity, fellowship and cooperation are 'hallmarks' of true evangelical, biblical Christianity." p. 13.

The very extravagance of the initial claims of the visionaries and planners who organized Key 73 makes it worthy of our study. One official publication of Key 73, Launching a Movement! declares:

After decades of going separate ways, most of the denominations and Christian groups in the United States and Canada have now joined together in what is to be the biggest cooperative evangelism project in the history of the Christian Church.

Key 73 is a voluntary movement of more than 140 denominations and Christian groups cooperating in a massive attempt to reach every person in North America with the Gospel of Jesus Christ during 1973.⁹

Likewise, Christianity Today claimed that "Key 73 is shaping up as a pan-institutional bridge leading to unified outreach unparalleled in American church history,"¹⁰ In one of the more famous slogans to come out of this endeavor, the Congregational Resource Book declares,

Key 73 proposed to raise an over-arching Christian canopy in both Canada and the United States under which all denominations, congregations and Christian groups may concentrate on evangelism during the year 1973.¹¹

For members of the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod, Key 73 has special significance because of the widespread and enthusiastic support it received. Not only did Concordia Publishing House publish the above-named Resource Book, but Dr. Theodore A. Raedeke became its Executive Director following fourteen years with Synod's Evangelism Department.

⁹ Launching a Movement! Developed by the Interdenominational Key 73 Phase One Task Force, n.d.

¹⁰ Edward E. Plowman, "On the Bridge Together," Christianity Today, June 18, 1971, p. 32.

¹¹ Edward A. Bertermann, "The Use of Mass Media in Key 73," Key 73 Congregational Resource Book (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, n.d.), p. 13.

In addition to Dr. Raedeke, at least thirteen members of the Synod served on Development of General Committees of Key 73.¹²

The theological scope of this inquiry will be to examine what might be termed "the reductionist principle" in American Evangelicalism and Fundamentalism and compare it with the doctrine of church fellowship set forth in the Symbolical books of the Lutheran Church. We shall attempt to show with extensive documentation that these two stances represent mutually exclusive understandings of what is required before outward fellowship may be practiced. Protestant Evangelicals have historically tended to reduce the basis for fellowship to five or ten or twelve fundamentals (the number varies from writer to writer and from generation to generation, but the principle remains the same), the rest of the corpus of Christian doctrine being nondivisive to fellowship by definition.

We shall trace the historical development of this reductionist principle from the time of the Reformation through the Pietists, the Arminians, John Wesley, through American revivalism down to the contemporary Evangelical movement. Although the arguments supporting the Evangelical use of this reductionistic principle differ very little from those used to support the conciliar movement in the twentieth century, we shall not examine the doctrine of church fellowship in liberalism or in the modern ecumenical movement. It is also beyond the scope of our study to analyze this principle in the Lutheranism, although it would be an interesting study to examine how this view of fellowship through

¹²See Chapter VII, pp. 266-68, below.

nineteenth century "American Lutheranism" under the "Definite Synodical Platform" and in the theology of S. S. Schmucker.¹³ If time and space permitted, it would be a fascinating study to explore the relationship between this Protestant Reformed/Pietistic view with the doctrine of fellowship which is prevalent in contemporary moderate to liberal Lutheranism, analyzing its place in the recent LC-MS controversy.¹⁴ The whole "Gospel Reductionism controversy is related to our study. It is this observer's opinion that modern liberal Lutheranism's doctrine of church fellowship is essentially Reformed and Pietistic and not Confessional Lutheran. It would take us beyond this already extensive study to treat this motif in modern Lutheran theology, however.¹⁵

Since it is difficult to separate doctrine and practice, we are including practical theology in this basically systematic-historical treatise. This will also provide a fuller and a more balanced discussion of Key 73 for the interested student. Furthermore, a very valuable part of our analysis deals with the Church Growth critique of Key 73,

¹³See, for example, Vergilius Ferm, The Crisis in American Lutheran Theology: A Study of the Issue Between American Lutheranism and Old Lutheranism (New York: The Century Co., 1927). Hermann Sasse is convinced that Schmucker is the father of the ecumenical movement in America. See Hermann Sasse, "The Ecumenical Movement and the Lutheran Church," Concordia Theological Monthly, 31 (February 1960):92.

¹⁴See, for example, John H. Tietjen, Which Way to Lutheran Unity? (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1966).

¹⁵See Kurt Marquart, Anatomy of an Explosion: Missouri in Lutheran Perspective (Ft. Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1977), for a powerful development of this thesis.

including especially the insights of C. Peter Wagner of the Fuller School of Missions in Pasadena, California. It was his intriguing observation that Key 73 and Saturation Evangelism are examples of "Evangelism for the sake of cooperation" rather than "cooperation for the sake of evangelism" which led to the selection of Key 73 as a dissertation topic. An examination of the Key 73 Resource Book will confirm this hypothesis.

We also admit to a very pragmatic concern in dealing at length with this subject; we pray that it may be an aid to developing the very best evangelistic approach possible to make our outreach strategies ever more effective as well as more Biblical. We are convinced by both experience and from Scripture, that what is Biblical will be most effective in accomplishing the objectives that God has for His Word as it has free course in the world.

My thesis, therefore, may be stated as follows: Key 73 is an evangelistic strategy which is dependent upon a doctrine of church fellowship which is in principle reductionistic, grounded in historic Reformed Protestantism and is therefore contrary to and mutually exclusive with the doctrine of church fellowship set forth in the Lutheran Confessions, which assumes "agreement in doctrine and all its articles" as a prerequisite to the practice of fellowship.

CHAPTER I

KEY 73 IN THE CONTEXT OF THE REFORMED FUNDAMENTALISM

PROTESTANT UNDERSTANDING OF CHURCH FELLOWSHIP

A Historical Survey of the Development of the Evangelical Doctrine of Church Fellowship

Before one can understand Key 73 as a case history illustrating Twentieth Century Evangelism's approach to church fellowship, one must see it in its historical setting. Once one understands from whence their reductionist notions come, one will be able to better assess both their validity and their impact on contemporary evangelistic and missionary practice. This will require a historical survey of the development of the doctrine of church fellowship among at least a certain strain of Protestantism from the time of the Reformation to the present. In the process we shall critically analyze the implications of this approach to cooperation and fellowship.

Luther and Zwingli

The encounter between Luther and Zwingli at Marburg in 1529 is an illustration of this thesis, an instructive case study in what we are trying to state.¹ The charge is often made that Luther missed a

¹For an account of the controversy between Luther and Zwingli, consult Hermann Sasse, This Is My Body: Luther's Contention for the Real Presence in the Sacrament of the Altar (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1959), especially pp. 116-294.

tremendous opportunity to unite the evangelical church against Romanism by refusing the right hand of fellowship to Zwingli. Therefore, it is alleged, Luther bears much of the guilt for a divided Protestantism.

True, Zwingli sincerely hoped that all parties could leave Marburg united in a common front against the Church of Rome and was therefore both pained and baffled by Luther's refusal to extend the hand of fellowship to him. The reason for this refusal, as Dr. Hermann Sasse has demonstrated in his great work, This Is My Body, centered on a different understanding of the Gospel, the Means of Grace and of fellowship itself. After agreeing on fourteen points, the two Reformers could not agree on the fifteenth article of a proposed common confession. Neither could accept the other's view of the Sacrament of the Altar. In spite of this disagreement, Zwingli was willing to accept Luther as a brother in the faith and to join forces with him. Luther declined this offer of fellowship. Dr. Sasse indicates the crux of the problem in Luther's view.

How . . . is it to be explained that [Zwingli] was prepared to recognize Luther as a brother in the faith in spite of what he regarded as Luther's grave error? The answer is that for him the sacrament and the doctrine of the sacrament did not belong to those essentials of the Christian faith concerning which there must be unity within the Church. In contradistinction to Luther the understanding of the Gospel on which there must be unanimity is independent of the understanding of the Lord's Supper and of the sacraments in general. The sacrament for Zwingli is not part and parcel of the Gospel. It is an ordinance of Christ, to be performed by Christians. . . . Here lies the deepest reason for the differing attitudes of Luther and Zwingli, not only toward the sacrament as such, but also toward the doctrine, that is the understanding of the sacrament.²

²Ibid., p. 282-83.

Zwinfli did not believe that the Lord's Supper should divide Christians. Sasse goes on to demonstrate why Luther could not extend the fraternal handshake and the name of brother to the Swiss Reformer.

He did not do it lightheartedly, as is shown by his attempts to save the union after the breakdown of the discussions. He had to take this stand because nothing less was at stake than the Word of God, the sacrament of Christ and thereby the existence of the Church. Not the existence of a Lutheran Church. Luther was never interested in that. Denominations in the modern sense had not yet come into existence . . . except as names given to certain groups in Christendom. . . . Confessional churches came into existence [only] after the unity of western Christendom had failed. The question for Luther was whether or not the sacraments, as means of grace, and whether the Sacrament of the Altar, as the sacrament of the true body and blood of Christ, were rooted in the Gospel and therefore essential for the Church.³

In terms of the thesis of this dissertation, Zwingli had a reductionistic view of church fellowship which was unacceptable to Luther and his followers. What Zwingli saw as a mere difference of opinion on what was external to the essence of the faith, Luther saw as an attack on the very marks of the Church. No common cause could be made with the Swiss leaders. For Luther the Gospel was at stake, for sinners found solace in the promises of Christ given with the body and blood of Christ in the Sacrament.

What to Zwingli and his friends was the difference of theological schools of thought, which might be tolerated within one and the same church, was for Luther the difference between Church and heresy.⁴

Would the Protestant Churches be stronger if Luther had compromised at Marburg? Would the Gospel now ring out clearer? Would a stronger front have been provided against the errors of Rome, for a

³ Ibid., p. 285.

⁴ Ibid., p. 290.

stronger mission outreach and would it have retarded the growth of rationalism in later years? Emil Brunner comments:

Let us not offer excuses for our Reformers, but let us be grateful to them for having taken so desperately seriously the questions of faith, the quest for the truth of the doctrines. For this very earnestness represents the real fount of strength of the Reformation. Had they taken their doctrines less seriously, had they been willing to make compromises for the sake of unity, had they been more afraid of the reputation of being stubborn than of the inner reproach of having been faithful to God's commission, then also the break with Rome and the Reformation would never have occurred.⁵

C. P. Krauth would strongly agree, for had Luther yielded on this point there could have been no Confessional Lutheran Church as we know it today.

Men have talked and written as if the doctrine of our Church, on this point were a stupid blunder, forced upon it by the self-will of one man. The truth is that this doctrine, clearly revealed in the New Testament, clearly confessed by the early Church, lies at the very heart of the Evangelical system—Christ is the centre of the system, and in the Supper is the centre of Christ's revelation of Himself. The glory and mystery of the incarnation combine there as they combine nowhere else. Communion with Christ is that by which we live, and the Supper is "the Communion." Had Luther abandoned this vital doctrine, the Evangelical Protestant Church would have abandoned him. He did not make this doctrine — next in its immeasurable importance to that of justification by faith, with which it indissolubly coheres — the doctrine made him. . . . It is not only a fundamental doctrine, but is among the most fundamental of fundamentals.⁶

Calixtus and the Humanists.

In passing, the humanistic school which argued against absolute creeds and doctrinal formulations should also be mentioned. Erasmus of Rotterdam (ca. 1466–1536), Jacob Acontius (ca. 1492–1566), and Hugo

⁵Quoted by Sasse in This Is My Body, p. 288.

⁶Charles P. Krauth, The Conservative Reformation and Its Theology (Philadelphia: J. P. Lippincott & Co., 1871; reprint ed., Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1963) p. 655.

Grotius (1583-1645) were among the most important of these men. In the same tradition was George Calixtus (1586-1656), who attempted a synthesis of humanism and Biblical orthodoxy. He argued for mutual recognition of the various factions of Christendom on the basis of those fundamentals on which they all agreed. In a rather romantic idealization of the early church, Calixtus appealed to the concept of the consensus quinquesaecularis, the doctrinal tradition of the Church of the first five centuries. The creeds of those centuries ought to have more authority than Reformation confessional documents, while the doctrinal differences which divided the churches were in the nature of "appendages and attached questions." Johann Konrad Dannhauer remarked correctly that in following Calixtus, the Lutheran Church would have to cease praising Luther and his Reformation and apologize for the schism that had been caused in Protestantism."⁷

Jacob Arminius

If Calixtus was in antithesis to orthodox Lutheranism, Jacob Arminius (1560-1609) is known for his attempt to modify orthodox Calvinism. Our concern, however, is with his views of church fellowship. The irenic theology of Arminius tended both to rationalism and reductionism. Otto Heick summarizes his influence on English Protestantism with two points:

- (1) The liberalistic trend of that movement led to rationalism;
- and (2) the emphasis upon the more practical aspects of religion produced a Church life which viewed Christianity primarily as a force for moral transformation.⁸

⁷ Otto W. Heick, A History of Christian Thought, Vol. II (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), pp. 51 and 59.

⁸ Ibid., p. 79.

His influence on later Wesleyan theology and American frontier evangelists is well known and need not detain us now.

The Pietists on the Fellowship Issue

The Pietistic movement, beginning with Philip Jacob Spener (1635-1705) merits greater attention, however. Both friends and foes of contemporary Evangelicalism in America acknowledge the debt of that movement to European Pietism. It is no exaggeration to say that the doctrine of fellowship held by modern Evangelicals is the Pietistic doctrine.

Spener and the early Pietists held to Lutheran Confessional Theology in a broad sense, but sought to reform it with a greater emphasis on personal holiness, lay Bible study, small groups and other means of church renewal. Their contribution to the cause of world missions deserves the eternal gratitude of every Christian and surely the scholarsticism which characterized some elements of the "age of orthodoxy" needed a warmer spirit. Unfortunately, however, the consequences of the movement weakened Lutheran loyalty to the Symbolical books and, by deemphasizing and even despising a concern for pure doctrine, paved the way for rationalism. Pietism also marked a definite shift in emphasis from the Word and promises of God for the assurance of salvation to a subjectivity which focused on man's inner state.⁹

⁹ Francis Pieper's attack on Pietism at this point is significant: The essence of . . . Pietism was that it led men to base their state of grace before God on inner experiences of the human heart, contrition, "faith," internal renewal, etc., instead of basing it on the grace earned by Christ and offered by Him in the objective means of grace. Schnecker rightly sees in this subjectivity a transition a transition to Reformed territory. Some of the Pietists plainly had a good intention. With a "heartfelt," "living" Christianity

Shifting the emphasis from sound doctrine to the Christian life of personal holiness, the Pietists became subjective not only in their attitude toward the basis of Christian assurance, but also in their understanding of the prerequisites for church fellowship. Kurt Marguart aptly summarizes Pietistism as:

A movement which stressed life rather than doctrine, sanctification rather than sacraments. At first the pietists intended to hold on to the fullness of Lutheran doctrine, meaning only to stress the necessary spiritual fruit in the lives of Christians. However, a one-sided concentration private piety, feelings, small prayer groups and Bible study circles, and the like soon led to an unhealthy subjectivism. The church's public liturgical and sacramental life and public preaching were disdained. Thorough theological work beyond the immediate needs of "practical" piety seemed wearisome, even unspiritual. Unconditional subscription to the Lutheran Confession because they agreed with Scripture, was now felt to be inappropriate.

they wanted to oppose the externalism which unfortunately had become rampart in the Lutheran Church and made an opus operatum of the use divinely appointed means of grace. But unhappily they belonged to the class of reformers who do not know how to bring about a true reformation of the Church. Instead of confining themselves to condemning the misuse of the means of grace on the part of the carnally secure, they impugned also the right use which the contrite sinners were to make of those means. Every poor sinner who, with a heart terrified by the Law, seeks for the grace of God is to be guided directly to the Word of the Gospel and the Sacraments, in which God proffers the forgiveness of sins earned by Christ to the sinner without attaching any subjective conditions, i.e., a stipulation as to man's inner state. Insofar as Pietism did not point poor sinners directly to the means of grace, but led them to reflect on their own inward state to determine whether their contrition was profound enough and their faith of the right caliber, it actually denied the complete reconciliation by Christ, . . . robbed justifying faith of its true object and thus injured personal Christianity in its foundation and Christian piety in its very essence. Francis Pieper, Christian Dogmatics, Vol. 3 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), pp. 174-75.

Its doctrinal substance having been softened up in this way, the church was virtually defenseless before the onslaught of the rationalistic Enlightenment.¹⁰

With the "new birth" at the center of their faith, rather than the Word and Sacraments as objective promises and God and as marks of the Church, Pietism fostered the idea that the people of God in all denominational and confessional families are one and ought to make their oneness visible. Spener believed that the differences between Lutheranism and the German Reformed were not divisive to fellowship. Thus Heick calls Spener the first "union theologian."¹¹ Since religious experience was so important in their spiritual lives, they came to see all those with the same experience as brethren in the faith. We shall see that much of modern fundamentalist, Evangelical and Charismatic theology is unionistic on the same experiential, rather than doctrinal, basis.

Two conflicting views of the nature of Christian unity have influenced Christians down through the centuries since the Reformation.

In the Pietistic concept of church unity . . . the church is understood as the sum total of believing individuals who associate themselves on the basis of what they find to be their common faith. The confession of this faith, of the subjective convictions of the "associated individuals" (Marx's definition of society) makes the believers one. This leads to the formation of local or regional unions which vary according to the circumstances. Thus we find the union churches of Germany in the 19th century, each of them based on a different doctrinal statement, or the corresponding schemes of union on the mission fields of Asia and Africa of today. It is this concept of unity which underlies the definition of church unity by the World Council of Churches (New Delhi Report, p. 116 ff.): "all in each place." The other concept of church unity is that of the

¹⁰ Kurt Marquart, Anatomy of an Explosion: Missouri in Lutheran Perspective (Ft. Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1977, p. 12.

¹¹ Heick, p. 23.

great confessional churches of Christendom, Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Lutheran, conservative Reformed and Presbyterian, and at least to a certain degree Anglican. It sees the basis of church unity not in subjective experiences and opinions, but in the objective truth of the divine revelation which is given to us and which the church expresses in a confession that binds together the believers in many places and throughout the world and even the generations of Christendom from the time of the Apostles to the Last Day. For confessional churches, Sasse argues, unity is not achieved by compromise or ignoring doctrinal differences but by "patient negotiations from church to church and by a common question for the truth of God's Revelation."¹²

Arthur P. Johnston's sympathetic treatment of the Pietists comes to a slightly different conclusion. Although Pietistic missionaries exhibited a spirit of cooperation in their missionary activity, in his view it was not done at the expense of a concern for truth. He quotes Spener on the means to union among Christians:

The primary way of achieving it, and the one that God would bless most, would perhaps be this, that we do not stake everything on argumentation, the present disposition of men's minds, which are filled by as much fleshly as spiritual zeal, makes disputation fruitless. It is true that defense of the truth, and hence also argumentation, which is part of it, must continue in the church . . . to build it up. Before us are the holy examples of Christ, the apostles, and their successors, who engaged in disputation--that is vigorously refuted opposing errors and defended the truth.¹³

Nevertheless, Heick agrees with most students of the Pietistic movement when he concludes that "Spener became the connecting link between the evangelical piety of the seventeenth century and . . . rationalism in the eighteenth."¹⁴ Pietism's stress on a better knowledge of the Bible among the laity, its emphasis on a spiritual ministry, good works

¹²Hermann Sasse, "Confessional Churches in the Ecumenical Movement," The Springfielder, Spring 1967, pp. 3-4.

¹³Arthur P. Johnston, World Evangelism and the Word of God (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1974), p. 34.

¹⁴Heick, p. 24.

and its essential contribution to making the 1800s the great mission century are important contributions. Yet, one must agree with Heick that many of the "fundamental principles have suffered severely at the hands of the radical Pietists."¹⁵

Nicholas von Zinzendorf

Standing in the Pietistic tradition, Count Nicholas von Zinzendorf (1700-1760) made a significant contribution to ecumenical thought. Such ecumenism "was for Zinzendorf a necessary consequence of his faith: to be a Christian on any other terms was for him impossible."¹⁶ In Germany "his Brethren church was a union church within Lutheranism, anticipating the Prussian Union by almost a century."¹⁷ American Lutherans have an unfortunate impression of this man because of his 1741 visit to Pennsylvania during which he tried to gather all believers into one fold regardless of their confessional backgrounds. He posed as a Lutheran pastor, assuming spiritual leadership of shepherdless Lutherans in the colony, and passing himself off as "Ludwig von Thurnstein." Standard works on Lutheranism in Colonial America record that these tactics caused him to lock horns with Henry Melchior Muhlenberg, the patriarch of American Lutheranism.

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 29-30.

¹⁶ Martin Schmidt, "Ecumenical Activity on the Continent of Europe in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries" in A History of the Ecumenical Movement. 1517-1948. eds. Ruth Rouse and Stephen Charles Niell. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1967). p. 102.

¹⁷ Reick, p. 34.

Friedrich Schliermacher

In order to trace the development of Pietism into modern liberal theology, we need look no further than to Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834). William A. Dyrness traced the formative influence of Pietism and Moravian stresses on the religion of the heart and of the primacy of experience over doctrine in the life and thought of Schliermacher. He notes that his thought was in error not only by what he rejected of this influence, but also in what he retained. In 1802 he wrote, "I have become a Herrnhuter again, only of higher order." His philosophy merely brought to a logical conclusion the Pietistic-Moravian feeling that experience was at the center of religion and that the quality of the experience, not the content of the doctrine, was the criteria for judging the value of faith.¹⁸

For Schleiermacher the personal reality of religion was always more important than doctrine about Christianity. Like many modern evangelicals, he was always afraid knowledge would replace faith. As a result he seemed less interested in the truth of theological statements than in their function in the religious life. This led him to strange views of certain traditional doctrines. Schleiermacher thought the two natures of Christ, the Virgin Birth, and miracles in the New Testament were not so much false, as without value in developing Christian religious affections.

Here lies one of the causes of the modern split between faith and history. It is the expression of the traditional pietistic elevation of life over thought. Schleiermacher errs at this point by

¹⁸ Werner Elert links Schleiermacher to the concept of fellowship that derives the nature of the church from the concept of fellowship rather than the other way around. For Schleiermacher, the church is above all "a fellowship." This fellowship "is created by the voluntary actions of men." His entire discussion is very useful in getting a handle on what is being said even today about the practice of fellowship both within churches and between them. Werner Elert, Eucharist and Church Fellowship in the First Four Centures. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1966), pp. 2-5.

insisting Christianity is not a belief about Christ but a life with him, while in fact it is both.¹⁹

The step from the deemphasis on doctrinal truth to the denial of the existence of truth is a short one. Compare the pietistic attitude towards controversy in religion with the rationalistic poet Alexander Pope's observation in his "Essay on Man" (1732-1734):

For modes of faith let graceless zealots fight. His can't be wrong, whose life is in the right. On faith and hope the world will disagree. But all mankind's concern is charity.²⁰

John Wesley

Since John Wesley (1703-91) had a "new birth experience" while hearing a Moravian read Luther's Preface to the Epistle to the Romans, he logically comes next in this survey of the development of the contemporary Evangelical notion of church fellowship. For Wesley, joy is obedience and love is holiness. The center of the Christian faith was Christian love, and love of our neighbor which flows out of love for God. Sanctification, not justification, was his great emphasis. Justification was only the initial step towards full salvation. He developed two acts of grace in the Christian life: the first was justification, by which we are saved from the guilt of sin. Sanctification was the second and totally different work of God by which we are saved by the

¹⁹William A. Dyrness, "The Pietistic Heritage of Schleiermacher," Christianity Today, December 15, 1978, pp. 15-17. See also Robert K. Johnston, "Of Tidy Doctrine and Truncated Experience," in Christianity Today, February 18, 1977, p. 10, where Luther's "Theology of Word" is contrasted with Schleiermacher's "Theology of Experience," and its legacy of Evangelicalism.

²⁰Quoted by Heick, p. 93.

power of sin. From Wesley's point of view, Luther was woefully lacking in his theology on the conditions of salvation. The seeds for the later Holiness and Charismatic movements with their emphasis on a "second blessing" and "entire sanctification" were shown here.

Wesleyanism may be called a Protestant version of Franciscan-Jesuit theology. Like Lutheran pietism, Wesleyanism became a driving force for religious individualism stressing personal experience rather than the objective biblical content of the Christian faith. Because of the strong ethical concern of Wesley, Methodism was also susceptible to the moralistic, humanitarian understanding of the kingdom as "humanity organized according to the principle of Love." (Albrecht Ritschl).²¹

American Revivalism

Influenced by Wesleyanism, Arminianism, the Great Awakening and the leveling influence of the American Frontier, the American revivalistic phenomenon with its emphasis on experience over doctrine and the emotions over the mind, helped shape modern American religion. The revival campaigns and camp meetings of the frontier led to cooperation between people of various theological positions.

Dwight L. Moody (1837-1899) contributed greatly to such cooperation with his evangelistic campaigns in the United States and Great Britain. Moody insisted on cooperation of the different churches before he would conduct a crusade in a city. A layman, he could not see the importance of the shades of differences between the denominations. He would warn believers in various places:

Talk not of this sect or that sect, of this party and that party, but solely and exclusively of the great comprehensive cause of Christ. . . . In this ideal brotherhood there should be one faith,

²¹Ibid., p. 44.

one mind, one spirit, and in this city let us starve it out for a season, to actualize this glorious truth. . . . Oh that God may so fill us with His love, and the love of souls, that no thought of minor sectarian parties can come in; that there may be no room for them in our atmosphere whatever; and that the Spirit of God may give us one mind and one spirit to glorify His holy name.²²

The great lay preacher put his philosophy into practice in his cooperative campaigns, with local churches working together in spite of their different traditions and teachings. J. C. Pollock terms the D. L. Moody/Ira Sankey campaigns "the strongest force for Christian unity in the nineteenth century." Because of these campaigns and his influence on John Mott, youth worker and lay evangelist turned ecumenical leader, at the Mount Hermon School Student Conference, Moody has been called "the grandfather of ecumenism."²³

From these conferences came the slogan, "The Evangelization of the World in this Generation" which became the motto of the Edinburgh Missionary Conference in 1910. Thus we may trace a direct line from D. L. Moody to John Mott to the 1910 Edinburgh conference and the World Council of Churches of Today.²⁴

Arthur Johnston traces the source of the great youth organizations such as the Student Volunteer Movement (SVM), the World Student

²² Stanley N. Grundry, "Grand Themes of D. L. Moody," Christianity Today, December 20, 1974, p. 6.

²³ J. C. Pollock, "Dwight L. Moody--Grandfather of Ecumenism?" Christianity Today, November 23, 1962, pp. 29-30. See also George M. Marsden, Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism 1870-1925. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980) pp. 32-39, where D. L. Moody's contribution to the making of modern evangelicalism is treated.

²⁴ For more on the 1910 Conference, see below pp. 33-39.

Christian Federation (WSCF) and both the Y.M.C.A. and the Y.W.C.A. back to both Pietism and revivalism.²⁵ They began with "evangelical tests" for membership, and were closely related to the ministry of D. L. Moody. Under the leadership of John Mott and others, they made significant contributions to the cause of both world missions and the beginnings of the ecumenical movement.²⁶ In fact, the leadership of the above-named organizations in 1900 made up much of the leadership at Edinburgh in 1910 and in the formal ecumenical movement some years alter.²⁷ Possibly their very para-church character, making them interdenominational in nature without the ecclesiastical discipline and direction a confessional church body provides, made them more susceptible to a drift to the left.

Meanwhile, the synergism and subjectivism of revivalism were planting the seeds of its own destruction. Johnston recognizes this:

The revivalist movement, as the heir of Wesley, unwittingly contributed to the social gospel by the synergistic principles of Methodism. Man cooperates with God both in salvation and in the outworking of the Christian life. When the liberal view of Ritschl concerning the kingdom of God reached into the theological stream of Protestantism, it very easily joined forces with revivalism. Ritschl saw the Kingdom on the earth . . . that Christ sought to establish an ethical reign as the Gospel's final objective. . . . Man, therefore, must work together with God as the instruments of God--to establish His reign in the social order.²⁸

²⁵ Arthur P. Johnston, pp. 63-82.

²⁶ For an overview of the relationship of these youth organizations and world missions, see David M. Howard, Student Power in World Evangelism (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1970).

²⁷ Ruth Rouse, "Voluntary Movements and the Changing Ecumenical Climate," in A History of the Ecumenical Movement, 1517-1948, ed. Ruth Rouse and Stephen Charles Neill, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1967), p. 341.

²⁸ Arthur P. Johnston, p. 72.

Because of its emphasis on experience, revivalism, like the Pietism from which it sprung, could not defend itself against the new theology.

In the spirit of Darwin and of nineteenth century scientific trends, liberal theology began with the date of experience, Ritschl applied this to "the immediate impression made on us by Christ, and the experimental knowledge we have of His power to give us spiritual deliverance and moral freedom." The evangelical authority of Scripture was replaced by the authority of an experience with Christ. The Bible became a means of an experience with Christ.²⁹

One should not be surprised that revivalism led to a weakening of conservative Protestantism's ability to fend off liberal trends at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries. As revivalism flourished on the fertile soil of the American frontier with its individualistic lifestyle, the discipline of the historic denominations had less importance. In such a setting, sophisticated theological systems had little influence. This in a strange and contradictory way Arminian free will emphasizing decisions for Christ became coupled with the Calvinistic insistence on "once saved, always saved" as a characteristic of the theology of conservative Protestantism. Combine this with the fact that many American evangelists operated as a law unto themselves, with no moral or doctrinal discipline to direct and tame them, it is a small exaggeration to say that each evangelist had his own home-made theology and that each congregation in effect constituted its own denomination.³⁰

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ We still see this phenomenon today: Fundamentalist congregations which claim to be "non-denominational" and even anti-denominational in effect are one-congregation denominations, each with its own doctrinal stance, depending on the position of the Pastor. A second factor which may tend to weaken American Christendom is the influence of independent, self-appointed television evangelists, such as Jerry Falwell, Jim Bakker,

It has already been noted how experience played a more important role than doctrine in establishing both the personal assurance of salvation and the ground for fellowship among Christians of the Pietist-revivalist strain. These two are related, for, if a person's acceptance with God was assured through experience, his acceptance with others will likely be on the same basis. Such subjectivism is detrimental both for the doctrine of salvation and for the practice of fellowship. In Lutheranism, both are determined by the outward makers of the church, Word and Sacrament, based on the Word and promises of God rather than concentrating on man and his moods.³¹ Subjectivism cannot withstand a liberalism which also focuses on subjective experiences, or feelings. We need a firmer foundation on which to build both our fellowship practice and our personal certainty of salvation,

Early Twentieth Century Ecumenism in the
Context of World Evangelism

Dr. Arthur P. Johnson, Chairman of the Division of World Mission and Evangelism at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois, has written extensively on the development of the ecumenical

Oral Roberts, Robert Schuller, Rex Humbard, Pat Robinson and others. Their independence of any ecclesiastical discipline tends to increase both the doctrinal relativism and the lack of denominational loyalty of American Evangelicals.

³¹ See Frederick Dale Bruner's A Theology of the Holy Spirit: The Pentecostal Experience and the New Testament Witness (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1970), for a magnificent discussion on the need for an objective foundation for Christian assurance. See especially his section on "Documents" (pp. 323-41) which is "A Repository of the Modern Theological Sources of the Pentecostal Doctrine and Experience of the Holy Spirit," including Wesley, Charles Finney, R. A. Torrey and others.

movement in the twentieth century from its roots in Pietism and the Evangelical Alliance through the great 1910 world missionary conference at Edinburgh, Scotland.³² Johnston's works, especially World Evangelism and the Word of God, are highly instructive, not only because of the information and insights they give on how the evangelical missionary movement at the turn of the century moved in a more liberal direction, finally terminating in the World Council of Churches, but also because he writes as a prominent American missiologist with Evangelical convictions. Johnston has a penetrating analysis of why a broadly based doctrinal statement designed to unite all Christians for world evangelism led to rapid degeneration of doctrinal substance which still characterizes the ecumenical movement. Yet his own reductionistic Evangelical viewpoint blinds him to the inherent unionism of Pietism and in contemporary Evangelicalism which makes almost inevitable the same deterioration. For this reason it is worthwhile to examine Johnston's work carefully in this section.

The Evangelical Alliance

The 1800s are known as the Great Century for missionary expansion.³³ The roots of this expansion are in Pietism and in the contribution of the Evangelical Alliance, founded in London in 1846. In response

³² See especially his World Evangelism and the Word of God (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1974), as well as The Battle for World Evangelism (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1978), and "The Unanswered Prayer of Edinburgh," Christianity Today, November 22, 1974, pp. 10-13.

³³ Three of the seven volumes of Kenneth Scott Latourette's classic History of the Expansion of Christianity (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), deal with this period from 1800 to 1914.

to the growth of rationalism, Romanism and Anglo-Catholicism, and in a zeal to spread the gospel, evangelical leaders from all over the world met to establish an organization to further common goals. Johnston argues that the "beginnings, growth and development" of this confederation reveal "the two principle concerns of pietism so apparent in the seventeenth century's doctrinal fidelity to the authority and infallibility of the Scriptures, and a concern for evangelism at home and in non-Christian lands."³⁴

The wholesome fidelity of the group to the inspiration of Scripture and to the evangelistic mandate of Our Lord is not in question. Beyond this basic point, the Alliance was unionistic from its inception for it demanded only a basic conformity to certain fundamentals as the basis of their work and fellowship.³⁵ Rouse cites Dr. Edward Steane, the first Secretary of the Alliance as he comments on the organizational meeting:

It has required incessant thoughtfulness and the most watchful care lest an indiscreet word spoken or sentence written should wound the sensitiveness or offend the prejudice of the curiously mixed and balanced ideas of which our association is composed - Churchmen and Dissenters, Presbyterians and Methodists, Establishmentarians and Voluntaries.³⁶

It is difficult to see where this sensitivity to offending others differs from the stance taken at Edinburgh in 1910. Yet, Johnston defends

³⁴ Arthur P. Johnston, World Evangelism and the Word of God, p. 45.

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 264-67, Appendix III, "The Basis of the Evangelical Alliance," 1847.

³⁶ Ruth Rouse, p. 320.

the alliance as firmly rooted in sound doctrine even while he severely criticizes the 1910 assembly.³⁷

By the dawn of the twentieth century, a number of trends coalesced to shape a more liberal environment for the modern ecumenical movement in general and the 1910 Missionary Conference in particular. We have already traced the development of a latitudinarian approach to church fellowship among the predecessors of the modern Evangelical movement. Couple with this the development of the historical-critical method of Biblical study and Darwinism, along with the resultant anti-credalism of Adolph Harnack, the most important historian of the history of missions of his day, and the relativism which became apparent at Edinburgh was almost inevitable.

At the turn of the century the theological works of Harnack led churchmen toward union based upon the minimum doctrinal statement of the Christian faith rather than upon essential biblical doctrines.³⁸

According to Harnack, the Reformation Confessions and the Ecumenical Creeds, although adequate for their own day, were not only inadequate for the modern era, but, in fact, "Christianity changed as soon as it codified its doctrines."³⁹ The tendency toward minimalistic doctrinal statements, already present among those in the Pietistic tradition, was therefore magnified.

Again, the Confessional Lutheran would question Johnston's attack on the minimalism of such approaches to cooperation, while seeing

³⁷ See below, pp. 35-39.

³⁸ Arthur P. Johnston, "The Unanswered Prayer of Edinburgh," p. 11.

³⁹ A. P. Johnston, Battle for World Evangelism, p. 43.

his "Scripture reductionism," that is, his tendency to reduce the basis of cooperation to a common "experience of salvation"⁴⁰ and a commitment to Scripture as the infallible Word of God.⁴¹

Interacting later with the theology of fellowship in the World Council of Churches, Johnston writes:

Questions on evangelism are further clouded by the contention that the witness to Jesus Christ to the world will be tarnished and in a measure ineffective without ecclesiastic unity, or, at least, without ecclesiastical fellowship. This again raises the question as to the very nature of fellowship already enjoyed and experienced by those from among all denominations who have a traditional evangelical experience of salvation. Fellowship is already there, as the Evangelical Alliances of the nineteenth century declared and the Berlin World Congress on Evangelism in 1966 demonstrated.⁴² [Emphasis mine].

We receive an insight into Johnston's doctrine of the church in his discussion of liberalism's emphasis on community.

Thus the adherence to the visible community which Christ initiated becomes of greater importance to the liberal than the personal experience of the revivalist. This approach to salvation naturally gave greater importance to the Church and church membership. An individual conversion experience or commitment to Christ, outside of the Church became part of the pietistic past.⁴³

Johnston's assertions here demonstrate again the difficulty of cooperation in church work without defining the Church.

Edinburgh was the climax of a number of missionary conferences among Evangelicals throughout the second half of the nineteenth

⁴⁰A. P. Johnston, World Evangelism, p. 253.

⁴¹A. P. Johnson, "The Unanswered Prayer of Edinburgh," p. 12, where he approvingly notes that "at Lausanne [1974] unity and . . . cooperation were grounded in the infallibility of Scripture."

⁴²A. P. Johnston, World Evangelism, p. 253.

⁴³Ibid., p. 74.

century.⁴⁴ The concept of missionary comity grew out of these conferences, in which various agencies and sending churches would agree to leave given fields to one mission to prevent overlapping.⁴⁵ The German missiologist Gustav Warneck pleaded for missionary comity at the London Missionary Conference in 1888 on the basis of mutual doctrinal understandings:

The indispensable assumption for the cultivation of true Comity amongst Evangelical Missions belonging to different denominations in the Church is the double acknowledgement: Firstly, that we all possess in common such measure of doctrinal truth as is sufficient to show a sinner the way of salvation. Secondly, that salvation is not by any Church, but alone by the Lord Jesus Christ. If this basis is lacking, then complaint of unfraternal intrusion is futile, and every request for brotherly consideration frivolous.⁴⁶

Here again we have an example of cooperation on the basis of the most limited doctrinal agreement.⁴⁷ Such agreements helped prepare the missionaries of the world for agreement on a larger scale after Edinburgh.⁴⁸

No one understands the existential reality of the division of Christendom and the scandal it provides for world evangelization more than the foreign missionary where Christians of every kind are in a minority. In such a context the pressure to unite even without doctrinal

⁴⁴ Stephen Neill, A History of Christian Missions (New York: Penguin Books, 1964), p. 541.

⁴⁵ See R. Pierce Beaver, Ecumenical Beginnings in Protestant World Mission: A History of Comity (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1962) for a history and defense of comity.

⁴⁶ Cited by A. P. Johnston in World Evangelism, p. 59.

⁴⁷ In "The Tragedy of Comity," Christian News, October 15, 1979, this writer explored the case against such agreements on both theological and practical grounds.

⁴⁸ Beaver, p. 78.

agreement is both powerful and understandable. Baron Stow has therefore asserted that "the spirit of missions is the spirit of concord"⁴⁹ and Henry Van Dusen maintained that "the Christian world mission has been both the precursor and the progenitor of the effort after Christian unity."⁵⁰

Harry R. Boer notes this fact as he writes:

On the mission field denominationalism tends to lose its urgency and even the creedal raison de'etre of denominationalism loses some of its cogency. The reason for this is . . . in the loneliness of a foreign land, in the face of common problems and difficulties, missionaries from different ecclesiastical backgrounds tend to be drawn together. . . . Their supreme concern is to find openings for proclaiming the elemental realities of the Christian faith. The theological and historical backgrounds that were factors in bringing the sending churches into being are, therefore, not invested with the primary importance that is associated with them at home. But especially is the desire for Christian . . . unity on the mission field understandable from the viewpoint of the younger churches. They nearly invariably constitute a very small minority in an overwhelmingly pagan environment. Confronted by a colossal mass of non-Christian religion and mores, by the power of age-old cultures, by indifference and not infrequently by hostility, they are more aware . . . of the faith that unites them than the differences that divide them. . . . Being drawn to each other is born of a sort of Christian instinct. The divisions that exist between them, on the other hand, are often regarded as things that may have been imposed, the rightness of which may live deeply in the sending churches, but which may appear as something less than essential to the men and women who are not the product of the theological and historical factors that brought the differences into being.⁵¹

The viewpoint which Boer articulates cannot be ignored, for many share his understanding. Several thoughts suggest themselves in response, however. First, Paul the Apostle worked among young "mission" churches,

⁴⁹ Cited by Beaver, p. 23.

⁵⁰ Cited by Beaver, p. 35.

⁵¹ Harry R. Boer, Pentecost and Missions (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1961), pp. 186-87.

very similar in many respects to young churches in today's third world. Yet, he was not only the Church's greatest missionary, but also her greatest theologian. His letters deal not only with fundamentals, but expound Christian theology on a most profound level. He stands second only to Jesus himself in the insistence on sound doctrine and avoiding error and errorists.

Secondly, Christians are part, not only of their own local congregations, but also of the whole Church, the Una Sancta. The controversies of the past, and of distant parts of the world, are therefore controversies which involve every Christian. Very often, indeed, ancient errors erupt again and again in new dress and in new settings. Furthermore, as we shall see later,⁵² the Ecumenical Creeds and the Lutheran Confessors spoke as the orthodox church to the whole church. Finally, we dare not falsely separate the "basics" of evangelism from the more profound truth of Christian education and nurture. The Great Commission itself commands us to teach new disciples "to obey all things" that he has commanded us. Theology must be contextualized so that it is meaningful in the hearer's situation, but it dare never be compromised by either inadequate grounding in the truth or by syncretistically combining it with error.

Edinburgh 1910

Such was the context of the Edinburgh Conference of 1910. Ecumenical historians rightly call the World Missional Conference (WMC), Edinburgh 1910 "the birthplace of the modern ecumenical movement."

⁵²See below, p. 122.

Kenneth Latourette asserts "it cannot be said too often or too emphatically that the ecumenical movement arose from the missionary movement and continues to have at its heart world-wide evangelism."⁵³

Cooperation for the sake of evangelism has a long history, as has been shown. The first call for a world-wide missionary conference had come from none other than William Carey in 1806.⁵⁴ In 1888 at the London Missionary Conference, the great German missionary theorist Gustav Warneck called for a General Missionary Conference every 10 years on the basis of their common dedication to world evangelization and the doctrines which they held in common:

We must learn to look upon Missions as a common cause . . . to kindle a missionary corps d'esprit . . . to accustom ourselves to a solidarity of missionary interests, and to place in the foreground the vital truths common to us all.⁵⁵

Dr. Johnston contrasts the motivation for mission work that drove men to dedicate their lives to missions in the world before 1910 with the new spirit that was beginning to be seen at Edinburgh. Quoting Gerald Anderson's Theology of the Christian Mission, Johnston notes

At the beginning of this century a large part of the missionary movement, had a passion for souls that stemmed from an emphasis upon the rapidly approaching judgment day and a strong sense of obligation to save the heathen from eternal damnation.

By 1910 at Edinburgh, however,

Two notable new points appeared: first, an understanding and sympathy for the nobler elements in the non-Christian religions, and second, a compromising of "the universal and emphatic witness to

⁵³ Kenneth Scott Latourette, "Ecumenical Hearings of the Missionary Movement and the International Missionary Council," in A History of the Ecumenical Movement, p. 362.

⁵⁴ Rouse, p. 311-12.

⁵⁵ Cited by Neill, p. 543.

absoluteness of the Christian faith" by a new attitude of "charity and tolerance."⁵⁶

The commanding personality at the Edinburgh World Missions Conference was John R. Mott, who not only headed the first of the preparatory sessions but also presided at most of the sessions. He became Chairman of the Edinburgh Continuation Committee and later of the International Missional Council (IMC) in 1921 and finally a co-president of the World Council of Churches itself. A Methodist layman of enormous energy, Mott was skilled as an organizer and presider. Although not theologically trained, he was a powerful thinker. He was assisted in his creative thinking by Joseph H. Oldham, the Executive Secretary of the Conference who became Secretary of the Continuation Committee and later first Secretary of the IMC. His training was also in the great international youth movements, having been a secretary of Student Christian Movement of Great Britain and Ireland and of the Y.M.C.A. in India.⁵⁷

Mott envisioned a united Christendom working for the evangelization of the world. The men who were later to meet at Key Bridge to organize Key 73 had much in common with the men of Edinburgh both in their theology and their goals. Johnston argues that "Edinburgh 1910 was no longer evangelical, but ecumenical in the present understanding of world,"⁵⁸ but there is little doubt that Mott's vision of world evangelism matches any held by any modern Evangelical missionary. In a powerful

⁵⁶A. P. Johnston, "The Unanswered Prayer at Edinburgh."

⁵⁷Latourette, p. 356.

⁵⁸A. P. Johnston, Battle for World Evangelism, p. 49.

and eloquent passage, Mott pointed to evangelism as necessary both for the world and the Church:

The only thing which will save the Church from the imminent perils of growing luxury and materialism, is the putting forth of all its powers on behalf of the world without Christ. Times of material prosperity have ever been the times of greatest danger to Christianity. The Church needs a supreme world-purpose -- a gigantic task, something which will call out all its energies, something which will throw the Church back up on God Himself. . . . To preserve the pure faith of Christianity, a world-wide plan and conquest are necessary. This lesson is convincingly taught in the pages of Church history. The concern of Christians today should not be lest non-Christian peoples refuse to receive Christ, but lest they in failing to communicate Him will themselves lose Him.⁵⁹

What John Mott was not able to see as clearly, however, was the other side of the coin: to preserve the "world-wide plan and conquest" of the Church, it needs the "pure faith of Christianity." It dare never be truth by itself without mission, or the mission of the church without the truth. Biblically, as we shall see in a later chapter, God gives his truth for the sake of the mission of the Church!

We must therefore agree with Arthur P. Johnston's verdict:

Edinburgh 1910 hoped to harness the global forces of Christianity to complete world evangelization, and to introduce the coming Kingdom of God upon the earth. It served rather to hinder evangelism by what it did not say concerning the authority of Scripture, and what it did through the agencies which grew out of it.⁶⁰

John Mott believed that uniting all Christians for world evangelism would in itself be a mighty apologetic for its truth before the non-Christian world. Mott wrote:

Christ emphasized that the mightiest apologetic with which to convince the non-Christian world of His divine character and claims would be the oneness of His disciples. Experience had already shown that by

⁵⁹ Quoted in A. P. Johnston, World Evangelism, pp. 98-99.

⁶⁰ A. P. Johnston, Battle for World Evangelism, p. 43.

far the most hopeful way of hastening the realization of true and triumphant Christian unity is through the enterprise of carrying the Gospel to the non-Christian world. Who can measure the federative and unifying influence of foreign missions? No problem less colossal and less baffling will so reveal to the Christians of today the sinfulness of their divisions, and so convince them together in answer to the intercession of their common divine Lord.⁶¹

In this same note, Johnston maintains:

It should be noted that the nineteenth century did not neglect the question of Christian unity but gave greater importance to the power of the Scriptures in evangelism, than to the instrumentality of organic union. For if the infallibility of the Scriptures were denied both the power of the Gospel in evangelism and this same basis of unity were vitiated.⁶²

It is the contention of this study that any compromise on the whole counsel of God and any common cause without agreement in doctrine and all its articles is also doomed to weaken both the Gospel which the missionary-evangelist proclaims. Indeed, it is not even true unity, for it continues and even institutionalizes errors which effect the message of the Gospel itself. It is no more an answer of the Lord's great high priestly prayer for oneness (John 17) to ignore differences on the free will of man in conversion or on baptism than it is to ignore a plague of gossip in a congregation. Both false doctrine and manifest sin violate the oneness for which our Lord prayed.

We receive a revealing glimpse into the full implications of Edinburgh's latitudinarianism in Minute 16 of the International Committee which stated that "no resolution shall be allowed which involves questions of doctrine or Church polity with regard to which the Churches

⁶¹Cited by A. P. Johnston in World Evangelism, p. 122, note 42.

⁶²Ibid.

or Societies taking part in the Conference differ among themselves."⁶³ Consensus itself became the uniting bond of the Conference! Bishop Charles Gore of Birmingham introduced his Commission Report with these remarks: "Documents like the Thirty-Nine Articles or the Westminster Confession are documents full of controversies, which are partial, which do not belong to the universal substance of our religion."⁶⁴

Unity was assumed, and anything that might disprove this presupposition (such as discussing doctrines which would divide the assembly) were ruled out of bounds for the Conference. Latourette declares that at Edinburgh 1910 "a new sense of fellowship among Christians was discovered . . . which transcended all the barriers. The growing realization of this fellowship was to be one of the most significant characteristics of the ecumenical movement."⁶⁵

Johnston gives examples of what Ralph Bohlmann has termed "minimalistic and pluralistic doctrinal approaches to ecumenism,"⁶⁶ when he lists the two views of unity which were found in the General Conclusions of the World Missionary Conference (WMC) at Edinburgh. The first was unity as federation, with each church body retaining:

. . . full liberty to hold and practice their own systems of doctrine and polity, but in which each would recognize the ministry, ordinances, and discipline of the others, and members might be freely transferred from the one to the other. They regard complete uniformity in the lines of thought and activity as an impossible ideal.

⁶³ Cited by A. P. Johnson in World Evangelism, p. 95.

⁶⁴ Cited by A. P. Johnston in Battle for World Evangelism, p. 44.

⁶⁵ Latourette, p. 361.

⁶⁶ Ralph A. Bohlmann, "The Celebration of Concord," in Theologians Convocation Formula for Concord Essays (St. Louis: Commission on Theology and Church Relations, LCMS, November, 1977), p. 67.

The other ideal of unity envisaged the transmission of the Church to the mission field as "rich and full and complete an interpretation as possible." This later unity would be real and yet leave room for diversity. Differences are not to be ignored or treated as unimportant, but rather "by patient and prayerful thought, to ascertain the elements of truth in all conflicting opinions, and to embrace them in a richer and higher and reconciling unity.

"Unity when it comes must be something richer, grander, more comprehensive than anything which we can see at present. It is something into which and unto which we must grow, something for which we must become worthy."⁶⁷

In summary, therefore, several diverse streams, most having their source in the nineteenth century Evangelical movement, converged to form the beginnings of the modern ecumenical movement. Theologically, the stream goes back to (1) the subjectivism of Pietism and Schleiermacher, (2) the liberalism which developed the Historical-Critical methods and (3) the pragmatic pressures for united evenaglim on the mission fields of the world. From an organizational standpoint, one may trace modern ecumenism back to several para-church agencies, including various interdenominational youth organizations, several foreign missionary organizations⁶⁸ which had been meeting together periodically to work for world evangelism, culminating in the great World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh and interconfessional organizations such as the Evangelical Alliance, organized for mutual fellowship and mission work. Each of these groups was united on the basis of a common experience of salvation and a common loyalty to a minimalistic doctrinal statement.

⁶⁷A. P. Johnston, *WEWG*, p. 112, quoting WMC Proceedings, 1910, Reports of Commission VIII, Co-operation and the Promotion.

⁶⁸Robert Preus, "The Lutheran Church and the Ecumenical Movement" in Crisis in Lutheran Theology, Vol. 2, ed. John Warwick Montgomery (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1967) p. 182. Preus points out that these Missionary organizations were for all practical purposes "cooperative ventures of different denominations."

They believed that the challenges of the mission of the Church among the lost of this world were so great that it was necessary to overlook doctrinal differences for a common cause: the winning of the world in their own generation.

Writing his "Foreward" to Johnston's World Evangelism and the Word of God, Billy Graham spoke of the 'tragic mistake of tying mission to unity'⁶⁹ in the early days of the ecumenical movement. The result, says Graham, was that "by 1961 ecumenism was the new focus of attention rather than missions and evangelism."⁷⁰ This study contends that it was tragic not only in 1910, but also during Graham's own ventures in co-operative evangelism in the mid-twentieth century and in Key 73 itself. Every weakening of the "whole counsel of God" to agreement on a few essentials weakens the "evangel" which is the message of the evangelist. We shall yet see whether the minimalism and pluralism of today's Evangelicals will bring a different result than did the experiment of their fathers in 1910.

⁶⁹ Billy Graham, "Forward," in World Evangelism, p. 7.

⁷⁰ Ibid. It is worth noting in this connection that ecumenism and missions have, in fact, been merged in many denominations. For example, the Lutheran Church in America now has a "Division for World Mission and Ecumenism" and the American Lutheran Church has a "Division for World Mission and Inter-Church Cooperation."

CHAPTER TWO

THE DOCTRINE OF CHURCH FELLOWSHIP IN CONTEMPORARY EVANGELICALISM

Who Are the Evangelicals

Before we are able to discuss the doctrine of church fellowship which characterizes contemporary evangelicalism in America, it is necessary to say a word about what is meant by "Evangelicals." Like beauty, the meaning of this term defies simple definition. There are almost as many definitions of Evangelicalism, as there are writers on the topic. In the brief articles on "Evangelical" and "Evangelicalism" in The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church, are helpful but oversimplified. Carl F. H. Henry says that the term "evangelical" categorizes those who

are committed to the inspired Scriptures as the divine rule of faith and practice. They affirm the fundamental doctrines of the Gospel, including the incarnation and the virgin birth of Christ, His sinless life, substitutionary atonement, and bodily resurrection as the ground of God's forgiveness of sinners, justification by faith alone, and the spiritual regeneration of all who trust in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ.¹

"Evangelicalism," says Donald Tinder, may

be distinguished from those of three other broad groupings within professing Christianity: nonevangelical Protestantism; Catholicism;

¹The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church, J. D. Douglas, gen. ed., s.v. "Evangelical" by Carl F. H. Henry.

and the so-called sects and cults. Evangelicalism has become the defender of the historically orthodox Protestant theologies. . . . Its Manifestation is primarily to be found within the . . . various Protestant denominational families, chiefly Lutheran, Anglican, Reformed (Presbyterian and Congregational), Mennonite (Anabaptist), Baptist, Quaker, Moravian, Dunker Brethren, Wesleyan . . . Plymouth Brethren, Campbellite, Adventist, Pentecostal, Bible Churches, and some of the Third World denominations rising indigenously or resulting from transdenominational missions. . . . [They] recognize each other by the common message of eternal salvation which they proclaim.²

In effect, then, Evangelicals see themselves as the heirs of the Protestant Reformation. Some have used the term as a synonym for conservative Protestant while others have used the term in a very loose way ("Christians in Fellowship with Billy Graham and Wheaton College"), or in ways so imprecise as to be almost meaningless. Some of those so included in the above articles would not claim this title for themselves. For example, Foy Valentine, a liberal Southeran Baptist who heads the SBC's Christian Life Commission has been quoted in Newsweek as insisting that the largest of all American Protestant bodies never belonged to the evangelical camp:

We are not evangelicals. . . . That's a Yankee word. They want to claim us because we are big and successful and growing every year. But we have our own traditions, our own hymns and more students in our seminaries than they have in all of theirs put together. We don't share their politics or their fussy fundamentalism, and we don't want to get involved in their theological witch-hunts.³

Since they demonstrate an entirely different approach to theology, to

²The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church, s.v. "Evangelicalism" by Donald Tinder.

³"Born Again! The Year of the Evangelicals," Newsweek, October 25, 1976, p. 76.

theology, to identify Confessional Lutherans as Evangelical causes more confusion than enlightenment.⁴

Modern Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism have always been reductionistic, going back to the modernist-fundamentalist controversy during which the so-called five fundamentals⁵ were considered a sufficient basis for fellowship: the verbal inspiration of the Bible, the virgin birth of Christ, His substitutionary atonement, His bodily resurrection, and His imminent and visible second coming.

These are: (1) the eternal preexistence of the Son as the second person of the one God; (2) the incarnation of God the Son in man as the divine-human person -- two natures in one person; (3) the virgin birth, the means by which God and Son entered into the human race and, without ceasing to be fully God, became also fully man; (4) the sinless life of Christ while sharing the life and experiences of alien men apart from sin; (5) the supernatural miracles of Christ as acts of his compassion and signs of his divine nature; (6) Christ's substitutionary atonement in which God did all that was needed to redeem man from sin and its consequences; (8) the bodily resurrection of Christ as the consummation of his redemptive work and the sign and seal of its validity; (9) the ascension and heavenly mission of the living Lord; (10) the bodily second coming of Christ at the end of the age; (11) the final righteous judgment of all mankind and the eternal kingdom of God; (12) the eternal punishment of the impenitent and disbelieving wicked of this world.⁶

⁴Because of this confusion, and because of the somewhat technical nature of the term "Evangelical" in this paper, as well as to avoid confusion with the historic use of the term with reference to Lutheranism we are capitalizing it throughout this work.

⁵George M. Marsden, Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism 1870-1925 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 117-18, 262, n. 30 and 278, n. 3.

⁶Kenneth S. Kantzer, "Unity and Diversity in Evangelical Faith" in The Evangelicals: What They Believe, Who They are, Where They are Changing, eds. David F. Wells and John D. Woodbridge (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1975), pp. 53-54.

Although he admits that the list cited above is by no means the only list which Evangelicals could put together, "No true evangelical would admit for a moment what anyone who clearly denied anyone of the above is evangelical in the full sense of the word."⁷

Robert E. Webber finds it useful to speak of "the evangelical spirit" in describing the subject of our study:

The evangelical spirit is the inward, passionate, and zealous personal commitment to the Christian faith which is born out of a deep conviction that faith in Jesus Christ, who died and was raised from the dead, produces life-changing effects in many and his culture. Evangelicals believe that this is the central message of Christianity, that it is the good news which gives meaning to life, that it has the power to heal the broken relationship that exists between man and God, man and his neighbor, man and nature, and man's separation from himself. This is grasped not merely as an objective fact, but also as a personal reality, changing persons from the inside, filling the believer with a sense of overwhelming joy, providing peace within the heart, offering a new moral purposefulness and a sense of the fulfillment of life.⁸

Two moods which often characterize the Evangelical spirit are evidenced in Webber's definition: First, the passion and zeal of the Evangelical to his dedication to Christ are eloquently stated; and two, the emphasis on the subjective, rather than the objective side of our faith is stressed in a way typical of the Pietistic-Revivalist tradition.

Webber is helpful also in tracing nine major movements since the Reformation which have produced the varying shades of contemporary Evangelicals:

Those include the Reformation, seventeenth-century orthodoxy (also known as Protestant scholasticism); Puritanism; pietism; revivalism;

⁷ Ibid., p. 54.

⁸ Robert E. Webber, Common Roots: A Call to Evangelical Maturity (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978, p. 17).

and the missionary movement; the pentecostal movement; dispensationalism; the fundamentalist movement; neoevangelicalism; and the charismatic movement.⁹

Later he has a useful chart which indicates fourteen Evangelical "subcultural groups" with their major emphasis and representative schools, institutions, persons and denominations which may be linked with the subculture.¹⁰

Webber's conclusion, not surprisingly, is that this term "evangelical" is "an extremely difficult work to pinpoint."¹¹ As we shall see as this chapter is developed, this is major weakness of the largest group of conservative Christians in the world, and explains both its inclination to overlook differences for common causes as well as its paradoxical tendency to divide. Like the liberal ecumenical movement, it often is based on an "agreement to disagree." The root of its weakness, it seems to us, is that it has no specific and no identifiable doctrinal or confessional character, and is more a mood than a confessional position. Sometimes one almost feels that in the eye of its adherents (those who claim the name), the term "Evangelical" is almost coterminous with the term "Christian" or "the company of the Redeemed." This quality also is behind the proneness to "fellowship" with all kinds of groups across the deepest of theological chasms. We shall see later,¹² also, that from this standpoint, "the radical basis of fellowship" advocated by the Verdict/Present Truth people is either the most consistent of all evangelical positions or is its reductio ad absurdum, depending on one's point of view.

⁹Ibid., p. 27-28. ¹⁰Ibid., p. 32. ¹¹Ibid., p. 33.

¹²See below, pp. 97-105.

Clark Pinnock demonstrated a perceptive insight into the practical consequences of Evangelicalism's non- and even anticredalism in an article on "Baptists and Biblical Authority," which is all the more important because Pinnock writes as a staunch Baptist, and at the stage of his career when he took a strong position on Biblical authority and inerrancy. He writes:

It might seem surprising that Baptists, for whom the Bible alone and not some creed is final authority, would succumb to a low view of the Bible. Though from one point of view, their non-creedalism might seem to allow this defection, yet that very same fact that Baptists hold to Scripture alone, ought to wed them indissolubly to a high view of it, having no other recourse. But it is less surprising when we consider the strong tendency of Baptists to locate truth in the saving encounter with Christ, rather than in the objective truth outside of themselves. . . . The effects of revivalism upon them prepared them, oddly enough, for them to be ravaged by liberal and later by neo-orthodox theology. For this simple reason, Liberalism and neo-orthodoxy also emphasize that the doctrines of Christianity are grounded in personal religious experience and not upon external authorities. Therefore, when untrained Baptists are confronted with subtle forms of liberal theology, classical or existential, they are not able to resist it intellectually, even though their instinctive reaction is hesitant. In the extent to which Baptists make their subjective experience of salvation, rather than the objective Word of God, the main weapon in their defense of the truth, in the same measure they are vulnerable to theological compromise. Needless to say, this is even more true of the worldwide Pentecostal movement whose emphasis on religious subjectivity is even more complete. It is this very same factor which explains how at the present time evangelicals in various traditions are finding it possible to define revelation in terms of "encounter" rather than objective inerrancy. History is repeating itself. It is terribly important to remember that the truth of our salvation lies outside the soul in the objective act and word of the gospel. If we do not remember it, we may very well lose our convictions about Scripture, and worse still our assurance of salvation itself. Luther's attitude seems much safer, at least to this Baptist, when he says, 'Unless I am convinced by the testimonies of the Holy Scriptures or evident reason . . . I am bound by the Scriptures . . . and my conscience has been taken captive by the Word of God; and I am neither able nor willing to recant, since it is neither safe nor right to act against conscience. God help me, Amen.'¹³

¹³Clark H. Pinnock, "Baptists and Biblical Authority," Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society, 17 (Fall, 1974):302-304.

In the light of the current controversy going on in the Southern Baptist Convention, Pinnock's comments take on added significance. Later, Pinnock would write,

There is no law in stone that says evangelicals cannot become liberals. There is, in fact a great deal of evidence that they have done so.¹⁴

The individualism of Evangelicalism is discussed by George Marsden in an essay analyzing the historical development of contemporary Evangelicalism.

Evangelicals today still tend to endorse something like a free enterprise system with respect to the primacy of individual religious experience and the relation of individuals to churches. To practice the primary unit of authority has often been regarded as the individual conscience informed by the Bible. Churches and congregations therefore have been viewed essentially as voluntary associations that individuals are free to join and leave. Thus although American evangelicals have inherited some denominational loyalties, they have generally lacked clear principles for such group authority. The strengths of this arrangement (or lack thereof) have been that the dynamic of the movement has always been able to find open channels for expression and that individualistic approaches--particularly as they emphasize individual experience--continue to have great appeal to many types of Americans. The weaknesses are that the idea of the church is amorphous, unity and cooperation within the movement are difficult to maintain, and there is little formal authority for checks on aberrant teaching or individual spiritual pretensions.¹⁵

When every Christian and every congregation is a law unto itself, and when the emphasis is on experience rather than God's Word and promise, how may truth be maintained and how may aberrations be contained?

¹⁴ Clark H. Pinnock, "Making Theology Relevant," Christianity Today, May 29, 1981, p. 49, cited by David Becker, "Christianity Today's 'Balanced' View in the Inerrance Debate," Christian News, June 7, 1982, p. 7.

¹⁵ George M. Marsden, "From Fundamentalism to Evangelicalism: A Historical Analysis," in The Evangelicals, eds. David F. Wells and John D. Woodbridge (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1975), p. 136.

Dispensationalists and Church Fellowship

Dispensationalism may be an exception to the rule that Evangelicals are apt to support minimalistic creedal or doctrinal statements, for compared to most Evangelicals, they often state their position in relatively detailed doctrinal statements. For example, Dallas Theological Seminary, the intellectual center of Dispensationalist Evangelicalism, has a twenty-one article doctrinal statement, to which all faculty and student must adhere.¹⁶ It is uncertain to what extent this is a test of fellowship, however, since Dallas faculty members and alumni view themselves as Evangelicals, write for Evangelical publications and belong to Evangelical organizations, and many Evangelical educational institutions count Dallas graduates as among their finest faculty members. Yet, seminary president, John F. Walvoord, in reply to an article by ex-Dallas faculty member, Bruce K. Waltke, entitled, "What Does a Seminary Believe?" write a letter to Eternity which pointed out the flaws in a "bare bones" doctrinal statement.

Any Christian institution which attempts to maintain theological orthodoxy with only the bare bones of a few fundamental doctrines, has always departed from the faith, because such a point of view is insufficient to maintain orthodoxy. What is required is more than a few fundamentals, but rather a system of theology which is consistent with the Bible and self-consistent within itself. Most of our new prominent liberal universities were founded by godly men who left an insufficient theological base for continued faithfulness to the truth. While students are often flattered with the thought they are competent to establish their own system of theology on the basis of a year or two of study, the result too often is that their formal theological education ends in confusion and uncertainty on many important doctrines.¹⁷

¹⁶ Dallas Theological Seminary Catalog, 1978-1979, pp. 160-67.

¹⁷ John R. Walvoord, letter to the editor, Eternity, July-August, 1981, p. 42.

Although Lutherans would not grant that dispensationalism is a system "consistent with the Bible," his point is well-taken.

Harold Lindsell and the Battle for the Bible

The whole question of who qualifies for the name "evangelical" surfaced with new urgency after the Editor of Christianity Today, Harold Lindsell, published his The Battle for the Bible,¹⁸ which raised questions about who may rightly sail under that banner. Lindsell's book raised an outcry from those who charged that by raising the issue of inerrancy as a test of fellowship among Evangelicals, Lindsell was dividing the Evangelical movement. A sequel, The Bible in the Balance, replied to the charge of divisiveness by sounding a clarion call for theological courage in the face of manifest error:

The first and most obvious response is that I did not create the problem; I only drew attention to the existence. Those who hold to a viewpoint which contradicts the historic position of Christiendom, and their denominational doctrinal statements as well as those of their educational institutions, are the ones who have brought about the new reality. On the other hand, I do not run away from the fact that there is a sense in which raising the issue is divisive. If to stand for the truth of Scripture is divisive, then I am divisive. So be it. And if a Christian must choose between theological compromise, which will hurt both the faith and believers who are subverted by error, or silence, inaction, and consent to error, then the answer is plain enough.¹⁹

Lindell is raising the issue of just who is the "troubler of Israel" in a time of controversy, a principle which must be learned well by pastors dealing with moral or doctrinal discipline problems, District Presidents

¹⁸ Harold Lindsell, The Battle for the Bible (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976).

¹⁹ Harold Lindsell, The Bible in the Balance (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979), pp. 16-17.

working with erring pastors or the denomination in its relationship with other church bodies: error and sin produce division, not spokesmen for the truth!

Keying into criticism from people such as Clark Pinnock, who asserted that Lindsell's book "threatened to create a new wave of bitterness and controversy on account of its militant tone and sweeping attacks,"²⁰ and from Setphen T. Davis, professor at Claremont Men's College, who "wants Francis Schaeffer and myself to accept the onus . . . for taking what he terms a divisive stand," Lindsell replied:

That is not the real question. The real question is whether the view Dr. Schaeffer and I have opted for is true or false. If it is a false view, then we are indeed guilty of divisiveness. But if it is a true view of the Bible, then we would be faithless servants of Christ if we did not press for the acceptance of it. To press for truth cannot fairly be condemned as divisive, nor can it be labelled as narrow-minded sectarianism.²¹

Lindsell's successor as editor of Christianity Today, Kenneth S. Kantzer made this statement about the relationship of one's stand on inerrancy and fellowship:

Inerrancy, the most sensitive of all issues to be dealt with in the years immediately ahead, should not be made a test for Christian fellowship within the body of Christ. The evangelical watchery is "Believer's only, but all believers." Evangelicals did not construct the church and do not set its boundaries. Christ is Lord and he is Lord over his church. The bounds of fellowship are determined by our relationship to Christ and by the life we share in him by grace through faith alone.²²

²⁰ Clark Pinnock, "The Inerrancy Debate Among the Evangelicals" (Mimeographed paper, May 1976), p. 1, cited by Lindsell, Balance, p. 39.

²¹ Balance, p. 59.

²² Kenneth S. Kantzer, "Evangelicals and the Inerrancy Question," Christianity Today, April 21, 1978, p. 18. The slogan "For Believers only, but for all believers" is the motto of the Evangelical Free Church in America, sponsor of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School of which

Here we have a classic statement of the typical Evangelical position which makes the practice of fellowship co-terminous with all who are Christians. At this point, of course, he must include within his boundaries of fellowship also the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches, unless he is prepared to exclude them from Christendom.

In a rejoinder to Kantzer, Lindsell makes an interesting observation about fellowship:

Unfortunately, many of my brothers have not defined what they mean by the term fellowship. . . . Since there are all kinds of theological requirements laid down for admission to different groups, why should it appear strange that some should require a belief in an inerrant Scripture for admission? And whoever is excluded from any group for whatever theological reason is bound to feel that fellowship has been affected. Thus it seems to me that saying inerrancy should not be made a test for Christian fellowship means very little when those who say this do make it a test for admission to institutions, societies, for ordination, etc.²³

Dr. Lindsell renders a service to the Church when he underscores the issue of the relative importance of peace and purity in the church. Which has the priority? Defending his Battle for the Bible, and the outcry it caused in many circles (including in our own LC-MS), Lindsell writes:

The assertion has been made that unity will be fractured by my book. It raises the old question of the peace and the purity of the church. This usually comes down to the question of whether a Christian group, be it a denomination, an institution, or a parachurch operation should ever have its peace fractured. The answer depends upon one's opinion about the body as an inclusivist organism. In other words, is there anything in the Christian faith of such magnitude that its

Kantzer served as Dean for several years. LC-MS theologian John Warwick Montgomery received his first claim to fame there, and perhaps this may have influenced his own position on church fellowship. (See below, page 56).

²³Lindsell, Balance, pp. 313, 315.

denial is a cause for division? For example, can a church include in its fellowship theists and atheists? I can only say that when the purity of the church or group is the issue, then peace must play a secondary role. Peace at the expense of theological purity means a denial of what is foundational to the existence of the body.

Certainly the peace of the body should not be disturbed by differences of opinion about inconsequential items. But if the issue is of signal importance, there is no choice. One must defend the purity of the body even though the peace of the body will be disturbed as a consequence. When the physician discovers an incurable cancer in the patient's body, he must disturb the peace of the body by radical surgery to remove the cancer. This figure is apt with regard to the Christian body when it has been infected with theological or spiritual cancer.²⁴

Carl F. H. Henry

In an article that treated both the growing influence of and the areas of disagreement and confusion among Evangelicals, Carl Henry listed nine steps the evangelical movement should take under the Holy Spirit's guidance to "move into broader usefulness" in the world. The eighth was:

Ecumenism: Beyond a defensive attitude toward World Council of Churches ecumenism to vigorous advocacy of a convincing Bible ecumenism. Especially in these days of a moribund WCC, the declaration of biblical thinking is critical. This should be applied to practical areas so evangelicals can act in unity around a core of accepted biblical essentials while being magnanimously tolerant of secondary differences."²⁵

The irony here is that the progenitors of the World Council of Churches, many of whom were the organizers of the World Mission Conference at Edinburgh in 1910, would have agreed fully with the statement. We have already seen from Arthur Johnston's World Evangelism and the

²⁴Ibid., pp. 17-18.

²⁵Carl F. H. Henry, "Evangelicals: Out of the Closet but Going Nowhere?" Christianity Today, January 4, 1980, p. 22.

Word of God the tragic consequences of such views.²⁶ Since Henry was one of the critics of Lindsell's Battle for the Bible,²⁷ due to the distraction and disturbance it made within evangelical ranks, the question and disturbance it made within evangelical ranks, the question of just what are "secondary differences" of which we ought to be "magnanimously tolerant" becomes especially significant. More on this in Chapter Five when we deal with Henry's "Somehow, Let's Get Together Editorial" which provided the inception for Key 73.

Billy Graham

The other major figure behind what was to become Key 73 was Billy Graham. Later we will have something to say about the great evangelist's cooperative evangelistic practices. Let us suffice now with a couple of statements which reveal the philosophy which lies behind Graham's practices. In his "Opening Greetings" to the Berlin World Congress on Evangelism, Graham declared

Where differences of class or race, or secondary doctrines or trivial patterns of behavior divide us, I am convinced that the Holy Spirit will be limited in using us for the evangelization of the world in our generation. Christ has transcended these differences by giving us a higher and ultimate sense of loyalty--a new center of gravitation--a new status that makes other distinctions trivial and meaningless. . . . But now all are Christians and so if any man be in Christ, old categories are passed away--all things become new.²⁸

²⁶ Harvey T. Hoekstra's book The World Council of Churches and the Demise of Evangelism (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1979) provides an account of what happened to world missions under the WCC.

²⁷ Lindsell, Balance, pp. 31-36.

²⁸ Billy Graham, "Opening Greetings," One Race, One Gospel, One Task, World Congress on Evangelism Official Reference Volumes, eds. Carl F. H. Henry and W. Stanley Mooneyham, Vol. 1 (Minneapolis, MN: World Wide Publications, 1967), p. 9.

Note the implications of this statement: how is it possible that the Holy Spirit, who moved the holy writers to give us the Scriptures to be "limited" by holding fast to issues which are clearly defined in His Book? Or, would he consider these "secondary doctrines" to be open questions on which the Scriptures are unclear? Further light on what he means by secondary matters are seen in his refusal to make a clear stand on the creationist/evolutionary controversy and on the "battle for the Bible." At the 1976 triennial missions conference of Intervarsity Christian Fellowship at Urbana, Illinois, Graham called on evangelicals to "accept unity in diversity" and avoid divisiveness over such matters as Biblical inerrancy, charismatic phenomena, and political activism.²⁹

Francis Schaeffer

One prominent figure on the evangelical scene today is Francis A. Schaeffer, the founder of L'Abri in Switzerland, and a highly regarded apologist for the Christian faith among youthful members of the drug culture, and drop-outs of society. His account of the lessons learned during the days of the modernist-fundamentalist controversy in his own Presbyterian Church should be carefully pondered by all who would defend the faith against liberalism while trying to maintain a loving and compassionate spirit even in controversy. The ministry of this colorful and eloquent man is a gift of God. Listen to his grand affirmation of the meaning of the practice of truth:

²⁹ Religious News Service, "Accept 'Unity in Diversity,' Graham Urges Evangelicals," January 6, 1977.

Thus it must be said that in spite of (and even because of) one's commitment to evangelism and cooperation among Christians, I can visualize times when the only way to make plain the seriousness of what is involved in regard to a service or an activity where the Gospel is going to be preached is not to accept an official part, if men whose doctrine is known to be an enemy are going to be invited to officially participate. In an age of relativity the practice of truth when it is costly is the only way to cause the world to take seriously our protestations concerning truth. Cooperation and unity that do not lead to purity of life and purity of doctrine are just as faulty and incomplete as an orthodoxy which does not lead to a concern for, and a reaching out towards, those who are lost.³⁰

And yet Schaeffer's inconsistency which is absolutely uncompromising in its opposition to every kind of liberalism on the one hand, while manifesting the broadest latitudinarianism in its attitude toward conservative Christians with whom he has serious differences is a prototype of the kind of Evangelicalism discussed in this study. Schaeffer's weakness consists in failing to see that heterodoxy is not a matter of black and white categories with liberals and secular humanists in one box with every type of "Evangelical" in another, but rather a continuum from one end of the spectrum to the other. The stance of the Lutheran Confessors which insists in agreement in doctrine and all of the articles as prerequisites to fellowship is much less subject to failure.

Schaeffer has written movingly about the necessity of simultaneously exhibiting a clear doctrinal stand and a "real, observable love that the world can see." This writer can still hear this great defender of the faith at the Lutheran Congress on Loyalty to the Scriptures and the Confessions in Chicago during the hot summer days in late August and early September 1970, when Schaeffer appealed almost with tears to

³⁰ Francis Schaeffer, The God Who Is There (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1968), p. 169.

orthodox Lutherans who were not at all sure whether their Synods would really stay with the Confessions of the Lutheran Church or gradually give way to some form of liberalism and humanism:

The heart of this is to show forth the love of God and the holiness of God simultaneously. If we show either of these without the other we do not exhibit the character of God, but a character . . . for the world to see. If we stress the love of God without the holiness of God, it turns out only to be compromise. If on the other hand, we stress the holiness of God without the love of God, we practice something that is hard, something that lacks beauty.³¹

It is necessary, Schaeffer declared,

To practice two biblical principles. The first is the principle of the practice of the purity of the visible church. . . . The second principle is the practice of an observable love and oneness among all true Christians. The emphasis here is upon true Christians. The Mark of the Christian stresses from John 13:34-35 that, according to Jesus himself, the world has the right to decide whether we are true Christians. John 17:21 provides something even more sobering in that here Jesus gives the world the right to judge whether the Father has sent the Son on the basis of whether the world sees love among all true Christians.³²

Schaeffer's instructions on how to resolve the tension between these two principles of "the orthodoxy of doctrine and the orthodoxy of community" are very helpful as we develop a theology of fellowship. On the one hand, he argues,

We must call for the discipline of those who take a position which is not according to the Scriptures. But at the same time we must visibly love them as we speak and write about them. . . . We must say that these men are desperately wrong and require discipline but do so in terms that show that it is not merely the flesh speaking. This is beyond me, but it is not beyond the work of the Holy Spirit.³³

³¹Francis A. Schaeffer, "A Protestant Evangelical Speaks to His Lutheran Friends in a Day of Theological Crisis," in Evangelical Directions for the Lutheran Church, eds. Erich Kiehl and Waldo J. Werning (Chicago: Lutheran Congress, 1970), p. 143.

³²Ibid.

³³Ibid., p. 146.

A little later he cautions "beware of the habits you learn in controversy." But on the other hand he emphasizes the need to have a meaningful orthodoxy which rules out error: "We must have courage to make no compromise with liberal theology and especially with neo-orthodox existential theology."³⁴

Orthodox Lutherans will agree here, but must be very careful: Schaeffer is a reductionist when it comes to the matter of when differences make a difference, that is, on when to call for discipline or to withhold fellowship. He is more in tune with Zwingli than Luther. Listen to his description of the difference between conservatives who left the mainline denominations in the twenties and thirties and those who did not.

This results in two different tendencies. First, those who come out tend to become hard; they tend to be absolutists even in the lesser points of doctrine. They tend to lose their Christian love for those who did not come out. Men who have been friends for years suddenly become estranged.

Second, on the other hand, those who stay in have an opposite tendency toward a growing latitudinarianism, and this has happened in evangelical circles in this country. They tend to go from ecclesiastical latitudinarianism to cooperative comprehensiveness. Thus they still talked about truth but tend less and less to practice truth. The next step comes very quickly, say in two generations. If you stay in a denomination that is completely dominated by liberals and you give in to ecclesiastical inclusiveness which becomes a cooperative latitudinarianism, there is a tendency to drift into doctrinal comprehensiveness and especially to let down on a clear view of Scripture.³⁵

³⁴Schaeffer, "Form and Freedom in the Church," in Let the Earth Hear His Voice, International Congress on World Evangelization, Lausanne, Switzerland, ed. by J. D. Douglass (Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1975), p. 368. Hereafter cited as LEHHV. See also p. 371.

³⁵Schaeffer, "Lutheran Friend," p. 148.

In a Christianity Today article reflecting on his experiences with liberalism and divisions over doctrine, Schaeffer elaborated on this principle:

If one accepts an ecclesiastical latitudinarianism it is easy to step into a cooperative latitudinarianism that easily encompasses doctrine, including one's view of Scripture. This is what happened historically. Out of the ecclesiastical latitudinarianism of the thirties and the forties has come a let down with regard to Scripture in certain areas of evangelicalism in the eighties. Large sections of evangelicalism act as though it makes no real difference whether we hold the historic view of Scripture or the existential methodology that says the Bible is authoritative when it teaches religious things but not when it touches on what is historic or scientific or on such things as the male/female relationship.

Not all who stayed in the liberal-dominated denominations have done this, by any means. I do not believe, however, that those who made the choice to stay in no matter what happens can escape a latitudinarian mentality. They will struggle to paper over the difference regarding Scripture so as to keep an external veneer of evangelical unity--when indeed there is no unity at the crucial point of Scripture. When doctrinal latitudinarianism sets in, we can be sure both from church history and from personal observation that in one or two generations those who are taught by the churches and schools that hold this attitude will lose still more, and the line between evangelical and liberal will be lost.³⁶

This study confirms the truth of Schaeffer's judgment here, but he does not go far enough and leaves in the seeds of another opening to error by his own latitudinarianism. The problem is not resolved by merely determining the differences between liberals and conservatives, but between truth and error. The "principle of the practice of observable love" must always characterize evangelical discipline, but other errors are as serious in many ways as those of liberalism as Luther, Chemnitz, Walther and others have clearly demonstrated.

³⁶ Francis A. Schaeffer, "Schaeffer Reflects on 50 Years of Denominational Ins and Outs," Christianity Today, April 10, 1981, p. 29.

Schaeffer rightly indicates the relationship between cooperation and "doctrinal comprehensiveness," so that if differing church bodies or teachers cooperate in a project or institution, they will soon come to the point of accepting one another's doctrinal positions.

As strong as the Presbyterian defender of the faith is on the need to avoid fellowship with liberalism, he believes that all Christians who hold to the full verbal inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture should unite in the practice of fellowship on that basis. In the following passage he is speaking to Lutherans at the 1970 Lutheran Congress:

We need each other. Let us keep our doctrinal distinctives. You are Lutheran, be Lutheran. I am Reformed. It is by choice for me from my study of Scripture. Let us keep our distinctives. And let us talk to each other as we keep our distinctives.

But in a day like ours let us keep the hierarchy of things in their proper place. The real chasm is not between Presbyterians and everybody else; it is not between the Lutherans and everybody else. The real chasm is between those who have bowed to the living God and to the verbal propositional communication of God's Word, the Scriptures, and those who have not.

As a Bible-believing Presbyterian I feel very close to you. I feel no separation in Christ. I come here and I shake your hand and I speak as though I have known you forever. If we got down to certain points of doctrine we would differ, but the things I have spoken are not rooted in Presbyterianism or Lutheranism; they are rooted in historical Christianity and the scriptural faith. I feel close to you as Bible-believing Lutherans. This is where the division lies. In a day like ours, when the world is on fire, let us be careful to keep things in proper order. Let us find ways to show the world that while we do not minimize, and we maintain our distinctives, yet that we who have bowed before God's verbalized, propositional communication--the Bible--are brothers in Christ. This we must do in the face of liberal theology.³⁷

Confessional Lutherans assent to the proposition that Bible-believing Lutherans have much in common with Bible-believing Presbyterians, Baptists, or other Christians. We rejoice in what we have in

³⁷ Schaeffer, "Lutheran Friends," pp. 149-50.

common and when we find ourselves on the same side in a given theological controversy. But we dare never ignore some differences for the sake of other areas of agreement or for a common cause. In some ways, conservative Lutherans have more in common with conservative Presbyterians than they do with liberal Lutherans. But pan-evangelical fellowship is just as erroneous as pan-Lutheran fellowship. Heterodoxy is heterodoxy wherever it is found and on whatever article of faith it is revealed.

We find a parallel situation in the fundamentalist-modernist controversies of a generation or so ago. Milton Rudnick points out that in that controversy, just as in today's "battle for the Bible," Missouri Synod Lutheran conservatives felt a real kinship with the Fundamentalists, feeling sympathy, approval of much of their literature and admiration for their leaders.

However, this rejoicing was always from the sidelines. Missouri Synod Lutherans could not identify completely with the Fundamentalists or accept their views and efforts uncritically. They remained profoundly aware of the distinctions and divisions between themselves and the Fundamentalists.³⁸

Milton Rudnick cites J. T. Mueller on why these orthodox Lutherans could not embrace Fundamentalism wholeheartedly:

Nevertheless, after all has been said, there remains a sharp difference between Calvinistic Fundamentalism and confessional Lutheranism --a difference not in degree, but in kind. This difference must not be overlooked. Honesty compels one to call attention to it. Indeed, the very desire of aiding the Fundamentalists in their struggle makes it necessary. For truth will be victorious only if it is accepted, confessed, and preached in its full glory and absolute purity. The one paramount blessing which we, as true friends, with the Fundamentalists is the clear visualizing of divine truth, the

³⁸ Milton L. Rudnick, Fundamentalism and the Missouri Synod, a Historical Study of Their Interaction and Mutual Influence (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1966), p. 75.

unqualified acceptance of God's Word, and the absolute rejection of all erroneous doctrines which erring reason may suggest. May the light come to them as it came to Martin Luther when he fought liberalism in the papacy, and may they, as did he, center all they believe and teach in the great doctrines of sola gratia, sola fide, sola Scriptura. It is then only that the differences between Lutheranism will be eliminated.³⁹

The paradox of Schaeffer's position is that he can see where cooperation and fellowship without doctrinal agreement leads in some areas, but not in others. For example, in another publication Schaeffer demonstrates the weakness in the "new Pentecostalism" in basing fellowship on external signs rather than on doctrinal context.

The new Pentecostals put their emphasis on the external signs themselves instead of on content, and they make these external signs the test for fellowship and acceptance. In other words, as long as you have the signs, you are accepted as one of "us." You are "in."

The rub, of course, is this: There are unitarian groups and Buddhist groups who also have these external signs. Furthermore, any external sign can be easily duplicated or counterfeited. Consequently when we face this situation, we must realize that the new Pentecostalism is very different from the old. . . .

One can also see a parallel between the new Pentecostals and the liberals. The liberal theologians don't believe in content or in religious truth. They are really existentialists using theological, Christian terminology. Consequently, not believing in truth, they can enter into fellowship with any other experience-oriented group using religious language.

A dismissal or lessening of content has occurred in the new pentecostalism. Instead of accepting a person on the basis of what he believes, which has always been the Christian way, it's, "Do you have these eternal manifestations?" Questions which have been considered important enough to cause crucial differences, all the way back to the Reformation and before, who are swept under the rug. On this level too, as with the liberals, it is as though people can believe opposite things on important points of doctrine, and both can be right. Or perhaps, it is simply better to say, content does not matter as long as there are external signs and religious emotion.⁴⁰

³⁹ John Theodore Mueller, Theological Monthly (August-September 1924), p. 243. Cited by Rudnick, p. 79.

⁴⁰ Francis A Schaeffer, The New Super-Spirituality (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1972), pp. 15-16. See also his Escape from

Schaeffer is correct here. But why would he then consider matters like baptism, the Lord's Supper, conversion, eschatology, and other matters unimportant? Therefore, we sadly conclude that Schaeffer's teaching is also reductionistic.

The Pentecostal-Charismatic Movement

Since we have allowed Schaeffer to raise the subject at this point, we will now treat the approach to fellowship which is typical of the Pentecostal-Charismatic Movement. This is important for our study since the General Superintendent of the Assemblies of God was Chairman of the Executive Committee of Key 73. In an article published in Christianity Today, J. Rodman Williams, President of the Melodyland School of Theology in Anaheim, California, made these comments on the fellowship teaching of the charismatic movement:

One of the most striking features of the charismatic movement is the resurgence of a deep unity of spirit across traditional and denominational barriers. For though the movement is occurring within many historic churches--and often is bringing about unity among formerly discordant groups--the genius of the movement is its transdenominational or ecumenical quality.

This may be noted . . . from the composition of the charismatic group that meets for prayer and ministry. It is not at all unusual to find people fellowshipping and worshipping together from traditions as diverse as classical Pentecostal, mainline Protestant, and Roman Catholic. What unite them [sic] are matters already mentioned: a renewed sense of the liveliness of Christian faith, a common expectancy of the manifestation of spiritual gifts for the edification of the community, and, a deepened sense of the presence and power of God. The overarching and undergirding unity brought about by the Holy Spirit has now become much more important than the particular denomination.

Reason (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1968), pp. 76-77 for evangelical reductionism on the basis of "What matters is an encounter with Jesus, . . ." not propositional truth.

Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox charismatics alike are going back far behind the theological, liturgical, and cultural barriers that have long separated them into a recovery of the primitive dynamic of the early ecclesia. . . . The charismatic movement has, I believe, been well described by Dr. John Mackay as "the chief hope of the ecumenical tomorrow."⁴¹

Such fellowship is based not on doctrinal content, as Schaeffer pointed out above, but entirely on subjective experience. Williams says as much himself:

This ecumenism is not an achievement derived from a common theological statement and agreed on polity, or an acceptance of differing liturgical expressions. It is rather that which is given through Jesus Christ in the renewed unity of the Holy Spirit.⁴²

Many charismatics argue that the charismatic movement is the real ecumenical movement. David du Plessis, the movement's "Mr. Pentecost," made that kind of claim to Philip Potter, then head of the World Council of Churches. "My dear Philip, we [charismatics] are so far ahead of you, we can't even see if you're still coming."⁴³

In the light of such contentions, we are not surprised that the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) of the Lutheran Church -Missouri Synod should make this aspect of the charismatic movement in its 1972 Report:

It is not in keeping with the Lutheran Confessions to maintain when Christians are agreed on the theology of the Holy Spirit or share the experience of baptism in the Holy Spirit, there exists a sufficient basis for the exercise of Christian fellowship. Although Lutherans may feel a close affinity with other Christians who agree regarding the experience of baptism in the Spirit, they are reminded that the

⁴¹Rodman Williams, "A Profile of the Charismatic Movement," Christianity Today, February 28, 1975, p. 11.

⁴²Ibid., p. 20.

⁴³John Maust, "Charismatic Leaders Speaking Faith for Their Own Healing," Christianity Today, April 4, 1980, p. 44.

Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod seeks agreement in the doctrine of the Gospel in all its articles, and in the right use of the holy sacraments as the Scriptural basis for the practice of fellowship. All Biblical doctrine is taught by the Holy Spirit. Unionistic worship with those who deny doctrines of the Holy Scripture dishonors the Holy Spirit and fails to give proper Christian witness to the erring brother.⁴⁴

John Warwick Montgomery

Since he describes himself as an Evangelical and moves in their circles, this study must include the apologist and lawyer-theologian Dr. John Warwick Montgomery. He is of interest particularly because he is also a confessional Lutheran. Montgomery's notion of church fellowship surfaces in his essay "Evangelical Unity and Contemporary Ecumenicity," where he writes:

To my way of thinking, "evangelicals" are bound together not by virtue of being members of the same Protestant confessional stream, but by their firm adherence to certain common theological tenets and emphases. These latter would summarize as follows:

- (1) Conviction that the Bible alone is God's objectively inerrant revelation to man;
- (2) Subscription to the Ecumenical creeds as expressing the Trinitarian heart of biblical religion;⁴⁵

⁴⁴The Charismatic Movement and Lutheran Theology, A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the LC-MS, January 1972.

⁴⁵Montgomery brings this question to mind: Would Baptist churches subscribe to the Nicene Creed with its confession "one Baptism for the remission of sins?" By the way, it is interesting to note the extent that the Evangelical-Fundamentalist movement has become Baptist in its theology, even though many of those who "came out of" the mainline denominations early in this century during that "Battle for the Bible" were conservative Congregationalists, Presbyterians and Methodists. Yet the Bible Colleges, Seminaries, and mission agencies of the Evangelical movement are to a large extent staffed with pastors and professors who hold a Baptist view of the sacraments. Examples of schools which are formally non-denominational and were organized by non-Baptists but which now are predominately Baptist in their theology are Moody Bible Institute and Dallas Theological Seminary.

- (3) Belief that the Reformation confessions adequately convey the soteriological essence of the scriptural message, namely, salvation by grace alone through faith in the atoning death and resurrection of the God-man Jesus Christ;
- (4) Stress upon personal, dynamic, living commitment to Christ and resultant prophetic witness for Him to the unbelieving world; and
- (5) A strong eschatological perspective.⁴⁶

In a footnote to the same section, Montgomery declares, "I look with a jaundiced eye on endeavors to persuade evangelicals that one particular confessional orientation conveys the "true" nature of evangelicalism."⁴⁷ The problem with Montgomery's assertion is that this is precisely what the confessors were doing when they set forth their positions in the Symbols of Lutheranism!⁴⁸ Is Montgomery merely saying that of the options available, Lutheranism is the one he finds most acceptable?

Montgomery goes on:

Whether a member of a large "inclusivist" church or of a small "separated" body, whether Anglican or Pentecostal, an evangelical regards himself in home territory where the above theological atmosphere exists. Indeed, if we are to be ruthlessly honest, he ordinarily finds more genuine Christian fellowship with evangelicals outside his own church body than with non-evangelicals within it. Why? Because of a firm, uncompromising stand on the objective authority of Scripture and the necessity of personal salvation through the subjective acceptance of the Christ of Scripture appeared to the evangelical as the bedrock of Christianity itself.⁴⁹

Fellowship with both Anglicans and Pentecostals on the basis of a common view of Scripture? Thus we note a remarkable fact: the man who coined the phrase, "Gospel Reductionism," which became widely used in the 1960s

⁴⁶ John Warwick Montgomery, Ecumenicity, Evangelicals and Rome (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1969), pp. 16-17.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 17, note 6.

⁴⁸ See Chapter III, below, p. 105-151

⁴⁹ Montgomery, pp. 17-18,

and 70s during the controversy in Scripture in the LC-MS is calling for fellowship on the basis of a "Scripture reductionism."⁵⁰

He continues:

Evangelicals such as this writer are, therefore, in many ways naturally ecumenical. Conditioned historically by the inter-confessional American experience of the frontier revivals, evangelicals in this country have found it very difficult to push other evangelical believers beyond the pale, regardless of the "aberrational" views they may entertain on minor doctrines or the particular denominational affiliations they may hold. The twentieth century has accelerated the tempo of evangelically ecumenical contacts:

The growth and organization of American denominations have put evangelicals of various confessional persuasions into each other's backyards from suburbia to the foreign mission field; and the increasing pressures of the secularism and unbelief in the mid-twentieth century have acted as a strong incentive to support and more effective witness.⁵¹

Montgomery is right when he traces the pressures which produced the indifference to doctrinal distinctives so typical of the evangelical mind-set. However, he seems to have fallen into the "sociologists fallacy," ("what is ought to be"). The fact that we may understand why a certain position is held sociologically, psychologically, and historically does not mean that it is a Scripturally sound position, let alone one that is in accord with the Lutheran Confessions.

On the other hand, in this same essay, Montgomery correctly reminds us of the necessity to penetrate the surface issues to look at the "theological motifs" which give rise to doctrinal differences. He writes:

When compared with the "tender mind" approach of the "ecumaniac" ("churches that commune together stay together," etc.), the evangelical attitude toward doctrinal matters is highly commendatory, for

⁵⁰ Montgomery, Crisis in Lutheran Theology, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1967), 1:120.

⁵¹ Montgomery, Ecumenicity, p. 18.

it both takes the Great Commission seriously ("teach them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you"-Matt. 28: 20) and manifests a properly "tough-minded" appreciation for the law of contradiction. But the evangelical concern with doctrinal differences is not without its dangers--though these are not the ones upon which religious liberals are wont to ring the changes (lack of love, etc.). Trouble arises when, in concentrating on particular doctrine problems, evangelicals neglect to penetrate behind the surface issues to the basic theological motifs that give the specific doctrines their force. The trouble is not that evangelicals are too occupied with doctrinal truth, but that they are too ready to skim the surface of doctrinal issues!⁵²

Montgomery's application of Anders Nygren's "Motiforsking (Motif research)" is useful in trying to understand why theologians come to different conclusions in exegeting certain passages.

The most important task of those engaged in the modern scientific study of religion and theological research is to reach an inner understanding of the different forms of religion in the light of their different fundamental motifs. . . . We must try to see what is the basic idea or the driving power of the religion concerned, or what it is that gives it its character as a whole and communicates to all its parts their special content and colour.⁵³

John R. W. Stott

The famous British Evangelical, Dr. John R. W. Stott, provides evidence that the basis of what is divisive and not divisive in the Evangelical movement is not whether it is clearly taught in Scripture but whether there are Christians who disagree on the issue. Stott asserts:

First, it does not mean that we expect all Christians to dot every 'i' and cross every 't' of our particular system. Our understanding of what is fundamental concerns what is plainly biblical. However, we recognize that the Bible does not speak on every issue with a clear and unmistakable voice. These matters, therefore,

⁵² Anders Nygren, Agape and Eros, trans. Philip S. Watson (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953), p. 35, cited by Montgomery, Ecumenicity, p. 22.

⁵³ Ibid.

including questions like the mode of baptism, the character of the ministry and forms of worship, cannot be regarded as fundamental. Indeed, any subject on which equally devout, equally humble, equally Bible-believing and Bible-studying Christians or churches reach different conclusions, must be considered secondary not primary, peripheral not central. We must not insist on these as fundamentals, but as so-called adiaphora or "things indifferent." We must respect each other's integrity and acknowledge the legitimacy of each other's interpretations. We cannot do better than follow the maxim which was enunciated by a certain Ruper Meldenius at the beginning of the seventeenth century and quoted with approval by Richard Baxter: 'In necessariis unitas, in nonnecessariis (or dubiis) libertas, in omnibus caritas.' That is, "in fundamentals unity, in non-fundamentals (or 'doubtful things') liberty, in all things charity.'⁵⁴

Stott begs the question, however, for the issue is not whether sincere Christians disagree on a certain Biblical doctrine but whether it is clearly taught in the Word of God. Notice the subjectivism of Stott's argument: "any subject on which equally devout, equally humble, equally Bible-believing and Bible-studying Christians" disagree "must be considered secondary." Drop Stott's qualification "Bible-believing" and his assertion could be made by the world's most liberal ecumenist to defend the widest and most pluralistic approach to unity merely on the basis of "agreeing to disagree." However, when Kantzer (see page 50 above) and others argue that inerrancy is not a test for fellowship they in effect are dropping the "Bible-believing" qualification.

One may predict, therefore, that with this restraint removed the contemporary evangelical movement may be only a generation or two removed from the most liberal rationalism or existentialism, thus following the same path to theological disintegration that the seventeenth century Pietists underwent when they succumbed to rationalism or when

⁵⁴ John R. W. Stott, Christ the Controversialist (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1970), p. 44.

nineteenth century revivalism gave rise to the liberalism which still plagues many "mainline" Protestant denominations, or, to select a further analogy, when the moderate evangelicals who organized the Edinburgh Mission Conference became the founders of the World Council of Churches.

J. Valentin Andreae, lay theologian and direct descendant of an author of the Formula of Concord, has written incisively on this subject in an unpublished manuscript in my possession. Andreae notes the kinship of liberal and conservative evangelicals on a subjective test of truth and argues that such

Subjectivist enthusiasm brings Fundamentalists to a position similar to that of some deniers of the Bible's verbal inspiration . . . in the case of those believers in the Gospel who nevertheless accept the historical-critical method as objective Bible scholarship and are therefore forced to retreat into the subjective experience of the Church for validation of their faith. Again both groups meet on the common ground of the subjective experience of Christ as the basis of their trust. . . . This explains the alarming indifference to doctrinal precision and correctness in the Fundamentalist Evangelical movement.⁵⁵

Geoffrey W. Bromiley

Church historian G. W. Bromiley of Fuller Seminary, like the other Evangelicals in our survey, holds that the Church's concentration must be on "the common preaching and teaching of the positive Biblical truth" rather than on pointing out error beyond what is "the common deposit of faith, e.g., in the Apostle's Creed." Even this common creed is not to be enforced rigidly.⁵⁶ The burden of his study of the unity

⁵⁵ Valentin Andreae, "The Bible Teaching Concerning the Holy Christian Church and its Ministry," Manuscript based on a German course outline by Wm. M. Oesch with Text by Andreae, p. 114 (handwritten).

⁵⁶ G. W. Bromiley, The Unity and Disunity of the Church (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1958), p. 80.

of the Christian Church is to stress the common confession of Christ as Savior and Lord with Christians patiently accepting under Scripture those with whom they disagree, not using the detailed confessions in any polemical manner.

The British-born Anglican understands the original function of the expanded creeds is to be "a unifying factor in the midst of division." "The confession, like the Bible, can be an instrument of disunity as well as unity." They were written "to exclude those who hold erroneous teaching in relation to individual aspects of faith."

Christians of many allegiances may . . . come together in the basic affirmation, but when they present their detailed confessions of faith they are at once plunged into more or less bitter and hopeless contention. Nor does this apply only to the great divisions between Roman, Orthodox, and Protestant. It applies equally to the lesser but important differences within Protestantism, e.g. between Lutherans and Reformed, Arminians and Calvinists, Baptists and Paedobaptists, etc. Not every difference is regarded as a group of actual division by every body, but schisms innumerable have taken place for detailed points of confession, and the "infallible" pronouncements of the Pope make any genuine unity in confession almost impossible so far as the Roman communion is concerned.⁵⁷

Against this understanding of a church body's confession, Bromily argues for a recognition that it is first of all a confession of Christ as Savior and Lord, "not our detailed beliefs concerning Him." Therefore, "even though we may differ widely in our doctrine and interpretation we are united in our faith in Him."⁵⁸ Our unity is in truth, but it is "the Truth, namely, Jesus Christ Himself." Furthermore, all of our detailed confessions of Him are relative, not absolute and no one can "claim that this particular confession can never be improved or amended in the light of biblical teaching."⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Ibid., pp. 76-77 ⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 77. ⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 78.

Lutherans would agree with Bromily here, for in our theology the Scriptures are the only source and norm for truth (norma normans).

Lutherans believe that their Confessions are derived from and are in conformity with the Scriptures, and in that sense are a "derived" rule and standard according to which the preaching in Lutheran churches is judged (norma normata) [normed norm]⁶⁰

They are not the final Word, for only Scripture as the Spirit-breathed Word of God can have this status. They are true standards for faith and doctrine because they espound the Scriptures rightly. The question that Dr. Bromily raised; however, is whether confessional documents can really be meaningful subscription at all. In effect, he relegated them to a confession of the same Lord that the Ecumenical Creeds and Reformation Confessions confess, without either taking seriously their assertions or rejecting what they reject. Since we will take up this theme again in Chapter Three, it is enough now to cite the Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod, on the subject:

"Of the Symbols of the Lutheran Church"

45. We accept as our confessions all the symbols contained in the Book of Concord of the year 1580. The Symbols of the Lutheran Church are not a rule of faith beyond, and supplementary to, Scripture, but a confession of these doctrines of Scriptures over against those who deny these doctrines.

46. Since the Christian Church cannot make doctrines, but can and should simply profess the doctrine revealed in Holy Scripture, the doctrinal decisions of the symbols are binding upon the conscience not because our Church has made them nor because they are the outcome of doctrinal controversies, but only because they are the doctrinal decisions of Holy Scripture itself.⁶¹

⁶⁰ F. E. Mayer, The Religious Bodies of America, 34 d ed. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1958).

⁶¹ The Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, n.d.), p. 21. For a

Bromiley recognizes the need to use our Confessional documents to protect the church from error and heresy of all kinds and to assure that only truth will be taught. After expressing his view that creedal statements are relative, he asks:

But does this mean that unity can persist even where there is error? Does not genuine unity have to be unity in truth? Can we cooperate with other Christian bodies when we are convinced that on certain issues they think and speak falsely? This is a difficulty which is felt acutely by almost all Christians except those who are so vague in their own convictions that they can extend an easy hand of comprehension to all parties. . . . The great confessions . . . feel that a line must be drawn at this or that place because the truth of the gospel itself is brought into question. Is there any means of preserving or restoring unity in confession in the face of this obvious difficulty?⁶²

Bromiley believes that we cannot have binding confessions because every church body and congregation has people at different levels of apprehension of the truth and even "with the most glaring of heresies or self opinion."⁶³

To confess Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord is obviously essential. To accept an intricate definition of His relationship to God is not so obviously essential to saving faith, and surely ought not to be imposed as a condition of unity.⁶⁴

fuller exposition of a view of the creeds and confessional documents in the Church, which is quite different from that held by Bromiley, we refer the reader to Robert Preus, "Confessional Subscription," in Evangelical Directions for the Lutheran Church, pp. 43-52, and C. F. W. Walther, "Why Should Our Pastors and Teachers Subscribe Unconditionally to the Symbolism Writings of a Church?" trans. Alex Guebert, Concordia Theological Monthly 18 (April 1947):241-53.

⁶²Bromiley, p. 78.

⁶³Ibid., pp. 78-79. The distinction Bromiley misses here is between casual and persistent, propagandizing errorists.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 79.

The Fuller Seminary Professor is setting up a straw man here, for who would claim that even a child or an infant could not be saved by a very simple faith in Jesus as Savior? The question, for us, is whether any part of the Gospel may be denied or attacked without effecting the Gospel directly or indirectly.

Bromiley grants the value of the confessions in this paragraph:

There has to be a working out of the truth . . . in the power of the Spirit and under the standard of Scripture. To this extent there is a real justification for more elaborate confessions; and in many cases the truths which they embody seem no less necessary to the evangelical life of the church than moral standards to its ethical. Thus, even though we realize that we are no more saved by beliefs than our works, but only by faith in Christ, are we not constrained to make a firm stand for what seems to be clear and biblical doctrines? And even if we are prepared to accept as Christians those who think otherwise, do we not have to dissociate ourselves from their errors and therefore pursue a different path of preaching and teaching? Is there anyway out of the resultant impasse for our relationships with other confessions?⁶⁵

He raises an important question here. In our next chapter we shall see how confessional Lutherans have wrestled with and answered the same issues. Let's see how Bromiley replies to these questions:

Unless we cling to the fact that unity is in Christ as the Truth and our confession of Him rather than in our statements of truth, there is obviously no possible way. All who think differently on important issues must be expelled or abandoned or denounced, and the fallibility of man defies the given unity in Christ in a riot of dogmatic disruption. . . . It is not a question of appeasement or compromise. It is a question of our quiet acceptance of the unity in Christ of all who confess His name, and a common commitment to the humble and patient task of understanding the implications of confession as the Bible declares them.⁶⁶

Bromiley is surely right when he cautions against allowing the passion of controversy to destroy our concern to win the errorist and to deal

⁶⁵Ibid.

⁶⁶Ibid., pp. 79-80.

in love with those who stray from the truth. Dr. Ralph Bohlmann's distinction between concordia and unitas,⁶⁷ provides a satisfactory resolution to this dilemma. Bromiley, however, does not deal with the difference between orthodoxy and heterodoxy, and provides no assurance to congregations that pastors called to their pulpit and teachers in their schools and seminaries will teach in accordance with sound doctrine. If a doctrinal statement or creed cannot be enforced after evangelical, loving admonition is applied by doctrinal supervisors, they have no meaning whatsoever as confessions except as vague guidelines suggesting a momentary consensus for a certain position. It is not an ad humanum argument but merely a sad lesson from history to point out that Dr. Bromiley's own Seminary, Fuller in California, formed with a conservative but interdenominational faculty and student body, has not been able to repulse the growing tide of liberalism with its own inclusivist doctrinal statement.⁶⁸ We must agree with Walvoord (see above, page 48) that history is not on the side of those who opt for minimalistic doctrinal stands.

Klaas Runia

Klaas Runia, writing in the classical Calvinistic tradition, gives us evidence that even orthodox Reformed theologians, coming out of a background which gives a greater place to formal confessional documents, still tend towards a unionistic approach to church

⁶⁸ See, Lindsell, Battle for the Bible, pp. 106-21 and Bible in the Balance, pp. 183-243 for evidence of what happened at the Seminary since its founding in 1947.

fellowship. His book Reformation Today provides grist for our mill as we study his position.

For the most part, Runia's work is an excellent study of the development of the ecumenical movement, with a masterly evaluation of the errors which grow out of the ecumenist approach to church unity. He cites J. C. Ryle, Bishop of Liverpool, on one of the "pressing dangers" which infected the Church of England by 1884:

It consists in the rise and progress of a spirit of indifference to all doctrines and opinions in religion. A wave of colour-blindness about theology appears to be passing over the land. The minds of many seem utterly incapable of discerning any difference between faith and faith, creed and creed, tenet and tenet, opinion and opinion, thought and thought, however diverse, heterogeneous, contrariant, and mutually destructive they may be. Everything . . . is true, and nothing is false, everything is right and nothing is wrong, everything is good and nothing is bad, if it approaches us under the garb and name of religion. You are not allowed to ask, what is God's truth? but What is liberal, and generous and kind.⁶⁹

Later Runia introduces his readers to the so-called "Down-Grade Controversy" in England, after which the great British Baptist preacher C. H. Spurgeon formulated the following thesis for those who find themselves in heterodox fellowships:

For Christians to be linked in association with ministers who do not preach the gospel of Christ is to incur moral guilt. A Union which can continue irrespective of whether its member churches belong to a common faith is not fulfilling any scriptural function. The preservation of a denominational association when it is powerless to discipline heretics cannot be justified on the grounds of the preservation of "Christian unity." It is error which breaks

⁶⁹ J. C. Ryle, Principles for Churchmen (N.p. 1884), xix., cited by Klass Runia, Reformation Today (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1968), p. 13.

the unity of churches, and to remain in a denominational alignment which condones error is to support schisms.⁷⁰

Spurgeon also asserted:

As to a breach of unity, nothing has ever more largely promoted the union of the true than to break with the false. . . . Separation from such as connive at fundamental error, or withhold the "Bread of Life" from perishing souls, is not schism, but only what truth, and conscience and God require of all who would be found faithful.⁷¹

No steadfast anti-unionistic Lutheran dogmaticism could say it better!

Runia's chapter on "Our Task within the Church" prescribes an appropriate remedy for the epidemic of theological indifference which he depicts. The Reformed scholar calls for a "New Reformation" to help the Church be, "the household of God, . . . the pillar and bulwark of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15). To that end Runia recommends the following strategy:

"First of all there is the need for the revival of doctrinal teaching within the church; with pastors being elders "who labour in preaching and teaching" (1 Tim. 5:17). This means the preaching of "the great doctrinal truths of the Bible once again" to overcome the shallowness of much evangelical preaching. Couple this with a thorough "doctrinal instruction of the youth of the church."

Secondly, "we shall . . . have to revive discipline in the church":

One of the main causes of present troubles is the neglect of discipline. Two areas in particular have to be mentioned,

⁷⁰Iain Murray, The Forgotten Spurgeon (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1966), pp. 164-65. Cited by Runia, p. 124, footnote 8.

⁷¹Ibid.

Firstly, people are too easily admitted to membership. . . . What is needed is a 'credible confession.' This means that the elders must be reasonably sure that the person concerned knows (and means!) what he confesses, and his life should be in accordance with the confession.

The second area . . . is closely related to the foregoing. People's names have been retained on the church roll, even when they clearly show themselves to have no interest in the Gospel.⁷²

Furthermore, Dr. Runia writes, it is our

. . . duty to raise our voice in protest against all that is contrary to Scripture in our Church, on both the local and the supra-local level. It is certainly not enough to work faithfully in our own local church and leave the rest to God. . . . The church is a community or, as Paul said, a 'body' and we share the responsibility for what is going on in our denomination. When there is unbiblical teaching in our church, . . . when from the pulpits or the seminaries we hear things which are contrary to Scripture and to subordinate standards; then we may not be silent, but have to raise our voice in protest. The silence of evangelicals had done untold harm to the church! And the few who have raised their voices have often been given the cold shoulder by their fellow evangelicals.⁷³

In the same spirit, Runia quotes Professor Stanford Reid who argues:

Not infrequently it has happened that some evangelicals, awakened to their position, have endeavored to rectify the situation by taking action in the courts of their church or have tried to warn the church by publication; but by and large they have gained little or no support from other evangelicals. The latter will devote large amounts of time to organize inter-denominational prayer meetings or evangelistic campaigns, but they are unwilling to take a stand within the church for the crown rights of Christ and they refuse to give any effective support to those who do.⁷⁴

In all of the above Dr. Runia insists on maintaining the truth of the Gospel regardless of the consequences, and of protesting error even when friends and enemies alike say that we are being obscurantist

⁷²Runia, *Ibid.*, pp. 100-104, *passim*.

⁷³*Ibid.*, pp. 104-106.

⁷⁴W. Stanford Reid, "Evangelical Defeat by Default," Christianity Today, Vol. VI, No. 7, 28, cited by Runia, *Ibid.*, p. 106.

and negative. Yet, Runia also succumbs to the temptation to weaken the full counsel of God in his desire to see the visible manifestation of the unity of the Evangelical churches. Runia proposes that efforts towards "a Federation of Evangelical Churches" and the eventual union of all Evangelicals into a "United Evangelical Church" should begin on areas where they agree.

We should not confess too much. Too elaborate confessions have always caused trouble afterwards and have given rise to new disagreements. We should limit ourselves to the main doctrines of our faith and refuse to include matters on which Scripture itself is not absolutely clear.⁷⁵

In traditional Reformed fashion, he suggests that the beginning be made at the doctrine of God. Secondly, a clear article on Scripture must be developed. Beyond the central articles, latitude should be permitted, and differences should be worked out after agreement on the basics has been reached. Runia's strategy isn't bad, but is he dealing with true open questions, not discussed by the Bible or "secondary doctrines" which are not divisive to fellowship simply because "evangelicals" disagree on them? His answer is disappointing:

Within the framework of our essential unity there are some fundamental differences among us. Let me mention some of them. There is the contrast between Calvinism and Arminianism, implying differences concerning the nature of election, the extent of the atonement, the perseverance of the saints. There are our differences concerning baptism. Some believe that the infant children should be baptized, while other contend that baptism is for professing believers only. Connected with this are differing views of the church. Paedobaptists have an "organic" conception, while Baptists generally hold the view of the "gathered" church. As to organization of the church, some defend a presbyterian structure, while others are in favour of the congregationalist idea. As to the millennium, we find amongst ourselves prepost-, and a-millennarians. There are also deep-seated differences concerning the question of "Christian liberty." I by no means wish to under-estimate the fundamental and intricate

⁷⁵Runia, p. 139.

nature of these differences. And yet I believe that they are not sufficient reason to stay apart. One of our first duties as evangelicals is to come together and discuss all these matters openly, with the open Bible before us. However important and fundamental our differences may be most of them do not really affect the essence of the Gospel itself. Or perhaps I should state it a little more carefully: They do not necessarily affect the essence of the Gospel.⁷⁶

With all due respect to the sincerity and the good intentions of our writer, his suggestion is not particularly helpful. Questions concerning the church government and polity belong to the realm of adiaphora, but how can issues of election, the extent of the atonement, free will, and baptism and even questions of "Christian liberty" be said to not necessarily affect the essence of the Gospel? Very little progress has been made since the time of Zwingli among the Reformed on these matters.

Bruce Milne

Another British Evangelical, Bruce Milne of Spurgeon's College in London, although not so well known, deserves attention on the strength of his little volume We Belong Together: The Meaning of Fellowship. In common with many Evangelical writers on this beautiful doctrine, Milne has an excellent treatment of its meaning on many levels. He writes on the corporate nature of the Christian faith, being the light of the Word on many aspects of koinonia includ the facets of the fellowship of suffering, the meaning of love in the light of Biblical fellowship and many other topics. He has an excellent chapter on the practice of fellowship, dealing with subjects like burden-bearing, prayer, confession and even the financial side of fellowship. Preachers and teachers

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 130.

will find much that is helpful in his book. As we might expect, Lutherans will find his chapter on "The Fellowship Meal" unsatisfactory.

Milne's eighth chapter, "Fellowship in the Gospel," has much to recommend it. Since "the gospel is the door entry to the fellowship of Christ and his people," and "since Christian fellowship is constituted on the basis of a response to truth, it continues to be effective only on that basis. In short, Milne continues, "fellowship has a truth content."⁷⁷

Therefore he warns those who

In their enthusiasm to find unity among professing Christians . . . [they] attempt to find the lowest common denominator of the commonly-held conviction and seek on that basis to achieve a unity which is strong and effective. In practice the results are frequently meagre in the extreme. But this is entirely what we should expect in the light of the New Testament link between fellowship and truth. It is only on the basis of a full-hearted commitment to the revealed truths of apostolic Christianity that fellowship is conceived. To reduce this basis or modify it to meet contemporary tastes and ideas is in effect to cut the ground from under one's feet. . . . Only the truths of apostolic Christianity, embraced and wholeheartedly adhered to, effectively break up the sinful isolation of the human heart and create the possibility of true relationship at depth with others. All schemes of unity which soft-pedal truth are therefore condemned to failure before they even begin. . . . Truth and fellowship belong together and the one cannot be had without the other.⁷⁸

Milne's exposition of the threat to the fellowship of the Church at the Church at Galatia are right on the mark:

Fellowship has a truth content, a doctrinal element. When this . . . is radically threatened then fellowship in the New Testament sense becomes impossible (1:6-9). Acts 2:42 draws a similar relationship between the "apostle's teaching" (didache) and fellowship (koinonia). The early church was a fellowship "constituted on the

⁷⁷ Bruce Milne, We Belong Together: The Meaning of Fellowship (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1978), pp. 92-93.

⁷⁸ Ibid., pp. 93-94.

basis of the apostolic teaching." The common participation in Christ which is what we have earlier seen koinonia to signify, implied a common participation in the truth of Christ. . . . It is therefore to be expected that those in whom the Spirit dwells will manifest that in-dwelling by confessing the truth which he had revealed (I Cor. 2:91; II Peter 1:20; Mt. 22:43; Acts 4:25; II John 9), and to do this corporately in a common acknowledgement of this truth in the church fellowship.⁷⁹

To be sure, fellowship without agreement and common practice of the truth of the Gospel which constituted the unity of the Church as the Body of Christ in the first place is folly indeed and in fact is no true fellowship at all. However, he continues:

Truth does matter. Indeed it is primary in the sense that the church exists only on the basis of the gospel. Anything which challenges or alters any basic element of the gospel is therefore intolerable and it is folly to imagine that fellowship that is true to the name Christian will continue to be possible on such a basis. From this point of view to tolerate denials of any of the major elements of the gospel is effectively to attack and assault the fellowship we seek with others, for it is to encourage factors which render true fellowship impossible.⁸⁰

It would seem that Milne is beginning to violate his own principle (above, p. 85), that only truth which is "whole-heartedly adhered to" without any soft-pedaling is doomed to weaken the message of the Gospel and the fellowship itself. Our author now hedges these words with his own brand of reductionism. On the one hand, "there are some issues where unambiguous and energetic opposition is the only alternative if fellowship is to remain a possibility."⁸¹ On the other hand,

The situation where fellowship is no longer possible, as in Galatians 1, is confined to issues which affect the very essence of the gospel. We are required to distinguish between these areas of truth which are primary, where the essence of the faith is at stake

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 108.

⁸⁰ Ibid., pp. 108-109.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 109.

and where compromise would mean a denial of the very gospel itself; and those which are secondary, where differences of viewpoint must be allowed and where such differences ought not to infringe our fellowship in our church with the brother or brethren concerned.⁸²

Then follows a list of those "truths of primary nature" in an all too typical fashion. But where does Scripture discuss truths which are not related to either antecedent or corollary to the Gospel? All truth is Gospel-truth and related to Christ and our relationship to Him. Which passages call some truths non-crucial to the Christian faith and therefore open questions?

The Australian Forum and the "Radical Basis of Fellowship"

Thus far we have shown how Evangelicals tend to reduce the basis for church fellowship to the fact that all parties are Christian. The most consistent practitioner of this view of fellowship of which we are aware is the Australian Forum, the publishers of the widely read publication Verdict, successor to Present Truth which appeared first in the early 1970s. It would be profitable to trace the development of the polemics and the theology of those publications, particularly in their application to church fellowship, but for the purpose of this study it is enough to examine the place to which they have come. The chief writers for these journals are Robert D. Brinsmead, a freelance theologian with an adventist background and an Anglican education educator named Geoffrey J. Paxton.

In their earlier issues they provided Protestants with a welcome corrective to all forms of Romanism, Pentecostalism, "the gospel of the

⁸²Ibid., p. 109.

changed life," subjectivism and dispensationalism along with other aberrations, and set forth a magnificent exposition of the Biblical teaching of justification by grace alone for Christ's sake. Many pastors undoubtedly found their preaching sharpened by these articles which included reprints from orthodox theologians of the Reformation and post-Reformation eras.

In the last few years a tendency to rely more and more on what might be categorized as neo-orthodox writers could be detected. At the same time, a very broad view of the outward practice of church fellowship became more and more evident.

For an earlier example of the position published in Present Truth, we turn to the April 1975 issue with its reprint of an excellent exposition of Gal. 2:11-16 by J. C. Ryle, an Anglican bishop mentioned earlier in this paper. Drawing lessons from Paul's dramatic confrontation with Peter, Ryle asserts:

To keep Gospel truth in the Church is [of] even greater importance than to keep peace. . . . [Paul] withstands Peter to the face. He publicly rebukes him. He runs the risk of all the consequences that might follow. He takes the chance of everything that might be said by the enemies of the Church at Antioch. Above all, he writes it down for a perpetual memorial, that it never might be forgotten, --that wherever the Gospel is preached throughout the world, this public rebuke of an erring Apostle might be known and read of all men.

Now, why did he do this? Because he dreaded false doctrine, because he knew that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump, because he would teach us that we ought to contend for the truth jealously, and to fear the loss of truth more than the loss of peace. . . .

Many people put up with anything in religion, if they may only have a quiet life. They have a morbid dread of what they call "controversy." . . . They are possessed with a morbid desire to keep the peace, and make all things smooth and pleasant, even though it be at the expense of truth.⁸³

⁸³J. C. Ryle, "The Fallibility of Ministers," Present Truth, April 1975, p. 26.

Such people, comments Ryle, would no doubt consider Paul to be a disturber of Israel and of the peace. This is fuzzy thinking, for:

We have no right to expect anything but the pure Gospel of Christ, unmixed and unadulterated,--the same Gospel that was taught by the Apostles,--to do good to the souls of men. I believe that to maintain this pure truth in the Church men should be ready to make any sacrifice, to hazard peace, to risk dissension, to run the chance of division. They should no more tolerate false doctrine than they should tolerate sin.⁸⁴

Indeed, false doctrine is nothing more, viewed from one perspective, than intellectual sin. Both are disturbers of the unity of the Body. Later Ryle affirms the importance of outward unity to the health and prosperity of the Church, and condemns schism. Yet, he argues:

False doctrine and heresy are even worse than schism. If people separate themselves from teaching which is positively false and unscriptural, they ought to be praised rather than reprov^{ed}.⁸⁵

There are, therefore important and pressing reasons for withdrawing from fellowship. Peace is precious, but it is not the pearl of great price. "Peace without truth is a false peace; it is the very peace of the devil. Unity without the Gospel is a worthless unity; it is the very unity of hell."⁸⁶

It is a tragic inconsistency, therefore, for Geoffrey Paxton to write a few months later in "The Radical Basis of Church Fellowship" that the Gospel is the only basis of acceptance before both God and man. We are to accept men because Christ accepts them and on the same basis. In one sense, of course, Paxton is right. In Chapter Three we shall see how Biblical and Confessional ecumenism is based on the presupposition

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 26. ⁸⁵Ibid., p. 28. ⁸⁶Ibid., p. 27.

that we are one with all other believers.⁸⁷ Paxton was wrong, however, when he argues that:

There is the irreducible core of the confession of the Lordship of Jesus Christ, demonstrated conclusively by the cross and empty tomb (Rom. 10:9; I Cor. 15:1-3). Faith in the crucified and risen Savior entitles a person to fellowship with God and with His people. We therefore advocate uninhibited fellowship with each other on the basis of God's action in Jesus Christ for us, and that alone!⁸⁸

Paxton's assertion raises two points: First, he fails to see that all doctrine is related to the Gospel, and therefore any error endangers the Gospel. Secondly, we have to wonder about the seriousness of the Present Truth/Verdict polemics in past issues against Pentecostalism, old and new, subjectivism and misplaced emphasis of the "false gospel of the new birth" and of the "gospel of the changed life" along with warnings against Romanism and other errors which they rightly said distorted and weakened the Gospel. Or are all those who hold such errors ipso facto, not accepted by Christ, and therefore not accepted by other Christians either? If the writers of Present Truth/Verdict were in positions which involved doctrinal supervision, what do they do with those who subvert the Gospel in these ways? Are they to be tolerated and permitted to go on undermining the Gospel? If not, does not this involve withholding fellowship?

⁸⁷ Bohlmann, "Celebration," p. 66.

⁸⁸ Geoffrey J. Paxton, "The Radical Basis of Christian Fellowship," Verdict, January 1982, p. 27. This is a shortened and slightly rewritten version of his earlier article by the same title in Present Truth, June 1975, pp. 13-17.

Brinsmead argues, moreover (on the basis of research by several neo-liberal scholars⁸⁹), that the early church included different and even contradictory theological emphasis side by side within the canon of the New Testament, and therefore we ought not insist on complete doctrinal unity today.⁹⁰ Calvinists and Lutherans, Anabaptists and the neo-orthodox may work and worship side by side. "The unity of the church (in the N.T. era) consisted in its commitment to the gospel of Christ."⁹¹ But Present Truth has itself demonstrated that the Gospel means much more than a minimalistic, simplified statement that "Jesus died for your sins." It comprises the whole of the New Testament corpus of revealed truth, for it is all involved in the Gospel. Brinsmead is either saying that the errors previously rejected by Present Truth/Verdict no longer subvert the Gospel and thus are no longer divisive to fellowship or he is saying that "unity in the gospel" includes unity with

⁸⁹ Brinsmead cites the books of Walter Bauer, Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971); James D. G. Dunn, Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Inquiry Into the Character of Earliest Christianity (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977); Peter Toon, The Development of Doctrine in the Church (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1978); Robert L. Wilken, The Myth of Christian Beginnings, History's Impact on Belief (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1972), cited by Robert D. Brinsmead, "The Gospel versus the Sectarian Spirit," Verdict, March 1981, p. 8.

⁹⁰ The Missouri Synod's Commission on Theology and Church Relations cites Ernest Kaesemann's use of the historical-critical method to come up with the same kind of thinking in "The New Testament Canon and the Unity of the Church," Essays on New Testament Themes (London: SCM Press, 1971). Cited in The Nature and Implications of the Concept of Fellowship, A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the LC-MS, April 1981, p. 23.

⁹¹ Brinsmead, p. 10.

only those whose errors have not been rejected by their publications. If the latter, then the Brinsmead-Paxton call for an "uninhibited fellowship" does not say very much, for they have condemned errors by Rome, revivalistic Evangelicals, the Pentecostal-Holiness churches not to mention dispensationalist groups! To what extent has Verdict changed its doctrine of church fellowship?

Brinsmead approvingly cites Robert M. Johnston as saying "absolute doctrinal unity is achieved only by religious movements on the verge of senility."⁹² Does this mean that young, vigorous religious movements are noted for latitudinarianism? Johnston's statement is either meaningless or it is absurd! Brinsmead compounds this confusion with a false antithesis from P. T. Forsyth, "A live heresy is better than a dead orthodoxy,"⁹³ Thankfully, these are not the only options before us! He grants that:

A divided church may often be an expression of how seriously God's people are taking their commitment to the truth. But unless diversity is kept subordinate to the gospel, it may exceed its bounds.

He goes on to declare:

The passionate commitment to our sectarian distinctives needs to be channeled into a passionate commitment to the gospel of Christ. A fellowship based on sectarian distinctives needs to be sublimated by fellowship based on the gospel.⁹⁴

⁹²Robert M. Johnston, unpublished manuscript, 12 August 1980, p. 5, cited by Brinsmead, p. 12.

⁹³P. T. Forsyth, quoted in Robert McAfee Brown, The Spirit of Protestantism (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 128, cited by Brinsmead, p. 13.

⁹⁴Ibid., p. 16.

We have seen above (pp. 13-15) that Luther broke with Zwingli not over "sectarian distinctives" but over the gospel itself!

The worst is yet to come. Brinsmead, writing in the first issue of Verdict Report, asserts

All ecclesiastical and theological systems, without exception, are built by man. . . . They set Christian against Christian or at least prevent the open fellowship of one Christian with another. We must learn that no religious system is big enough or adequate enough to contain or to comprehend the incomparable Christ. All systems are inadequate to encompass the timeless gospel.⁹⁵

We all "see through a glass darkly" of course, but it does not follow that what we do see is erroneous.

In the statement of this publication's editorial policy, the claim is made that

Verdict's commitment to "Nothing But the Gospel, and the Gospel Plus Nothing" is not a Christian reductionism which accepts less than the whole counsel of God. Rather, it is a recognition that the gospel of Christ is God's final word, beyond which there is no more profound knowledge or experience of God.⁹⁶

The opening "Editorial" by R. D. B. [Brinsmead] gives us a clue to where all this is going:

We believe that the future lies with a free union of Christians in "The Gospel Plus Nothing." And if existing structures will not provide for that, those who are free in the gospel will be free to create new structures for the new wine.⁹⁷

One gets the feeling that one has heard all this before. Shades of the nineteenth century restoration movement, with its dream of restoring all Christians in the revived New Testament Church, but wound up by

⁹⁵ Brinsmead, "Other Lights are Palling," Verdict Report, Vol. 1, no. 1, May 1982, p. 4.

⁹⁶ Verdict Report, p. 2.

⁹⁷ Brinsmead, "Editorial," Verdict Report, p. 2.

mothering several new denominations, making the situation worse, not better! What are these "new structures" which the Verdict people feel free to create? New church bodies? A federation of Gospel-believing Christians and churches? It is predictable that we will soon see the establishment of such a structure or structures, which will result, not in uniting Christians under the Gospel, but in further dividing the outward fellowship of the visible church into more bodies.

Rudnick shows how leaders of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod in an earlier day rejected Fundamentalism as much on the grounds of their unionism as anything. Conservative Christians from various denominations "joined forces to contend for certain basic Biblical truths on which they agreed."

Every effort was made to avoid controversy on points of difference, with the result that such doctrines were largely relegated to the background. To Fundamentalists it was far more important to defend the crucial doctrines under attack by liberalism than to asset the distinctive teachings of their respective denominations. . . . With few exceptions. Fundamentalists were . . . willing to worship together, in some cases even to unite organizationally, so long as there were agreement on the fundamentals.

Missouri Synod Lutherans considered this controlling principle of Fundamentalism completely unacceptable and even sinful. They believed that Christians should unite for worship and work only if they are in full agreement on all doctrines clearly defined in the Bible.⁹⁸

From the time of the Reformation, therefore, there has been a difference between the theology of fellowship typical of the Fundamentalist/Modernist controversy still applies in our day as Rudnick notes below:

⁹⁸ Milton L. Rudnick, Fundamentalism and the Missouri Synod, A Historical Study of Their Interaction and Mutual Influence (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1966), p. 84.

Many who put themselves in the ranks of the Fundamentalists actually undermine the foundation of the faith by employing an approach very similar to that of the modernists whom they are trying to defeat. Christ commanded His followers to observe all that He commanded them (Matt. 28:20). To agree to ignore some teachings--those on which Fundamentalists themselves could not agree--was to pave the way for complete doctrinal indifferences.⁹⁹

The issue for Lutherans can never be merely "Are they Evangelicals, and do they share our common cause?" but rather, "Are they Biblical" in considering whether a united front may be established and whether joint church work is possible.

The Evangelical Fellowship Position Applied
To Evangelism and Missions

When our Lord Jesus Christ prayed for all believers in his high priestly prayer in John 17, he indicated that the purpose of our fellowship in him is that the world might believe. The goal of a united church is not only to glorify God and to build believers, but that the world may believe in Christ and the Father who sent Him. The Savior prayed, "May they be brought to complete unity, to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me" (John 17:23).

Hermann Sasse aptly puts it:

Nothing has provoked more mockery from the world than those occasions when the old saying about the early Church "Behold how they love one another" could be changed into an ironical "Behold how Christians bite and devour one another" (cp. Gal. 5:15). How often such controversy has destroyed the missionary opportunities of the Church. Was there a greater missionary possibility than at the moment when Constantine recognized Christianity as the religion of the Roman Empire? But to his amazement the Donatist controversy in Africa and the Arian controversy in the East, which was soon to spread throughout Christendom, absorbed the strength of the Church for generations to such a degree that it never could live up to the task of preaching

⁹⁹ Rudnick, p. 85.

the Gospel to the millions of Roman citizens as it should have done. Is not the same true of other centuries and even of our own age when Christianity, in a state of obviously incurable divisions, meets the great world religions on the mission fields.¹⁰⁰

Given these evangelistic dimensions of the scandal of a divided Christendom, it is not surprising that those involved in bringing the Gospel to the world, both at home and on the frontiers of world missions, should be concerned about healing that division and bringing the churches together in the united front. They would be unfaithful to both their Lord and to their evangelistic goal if they did otherwise. It is a premise of this dissertation that outward union without unity in the full truth of the Word of God is not really unity, but rather a perpetuating of the disunion of the churches and thus falls short of the goal for which Jesus prayed in John 17. Outward unity without full agreement on the truth of the Word is ultimately counter-productive evangelistically and comprises the message which the missionary proclaims.¹⁰¹

Jack F. Shepherd, a former missionary in China and the Philippines now on the faculty of Fuller Seminary, expresses the thinking that often

¹⁰⁰Hermann Sasse, This Is My Body: Luther's Contention for the Real Presence in the Sacrament of the Altar (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1959), p. 134.

¹⁰¹The counter-productivity of ecumenical union and merger without doctrinal agreement may sometimes be documented pragmatically and statistically. See, for example, Donald McGavran's study of the Church of South India in his How Churches Grow (London: World Dominion Press, 1959), in which he concludes that this merger of Anglican, Congregationalists, Methodist and Presbyterians has made little or no difference in its rate of growth. See also, Harvey T. Hoekstra, The World Council of Churches and the Demise of Evangelism, for a description of what happened to the theology and practice of evangelism in the WCC in recent years.

moves people to compromise on doctrinal issues for the sake of what they see are the higher priorities of evangelism in these words:

Evangelicals were defined . . . as those who have been regenerated and hold basic evangelical doctrines. This seems a legitimate standard, but it is one that has not yet been fully evinced in the interest of unity in evangelism. Those who really believe in evangelism should find it the rallying point for united action. The ecumenical movement has tended toward a fixation on organizational union--the result of beginning with Life and Work and then moving on to Faith and Order--thus minimizing doctrinal truth. Conservative evangelicals, on the other hand, tend to multiply the number of doctrines that are held to be basic to evangelical belief. Many divisive issues are in reality incidental in comparison with the significance of unity in evangelism. Cooperation in evangelism should be welcomed, with biblical truth as the only criterion of aims and methods. Evangelical conservatives affirm, then, that ecumenical relationships are valid as aspects of mission if they involve unity in mobilization of the whole church for world evangelization.¹⁰²

In the same context he writes:

Conservative evangelicals have often been guilty of finding excuses to avoid a clear demand for unity in mission. They have excused their toleration of divisions by raising secondary issues, with a loud profession of loyalty to the truth. But today there is an honest concern on the part of evangelicals to face the fact that Christians can and must work together.¹⁰³

Like many other Evangelicals, Shepherd on the one hand criticizes the ecumenical movement for its beginning with life and work and then going on to consider doctrinal issues, while calling for an identical procedure for Evangelicals in evangelistic work. Although Shepherd is undoubtedly right when he declares that Evangelicals have often refused to unite because of this or that doctrinal point (and often the problem is that the various groups disagree on what precisely is divisive to

¹⁰² Jack F. Shepherd, "The Missionary Objective: Total World Evangelization," in Protestant Crosscurrents in Mission: The Ecumenical-Conservative Encounter, ed. Norman A. Horner (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1968), pp. 123-24.

¹⁰³ Shepherd, p. 123.

fellowship), we have given ample evidence that, on the contrary, Evangelicals have largely ignored a concern for the whole truth of God for the sake of common fronts in various causes.

The Wheaton Declaration

In 1966, 939 delegates from 71 countries gathered at Wheaton College in Illinois for the Congress on the Church's Worldwide Mission. Representing missionaries affiliated with the Interdenominational Foreign Missions Association and the Evangelical Foreign Missions Association, the Congress produced the "Wheaton Declaration" covering a number of important issues facing people working in mission situations throughout the world. One of these concerns was "Mission and Evangelical Unity," bearing directly on the subject at hand. The Congress declared in part:

The unity of the Church of Jesus Christ is directly and significantly related to her worldwide mission. Our Lord's earnest petition to the Father on behalf of his Church (John 17) was for her essential spiritual unity and its visible expression in the world. His concern 'that they all may be one' was in order 'that the world may know that thou has sent me.'

Another paragraph affirmed:

Christians having been regenerated by the Holy Spirit and who agree on the basic evangelical doctrines can experience a genuine biblical oneness, even if they belong to different denominations. Such biblical oneness cannot exist among those who disagree on basic evangelical doctrines, even if they belong to the same denomination. Evangelicals, however, have not fully manifested this biblical oneness because of carnal differences and personal grievences; and thus missionary advance¹⁰⁴ and the fulfillment of the Great Commission have been hindered.

¹⁰⁴ "The Wheaton Declaration," in The Church's Worldwide Mission, ed. Harold Lindsell (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1966), pp. 230-31.

Here is another example of Evangelical reductionism applied to a mission situation.

The Berlin Congress

A few months later, Evangelicals gathered in Berlin for the World Congress on Evangelism in November 1966. The Closing Statement called all believers to unite for the task of world evangelism on the basis of a common commitment to the basic kerygma of Scripture:

As an evangelical ecumenical gathering of Christian disciples and workers, we cordially invite all believers in Christ to unite in the common task of bringing the world of salvation to mankind in spiritual revolt and moral chaos. Our goal is nothing short of the evangelization of the human race in this generation, by every means God has given to the mind and will of men.¹⁰⁵

As in so many of the great missionary conferences of recent history, much of the sharing of ideas, exhortations to strengthen weakness and downcase spirits and of methods and insights on how mission work and evangelism may more effectively be done among people of various cultures and in various situations, The Berlin Congress served a very valuable purpose. The position and strategy papers will be studied by missionaries, missiologists and specialists in the theology and practice of missions and evangelism for many years, but its call for unity in joint mission work is too ambiguous to be useful. The criteria is not spelled out beyond the usual broad outlines of common articles of faith, and no instructions are provided on how to deal with matters of evangelistic and mission theology which are mutually contradictory among those

¹⁰⁵ Arthur P. Johnston, The Battle for World Evangelism (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1978, p. 366.

involved in those great tasks. We will have more to say about The Berlin Congress in Chapter Four.

The Lausanne Covenant

In 1974 another significant missiological document worthy of our study was released by the historic International Congress on World Evangelization at Lausanne, Switzerland. On the whole, probably due to the growth and greater experience of the participants, the papers and strategy documents presented at Lausanne were of a higher quality than those delivered in Berlin eight years before.

The Lausanne Covenant was offered to the participants and delegates at Lausanne for their signatures. For the most part, this Covenant is an excellent document, speaking directly and specifically to a number of issues which face those who proclaim the Gospel in today's world. Its conclusion pledged the signatories to enter into a common work for the evangelization of the whole world.

Therefore, in the light of this our faith and our resolve, we enter into a solemn covenant with God and with each other, to pray, to plan, and to work together for the evangelization of the whole world. We call upon others to join us. May God help us by this grace and for his glory to be faithful to this our covenant! Amen. Alleluia!¹⁰⁶

Almost the entire Covenant could be enthusiastically signed and implemented by mission minded Confessional Lutherans. Its Seventh Article, however, on "Cooperation in Evangelism," makes one hesitate to raise it to the status of an ecumenical Confession because of its ambiguous,

¹⁰⁶ Let the Earth Hear His Voice, p. 9.

undefined call for "unity in truth, worship, holiness and mission."

We affirm that the church's visible unity in truth is God's purpose. Evangelism also summons us to unity, because our oneness strengthens our witness, just as our disunity undermines our gospel of reconciliation. We recognize, however, that organizational unity may take many forms and does not necessarily forward evangelism. Yet we who share the same biblical faith should be closely united in fellowship, work and witness. We confess that our testimony has sometimes been marred by sinful individualism and needless duplication. We pledge ourselves to seek a deeper unity in truth, worship, holiness and mission. We urge the development of regional and functional cooperation for the furtherance of the church's mission, for strategic planning, for mutual encouragement, and for the sharing of resources and experiences.¹⁰⁷

Properly understood, most of this is true enough and speaks to the very real barrier the church's outward division creates before the world.

But on what basis will we seek a deeper unity in truth? How much truth is necessary as the foundation on which we will join in worship, holiness and mission? How will we know when we have reached such unity? Here again, the document fails to distinguish between the unity we have and the unity we seek. Furthermore, like most Evangelical documents of this sort, no provision is made to get at the source of the divided churches: serious differences in doctrine. The scandal of a divided Christendom is merely the symptom of which theological error is the disease.

John Stott's Exposition and Commentary on the Lausanne Covenant does little to eliminate doubts concerning the meaning of the unity to which it rallies us. Even 'though we still disagree . . . on some secondary issues' (which are these, and why are they secondary?), yet "we

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 5. Scriptural passages listed under this Article are: John 17:21,23; Eph. 4:3-4; John 13:35; Phil. 1:27; John 17:11-23.

stand firm and together on the great fundamentals of the biblical revelation."¹⁰⁸

The Official Reference volume of the Lausanne International Congress on World Evangelization has several essays which treat the matter of cooperation for evangelistic purposes. One such paper, by French Baptist Henri Blocher, is flawed in its discussion of "The Nature of Biblical Unity"¹⁰⁹ because it makes open questions out of matters clearly resolved in Holy Scriptures, considering them to be minor differences which do not hinder working together for a greater cause.

African Pentecostal S. O. Odunaike's presentation on "Intermission Relationships" provides us with yet another example of Evangelical reductionism in mission situations. After dismissing those who insist on others signing "the dotted line on every tenet of faith embraced by their group," he limits the marks of false teachers to those who deny:

- a personal God;
- the incarnation of God in human flesh;
- the person of the Holy Spirit;
- the virgin birth;
- the sinless life of Jesus Christ;
- the divine miracles performed by Jesus Christ;
- his physical death, burial and bodily resurrection;
- his ascension to the right hand of the Father;
- his Headship of the Church;
- his personal and imminent return for his saints.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ John R. W. Stott, The Lausanne Covenant: An Exposition and Commentary (Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1975), p. 34,

¹⁰⁹ Henry Blocher, "The Nature of Biblical Unity," in Let the Earth Hear His Voice, p. 380-397.

¹¹⁰ S. O. Odunaike, "Intermission Relationships," in Let the Earth Hear His Voice, pp. 518-19.

Therefore, "I do not believe the Scriptures teach us to embrace all and sundry so long as they name the name of Christ." There are clear grounds, he argues, for refusing fellowship to a "brother."

With false teachers we should not and cannot compromise. But what do we say about divisions based on differences of revelation on things like:

- Infant baptism versus adult baptism?
- mode of baptism, immersion or sprinkling?
- charismatic operation of the Holy Spirit?
- ministerial dress?
- antepost millennialism?¹¹¹

By implication, Odunaike throws together very serious issues (baptism) with pure adiaphora (ministerial dress) as if they were on one level. We shall see later how Lutherans are the most liberal of all church bodies on adiaphora while rejecting any deviation on that which really matters to the Gospel.

A later essay in the Lausanne volume of missionogical and sister disciplines by Jonathan T'ien-en Chao, Dean of the China Graduate School of Theology in Hong Kong, contrasts three theories on unity and schism in evangelistic practice:

a. That there can be no effective witness to the world without visible organizational unity. This position of the ecumenical wing of Protestantism is dismissed as neither necessary or helpful.

b. That there can be no visible unity without doctrinal unity. This is the Reformed and fundamentalist position. It is a continuation of the Protestant confessional mentality. However, the scriptural teaching is that a church should chase out false teachers rather than withdraw from fellowship. . . . Furthermore, the doctrinal unity is the goal of church growth, not the condition of evangelism and church growth (Eph. 4:3, 13). This priority of the

¹¹¹Ibid., p. 520.

doctrinal integrity over mutual love of the body members has been a cause of schism within the body, and thereby weakens both the task force and witness of the body for evangelism.¹¹²

But how can church growth produce doctrinal unity? How may Christians propagate the Gospel together if that Gospel is left undefined? Furthermore, Dr. Chao does not explain how we may discipline those outside our denominational or congregational family without provision for doctrinal supervision and discipline. Withdrawing fellowship, at this level, is the only "discipline" we can exercise. Chao quotes ecumenistic missiologist R. Pierce Beaver as saying "More and more I am convinced that exported divisiveness is the greatest hinderance to the spread of the Gospel in the non-Christian world."¹¹³ Yet it is the creators of this divisiveness through sin and false doctrine, not its "exporters" who are responsible for this scandal.

In a later chapter we shall see how important unity in the Gospel in all of its articles is to the preservation of the purity of the Gospel.

Thirdly, Dr. Chao gives us his own position on the relationship of doctrinal agreement and evangelistic cooperation:

c. That unity in the form of cooperation may be expected in direct proportion to the degree of doctrinal agreement. This is a kind of compromise between the above two extremes, but still basically adopting a 'doctrinal integrity' approach to this problem. May we not ask, 'In addition to doctrinal integrity, should we not apply the doctrine of the unity of the Body of Christ which demands love as another criterion for participation in visible forms of unity.'¹¹⁴

¹¹² Jonathan T'ien-en Chao, "The Nature of the Unity of the Local and Universal Church in Evangelism and Church Growth," in Let the Earth Hear His Voice, pp. 1111-12.

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 1111.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 1112.

Chao thus raises the important issue of the inter-relationships of truth, unity and love in our dealings with Christians of other denominational families. One of the finest treatments of the tension between these features is found in Ralph Bohlmann's "Formula for Concord" presentation in St. Louis in 1977. Bohlmann expounds on these three vital principles as they are involved in our relationships with other Christians as follows:

The truth principle is the biblical mandate to the church to prize, proclaim, and defend its divinely revealed message in its entirety The unity principle is the biblical teaching that Christians are to manifest the oneness they have with each other by virtue of their having a common Head, Jesus Christ. . . . Our koinonia with Christ leads to an immediate koinonia with all other Christians (Acts 2:42; Philippians 4:15; I John 1:3, 6,7). . . .

 The love principle is the great New Testament theme that Christians are to manifest the same self-giving love toward each other that Christ gave to the church.¹¹⁵

Although there is a continuing tension between these three principles, Bohlmann shows from the Bible that they are not contradictory and demonstrates their Biblical foundation. Speaking on this third axiom, Bohlmann writes:

Such love is extolled as the greatest of Christian virtues (I Corinthians 13). Jesus exhorted Christians to love one another just as He had loved them (John 13:34, 15:12, 17). To love is to obey the whole law (Romans 13:8-10). Christians are to serve one another by love (Ephesians 4:15), and walk in love as Christ also loved us (Ephesians 5:2). In virtually every epistle, Christian readers are encouraged to increase their love toward one another. The epistles of John give particular emphasis to this concern, reminding Christians that he who loves God should love his brother also (1 John 4:21). To be sure, such love is not mere sentimental affection; as the Apostle Paul's own example shows, love will not tolerate dissimulation in a brother (Galatians 2:11 ff.). Love is tolerant and long-suffering, but intolerant of error, since error not only

¹¹⁵ Bohlmann, "Celebration," pp. 57-58.

denies God's truth, but may jeopardize the brother's faith. But love impels Christians to be genuinely concerned about every brother.¹¹⁶

The Missouri Synod theologian asks, "How are we to resolve the tension between a confessionally narrow conscience and an ecumenically broad heart?"¹¹⁷ After further elaborating on the relative weight each of these principles should have when one seems to stand in conflict with another, he cites the late Dr. F. E. Mayer's Concordia Theological Monthly essay, "The New Testament Concept of Fellowship," on two vital aspects of this question.

Dr. F. E. Mayer observed twenty-five years ago that Christian fellowship will manifest itself both in "Aengstlichkeit um die reine Lehre" [concern for pure doctrine] and "weltumfassende Liebe" [world embracing love]. "In matters of faith and doctrine," he wrote, "we must have an extremely narrow and keen conscience, while in matters of love, we must be broad and wide, in fact so broad that our love will embrace the entire world."¹¹⁸

These inter-relationships and distinctions are lost on the Evangelicals as a group, according to our experience, for they tend, like the ecumenists, to equate a refusal or a withdrawal of fellowship as a loveless act.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 58. The remainder of this crucial essay is an answer to this question.

¹¹⁸ F. E. Mayer, "The New Testament Concept of Fellowship," Concordia Theological Monthly, 23 (September 1952):644. Cited by Bohlmann in "Celebration," p. 58.

¹¹⁹ Professor Kurt Marquart discusses the relationship of love and truth in a less ironic tone in his Bethany, Mankato (Minn.) lecture on "The Church of the Augsburg Confession as the True Ecumenical Movement." Lutheran Synod Quarterly, 8 (Winter 1967-68):62-109.

The Thailand Statement

The "Thailand Statement of 1980" from the Consultation on World Evangelization at Pattaya, Thailand, June 16-27, 1980, provides a recent document calling for cooperation in world evangelization. Participants solemnly committed themselves to Christ to fulfill by his grace the following affirmation:

10. We pledge ourselves to cooperate with all who share with us the true Gospel of Christ, in order to reach the unreached peoples of the world.

That commitment was acting on two important paragraphs in the body of the "Statement" which said:

We joyfully affirm the unity of the Body of Christ and acknowledge that we are bound together with one another and with all true believers. While a true unity in Christ is not necessarily incompatible with organizational diversity, we must nevertheless strive for a visible expression of our oneness. This witnesses to Christ's reconciling power and demonstrates our common commitment to serve him. In contrast, competitive programmes and needless duplication of effort both waste resources and call into question our profession to be one in Christ. So we pledge ourselves again, in the words of the Lausanne Covenant, "to seek a deeper unity in truth, worship, holiness and mission."

It is imperative that we work together to fulfill the task of world evangelization. Cooperation must never be sought at the expense of basic biblical teaching, whether doctrinal or ethical. At the same time, disagreement on non-essentials among those equally concerned to submit to Scripture should not prevent cooperation in evangelism. Again, cooperation must never inhibit the exercise of the adverse gifts and ministries which the Holy Spirit gives to the people of God. But nor should diversity of gifts and ministries be made an excuse for non-cooperation.¹²⁰

The Thailand Statement is an excellent exhortation to Christians the world over to take seriously and act on the mandate and primacy of evangelism in our time, and even the above section on cooperation for evangelism

¹²⁰ "The Thailand Statement 1980," International Bulletin of Missionary Research, 5 (January 1981):31.

has much to commend it and ought to be taken seriously. However, its permission for differences on "non-essentials" once again gives evidence that the old Zwinglian-Pietistic position of Church fellowship is alive and well on planet earth.

Carl Henry's assertion that "There is more truth than many evangelicals willingly recognize in the observation that Christian unity is crucial to effective evangelism"¹²¹ is true enough, but it begs the question of both the nature of this Christian unity and how is it to be achieved. Confessional Lutheranism, as we shall see in our next chapter, contends that such unity for evangelism or any other common purpose mandated by Our Lord is achieved only by removing the hinderences to that unity, namely, sin and false doctrine. Without that crucial step, we have not achieved unity, but merely caricatured it.

The EFMA Guidelines

On a practical level, the Evangelical Foreign Missions Association has provided guidelines for those member missions involved in cooperative evangelism in a document entitled, "Guidelines for All Those Involved in Cooperative Mass Evangelism." Conservative missiologist George W. Peters brings them to our attention as means of steering a path between "indiscriminate cooperation and absolute separatism."

These "Guidelines" say in part:

1. These are days of superficial and fuzzy theological thinking. Biblical terms which are previous and meaningful to us take on different interpretations in the hearts and minds of those of liberal and neo-orthodox persuasion. We strongly believe that the doctrine

¹²¹ Carl F. H. Henry, "Looking Back at Key 73," The Reformed Journal, November 1974, p. 11.

of the Scriptures, including their divine inspiration, is basic to all other doctrines and one that is being subjected to heavy attack by ecumenical theologians. Because of this we strongly urge you to have a minimum doctrinal statement as a basis for sponsorship of any of your campaigns. It would seem that this statement should be believed and signed by all who serve in places of leadership in any campaign, either national or local.¹²²

Although the "doctrinal statement" is designed to clarify superficial, fuzzy theological thinking, its "minimal" nature on the basis of a common view of Scripture does not solve many problems.

The "Guidelines" go on secondly to make a distinction between "sponsorship and endorsement" in an evangelistic campaign:

Sponsorship implies participation at the planning and leadership level and . . . this can be controlled by your evangelistic team through the use of a doctrinal statement and a careful selection of men, following patient and adequate consultations with known evangelicals in the area where the campaign is to be held.¹²³

The term "evangelical" is left undefined. Endorsement, they go on, may be on a much broader basis "to secure as large an attendance as possible."

The third guideline relates to the interesting point of who is to be used "on the platform during a campaign or conference." The Guidelines point out the ambiguity created by such situations, but note the subjective standard used to determine what sort of person may be used:

Inviting participation in a public way implies to the uninformed and spiritually undiscerning people, endorsement (or at least approval) of the men used. Our suggestion that only known evangelical men be used does not mean that they must be members of evangelical

¹²²George W. Peters, Saturation Evangelism (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970), p. 43.

¹²³Ibid.

organizations, but that they be solidly evangelicals in their personal relationship to Christ.¹²⁴

Do they mean that there are Christians who are not "evangelical in their personal relationship to Christ" or that some evangelicals are not "solid" at that point? Or, is this how "evangelical" is defined? One is left guessing. The question of using people with whom we are not in agreement in conference, teaching or sharing situations will be raised in Chapter Eleven.

Numerous other citations could be added to document the position that has been found to be typical of the Evangelical movement at home and abroad. Leighton Ford, associate evangelist with Billy Graham's organization and chairman of the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization summarizes representative arguments for cooperation in evangelistic situations. Not only does God will it, he argues, but "the immensity of the task" requires a unified strategy. "If two billion unreached people are to hear the Gospel, we simply cannot be fragmented and diverse."

Furthermore, credibility before the non-Christian world calls for a unified front.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ "Leighton Ford Urges Evangelization Cooperation." World Evangelization, newsletter published by The Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, March 1981. See also, the article by another Graham associate evangelist, John Wesley White in Evangelism Now. ed. Ralph G. Turnbull (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1972), pp. 82-93, entitled, "Togetherness Has Advantages--The Evangelism of Mass Crusades," which calls for the grossest form of unionism and "togetherness" in an evangelistic version of "The more we get together, the happier we will be."

Such understandable and sincere, but misguided zeal characterizes many books and articles by Evangelicals involved in church growth, church renewal and evangelism.¹²⁶ The three priorities popularized by Ray Orland's Lord, Make My Life a Miracle, are typical of the kind of reductionism we have been discussing. Orland's three priorities are:

1. Commitment to Christ,
2. Commitment to the Body of Christ, and
3. Commitment to the work of Christ in the world.¹²⁷

In a series of sermons following this theme, this writer added another priority between Orland's first and second, namely, "Commitment to the Word of God." If we are committed to the Church and Christ's work in the world before our commitment to the truth of God's word, compromise, relativism and unionism are almost inevitable. The truth must always have priority over the unity of the people of God or the result will be compromise and not true unity, and the work of God will be done either on a superficial or false basis.

The late Dr. Hermann Sasse's landmark work, Here We Stand, provides an excellent response to the prevailing fanaticism for unity for

¹²⁶ Two popular examples are Ray C. Stedman's Body Life (Glendale, CA: Gospel Light, Regal Books, 1972), see especially Chapter 3 "Not Union - Unity!" pp. 21-36; and Michael R. Tucker's The Church: Change or Decay (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1978), pp. 102-104.

¹²⁷ Raymond Orland, Lord, Make My Life a Miracle (Glendale, CA: Gospel Light, Regal Books, 1974). His priorities reappear in the literature of the Church Growth and church renewal movements, as in, for example, C. Peter Wagner, Your Church Can Grow (Glendale, CA: Regal Books, 1976), especially Chapter 12, "Are Your Priorities in Order," pp. 147-60, and also Edward R. Dayton and David A. Fraser, Planning Strategies for World Evangelization (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980), pp. 203-206.

the sake of this or that cause by tackling the Reformed insistence that the divisions of the past are wrong and unnecessary and should be set aside for the more important and urgent goals:

Let the Lutherans declare at least that they are ready to introduce altar fellowship with the Reformed! The love-feast should no longer be the symbol of a feud! Unity against a common foe is necessary. Yesterday this foe was the Turk; tomorrow it may be Russian atheism or some other power threatening the church. Now nationalism is the great enemy, now idealistic philosophy or some other terrible heresy that has suddenly arisen in the church. But no matter what or who the enemy may be, the slogan is always the same: it is necessary to unite in a solid front, in the fellowship of the single church to oppose this foe - yes, this articular foe who has never appeared before. This is the Calvinistic idea of union with which the Lutheran Church has been wrestling since the days of the Reformation.¹²⁸

¹²⁸Hermann Sasse, Here We Stand, trans. Theodore G. Tappert (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1938), pp. 179-80.

CHAPTER THREE

THE CONFESSIONAL LUTHERAN DOCTRINE OF CHURCH FELLOWSHIP

Its Scriptural Basis

The fellowship we have with God in Christ and with one another through Christ is a very practical doctrine. The Church is the people of God who are in fellowship with each other because they are in fellowship with God in Christ. So central is this teaching to the church that one could organize all of Christian doctrine in terms of our fellowship with God and one another.

The Missouri Synod's 1981 Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) on The Nature and Implications of the Concept of Fellowship¹ reminds us that the New Testament word koinonia has as its root meaning "having part in a common thing." The early Christians "continued steadfastly" not only in the "apostle's doctrine" but also in "fellowship, in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42). In Genesis 1 and 2 we find our first parents enjoying a profound oneness with God, one another, and with all creation. The fall shattered this unity, however, and they became aliented first from themselves (shame:

¹The Nature and Implications of the Concept of Fellowship, a Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, April 1981, pp. 8-9. See this section for reference to scholarly literature on this concept.

Gen. 3:7), then from God (3:8), from one another (3:12) and from nature itself (3:16-19), and thus were banished from their original home (3:24). Since then we all by nature are enemies of God and thus separated from Him (Isa. 59:1-2; Rom. 8:7-8). The balance of the Bible is an account of the work of God restoring mankind to fellowship with God.

God initiated this process in Genesis 12 by calling one man (Abraham) and through him a people, Israel. They were to be a people holy unto the Lord, chosen out of all the peoples of the earth (Deut. 7:6; Ex. 19:3-8). Repeatedly God promises that "they will be my people, and I will be their God (Ezek. 14:11). This teaching of the people of God is applied to all Christians in the New Testament (Eph. 2:11-22; 1 Peter 2:9-10; Rom. 9:25-26; and so forth).² Finally, at the end of the Bible, we find the church triumphant in heaven, gathered around the throne " in a great multitude that no one could count" (Rev. 7:9), to whom the final promises is "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God" (Rev. 21:3).

In Christ and through the cross God creates fellowship and the Church (Heb. 10:19-25; Eph. 2:11-22; 1 John 1:37). Viewed from this angle, it is significant that salvation is pictured also as the reconciliation of the lost to God (2 Cor. 5:18-21) and the mission of the church is called "the ministry of Reconciliation." Christ died to make us His

²The literature on the "people of God" concept is voluminous. See, for one helpful example, Paul S. Minear's Images of the Church in the New Testament (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1960), especially chapter three.

people (1 Peter 2:9-10) and the task of the Church is to gather a people for God (Acts 15:14; 26:18) not just to save individuals.³ To think that one can be a Christian without fellowship with Him and His people, is, therefore, an idea totally foreign to the Bible and the Gospel.

Throughout the New Testament the life of the church is expressed in corporate, not individualistic, terms. Love for one another is "the mark of the Christian before the world"⁴ (John 13:34-35). God creates, sustains, and nourishes the Church through the Word and Sacraments (Rom. 10:9-17; 1 Cor. 12:13; 1 Cor. 10:14-17) and through the office of the public ministry (Eph. 4:1-16; Acts 20:28) which uses these means in the name of and on behalf of the church. Church attendance and Bible study foster fellowship by stirring up one another to love and good works (Heb. 10:23-25). Christian living in community exists when we love and forgive one another for Jesus's sake (Rom. 15:7, Eph. 4:25-32). The Holy Spirit's gifts are not merely for our individual edification but for the "common good" (1 Cor. 12:7).⁵

³The contemporary church has been greatly blessed with a renewed interest in the concept of the church as God's agent for the evangelization of the world. A few worth reading are: Johannes Blauw, The Missionary Nature of the Church (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 1962), Richard R. DeRidder, Discipling the Nations (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1971), a volume particularly valuable for its treatment of the O.T. roots of the Church's mission task; two books by George W. Peters, A Biblical Theology of Missions (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1972) and A Theology of Church Growth (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), and Georg F. Vicedom, The Mission of God, St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1965).

⁴Francis Schaefer popularized this expression in his writings, including especially The Church at the End of the 20th Century (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1970), especially its appendix "The Mark of the Christian."

⁵In Chapter 11, we mentioned Bruce Milne's We Belong Together as a useful book on the meaning of the fellowship. This writer is indebted

John F. DeVries of the World Home Bible League picked up the imagery of Scripture when, in a tape in Project Philip's "Outreach Advance" program, he calls the Church God's "Paradise Building Society" re-creating in a small way the paradise our first parents lost in the Fall.⁶ In it we experience a foretaste of heaven, loving and building up one another in the faith, while at the same time bringing others into this little paradise on earth. In contrast, Satan works to destroy the fellowship of Christians here on earth and to establish rival, counterfeit fellowships in the world (such as the Lodges, the Cults, and the "fellowship" of the taverns and bars and even Communism, whose members refer to one another as "comrades").

The intimate unity which each Christian enjoys with every other Christian is seen also in the Pauline picture of the Church as the Body of Christ. In this picture, the Apostle Paul emphasizes the interdependence of every Christian with every other member of our Lord's body

to two controversial and thought provoking books by Howard A. Snyder, The Problem of Wineskins (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1975) and The Community of the King, (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1977). In Wineskins, for example, Snyder appeals for "more intimate, less institutionalized structures for the church's life. . . . The church today is suffering a fellowship crisis. It is simply not experiencing or demonstrating that 'fellowship of the Holy Spirit' (2 Cor. 13:14) that marked the New Testament church. In a world of big, impersonal institutions, the church often looks like just another big, impersonal institution. The church is highly organized just at the time when her members are caring less about organization and more about community."

⁶ John R. DeVries, Tape three, "The Paradise Building Business," Project Philip's Outreach Advance, A Church Changing Seminar Designed to Solve the "Decision-Discipleship" Gap in Evangelism. (South Holland, IL: The World Home Bible League, 1978.

(Rom. 12:3-8; 1 Cor. 12). None exist for themselves, but for the whole and no part of the body exists to serve itself. Dr. F. E. Mayer wrote:

The rich and meaningful concept soma tou Christou expresses the transcendent unity of the Church in spite of the great diversity. This one body of Christ transcends all earthly, social, racial, cultural, yes, also denominational distinctions. According to the New Testament every Christian shares with every other Christian the blessings which he enjoys. The New Testament fellowship crosses all denominational and all man-made lines of distinction. The middle wall of partition is completely torn down. Every Christian shares his blessings with the Christians in every denomination and in every part of the world.⁷

If koinonia means sharing, it means sharing with every Christian, for it is a sharing in the Gospel. "This means nothing less than that every Christian shares all the treasures which the Gospel proclaims and offers to all mankind."⁸ In 1981 the Missouri Synod's CTCR reminded us:

The New Testament describes Christians as partners who share in the Gospel (1 Cor. 9:23), in faith (Philemon. 6), in sufferings and comfort (Phil. 3:10; 2 Cor. 1:7; Rev. 1:9), in the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 13:14; Phil. 2:1), and in eternal glory (1 Peter 5:1). St. Paul tells the Corinthians that they have been called "into the fellowship (koinonia) of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Cor. 1:9), and St. John writes that he proclaims that which he has seen and heard "so that you may have fellowship (koinonia) with us; and our fellowship (koinonia) is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3).⁹

These principles hold true for all Christians wherever and whoever they may be. Far from being a nebulous and "platonic" concept which is true only of an indivisible church which exists far from our

⁷ F. E. Mayer, "The New Testament Concept of Fellowship," Concordia Theological Monthly, 23 (September 1952):636.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ The Nature and Implications of the Concept of Fellowship, CTCR, 1981.

real world where we rub shoulders only with a "visible church," as has often been charged, this doctrine incorporates implications which are germane to the lives of us all.

Speaking of the gifts of the Spirit which we all share as part of the Body of Christ, Mayer writes:

These gifts are the possession of the entire Una Sancta, and every member shares in every testimony of the Gospel, wherever witnessed, in the mission work for Christ in every part of the globe, in every God-pleasing exegetical and dogmatical contribution, no matter by whom offered, in short, in every victory for Christ made by any Christian, regardless of denominational connection. . . . It means that all rejoice with those who gain conquests for Christ. We grieve with those who for the Gospel's sake must endure hardship.¹⁰

We enjoy our fellowship with others whenever we use books by non-Lutherans in our Seminaries or sermon preparation and when we sing hymns from other traditions or apply and adapt principles in counseling, evangelism, or missions developed by others.

This unity we have with all Christians, grows out of the fellowship we enjoy with God in Christ.¹¹ As Christ is the head of the Church (Col. 1:18), he is head of us all. The members of the one holy Christian church "do not exist as pebbles in a box but as branches on a vine (John 15:5)."¹² Christianity therefore knows nothing of a "solitary

¹⁰Mayer, "The New Testament Concept," p. 637. We shall have more to say about Mayer's far-reaching assertions in Chapter Eleven, when we deal with the perplexing question of the use of materials from non-Lutheran sources.

¹¹"The fellowship with and in Jesus Christ and the Spirit is the creative ground and the sustainer of the Fellowship (koinonia) of the believers with each other." Hendrik Kraemer, A Theology of the Laity (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1958), p. 107.

¹²CTCR, 1981, p. 11.

religion" in which people are related to Christ without being related to one another. Fellowship must be understood not as an option which we may select, but as something we badly need. In this connection, Dr. Gene A. Getz has identified at least thirty-seven uses of the phrase "one another" in the New Testament Epistles in his Sharpening the Focus of the Church,¹³ each one of which underscores the interdependence of Christians with each other.

Christ has called the Church into existence for an evangelistic purpose and therefore missions and evangelism have always had and must necessarily have a close relationship to both the doctrine of the church and its unity. Thus Jesus prayed that we might be one as He is one with His Father, "to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me" (John 17:23). Responding to Jess Moody's assertion that "We will win the world when we realize that fellowship, not evangelism, must be our primary emphasis," Howard Snyder countered that our emphasis rather should be "evangelism through fellowship."¹⁴ Only as the Church is one in doctrine and love will it be able to win a lost world to Christ. This is the burden of Howard Snyder's provocative Lausanne Congress address, "The Church as God's Agent in Evangelism."¹⁵ In this persuasive essay, Snyder shows God's

¹³ Gene A. Getz, Sharpening the Focus of the Church (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974), pp. 114-16. See also his Building Up One Another (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1976), which expands on these "one anothers."

¹⁴ Snyder, Wineskins, p. 142.

¹⁵ Snyder, "The Church as God's Agent in Evangelism," in Let the Earth Hear His Voice, ed. J. D. Douglas (Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1975), pp. 327-60. This paper has been expanded into his book The Community of the King, mentioned earlier.

original and continuing purpose is "to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ" (Eph. 1:10)¹⁶ and that it is God's intention to win our world "through the church" (Eph. 3:10).¹⁷

Michael Green in his Evangelism in the Early Church, verifies this principle in the life of the early Christians.

Their love, their joy, their changed habits and progressively transformed characters gave great weight to what they had to say. Their community life, though far from perfect, as Christian writers were consistently complaining, was nevertheless sufficiently different to attract notice, to invite curiosity, and to inspire discipleship in an age that was as pleasure-conscious, as materialistic and as devoid of serious purpose as our own. Paganism saw in early Christianity a quality of living, and supremely of dying, which could not be found elsewhere.¹⁸

This is what Snyder means by evangelism through the fellowship of God's people. Those who argue for the priority of the oneness of God's people in doctrine and life over the evangelistic task of the church are right. Without unity of faith and love, evangelistic success is impossible.

Green goes on:

Unless there is a transformation of contemporary church life so that once again the task of evangelism is something which is seen as incumbent on every baptized Christian, and is backed up by a quality of living which outshines the best that unbelief can muster, we are unlikely to make much headway through techniques of evangelism.¹⁹

Koinonia's Enemies: Sin and False Doctrine

As precious as the fellowship of God's people is, it dare never be taken for granted. Just as this beautiful fellowship is created by

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 53.

¹⁸ Michael Green, Evangelism in the Early Church (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing House, 1970), pp. 273-75.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 275.

God through the work of the Holy Spirit in Word and Sacrament, and sustained by the love and support of Christians for one another, so every attack on the Word and promises of God and the doctrine which creates, sustains and preserves this fellowship along with every kind of sin, distrust, backbiting, gossip and party spirit permeates through the body and corrupts either the Gospel itself or the love and holiness of the Body of both. The knowledge that intrusions from Satan's Kingdom, the flesh and the world weaken and ultimately conspire to destroy the fellowship of God's people makes us treasure and defend it all the more.

It is a fellowship which places us into the most intimate union with God. It binds people together in a closer fellowship than any social relationship, even the relationship of husband and wife. Therefore we are to treasure it, do everything to deepen it, and avoid everything in doctrine and life which might endanger its continuance.²⁰

The very fact that our fellowship is a gift of God's grace is the reason that we are so reluctant to withhold it. Sin and error, never truth or sound doctrine, corrupts, weakens and subverts our fellowship in Christ. To argue that since our fellowship is created by God through the work of Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit, it cannot be destroyed by our actions or belief or lack of it, is to say that our love, our teaching, our care for one another cannot sustain it either. Furthermore, the Bible roots godly living in sound doctrine (1 Tim. 1:10) just as it blames sinful lust for much doctrinal error (2 Tim. 4:3-4).

The God-breathed Scriptures were given for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness, all of which are applications of loving fellowship in the church. But we cannot admonish, correct,

²⁰ Mayer, "New Testament Concept," p. 637, emphasis supplied.

encourage, comfort or instruct unless we do it with doctrine. One has the feeling that objections to a concern for sound doctrine are often rooted in the mistaken notion that doctrine is merely an intellectual exercise for academics, interesting, perhaps, but really unrelated to our personal lives. This idea in turn assumes that the source of the Christian's security is lodged either in his obedience or in his experience of conversion or of a "baptism of the Holy Spirit" apart from the means of grace. Paul Huebner makes this observation in a somewhat overstated but still useful presentation on "The Reformed View of the Gospel."

Arminianism . . . rejects the power of salvation in the Word itself. The Holy Spirit will work with the Word, alongside of the Word, but not through the Word. Consequently, doctrine has little value to the Methodist, except perhaps for the very basics since learning Christian doctrine becomes a mere mental exercise rather than a means by which the Holy Spirit feeds our faith. Once the Holy Spirit is separated from the Word, faith becomes a hollow shell, turning itself to obedience and emotions, rather than trust. It becomes something that tries to anchor itself in something within a person rather than anchoring itself in the promises of God in the Word and Sacrament.²¹

Since the Gospel is the means by which the unity of the church is established, and since all Biblical articles of faith are related to the Gospel, concern for unity in doctrine is a concern for the preservation of the Gospel itself.

Conversely, anything that weakens the teachings of the Gospel subverts that unity and must be virorously opposed. Mayer clarifies the issues:

²¹Paul Huebner, "The Reformed View of the Gospel," Christian News, October 11, 1982, p. 11.

Since the spiritual fellowship is engendered only by the Gospel, the fides quae, the fellowship must aim to achieve two goals: a) agreement in, and confession of, the Gospel, and b) the rejection of all views, teachings, tendencies, and practices which will jeopardize the fides quae.²²

The same Bible which calls us to a new oneness in Christ, also calls on us to withhold fellowship whenever its basis is subverted or threatened (Rom. 16:17-18; Titus 3:9-11; 2 John 7-11; Gal. 1:6-9). Because persistent false doctrine ultimately destroys both faith and the Gospel (2 Tim. 2:16-19), we are to beware of false doctrine and false teachers (Matt. 7:15). For this reason, therefore, we are to stand together in one mind and spirit, with no divisions among us while we "speak the same thing" (1 Cor. 1:10; Rom. 15:5-7) and abide in the Word of Christ (John 8:31-32).

It is significant that verses 17 and 18 of the sixteenth chapter of Romans²³ occur following a beautiful recounting and renewing of Paul's fellowship with many Christians who were now making their home in Rome. In order to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:3), it may be necessary to discipline individual Christians or sever our outward fellowship with church bodies or para-church organizations. It was precisely because Paul cherished his fellowship with other Christians that he warned them about those who would disrupt it by sin and error (see also Acts 20:27-32).

²² Mayer, "New Testament Concept," p. 638.

²³ For a thorough discussion of the of the exegetical questions involved in Rom. 16:17-18, see Martin H. Franzmann, "Exegesis on Romans 16:17 ff." Concordia Journal, 7 (January 1981):13-20, and Robert G. Hoerber, A Grammatical Study of Romans 16:17 (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1948).

Kurt Marquart counters the argument that Rom. 16:17-18 cannot be used against sincere Christians but only against unbelievers (cultists, and the like) as follows:

The argument is a red herring. The point in Rom. 16:17 is not whether given individuals still retain faith somehow, but whether they oppose and resist apostolic, orthodox teaching or doctrine. The criteria for separation are objective, not subjective. . . . The question might also be asked whether the language of Rom. 16:18 is really any harsher than that of Matt. 16:23 or Rom. 7:14-25, addressed to the flesh of believing Christians.²⁴

Paul sees heterodoxy as an infraction of the church's koinonia which must be resisted and disciplined by those charged with that responsibility, for here the church is attacked on the level of doctrine, by which the church is created, sustained, nourished and supported.

All subversion of the unity of the Body of Christ must be seen as a demonic undoing of the work of Christ on the cross. This is easily seen in the area of life, where the family of God is attacked by sin in its various forms. Our fellowship must be expressed; failure to express it in love is to cause it to wither on the vine and die. Therefore, all lovelessness is an enemy of our koinonia. Whenever we sin against another Christian we violate not only our outward fellowship, but we subvert our inward fellowship in Christ as well. Persisted in deliberately, without repentance, sin destroys faith and ultimately leads to damnation (Herb. 10:26-31). The context here in verses 19-25 contrasts

²⁴ Kurt Marquart, Church-Fellowship: Its Nature, Basis and Limits (Ft. Wayne, IN: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1982), p. 15. Dr. Karl L. Barth has rightly criticized the LC-MS's "Theology of Fellowship" which in part III warns against the use of many of the traditionally used passages on "unionism" against believers, pointing out that "Its weakness appears to be that, in a discussion of the Bible passages, it points out how these may not be used indiscriminately against fellow Christians,

our fellowship with God and one another founded at the cross with its destruction by deliberate, unrepented sin! Gossip, backbiting, vindictiveness, grudges, all weaken the oneness God wants for all of us. Unjustified withdrawal from church attendance, or stewardship of time, toil or treasure likewise involves a weakening of our fellowship in Christ.

Paul dramatizes the danger to God's people which the toleration of the incestuous adultery in Corinth (1 Corinthians 5) constituted by comparing it to a permeating yeast which works through the whole lump. To permit the offender to continue undisciplined in your midst, Paul implies, is to endanger every marriage in the congregation. Therefore he insists on his expulsion from their fellowship (Verses 2 and 13). The purpose of evangelical discipline in the church is always to win the brother (Matt. 18:15), to preserve the unity and purity of the Body (1 Corinthians 5), and to warn others against the same aberrations (1 Tim. 5:20). In this case, thankfully, discipline achieved the desired result, for in 2 Corinthians 2, Paul implores them to receive him back. The Law had done its work! Now was the time for the Gospel!

John W. Drane illustrates this point by comparing an undisciplined sin to an untreated wound in the human body.

Gradually the wound will fester, poison will enter your bloodstream, your whole body will be affected by the one small injury. It's just like that in the Christian fellowship. The Christian who habitually

but never really answers the question of how or, in fact, if they should be used." "Together in Christ To Gather for Christ," Concordia Journal, 1 (March 1975):64. Theology of Fellowship, Appendix II, Convention Workbook, 48th Regulation Convention, LC-MS, Denver, Colorado, 1969, pp. 527-46.

sins will be like a wound, having an effect on the life of the whole body. On the otherhand, if we are living a life in close fellowship with God himself, we will be releasing not spiritual poison but spiritual nourishment into the fellowship, for the benefit of the whole body.²⁵

Love therefore, not only encourages the strong and strengthens the weak, it also admonishes the erring (Gal. 6:1-2).

Above all, it seeks to help fellow believers remain faithful to Christ and to His Word. This love may in certain situations lead members of the church to separate themselves from fellow Christians and even to exercise church discipline, although it be with many tears (I Cor. 5:5, II Cor. 2:4).²⁶

Love, truth, and unity are not in antithesis to each other in seeking the unity of the Body of Christ, but rather support one another.²⁷

Speaking of "the love principle," Bohlmann reminds us that:

Such love is not mere sentimental affection; as the Apostle Paul's own example shows, love will not tolerate dissimulation in a brother (Galatians 2:11 ff.). Love is tolerant and long-suffering, but intolerant of error, since any error not only denies God's truth, but may jeopardize the brother's faith.²⁸

Bohlmann cites F. E. Mayer's essay in Concordia Theological Monthly as he wrestles with "the tension between a confessionally narrow conscience and an ecumenically broad heart":

Christian fellowship will always manifest itself in accord with pistis and agape; according to faith in "Aengstlichkeit um die

²⁵ John W. Drane, "Fellowship: Our Humpty-Dumpty Approach," Christinity Today, May 9, 1975.

²⁶ CTCR, 1981, p. 12.

²⁷ See Ralph A. Bohlmann's very useful summary in the "Prolegomena" section on "Truth, Unity, and Love" in his very important essay, "The Celebration of Concord," in Theologians' Convocation Formula for Concord Essays (St. Louis: Commission on Theology and Church Relations, 1977), pp. 56-59.

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 57-58.

reine Lehre" [concern for pure doctrine] and according to love in "weltumfassender Liebe" [world embracing love]. In matters of doctrine and faith we must have an extremely narrow and keen conscience. In matters of love we must be broad and wide, in fact so broad that our love will embrace the entire world. This is the difficult but blessed paradox of koinonia.²⁹

In Eph. 4:11-15, Paul exhorts us to grow to complete unity in the faith and maturity in contrast to being "infants, tossed back and forth by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in the deceitful scheming."³⁰ Instead he calls on us to speak "the truth in love." It is no more correct to ignore the truth in our speaking than it is to ignore love.

As Christians we strive to maintain the outward fellowship of the church by combating error for the sake of the Spiritual unity of the Church. The Missouri Synod's Commission on Theology reminds us that:

Error in the understanding and use of the Scriptures threatens unity with Christ and with the saints. Since teachings contrary to God's Word lead away from Christ and not to Him, it is necessary that the Gospel be preached purely and the sacraments administered rightly. Love for Him who is the Truth and for the saints for whom He died will have nothing to do with subverting or compromising in any way the only means through which Christians are made one with Christ and with one another.³¹

The CTCR goes on to declare:

Members of the body of Christ are therefore commanded by God to seek external unity in the church for the sake of the spiritual unity of the church. The Holy Scriptures exhort Christians to teach sound doctrine as it is given in the writings of the prophets and apostles and to defend and preserve the Gospel against all error. It is for the sake of the spiritual unity of the church that the Old Testament

²⁹ Ibid., p. 644.

³⁰ Note that being tossed back and forth by various teachings is just as much a mark of immaturity as lovelessness is.

³¹ CTCR, 1981, p. 12.

prophets repeatedly speak out against false prophets and their false teachings (e.g. Deut. 13:1-5; Jer. 9:13-15). It is for the sake of the spiritual unity of the church that Jesus Himself warns against false prophets who come in sheep's clothing (Matt. 7:15; cf. Acts 20:28-30) and commissions His disciples to "observe all that I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19-20). It is for the sake of the spiritual unity of the church that St. Paul condemns those who "pervert the Gospel of Christ" (Gal. 1:17), that he stresses the necessity of avoiding those who create "dissensions and difficulties, in opposition to the doctrine which you have been taught" (Rom. 16:17), and that he encourages his co-worker Titus to "hold firm to the sure Word" and rebuke "sharply" those who "reject the truth" (Titus 1:9-16).³²

The unity of the church, as has been seen, is a given which all Christians enjoy. Yet it is also something which we are told to maintain against all its foes, and to build up the church by every possible means (Eph. 4:3, 11-16). Unless this distinction is recognized and understood, any withholding of fellowship in either congregational discipline cases or in church body relationships will invariably be misunderstood.

In his classic study, Eucharist and Church Fellowship in the First Four Centuries, Werner Elert cogently argues that the view that error shatters the fellowship of the people of God has been the position of the Christian Church in both the Apostolic and sub-apostolic eras. Elert states:

Heterodoxy breaks the fellowship ipso facto. The basic foundation for this we have seen when considering the local congregation. What is true there is true also between churches. The divisive significance of dogma is only one side of the matter. Dogma is not only the binding doctrinal norm for those who teach in the church, but it is also the confession of all the members who are included in the "We confess" or "We believe." For this reason doctrine is the point at which the unity of the church is most grievously wounded and therefore the point at which also the wounds must again be healed.

³² Ibid.

Where church fellowship is broken by heterodoxy, it can only be restored by the achievement of doctrinal unity. Doctrinal unity is part and parcel of orthodoxy. The truly sound faith leads "to fellowship and unity with those who believe the same."³³

The early church had no concept of a person being excused from the position of the church body or congregation to which he is affiliated on the grounds of his personal faith, sincerity or personal orthodoxy in any type of selective fellowship. Rather, "doctrinal differences . . . were understood as confessional differences which called for the personal decision of each member of the church."³⁴

Elert applies this to fellowship at the Lord's Supper, for "church unity is not the goal in celebrating the Sacrament together but the indispensable prerequisite."

The fellowship of the Sacrament is in partaking (metalepsis) of the body of Christ, something with which men may not do as they please For this reason all who would partake of the Sacrament must first remove every dissention. . . . So long as there is anything that divides them, they may not communicate together. Any disunity carried into the celebration of the Communion does injury to the body of Christ.³⁵

"Close" communication was the rule in the early Church. Elert proves this indisputably with ample documentation.

The modern theory that anybody may be admitted "as a guest" to the Sacrament in a church of a differing confession, that people may

³³ Werner Elert, Eucharist and Church Fellowship in the First Four Centuries, trans. N. E. Nagel (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1966), p. 143. See his chapter on "Unity and Fellowship," pp. 43-62 where he sets forth the argument that in the early church, "The opposite of unity is not plurality but discord and disunity."

³⁴ Elert, p. 179.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 180.

communicate to and fro in spite of the absence of full church fellowship is unknown in the early church, indeed, unthinkable. . . . Since a man cannot at the same time hold two differing confessions, he cannot communicate in two churches of differing confessions. If anyone does this nevertheless, he denies his own confession or has none at all.³⁶

In this light it is interesting to note that the function of sound doctrine is to create, sustain and encourage the health of the Body of Christ. Milne contributed to our understanding by reminding us that the root of the Greek word for "sound" is the same as the word for health, so that sound doctrine is health-giving doctrine, while conversely, false doctrine corrupts the health of the Body.

One of Paul's favorite adjectives for true doctrine is 'sound,' which literally means 'healthgiving,' and this applies to its effect upon relationships between church members as surely as anything. Churches where the truth of God is set forth positively and relevantly in all its height and depth are the least likely to be split asunder by theological disputation.³⁷

The Doctrine of Fellowship in the Lutheran Confessions

Every Lutheran pastor, teacher and congregation accepts the Confessions of the Lutheran Church contained in the Book of Concord of 1580 as true expositions of the Scriptures. They are valid not only for their time, but for all time. In thesis and antithesis they confess our faith and reject the errors of both the Roman Church and of other errorists both inside and outside Lutheranism. Their authority rests on their nature as correct expositions of the Bible, not on any action by the Church in adopting them as her own confession. As Edmund Schlink put

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 174, 182.

³⁷ Milne, p. 111.

it, "The Confession does not in the first instance determine what is to be taught, but sums up what is taught in the church."³⁸

Harry Huth stresses this in this paragraph:

Their authority as judges is a derived authority, derived from the fact that they are "drawn from the Word of God" (p. 506:10), "taken from the Word of God and solidly and well grounded therein" (p. 504:5), "supported with clear and irrefutable testimonies from the Holy Scriptures" (p. 505:6) and that "they formulate Christian doctrine on the basis of God's Word . . . in a most correct . . . form" (p. 505:8). But far from diminishing their authority, this is the very factor that establishes it.³⁹

Under the Scriptures, and as witnesses to them, the Lutheran Symbols set forth how "the Holy Scriptures were understood in the church of God by contemporaries with reference to controverted articles, and how contrary teachings were rejected and condemned (465:8)."⁴⁰

With Paul, the Confessors say, "I believed: therefore I have spoken" (2 Cor. 4:13). Since Christianity is a confessional faith, we must confess. Dr. John F. Johnson writes:

We unite with those confessors because, our faith, like theirs, is simply an affirmative response to the claim of divine revelationScripture demands confession and it shapes confession.⁴¹

³⁸ Edmund Schlink, Theology of the Lutheran Confessions, trans. by Paul F. Koehneke and Herbert J. A. Bouman (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1961), p. 13.

³⁹ Harry A. Huth, "One Savior and One Confession," Concordia Journal, 2 (March 1976):66-67. Here and elsewhere in this paper, references are to The Book of Concord, trans. and ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), unless otherwise indicated.

⁴⁰ Dr. John F. Johnson answers the question of why the Confessions are even necessary if they are in fact mere expositions of the Scripture. "Confession and Confessional Subscription," Concordia Journal, 6 (November 1980):236-38.

⁴¹ Johnson, p. 241.

The Confessions claim to be normative not only for their own times, but speak as the orthodox church to the whole church, as Schlink asserts:

. . . They are the norm according to which the thinking and speaking of the believers is to be tested and determined. Specifically, they claim to be the obligatory model of all of the church's preaching and teaching. This claim admits no limits, either of time or of space. . . . The Confessions which comprise the Book of Concord make this claim not only with respect to the members of the Lutheran churches but with respect to the whole Christian church on earth. It is not the 'Lutheran' church (this designation is repudiated in the Confessions themselves) but the una sancta catholica et apostolica ecclesia which has spoken in the Confessions. They therefore make their claim not only with respect to the time in which they arose, but for all time to come, even until Christ's return.⁴²

In other words, to subscribe to the Confessions is to assert that the doctrinal decisions of the Symbols are the doctrinal decisions of Scripture itself.

The Confessions contained in the Book of Concord are, in a very real sense, fellowship documents. Everything they say, either in affirming what is believed in a positive way or refuting error by way of antithesis, has fellowship implications. In the spirit of Jude, who "was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share," but was forced by false teachers to urge his readers "to contend for the faith once for all entrusted to the saints" (Jude 3-4), the authors of the Book of Concord wanted peace, but false doctrine and discord had brought in "destructive and scandalous division in churches and schools"⁴³ and thereby Satan was able not only to "adulterate the pure doctrine of God's

⁴² Schlink, p. xvii. See C. F. W. Walther in his The True Visible Church, trans. J. T. Mueller, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1961), for a similar position.

⁴³ Preface to the Book of Concord, Tappert, p. 4.

Word, sever the bond of Christian charity and agreement, and in this way hold back and perceptively impede the course of the holy Gospel."⁴⁴

Two things may be noted by this declaration: First, it is error, not truth, that produces division within the church. Creeds, confessions and the preaching of the truth no more create divisions than an x-ray creates broken bones. Secondly, the division of the church by false doctrine has grave evangelistic consequences, for by it the progress of the Gospel is impeded.

The "formula for concord" in the Church of the Augsburg Confession in 1580 was by way of doctrinal agreement. The Confessors:

Saw that there was no better way to counteract the mendacious calumnies and the religious controversies that were expanding with each passing day than, on the basis of God's Word, carefully and accurately to explain and decide the differences that had arisen with reference to all the articles in controversy, to expose and reject false doctrine, and clearly to confess the divine truth. In this way the mouths of the adversaries might be stopped by solid reasoning, and a correct explanation and direction might be provided for simple and pious hearts, so that they might know what attitude to take toward these differences and how by God's grace they might be preserved from false doctrine in the future.⁴⁵

The target⁴⁶ was not those who erred "ingenuously" but only the "false and seductive doctrines and their stiff-necked proponents."

It is unthinkable that the authors of the Formula would practice fellowship with those who were responsible for propagating the errors they were rejecting for they avowed that "such teachings are contrary to the expressed Word of God and cannot coexist with it."

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 6

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Preface to the A. C. Tappert, p. 11.

Still, they held out the hope that when those who held the doctrines they condemned were

rightly instructed in this doctrine, they will, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, turn to the infallible truth of the divine Word and unite with us and our churches and schools.⁴⁷

For this reason the Confessors at Augsburg were ready to discuss doctrine with any and all their opponents in an effort to restore the unity that error had caused.⁴⁸

A similar "formula for concord" in the Church is found among the Confessors fifty years later in the introductory Rule and Norm sections of both the Epitome and the Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord.⁴⁹

The primary requirement for basic and permanent concord within the church is a summary formula and pattern, unanimously approved, in which the summarized doctrine commonly confessed by the churches of the pure Christian religion is drawn together out of the Word of God.⁵⁰

On the other hand, their whole approach to false doctrine ruled out any compromise or fellowship with it. The Formula states:

We have no intention (since we have no authority to do so) to yield anything of the eternal and unchangeable truth of God for the sake of temporal peace, tranquility, and outward harmony. Nor would such peace and harmony last, because it would be contrary to the truth and actually intended for its suppression. Still less by far are we minded to whitewash or cover up any falsification of true doctrine or any publicly condemned errors. We have a sincere delight in and deep love for true harmony and are cordially inclined and determined on our part to do everything in our power to further the same. We desire such harmony as will not violate God's honor, that will not detract anything from the divine truth of the holy Gospel, that will not give place to the smallest error but will lead the poor sinner

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 12.

⁴⁸Preface to A. C. p. 10.

⁴⁹See Tappert, pp. 464-65 and 501-508.

⁵⁰F. C., D.S. Rule and Norm: 1. Tappert, p. 503.

to true and sincere repentance, raise him up through faith, strengthen him in his new obedience, and thus justify and save him forever through the sole merit of Christ, and so forth.⁵¹

The very purpose of the Confessions was to counteract the terrible results of the controversies of their day.⁵² We find no room here for any fellowship with those who teach false doctrine. Again, in the Rule and Norm section of the Formula, the errorists are denied the right and of fellowship, for "the controversies deal with weighty and important matters, and they are of such a nature that the opinions of the erring party cannot be tolerated in the church of God, much less excused or defended."⁵³

Feeling a responsibility for the faith of their people, they wanted to make sure "that well-meaning Christians who are really concerned about the truth may know how to guard and protect themselves against the errors and corruptions that have invaded our midst."⁵⁴ The continuing concern of the Confessions is to defend and declare the truth of God's Word for the sake of those who might be deceived by error and errorists.⁵⁵

⁵¹F.C., D.S., XI:95-96. Located near the conclusion of the Formula, this passage refers to the entire Book of Concord.

⁵²For detailed expositions of the teachings of the Lutheran Confession on church fellowship, we refer the reader to two documents published by the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod: A Lutheran Stance Toward Ecumenism, published in November 1974, and The Naute and Implications of the Concept of Fellowship of April 1981, both of which are available from Concordia Publishing House in St. Louis.

⁵³F.C., S.D., Preface, p. 9. ⁵⁴Ibid., p. 10.

⁵⁵Ibid., pp. 8-10; Rule & Norm 9; Rule and Norm, 10, 14, 19; and F. C., S.D., XII, 40.

This pastoral concern for a pure faith in the Gospel among both teachers and the taught was also the basis for the Symbol's spelling out the antithesis in their writings:

In order to preserve the pure doctrine and to maintain a thorough, lasting, and God-pleasing concord within the church, it is essential not only to present the true and wholesome doctrine correctly, but also to accuse the adversaries who teach otherwise (I Tim. 3:9; Titus 1:9, II Tim. 2:24; 3:16). "Faithful shepherds," as Luther states, "must both pasture or feed the lambs and guard against wolves so that they will flee from strange voices and separate the precious from the vile" (John 10:12-16, 27; Jer. 15:19).⁵⁶

If the Gospel is to be preserved, they argued, God's people must know

what he should accept as correct and true in each of the controverted articles of our Christian faith, according to the prophetic and apostolic writings of God's Word, and what he should reject, flee, and avoid as false and wrong.⁵⁷

For the Confessors at Augsburg in 1530, as well as in the Symbolical writings penned by Luther and by the authors of the Formula of 1577, there was no room for ambiguity in theology or for lowest common denominator doctrinal statements. In contrast to many modern fellowship and doctrinal statements which are often ambiguous the Lutheran Confessors avoided ambiguity in expounding the Gospel.

The Solid Declaration shows this determination in these words:

We wanted to set forth and explain our faith and confession unequivocally, clearly, and distinctly in thesis and antithesis, opposing the true doctrine to the false doctrine, so that the foundation of divine truth might be made apparent in every article and that every article and that every incorrect, dubious, suspicious, and condemned doctrine might be exposed, no matter where or in what books it might be found or who might have said it or supported it. We did this so that we might thereby faithfully forewarn everyone against the errors contained here and there in the writings of certain

⁵⁶ F.C., S.D., Rule & Norm. 14.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 16.

theologians, lest anyone be misled by the high regard in which these theologians were held.⁵⁸

Unity Both a Given IN the Church
and a Goal OF the Church

Ralph A. Bohlmann's splendid essay on "The Celebration of Concord," clarifies the fuzzy thinking so often surrounding discussions of fellowship in the Christian Church⁵⁹ with six well-defined theses. Pointing out that

Christian unity is nothing other than the spiritual bond that unites all believers to their Lord Jesus Christ and thereby to each other. There is one aseembly of such believers in both space and time. Ubi ecclesia, ibi unitas, our fathers said: "Where the church is, there is its unity."⁶⁰

Bohlmann makes a distinction between the unity of the church (which all believers have with each other) and the unity in the church (which believers seek with one another). The unity we have he calls unitas (unity) while the unity we seek he terms Concordia.⁶¹ Since the

⁵⁸ F.C., D.S., Rule and Norm: 19. For an excellent study of the orthodox Lutheran approach to false doctrine, see Hans-Werner Gensichen, We Condemn: How Luther and 16th Century Lutheranism Condemned False Doctrine (trans. Herbert J. A. Bouman (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1967), especially his very helpful summary on both the firmness of the condemnation and its limits on pages 191-192.

⁵⁹ This essay, printed in the CTCR's Formula for Concord essays, which is an updating of his presentation at the 1970 "Lutheran Congress" in Chicago found in Evangelical Directions for the Lutheran Church, eds. Erich Kiehl and Waldo Werning (Chicago: Lutheran Congress, 1970), with the title "Confessional Ecumenism," pp. 82-91., is one of the best in print on the Lutheran Confessional understanding of Church fellowship.

⁶⁰ Ibid,, p. 61

⁶¹ This terminology is also used and discussed in the CTCR's A Lutheran Stance Towards Ecumenism, pp. 9-10, written while Bohlmann was Executive Secretary for this Commission. Bohlmann's distinctions are not shared by all, however. Kurt Marquart argues that "It is a serious

Symbolical books of the Lutheran Church speak of the church not only sociologically (an "association of outward ties and rites") but mainly as "an association of faith and of the Holy Spirit in man's hearts,"⁶² we must speak of the church both in a broad and a narrow sense. In the narrow, proper sense, unity is a "given" because all Christians are one in the una sancta. In the broad sense of outward fellowship, however, this unity has been shattered by sin and false doctrine. The Lutheran Confessions were written, in part at least, to help restore this outward unity. Unity in the outward sense of concordia must always and everywhere be the goal of the Church.⁶³ Here one sees the true ecumenical character of the Augsburg Confession, for its purpose was "to have us all embrace and adhere to a single, true religion and live together in unity and in one fellowship and church, even as we are all enlisted under one Christ."⁶⁴

Dr. Bohlmann goes on to say that one of the most serious errors on contemporary ecumenism is that it equates denominational fellowship

mistake to say that this 'unity' in AC VII (German: 'Einigkeit,' Latin: unitas') is something different from the 'unity' of F. C. Ep. X, 7 (German: 'Einigkeit,' Latin: consensus'); that the Augsburg Confessions 'unity' (unitas) refers to inner, spiritual unity in the 'invisible' church, and the Formula of Concord's 'unity' (Concordia, cf. F.C., S.D., X, 31) to external agreement in doctrine and sacraments." Professor Marquart traces this "error" in the Missouri Synod back to A. C. Piepkorn, "What the Symbols Have to Say about the Church," Concordia Theological Monthly, 26 (October 1955). Kurt Marquart, Church Fellowship: Its Nature, Basis and Limits (Ft. Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1982), pp. 11-12.

⁶²Ap. VII-VIII, p. S.

⁶³Bohlmann, "Celebration," p. 62.

⁶⁴Preface to A.C., p. 4.

with Christian unity, which notion "has either forgotten or rejected the spiritual unity of the church on the basis of its common faith in Jesus Christ."⁶⁵ He argues that this spiritual unity is the "presupposition and basis for seeking the empirical manifestation of that unity."

He writes:

It is precisely because we are one with all Christians that we are concerned about all Christians. It is because the Roman Catholic believer is my brother in Christ, for example, that I am concerned about his understanding of the role of Mary or of the authority of the papacy. It is because the Baptist believer is my brother that I am concerned about his views on the sacraments. Oneness of faith leads and impels us to frank and earnest efforts with other Christians to help them preserve the faith, grow in the knowledge of the Savior, and share His love with others. On the other hand, it is for the sake of their common faith that Christians will often have to remain separate, individually and denominationally, from other Christians; for such separation as is commanded by God Himself serves as a fraternal admonition to the separated brethren to heed the whole counsel of God for the sake of their salvation. It is most unfortunate that so much recent ecumenical literature treats Christian unity only as the goal, and not as the presupposition, for our ecumenical efforts.⁶⁶

In another thesis, Bohlmann asserts that

Confessional ecumenism is both evangelical and evangelistic. It knows that the Gospel of Jesus Christ creates, sustains, and enlarges the church and therefore spares no effort to preach and administer that Gospel. It keeps the Gospel central (evangelical); it shares it with others (evangelistic).⁶⁷

In this context, he makes the intriguing statement that "confessional ecumenism can be correctly understood as the practice of evangelism within visible Christendom."⁶⁸

No discussion of the Confessional Lutheran position on church fellowship could be complete without a consideration of the fellowship

⁶⁵ Bohlmann, "Confessioal Ecumenism," p. 85.

⁶⁶ Bohlmann, "Confessional Ecumenism," p. 86.

⁶⁷ Ibid. ⁶⁸ Ibid.

implications of the Seventh Article of the Augsburg Confessions. Tap-part's translation of the German text renders it as follows:

It is also taught among us that the one holy Christian church will be and remain forever. This is the assembly of all believers among whom the Gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the Gospel. For it is sufficient for the true unity of the Christian church that the Gospel be preached in conformity [German: eintraechtiglich, unanimously] with a pure understanding of it and that the sacraments be administered in accordance with the divine Word. It is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian church that ceremonies, instituted by men, should be observed uniformly in all places. It is as Paul says in Eph. 4:4, 5, "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism."⁶⁹

To understand this article correctly, we must see it as an affirmation of what the Church is, not as a "pragmatic statement" on the basis for outward fellowship.⁷⁰ This is seen by the whole context which quotes Ephesians 4:4-5 and by its official commentary, the Apology, where the phrase "true unity" is defined:

We are talking about true spiritual unity, without which there can be no faith in the heart nor righteousness in the heart before God. For this unity, we say, a similarity of human rites, whether universal or particular, is not necessary.⁷¹

The contrast in A.C. VII "is between the divine Gospel and human ceremonies, and not between the Gospel and 'other' teachings of the Holy Scripture."⁷²

⁶⁹ A.C. VII. ⁷⁰ Bohlmann, "Celebration," p. 61.

⁷¹ Ap. VII-VIII:31.

⁷² Bohlmann, "Celebration," p. 64. This point has been made extensively by many writers. For example, see not only the aforementioned CTCR documents and Bohlmann's essays, but also several essays in The Way to Lutheran Unity, ed. Vernon H. Harley (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1972) subtitled "Five Essays on Article VII and VIII of the Augsburg Confession"; Frederick E. Mayer, "The Voice of Augustana VII on the Church," *Concordia Theological Monthly*, 34 (March 1963):135-46; Karl

The use of A.C. VII as a reductionistic formula for church fellowship is very common among moderate to liberal Lutherans today. This misreading of the Seventh Article is even found in the Resolutions which set the stage for and then declared fellowship between the American Lutheran Church and the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod in 1967 and 1969.⁷³

Article VII underscores the truly ecumenical character of Lutheran doctrine for it bases the unity of the church on the Gospel, on the teachings of the Scripture and the means of grace which create the unity of the Church in the first place. The Lutheran Church does not consider matters such as ceremonies, liturgy, methods or other human traditions or usages which change from culture to culture and from age to age to be part of the true unity of the church or that agreement in such matters is necessary before outward fellowship may be practiced. The Epitome summarizes the Lutheran position:

We believe, teach and confess unanimously that the ceremonies or church usages which are neither commanded nor forbidden in the Word of God, but which have been introduced solely for the sake of good order and the general welfare, are in and for themselves no divine worship or even a part of it.⁷⁴

Barth, "Together in Christ, to Gather for Christ," Concordia Journal, 1 (March 1975):62-68; John T. Mueller, "Notes on the 'Satis Est' of Article VII of the Augustana," Concordia Theological Monthly, 18 (June 1947):401-10; Herman Sasse, "Theses on the Seventh Article of the AC," Springfielder, 25 (Autumn 1961):13-17; A. Aijal Uppala, "'It is Enough' - Satis Est," Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly, 66 (July 1969):169-186; Siegfert W. Becker, "Augustana VII and the Eclipse of Ecumenism" Concordia Theological Quarterly, 44 (July 1980):180-222.

⁷³ Proceedings. 49th Regular Convention of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, 1969, p. 97 R. 3-15. See also the 1967 Proceedings, R. 3-23, pp. 102-3.

⁷⁴ F.C., Ep. X, 3.

Furthermore, the Confessors argued, changing situations may compel the church to adapt or change its way of communicating the Gospel, thus separating the form of the Gospel from its doctrinal content.

We believe, teach and confess that the community of God in every locality and every age has the authority to change such ceremonies according to circumstances, as it may be most profitable and edifying to the community of God.⁷⁵

This principle makes Lutheranism the most adaptable of all denominational families, for we have never made matters of liturgy, church government, clerical dress, or the like divisive of church fellowship. As the Church becomes more successful in its world-wide outreach, and as the issue of contextualization becomes increasingly important on the world Christian scene, the strategic significance of this position will become increasingly clear. In principle the Lutheran Church may take many cultural forms, with F.C.X. providing the way for altering, adapting or innovating according to the culture of the times as long as the doctrinal content remains unaffected.

On the other hand, Article X also sets the perimeters within which changes, contextualization or adaptations of the outward form of the Gospel may take place. The content of the Gospel may never change. At this point the Lutheran Church, so liberal and broad on matters of form, becomes the most steadfast and immovable of all churches when it comes to the stewardship of God's unchanging truth.

Churches will not condemn each other because of a difference in ceremonies, when in Christian liberty one uses fewer or more of them, as long as they are otherwise agreed in doctrine and in all its articles (Latin: partibus - parts) and are agreed concerning the

⁷⁵F.C., Ep. X, 4.

right use of the holy sacraments, according to the well-known axiom, "Disagreement in fasting should not destroy agreement in faith."⁷⁶

Article X of the Formula of Concord, therefore, is a good commentary on A.C. VII. Differences in ceremonies have nothing to do with the true unity of the people of God and therefore cannot affect its outward fellowship, as long as these matters of adiaphora do not imply a concession or an agreement with the enemies of the Gospel, and as long as there is agreement "in doctrine and all its articles."

The reason A.C. VII and F.C. X require agreement in the Gospel and the Sacraments is because they are the means by which the unity of the Church is established and maintained. They constitute the "marks" of the Church, for where they are present the Church exists. Kurt Marquart calls attention to a document which capsulizes the Biblical and Confessional teaching concerning the consequences of attacking the unity of the church by subverting the marks of the church:

Where the marks of the church are opposed by false teaching, not only is this double fellowship (in the Una Sancta) endangered but a power is set up which is in contradiction to the fellowship manifested on earth. Where the pure marks of the church (notae purae) hold sway, this disrupting power is repudiated and overcome through refusal to recognize its right to exist, for Christ alone must reign in His Church through His Word. Where the sway of the pure marks of the church is rejected, the fellowship is broken. A rupture of fellowship for any other reason is impermissible. The restoring of a broken fellowship must be brought about by the use of the pure marks of the church, as they cleanse out the impurity.⁷⁷

⁷⁶F.C., S.D, X:31.

⁷⁷"Fellowship in Its Necessary Context of the Doctrine of the Church," Appendix B in Kurt E. Marquart, Anatomy of an Explosion, Concordia Seminary Monograph Series: No. 3 (Ft. Wayne, IN: Concordia Seminary Press, 1977), p. 147.

When the Lutheran Church insists that the unity of the church is unity in the truth it is merely following the clear teachings of the Word of God itself.⁷⁸ Hermann Sasse underscores this truth:

Church unity is dependent upon agreement in the generally received truth of the pure Gospel. . . . Whenever attempts have been made to unite churches without inquiring about pure doctrines -- that is, without establishing what truth is, and what error, in Christianity -- unity has not been achieved; and, what is worse, the divisions have always been magnified. . . .

.....
 This unity can become manifest in the historical church . . . only when we agree in our profession of faith in this one Lord and in the one truth of the Gospel. The unity of the historical church is not achieved through conformity in rites and ceremonies, nor through identical organization and life patterns, nor even through uniformity in theological thought-forms and opinions. Such unity is only achieved when, in the joyful assurance of our faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, we are one in our understanding of what His Saving Gospel is, and one in our understanding of what He gives us in His Sacraments.⁷⁹

We have another look into the Fellowship theology of the Lutheran Fathers when the Formula calls upon Christians to resist even conformity in externals or adiaphora when this implies agreement with error and errorists.

Hence yielding or conforming in external things, where Christian agreement in doctrine has not previously been achieved, will support the idolaters in their idolatry, and on the otherhand, it will sadden and scandalize true believers and weaken them in their faith. As he values his soul's welfare and salvation, every Christian is obligated to avoid both.⁸⁰

Furthermore, the Confessors were unbending in their refusal to permit error to stand side-by-side with truth. "Such teachings," they

⁷⁸ John 17:17; Gal. 1:6-8; 1 John 4:1; 2 John 10; along with the warning passages of the Pastorals and other places.

⁷⁹ Hermann Sasse, Here We Stand, trans. Theodore G. Tappers (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1938), pp. 178-79.

⁸⁰ F. C., S.D. X, 16.

wrote, "are contrary to the expressed Word of God and cannot coexist with it."⁸¹ In a similar vein, Francis Pieper cites Luther on declaring "Whoever really regards his doctrine, faith, and confession as true, right and certain cannot remain in the same stall with such as teach or adhere to false doctrine."⁸²

In its article on the Lord's Supper, Luther is cited in a way that applies to the question of open or close communion today:

I reckon them all as belonging together (that is, as Sacramentarians and enthusiasts), for that is what they are who will not believe that the Lord's bread in the Supper is his true, natural body, which the godless or Judas receive orally as well as St. Peter and all the saints. Whoever, I say, will not believe this, will please let me alone and expect no fellowship from me. This is final.⁸³

The real issue underlying all the recent debates on the fellowship question within the Lutheran Church in recent years, extending back to before the LC-MS declaration of fellowship with the American Lutheran Church in 1969 up through the floor debates of the 1981 Convention and including the whole open or close communion question is really over whether faith in the heart is sufficient for the practice of outward fellowship, or not. We have demonstrated that the Lutheran Confessions limit outward fellowship to those with whom we have found agreement "in doctrine and all of its articles."⁸⁴ Since the Formula of Concord

⁸¹ Preface to the Book of Concord, Tappert, p. 11. See also the treatment of the Roman Church in the "Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope," where Christians are warned against any involvement with them, applying Matt. 7:15, and 2 Cor. 6:14 to their erring leaders. Tappert, pp. 327-28.

⁸² Francis Pieper, Christian Dogmatics, Vol. 3 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), p. 426.

⁸³ F.C., S.D., VII, 33. ⁸⁴ F.C., S.D., X, 31.

warned against fellowship even with those who differed with us on the nature of Good Works, the Third Use of the Law, Election and even Christ's Descent into Hell, it is impossible to believe that the Confessors of either 1530 or 1580 would have accepted the notion so common even among Lutherans today, and characteristic of the Evangelical-Fundamentalistic position, that membership in the Body of Christ is grounds for full fellowship, even at the Lord's Table.⁸⁵

Since all articles of faith are related directly to the Gospel which creates and preserves faith, any error weakens the Gospel in the narrow sense. As Bohlmann reminds us:

All articles of faith . . . as the fathers often said . . . are either antecedent or consequent to the doctrine of justification by grace. . . . [Therefore] all articles of faith have a direct or indirect bearing on the Gospel in the narrow sense. Because of this relationship, the denial or falsification of any article of faith seriously injures the preaching of the Gospel according to a pure understanding of it.⁸⁶

Schlink is right, therefore, when he notes:

Since the Confession grows out of the unanimity of the preaching of the Gospel and of faith and serves the preservation of the preaching of the Gospel and of faith, the unity of the church is essentially also the unity of Confession.⁸⁷

⁸⁵This is why the CTCR in its 1981 Report on the Nature of Fellowship warned against local congregations declaring fellowship individually with specific congregations on the assumption "that church members at the local level are in a better position than national conventions to determine with whom they should give expression to their unity in the body of Christ" because it is based on the false assumption that "church fellowship is based on faith in the heart instead of on agreement in confession." CTCR, 1981, p. 31, note 57.

⁸⁶Bohlmann, "Celebration," pp. 63-64.

⁸⁷Schlink, p. 206.

Ruth Rouse describes the difference between what she designates "Unity in truth" and "Unity in Christian fellowship" approaches. Referring to the difference between confessional Lutheran and others in the early ecumenical movement and in the Evangelical voluntary movements,

In which disagreement in matters of doctrine was not allowed to impede co-operative action or fellowship, and in which the bond of unity was the common sharing of a certain type of Christian experience.

Those who insisted on unity in truth as the only path to Christian union could not but oppose what they regarded as the compromising disloyalty to truth and the woolly-headed or sentimental character of the type of ecumenism based on unity in fellowship and on a common Christian experience.

Outstanding among those who held this position she lists the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, which "has proved to be a serious obstacle to union even amongst Lutherans."⁸⁸

All those who would encourage joint worship and work without full agreement in doctrine must say either that God does not care if we set aside His Word when it speaks in certain areas, or that the Scriptures are actually unclear on "secondary matters" and therefore we have no right to be "dogmatic" in insisting on unity on these matters. Luther's reply to Erasmus on this point still serves us today:

If Scripture is obscure or equivocal, why need it have been brought down to us by act of God? Surely we have enough obscurity and uncertainty within ourselves, without our obscurity and uncertainty and darkness being augmented from heaven! And how then shall the apostle's word stand: 'All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction?' (2 Tim. 3:16). No, no, Paul, you are altogether unprofitable; such blessings as you ascribe to Scripture must be sought from the fathers, who

⁸⁸ Ruth Rouse, "Voluntary Movements and the Changing Ecumenical Climate," in A History of the Ecumenical Movement, 1517-1948, eds. Ruth Rouse and Stephen Charles Neill (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967), p. 325.

have found acceptance down the long line of the ages, and from the see of Rome.⁸⁹

The Disaster of Doctrinal Indifference

Orthodox Lutheranism views every form of doctrinal indifference as an enemy of God's Truth and of the Gospel itself. To ignore the errors into which one's brother or sister in Christ falls or to fail to warn against false teachers is to fail to practice loving fellowship.

Francis Pieper writes:

He who loves Christ loves Christ's Word, and Christ commands us to avoid all who teach anything that is contrary to His Word. And whoever really loves the brethren refuses to participate in their erring and sinning, seeking rather to deliver them from error and sin.⁹⁰

Does such an attitude condemn the church to continual controversy and lovelessness? No, rather it is unionism which causes error along with the failure to warn against it.

Because the unity of the Christian Church consists in having one faith and one profession, unionism actually is a caricature, indeed a mockery of Christian unity. Instead of healing the hurt, it makes it permanent. . . .

.....
This Christian Church can and should have patience with the erring and seek through instruction to remove the error. But never can or should the church grant error equal rights with the truth. If it does it renounces the truth itself. It is the very nature of truth to antagonize error. Truth which no longer excludes error, but grants it domicile, is eo ipso resigning the truth. . . . Unionism in principle abolishes the difference between truth and error, so that only through a "happy inconsistency" can the erring retain their hold on the essential truth. For this reason unionism is a grave threat to the Christian Church.⁹¹

Our sinful flesh wants peace at any price, willingly compromising for the sake of "more important" ends. But that forgets that the means

⁸⁹ Martin Luther, The Bondage of the Will, trans. J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston (London: James Clarke & Co., 1957), p. 128.

⁹⁰ Pieper, p. 425

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 426.

to all the ends that the Church can seek is the Word of God, and it alone is the guide and lamp in seeking these ends. Therefore, "if consideration of truth are in conflict with considerations of peace, the former must always take precedence."⁹²

Error has no rights in the Church. With respect to doctrine the Christian Church is not a republic, in which all views enjoy equal rights, but an absolute monarchy, in which all subjects are irrevocably committed to the Word of their divine King as promulgated in his Prophetic-Apostolic Constitution.⁹³

Such sentiments seem anachronistic to our age, but they are fully in accord with the Scriptures, Luther and the Symbols of the Lutheran Church. Commenting on the charges of those who "accuse us today of being quarrelsome, harsh, and intractable, because, as they say, we shatter love and harmony among the churches on account of the single doctrine about the Sacrament." The great Reformer replied,

To this argument . . . we reply with Paul: "A little yeast leavens the whole lump." In philosophy a tiny error in the beginning is very great at the end. Thus in theology a tiny error overthrows the whole teaching. Therefore doctrine and life should be distinguished as sharply as possible. Doctrine belongs to God, not to us; and we are called only as its ministers. Therefore we cannot give up or change even one dot of it (Matt. 5:18). Life belongs to us; therefore when it comes to this, there is nothing that the Sacramentarians can demand of us that we are not willing and obligated to undertake, condone, and tolerate, with the exception of doctrine and faith, about which we always say what Paul says: "A little yeast, etc." On this score we cannot yield even a hairbreadth.⁹⁴

⁹²Barth, "Together," p. 67.

⁹³Kurth Marquart, "The Question of Procedure in Theological Controversies," reprinted in The Lutheran News, November 28, 1966, from Australasian Theological Review, April-September 1966.

⁹⁴Luther's Works, American Edition, eds. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), vol. 27, p. 37.

A few pages later he continues:

With the utmost rigor we demand that all the articles of Christian doctrine, . . . be kept pure and certain. This is supremely necessary. For this doctrine is our only light, which illumines and directs us and shows the way to heaven; if it is overthrown in one point, it must be overthrown completely. And when that happens, our love will not be of any use to us. We can be saved without love and concord with the Sacramentarians, but not without pure doctrine and faith. Otherwise we shall be happy to observe love and concord toward those who faithfully agree with us on all the articles of Christian doctrine. . . .

Doctrines is heaven; life is earth. In life there is sin, error, uncleanness, and misery, mixed, as the saying goes, "with vinegar." Here love should condone, tolerate, be deceived, trust, hope and endure all things (I Cor. 13:7); here the forgiveness of sins should have complete sway, provide that sin and error are not defended. But just as there is no error in doctrine, so there is no need for any forgiveness of sins. Therefore there is no comparison at all between doctrine and life. "One dot" of doctrine is worth more than "heaven and earth" (Matt. 5:18); therefore we do not permit the slightest offense against it. But we can be lenient towards errors of life. For we, too, err daily in our life and conduct; so do all the saints. . . . But by the grace of God our doctrine is pure; we have all the articles of faith solidly established in Sacred Scripture. The devil would dearly love to corrupt and overthrow these; that is why he attacks us so cleverly with this specious argument about not offending against love and the harmony among the churches.⁹⁵

The Confessions Reject Both Minimalistic and
Pluralistic Approaches to Unity

Ralph A. Bohlmann asserts that "Confessional ecumenism is doctrinal ecumenism," because

It knows that doctrine is in all its articles related to the Gospel by which the church lives, moves, and has its being. It therefore opposes both minimalistic and pluralistic doctrinal approaches to ecumenism. The former occur in the appeal to practice ecclesiastical fellowship simply on the basis of a declaration of the Lordship of

⁹⁵ Luther's Works, Vol 27, p. 41-42. In contrast to this, note the tentativeness of G. Bromiley's stand on the 39 articles in The Unity and Disunity of the Church (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1958), pp. 77-8.

Christ, the "simple" Gospel, a Trinitarian statement, the fact of Baptism, or perhaps membership in a nominally Christian church. . . . Closely related is the pluralistic assertion so common in ecumenical literature, that many doctrinal positions can exist side by side within the same fellowship without disrupting the fellowship. This agreement to disagree is often bolstered by the fallacious argument that varying traditions of doctrine can enrich and help each other. Both the minimalistic and the pluralistic positions reflect an indifference to revealed doctrine that dishonors God's Word, weakens the Gospel that sustains the church and its true unity, offends the bretheren, and ultimately promotes the external disunity of the churches. Such positions, often predicted on an inadequate notion of Christian love, serve the cause of neither love nor truth. Love demands that our brother be served by truth rather than by error, because error leads away from Jesus Christ, not toward Him. Doctrinal indifferences ultimately destroy true Christian unity and produces schism, division, and polarization within Christendom. . . . Granted that the divided state of Christendom is a serious offense, it must be understood that doctrinal indifference or laxity not only does nothing to remove real barriers to fellowship, but creates an additional offense.⁹⁶

Bohlmann further notes in this context that it is agreement in truth of the Gospel, not in social action, structure or liturgy (or, he might have added, evangelism or missions), that constitutes the basis for Christian fellowship. Adding a telling footnote, he says, "Nor is sociological or psychological compatibility to be confused with true Christian unity. Advocates of the 'more we get together, the happier we'll be' kind of ecumenism are too much in evidence."⁹⁷

Similarly, Kurt Marquart warns against reducing fellowship to an undefined good feeling without objective content in this citation:

Fellowship dare never be treated as simply another aspect of sanctified living, something in the realm of the Second Table, perhaps

⁹⁶Bohlmann, "Celebration," pp. 67-8. See also his "Confessional Ecumenism" essay, p. 86. Likewise, consult Harry Huth, "Confessional Subscription and Theological Pluralism" in "One Savior and One Confession," Concordia Journal 2 (March 1976):64-8.

⁹⁷Ibid., p. 68, footnote 15.

of the Eighth Comamndment. Where this is done, the objective Gospel is subtly transformed into subjectivity, and doctrine and confession are relativized, on the plea that perfection is impossible in a sinful world.⁹⁸

In spite of protests from the World, Satan, and our flesh, we must obediently follow the way of the Cross:

The way of eternal church unity by strict adherence to all of the teachings of God's Word is a way of the Cross in a two-fold sense:

1. It calls for the crucifixion of our own flesh, our Old Adam It knows that agreement in doctrine, honest acceptance of all the teachings of God's Word as the only basis of union, is a long hard row to how -- a row watered with sweat and tears. Our flesh would rather take the seemingly easy short-cut of union by compromise. Furthermore, those who stand up for this way are subject to all manner of verbal abuse: "Loveless! Proud! Holier than thou! Arrogant! Old Fogey! Behind the Times!". . . .

2. But this way -- the way of external unity by faithful adherence to all the teachings of God's Word -- is the way of the Cross in a more excellent sense. It preserves and teaches the Gospel of Christ crucified, the only hope of sinners. Even if we didn't know it from the warnings of God's Word that a "little leaven leaventh the whole lump," that every move to give up on the "little doctrines" in Satan's way of ultimately stabbing the big one, the very heart, we would know it from the study of Church History which repeats the story ever and again of erosion of doctrine till only husks are left.⁹⁹

Sound Doctrine for the Sake of the Gospel

It was not for academic reasons or for the sake of maintaining a denominational identity that the Lutheran Church insisted on sound doctrine, but always for the sake of the Gospel. The Confessions repeatedly manifest an evangelical concern that error weakens the Gospel.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Kurt Marquart, "The Church of the Augsburg Confession as the True Ecumenical Movement," Lutheran Synod Quarterly, 8 (Winter 1967-68):87.

⁹⁹ Torald N. Teigen, "Let the Gospel Be Gospel," The Way to Lutheran Unity, pp. 57-8.

¹⁰⁰ F.C., S.D., V, 27; Ap. 11, 33; IV, 3, 110; XII, 77; XV, 14; XXVII, 23, 34; S.A. 11, I, 5; S.A. II, II, 1, 7, 12, 17, 21, 24-25; S.A., II, III, 2; IV, 3.

For this reason the Apology exhorts us to "forsake wicked [German: falsche] teachers for they no longer function in the place of Christ but are antichrists."¹⁰¹ Matt. 7:15 and Gal. 1:9 are then applied against them.

For the Confessors there are no such things as doctrinal issues unrelated to the Gospel. Thus the CTCR is fully confessional when it asserts:

Every question about what Scripture says or teaches is already a "Gospel question" simply because it is a question about Scripture given to us by God for the sake of the Gospel! To dismiss any question about Scripture as though it had no bearing on the Gospel is to forget what the Scriptures are for.¹⁰²

We manifest our unity in the Body of Christ in many ways, "but never by compromising the means by which the spiritual unity of the church comes into being."¹⁰³ The truth of the Gospel is what builds, edifies, unites, converts, and sanctifies. Error can never edify; only truth does. Even when a person who is teaching false doctrine converts, or edifies his readers or hearers, it is the truth that he teaches and preaches that does this, over his error which can only divide the church.

Hermann Sasse comments on the intimate relationship between the integrity of the Gospel and unity in the truth in Here We Stand:

¹⁰¹Ap. VII-VIII, 48. The German is actually stronger: These "falsch Lehrer" should not be received or heard ["annehmen oder hoeren"]. Triglot Concordia ed. Paul Bente (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), pp. 243, 245. The fellowship implications here are clear.

¹⁰²Gospel and Scripture, the Interrelationship of the Material and Formal Principles in Lutheran Theology. A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations, The LC-MS, November 1972, p. 14.

¹⁰³CTCR, "Nature and Implications," p. 14.

When the Reformation demanded that the Gospel be taught in its purity, the phrase "pure teaching," or "pure doctrine," was intended to mean far more than correct theological theory. "Doctrine" and "teaching" have the same meaning in the writings of Luther and in the Lutheran Confessions as they have in the New Testament: to teach is to present to the people the saving message of the Gospel. So the Reformation also used the words "confess" and "confession" in the same way as the New Testament: a confession is the response of the church ("We have believed and know that Thou art the Holy One of God") to the revelation. Just as we can not "teach," so we can not "confess," "but in the Holy Spirit" (I Cor. 12:3). Nor did the Reformation ever forget that the same word is used in the New Testament for the confession of faith, the confession of sin, and the worship of God. At bottom, for the Lutheran Church a confession is nothing else than the great "We praise Thee, O God: we acknowledge Thee to be the Lord" of a pardoned sinner. And when the church rejects the errors of ancient and modern times "with common consent" in the great "we believe, teach and confess" of the Lutheran Confessions, this concern for pure doctrine is nothing else than the concern which Paul and John manifested when they warned their congregations against distortions of the evangelical proclamation, against gospels which were no longer the Gospel.¹⁰⁴

Robert Preus is right, therefore, when he declares that "the Gospel is never mere proclamation devoid of doctrinal content but is always doctrine." "The church," he writes, "is not only a believing community, it is also a confessing community."¹⁰⁵

The Significance of the Lutheran Concept of
"Unionism" to the Defense and Purity of the Gospel

The term "unionism" as used in conservative Lutheran circles, come into prominence as a result of the Prussian Union of 1817 which sought to unite Lutheran and Reformed churches in Prussia on the basis of a compromised doctrinal position.¹⁰⁶ Its most famous definition is

¹⁰⁴ Sasse, Here We Stand, "Forward," pp. vii-viii.

¹⁰⁵ Robert Preus, "The Basis for Concord," Formula for Concord Essays, p. 21.

¹⁰⁶ "Unionism," Lutheran Cyclopedia, ed. Erwin L. Lueker (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House), p. 1081.

probably that embodied in the Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod, which we quote in the context of the paragraph "On Church Fellowship":

Since God ordained that His Word only, without the admixture of human doctrine, be taught and believed in the Christian Church, 1 Peter 4:11; John 8:31-32; 1 Tim. 6:3, 4, all Christians are required by God to discriminate between orthodox and heterodox church-bodies, Matt. 7:15, and, in case they have strayed into heterodox church-bodies, to leave them, Rom. 16:17. We repudiate unionism, that is, church-fellowship with the adherents of false doctrine, as disobedience to God's command, as causing divisions in the Church, Rom. 16:17; 2 John 9, 10, and as involving the constant danger of losing the Word of God entirely, 2 Tim. 2:17-21.¹⁰⁷

Therefore the Lutheran Church as an orthodox church must reject anything that endangers the truth

Christian fellowship must reject all views, trends, or practices which in any way might jeopardize and ultimately destroy the faith of the koinonikos. Faith is engendered by, and rests solely upon, the Word of God. Any tampering with the Word of God may, and frequently does, destroy faith. Since Christ is the center of all Christian revelation and of all proclamation within the Christian Church, 1 Cor. 2:2-10, therefore, any deviation from the Word, though it may appear non-essential, will ultimately strike at the very heart and center of the Gospel. The spiritual fellowship is so delicate that it cannot endure any deviation from Christ's Gospel. With Luther all Christians deplore the schisms and dissensions within the Christian Church. It is no easy matter to be separate from others, and even to be charged with separatism. Nevertheless, Luther is right when he maintains that only one thing counts; namely, to maintain the fellowship of the Spirit and Christ.¹⁰⁸

Neither the Brief Statement nor Dr. Mayer is calling for a legalistic stance, but rather for an evangelical one. To withhold fellowship is simply the application of church discipline to the church body level. Bohlmann writes:

¹⁰⁷ Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1932), p. 13, paragraph 28.

¹⁰⁸ Mayer, "New Testament Concept," p. 640.

Such separation as is commanded by God Himself serves as a fraternal admonition to the separated brethren to heed the whole counsel of God for the sake of their salvation.¹⁰⁹

Likewise, the Theology of Fellowship, Part I, of the LC-MS calls for the Christian to carefully guard fellowship that he has with God and with other Christians against every attack from Satan to disrupt it

1. By remaining steadfastly under the power of Gospel in Word and Sacrament. . . .
2. By applying the corrective measures of the Law and the healing powers of the Gospel whenever the church is invaded by errors in teaching and preaching, . . . by corruption of morals . . . and by schismatic and separatistic tendencies. . . .
3. By resolutely confronting, exposing, and excluding all that threatens to vitiate and destroy the fellowship . . . whether it be a satanic intrusion from outside the church or a satanic perversion from within. . . .¹¹⁰

Peter Brunner shares this emphasis on the refusal of fellowship being the necessary duty when the Gospel which unites the Church is threatened in any way:

For the sake of men's salvation, the church stands under the command to preserve clearly the apostolic Word, and therefore, the mark of apostolicity at its center. In obedience to this command, it must refuse to grant church fellowship where agreement cannot be reached on the content of the Word which is to be proclaimed as the apostolic message and faithfully administered in the sacraments.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Bohlmann, "Celebration," p. 66.

¹¹⁰ Theology of Fellowship, Convention Workbook, 48th Regular Convention of the LCMS, 1969, as part of Appendix 11, Theological Documents, p. 529.

¹¹¹ Peter Brunner, "The Realization of Church Fellowship," in The Unity of the Church: Symposium (Rock Island, IL: Augustana Press, 1967), p. 20.

John H. C. Fritz attacked every form of unionism in the strongest possible terms because of its indifference to doctrine and its failure to see the danger of false teaching and teachers. Unity becomes a goal for its own sake for the unionist, and whatever stands in the way is ipso facto a matter of indifference.

For their union is not at all to be brought about on the basis of doctrine, but with the understanding that whatever has hitherto separated them be declared a matter of indifference and therefore not a cause for separate existence. . . . This, however, does not prevent individual pastors, church-members, or congregations from retaining their own peculiar doctrines, provided that they do not insist that others must also accept them, which, as a matter of course would preclude any union. . . . What is not included in the doctrinal consensus is to be considered as being merely a theological opinion. . . . They form a union on the basis of what both believe and teach, entirely disregarding those points concerning which they do not agree.¹¹²

The Founder of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, C. W. Walther, warns that those taking a firm stand on the truth and against error, refusing to fellowship with it, are in for severe criticism.

We consider it our duty to criticize, refute, oppose, content against, and reprove whatever error becomes manifest in the teaching of those who wish to be our brethren, whether this error pertains to a fundamental or a nonfundamental teaching of the Word of God. By taking this course, we merely follow all faithful servants of God, from the prophets and apostles down to the most recently recognized faithful ministers of our Church. The result, of course, is that the Church never for a long time enjoys peace and that precisely the orthodox Church usually presents the appearance of a body torn by internal dissensions. But this, far from being an indictment of a servant of God and of the Church, is rather an indication and seal that the servant of God is faithful, and it gives the Church the assurance that it

¹¹² John H. C. Fritz, Religious Unionism (Yuba City, CA: Scriptural Anchor Publications, condensed from a 1930 Concordia Publishing House publication), pp. 2-3. For an account of how LC-MS Lutherans of Fritz's generation dealt with unionism among Fundamentalists see Milton L. Rudnick, Fundamentalism and the Missouri Synod, A Historical Study of Their Interaction and Mutual Influence (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1966).

belongs to the ecclesia militans. For this reason Gerhard writes: "For the zealous warfare which pious and faithful teachers conduct against false doctrine one may not unjustly conclude that they are instruments of the Holy Spirit and that their teaching undoubtedly is true. It is an attribute of faithful teachers that they endeavor to purge the Church completely of all creations of Satan regardless of who the persons may be that have introduced or are introducing them. Therefore, even when very insignificant adulterations occur and they observe them, they will not for one hour close their eyes indulgently."¹¹³

The Lutheran Church continually resists any compromise with false teaching and teachers because of the oneness of all doctrine, centered around the Gospel. F. E. Mayer stressed this in his The Religious Bodies of America, where he puts justification by faith at the center of our faith and confession:

Only within the frame of reference of the doctrine of justification can any Christian doctrine be considered in a salutary way. The doctrine of justification is, as it were, the strand on which all the pearls of the Christian revelation are strung.¹¹⁴

Elsewhere, Mayer writes:

The Reformers never thought of the Gospel as a summary of isolated doctrinal statements, a series of dogmatical loci. Luther, in particular, speaks of the Gospel as an integral unit saving faith of which Christ is the center.¹¹⁵

Professor Marquart speaks cogently to the problem of denominational differences and the idea that there is one common denominator among all Christian groups, after which one adds his own specific differences.

As soon as the dogmatic fullness or integrity of the Gospel is seen to be something more than an expendable theological luxury, then the

¹¹³Walther, "False Arguments," p. 354.

¹¹⁴F. E. Mayer, The Religious Bodies of America, 3rd ed. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1958), p. 145.

¹¹⁵Mayer, "New Testament Concept," p. 638.

question of the so-called "denominational differences" at once becomes unavoidable. The fact is that there simply is no neutral, undogmatic, generic Gospel, which may then be flavored to taste with denominational additives, say a dash of delicate Anglican mint sauce here, and a hearty Lutheran sauerkraut or Baptist okra there. Every confession of the Gospel is at once and inevitably dogmatic or "denominational." For no honest presentation of the Gospel can escape the necessity of saying yes or no to basic evangelical ingredients like the power of Baptism, grace alone, universal grace, or the real presence of Christ's body and blood in the Holy Supper for our salvation. With these considerations we have arrived at the heart of the ecumenical dilemma: how can we serve the whole church of God in the catholicity of the one faith, while at the same time holding firmly to Lutheran distinctives? Indeed, what are the distinctive features of the Lutheran understanding of the Gospel, and what place in the total scheme of things must we assign to them.¹¹⁶

A little later he adds:

All dogmatic, theological specifics thus have meaning and importance only as they serve and express this one pure Gospel of Christ. To be sure, Lutheran theology has very distinctive dogmatic features. These, however, are seen as part and parcel of the Gospel itself, not as extras over and above the Gospel. The Lutheran church has no sectarian hobby-horses, to represent no sectarian ambitions, to invent no deviations from the common faith of all Christians. She desires only to confess the one Gospel of the one Lord and His one body, in the one faith and the one Baptism. The distinctiveness of the Lutheran Church is that she eschews all distinctives beyond the Gospel itself. This ecumenical Gospel mindedness must patiently endure the nickname "Lutheran," not as a mark of sectarian willfulness and individualism, but in the same sense as the Gospel was in other ages characterized as "Pauline," "Athanasian," or "Augustinian."¹¹⁷

In our introductory chapters, we have seen how different the Lutheran understanding of fellowship in the Gospel is from the understanding which we commonly find among the Reformed in general and among Evangelicals specifically. For orthodox Lutherans there are no articles of faith or points of teaching which are unrelated to the Gospel. As

¹¹⁶ Kurt E. Marquart, "Central Lutheran Trusts for Today," Concordia Journal, 8 (May 1982):87.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 88. The entire essay is related to our theme and presents the unique, evangelical nature of Lutheranism in today's theological scene in his best, provocative style.

stewards of the doctrine which God has delivered to the Church, none of it is negotiable or may be pushed aside for the sake of some other seemingly more important goal or unity. Not every union is good and promotes the unity of the Body of Christ, but only that which is unity in the true fullness of the Gospel of Christ and created by the means of grace by the Holy Spirit. But such a unity is solid indeed!

CHAPTER IV

THE HISTORICAL ROOTS OF KEY 73

We have already sufficiently demonstrated the background of Key 73 in the historical survey of the Evangelical movement in our first chapter and in our overview of representative contemporary Evangelicals in Chapter Two.¹ Our purpose in this chapter will be to trace the background of Key 73 more specifically in three sources: the Billy Graham Evangelistic crusades, the Berlin Congress on World Evangelicism in 1966 and in its major model, the Latin American "Evangelism-in-Depth" crusade.

In Billy Graham's Cooperative Evangelistic Crusades

The 1967 Christianity Today editorial which planted the seed of what was to become Key 73, "Somehow, Let's Get Together,"² noted that the one major event in which most American Evangelicals would join together was in Billy Graham's crusade. From the beginning, Billy Graham

¹For a further overview, see George M. Marsden, "From Fundamentalism to Evangelicalism: A Historical Analysis," in The Evangelicals, eds. David F. Wells and John D. Woodbridge (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1975), pp. 122-42 and his Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth Century Evangelicalism, 1870-1925 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

²See Chapter V, p. 221 of this dissertation. The editorial is reprinted below as Appendix II.

extended his influence, his name and his assistance to the planning and execution of Key 73. Elsewhere we will show how his organization funded the original Key Bridge meeting which started the ball rolling for Key 73.³ Afterwards, he would write the Preface to Ted Raedeke's Yesterday, Today, and Forever,⁴ which served as a summary volume for the movement.

D. A. Kemper points out that it is not fair to say that Billy Graham's Evangelistic Association was only one of 140 groups supporting Key 73 for "throughout the campaign the imprimatur of Billy Graham was widely publicized."⁵

Since Billy Graham is closely linked with Key 73, it is fair to briefly look at his theology of fellowship, even though an extensive treatment would take us beyond the scope of this study. His cooperative evangelistic methods and style have been both attacked and defended for many years from many sources.⁶ After documenting Graham's cooperation with those who preached "another Gospel,"⁷ and critiquing his synergism,⁸ albeit from a strongly Calvinistic viewpoint, Errol Hulse lists the reasons for his own misgivings in cooperating with Graham in Great Britain:

³ See below, p. 190, n. 15.

⁴ T. A. Raedeke, ed., Yesterday, Today, and Forever (Washington: Canon Press, 1974), pp. v-vi.

⁵ Deane, A. Kemper, "Another Look Back at Key 73," The Reformed Journal, January 1975, p. 17.

⁶ One defender is Robert O. Ferm, Cooperative Evangelism: Is Billy Graham Right or Wrong? (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1958), while his critics include Gary G. Cohen, Biblical Separation Defended (Nutley, N. J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1966) which systematically answers Ferm's argumentation, and Erroll Hulse, Billy Graham - The Pastor's Dilemma (Hounslow, Middlesex, England: Maurice Allen Publishers, 1966), which also is in part a reply to Ferm.

1. A realization of the desperate need of reformation and true revival in the Church will be further off.
2. A lower premium will be placed on Biblical doctrine than before.
3. Believers will be more confused concerning Biblical principles. and pragmatism will be more part of their thinking than before.
4. The line of demarcation between true and false Christianity will be more blurred than before.
5. Shallow methods will be more in vogue than before.
6. As in American evangelicals will be more divided than before, those who cannot co-operate with Modernists being divided from those who brush differences aside.
7. Inquirers will be sent to unreliable churches, perhaps to their undoing.⁹

Both because of his theology and his latitudinarian fellowship policy, conservative Lutherans have generally not supported his crusades, even though they found much to support in his preaching of the Gospel.¹⁰

Graham is also of interest to us because his extensive travel on behalf of the Gospel:

Proved to be the catalyst necessary to unite Evangelicals for the Berlin World Congress on Evangelism in 1966. The evangelistic declaration of the Gospel -- based upon the authority of the apostolic writings, the Bible transcended denominational differences and united churchmen, evangelists, and missionaries around the world in a renewed vision to fulfill the Great Commission of Matt. 28:19-20.¹¹

The Berlin World Congress on Evangelism, 1966

Although the purposes and contributions of the great Berlin Congress extended far beyond cooperation in evangelism, there can be no doubt that this was high on the agenda of the planners from the beginning.

⁷Hulse, p. 67. ⁸Ibid., pp. 18-33. ⁹Ibid., pp. 85-86.

¹⁰For examples, see James G. Manz, "Billy Graham: Twentieth Century Evangelist," Lutheran Witness, March 25, 1958, pp. 6-7, 21, and Martin H. Scharlemann, "The Graham Brouhaha," Concordia Journal, 8 (September 1982):161-62.

¹¹Arthur P. Johnston, The Battle for World Evangelism (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1978), p. 141.

At the first meeting of the Executive Committee for World Congress of Evangelism, at Chicago in April 1964, the third purpose was "To develop the framework of cooperation (discuss our oneness)."¹² This Congress belongs in our study of the sources of Key 73 because Carl Henry traced Key 73 back to this great meeting of evangelists, missionaries and theologians.¹³ It is also significant that the first backers of a Key-73 type effort, Henry and Billy Graham, were Chairman and Honorary Chairman, respectively, of the Berlin Congress.¹⁴

Like the Lausanne Congress nearly a decade later, Berlin produced many important essays which are of interest to any student of the theology and practice of evangelism and missions. There were also warnings against superficial proclamations of a watered down "gospel" and of practice which was not based upon a solid foundation in the bedrock of Scripture. One passage which relates to our subject is in a brief presentation by C. Stacey Woods, who admonished would-be evangelists:

If care goes into the preparation of an evangelistic campaign, surely equal - and even more - care should be given to ensure that those professing Christ are received by Bible-believing Churches, and not by apostate congregations that falsely bear the name of Christ. These New Testament Churches must instruct babes in Christ more fully. Therein lies the failure of many evangelistic campaigns and of many Churches involved in the task of evangelism. The root of this problem is doctrinal, not situational. There are those whose evangelistic activity betrays an essential pelagianism, and whose Augustinianism commences once a decision has been made.¹⁵

¹²From minutes of "The First Meeting of the Executive Committee for World Congress on Evangelism," cited by A. P. Johnston, Battle, p. 172.

¹³Carl F. H. Henry, "Key 73: Good News for the Nation," Christian Herald, March 1973, p. 32.

¹⁴A. P. Johnston, Battle, p. 173. Johnston devoted an entire chapter to this Congress, pp. 153-224.

¹⁵C. Stacey Woods, "Some Modern Temptations," in One Race, One Gospel, One Task, eds. Carl F. H. Henry and W. Stanley Mooneyham,

Yet a thread of pietistic unionism runs through many contributions at the Congress. Arthur P. Johnston, who holds that the doctrine of Scripture is the unifying element in Evangelism, says as much in this citation:

Third, Berlin 1966 spoke of an interdenominational, international, and interracial unity that evangelical evangelism inspired. As the contemporary ecumenical movement of the WCC recognized its modern roots in the pietism and revivalism of the nineteenth century, so the regrouping of world Evangelicals at Berlin restored the image of apostolic unity under the authority of the Holy Scripture, rather than under ecclesiological tradition or denomination traditions. The "given" unity in Christ centered around the authority of Christ as revealed in the infallible Scripture.¹⁶

In this same chapter Johnston praised restoration of "international unity" and "nonsectarian pattern of evangelistic cooperation" "in the tradition of revivalism and pietist evangelism."¹⁷

Billy Graham's associate, Leighton Ford, called for the kind of "united witness" which is characteristic of much cooperative evangelism today.

Evangelistic campaigns give opportunity to witness together; a true, scriptural ecumenism is often a byproduct. . . . The united campaign . . . combines rather than by-passes local fellowships.¹⁸

Francis Schaeffer thus put his finger on a serious weakness in the Berlin Congress when he advised:

In the Conference's Theme: "One Race, One Gospel, One Task," one might ask whether perhaps the most important thing has been omitted, namely, "One Truth."

World Congress on Evangelism - Berlin 1966, Official Reference Volumes, vol. 2, p. 204.

¹⁶ A. P. Johnston, Battle, p. 177, Note the Congress Slogan, "One Race, One Gospel, One Task."

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 215.

¹⁸ Leighton F. S. Ford, "The Gift of the Evangelist," in One Race vol. 2, pp. 267-68.

The unity of orthodox or evangelical Christianity should be centered around an emphasis on truth and not on evangelism as such. This emphasis on truth is always important, but doubly so when we are surrounded by a generation for whom the concept of truth in the sense of antithesis is not so much denied as it is considered to be totally untenable.¹⁹

For this reason Schaeffer warned:

Thus -- because of our commitment to evangelism on the basis of the holiness of God and for the sake of truth -- I can visualize times when the only way to make plain the seriousness of what is involved in regard to a campaign where the Gospel is going to be preached, but where men (whose doctrine is known to be an enemy) are going to be invited to pray, etc., is with tears not to accept an official part in the campaign. Evangelism that does not lead to purity of life and purity of doctrine is just as faulty and incomplete as an orthodoxy which does not lead to a concern for, and communication with, the lost.²⁰

At the end of the Congress, by an unanimous standing vote,²¹ however, there was a call to "all believers" to unite for the evangelization of the world:

As an evangelical ecumenical gathering of Christian disciples and workers, we cordially invite all believers in Christ to unite in the common task of bringing the word of salvation to mankind in spiritual revolt and moral chaos. Our goal is nothing short of the evangelization of the human race in this generation by every means God has given to the mind and will of men.²²

The "Evangelism-in-Depth" Campaigns of Latin America

The Evangelism-in-Depth (EID)²³ campaigns initiated by R. Kenneth Strachan (1910-1965) of the Latin American Mission during the 1960's

¹⁹ Francis A. Schaeffer, "The Practice of Truth, in One Race, vol. 2, p. 454.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 455. ²¹ A. P. Johnston, Battle, p. 224.

²² Closing Statement of the World Congress on Evangelism, in One Race, vol. 1, p. 5.

²³ Ray C. Rosales documents and comments on the typically conservative and Evangelical doctrinal statement of the Latin American Mission in

supply us with the model for Key 73. Also called "Saturation Evangelism" because of its comprehensive, nation-wide character, this approach to evangelism was used in many Latin American countries²⁴ and adapted in both Africa and Asia. Since publicity pieces on Key 73 published in Christianity Today expressed the hope that Key 73 would achieve the "depth of saturation aimed for in the Evangelism-in-Depth movements conducted in Latin America,"²⁵ we are safe in asserting that evangelistic endeavors such as Key 73 and Campus Crusade's "Here's Life, America"²⁶ are essentially "Evangelism-in-Depth" campaigns applied to the American scene. If we are to understand the theology and methodology of Key 73, therefore, we must first examine the model from which it was derived.

Ruben Lores, successor to Kenneth Strachan as director of the EID program, has described its "theological foundation . . . as an ellipse whose two foci are the Great Commission of the church and the unity of

his Luther Theological Seminary M.Th. dissertation entitled, The Evangelism in Depth Program of the Latin American Mission: A Description and Evaluation (privately published, April 1966), in the Concordia Seminary Library in St. Louis, p. 1/3 [his page numbering system].

²⁴C. Peter Wagner lists EID campaigns in Nicaragua (1960), Costa Rica (1961), Guatemala (1962), Honduras (1963-64), Venezuela (1965), Bolivia (1965), Dominican Republic (1965-66), Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua (1967), Peru (1967), Columbia (1968), Ecuador (1970), Mexico (1971), and Paraguay (1971). Frontiers in Missionary Strategy (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), p. 137.

²⁵David Kucharsky, "Unlocking Evangelistic Potential," Christianity Today, January 1, 1971, pp. 43-44, and "Getting It Together for Jesus: An Introduction to Key 73," Christianity Today, July 7, 1972, p. 17.

²⁶See Win Arn's analysis of this evangelism approach in "A Church Growth Look at . . . Here's Life America!" Church Growth: America, January-February 1977, pp. 4-7, 9, 14-15, 27, 30.

the body of Christ."²⁷ In this section we shall attempt to demonstrate that cooperative evangelism is essential to the EID system and not merely incidental to it.

In order to understand the movement, we must understand its founder. Here we discover evidence that R. Kenneth Strachan's background is in the faith mission movement and in his training in non-denominational Evangelical schools movement. Given such a background helped shape the theology and practice which resulted in the inter-confessional approach which was to characterize his missionary career.

W. Dayton Roberts, Kenneth Strachan's brother-in-law, provides clues from his professional education. A graduate of Dallas Seminary (an interdenominational, albeit rigidly dispensational, seminary), Strachan earned his Th.M. at Princeton Seminary under the moderately conservative ecumenical scholar John MacKay, President of the Seminary.²⁸ Strachan was not raised in any denominational tradition, nor even in a particular local church. His father, founder of what was to become the Latin American Mission, was interested only in evangelization, not in church planting which he left to others. Nor did Strachan develop denominational or confessional loyalties in the non-denominational faith

²⁷ Ruben Lores, "Depth in Evangelism" mimeographed material, Division of Evangelism, Latin American Mission, p. 1, cited by George W. Peters, Saturation Evangelism (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970), p. 64.

²⁸ W. Dayton Roberts, Strachan of Costa Rica: Missionary Insights and Strategies (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971), p. 36-38.

mission background. It would be surprising if he had not developed a unionistic approach to mission work.²⁹

The Principles of Evangelism in Depth

Kenneth Strachan developed his EID concepts and mission strategies by studying three rapidly growing movements in Latin America: Communism, the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Pentecostal movement. He wrote,

The thing that intrigued me . . . was that they were growing rapidly, whereas, the traditional Christian Church, with all of its formality, with all of its proper life and all of its orthodox doctrine, with all of its organization, was more or less maintaining a level of stagnation, or else losing ground.

His studies led him to this conclusion:

The doctrine in itself had nothing to do with the expansion of the movement; neither did the form of worship; nor . . . the form of government [or] ministerial preparation, nor . . . could its own particular emphasis -- one thing alone could account for the growth of any particular movement.

Thus Strachan evolved what came to be known as the "Strachan Theorum":

The expansion of any movement is in direct proportion to the success achieved in mobilizing and deploying its total membership in the continuous propagation of its beliefs. The key to success is the mobilization of the entire forces in continuous evangelism. . . . It means

²⁹Ibid., p. 41. Roberts provides a valuable clue to the non-denominational style, not only of Strachan but of much of the modern Evangelical-Fundamentalistic movement, in the ecclesiology of the Dispensationalism in which he was trained at Dallas Seminary. According to this doctrinal tradition, the denominations are apostate and interium until Christ comes to rapture away the remnant. "A local corollary of this teaching would be to subordinate the structures as much as possible; live with them only when necessary; separate oneself from them when they show signs of decay; and build one's fellowship in the supraecclesiastical realms of the 'invisible church'."

that the laymen will have to function properly as God intended -- as the pattern of Acts describes -- which is that every solitary Christian is a missionary.³⁰

Much like Key 73, EID had four stages:

- I. Mobilization
- II. Training
- III. Evangelism
- IV. Follow Up.³¹

In carrying out these stages, the Evangelism in Depth coordinators followed four "Presuppositions":

1. Abundant Reaping requires abundant sowing.
2. Christians can and must work together in evangelism.
3. When Christians pool resources for evangelism, God multiplies them.
4. A dedicated minority can make an impact on an entire area.³²

All four of these principles were later applied in Key 73 and are typical of cooperative evangelism efforts generally. For our study of the theology of Evangelical Cooperative evangelism, points two and three are especially important. An official commentary on their implications found in the EID Coordinators Manual elaborates on point two as follows:

2. Christians can and must work together in evangelism. Without compromising their own doctrinal positions or sacrificing their denominational distinctives, Christians have found a common ground in the proclamation of the gospel. And they have done this because of their burden for those who need the gospel witness.

Applying John 17:21, the Manual rightly asserts that a basic purpose for Christian unity is evangelization, "that the world may believe." Its definition of Christian unity is inadequate, however:

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 85-86.

³¹ Rosales, pp. 2/8-9.

³² Peters, Saturation Evangelism, p. 56.

If the unbeliever is to be persuaded that there is but one gospel, one way, one truth, one life, all who name the name of Christ must find a common denominator [my emphasis] for witnessing to the unique power of Christ to save. . . . We should joyfully acknowledge our need and dependence on each other, thank God for the emphases and insights brought to our common experience by our brethren from other denominations and communions, and jointly proclaim the gospel by which we have all been brought into the sonship of the family of God.³³

George Peters' sympathetic book on Saturation Evangelism speaks of the distinctives of EID as a "transformation" of traditional evangelistic methods and a "return to the New Testament." As we ponder the distinctives which Peters' lists for us, we note that cooperative evangelism is a cornerstone for saturation evangelism and is based upon a unionistic assumption that church bodies of differing and contradictory positions can and should unite for evangelistic purposes on a fundamentalistic and reductionistic basis. In condensed form they are:

1. Saturation evangelism aims at gospel saturation of community and country, and also of the believers and churches. It presents the Gospel in spoken and written form to every people of the land, to every strata of society, to every home and individual. . . .
2. Saturation evangelism makes a strenuous attempt to reverse an ago-old practice in evangelism, best described as church centripetalism, and transforms it into dynamic evangelistic centrifugalism. . . . The major effort of evangelism is done by the church but not in the church. . . . If this world is to be evangelized, it will have to happen outside of the church building. The world is the field and not the church building. . . .³⁴

³³ Evangelism in Depth Coordinators Manual, Revised (Bogata, NJ: Latin American Mission, 1969), pp. 5-7. An assertion with interesting implications for the doctrine of preservation is found in the same context: "Succession from the body [of Christ] is impossible."

³⁴ Scholarly and popular literature contains much to support this second premise. The contrast between Old Testament centripetalism and New Testament centrifugalism is developed by Johannes Blauw, The Missionary Nature of the Church (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1962). Dr. Gene

3. Saturation evangelism follows a predetermined and coordinated schedule of simultaneous activities throughout cooperating churches. [The pattern described here is almost exactly that later used by Key 73 coordinators.] This makes for unity of spirit and depth of impact . . .

4. Saturation evangelism earnestly endeavors to enlist in the movement as many churches, missions, and denominations as will cooperate in an evangelical and evangelistic program in order to express the unity of the body of Christ. This unity strengthens the cause of evangelism, involves and trains as many people as make themselves available, and creates the greatest possible impact upon the churches and communities.³⁵

In this instance, EID not only confuses the given unity of all Christians (unitas) with its outward fellowship (concordia), but also confounds the visible and the invisible church, that is, the church in the broad and the narrow sense (see Apology VII-VIII). Since it assumes that mere membership in the Church as Una Santa is the basis for outward fellowship, this call for an expression of the unity of the body of Christ created difficulties later because Strachan excluded both church bodies affiliated with the World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church.³⁶ Given his presuppositions, this inconsistency could only be avoided by asserting that such bodies are not part of the body of Christ.

In a wide-ranging article in Christianity Today, predating his formal EID campaigns, Strachan described his missionary philosophy. The final paragraphs show how Strachan was satisfied with agreement on the "fundamentals of the faith" for the sake of a larger end:

The urgency of the times and the immensity of the task cry out for us to forsake our costly, overlapping, conflicting, competitive, independent ways of operating and to determine to work together, lovingly

Getz has noted that only in 1 Cor. 14:23-25 do we find a New Testament reference of anyone being evangelized during a church service. (See his Sharpening the Focus of the Church (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974), p. 42, and Hollis L. Green in Why Churches Die (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1972), which is a popular pathology of churches, has a section on making the church rather than the world the field of work, pp. 42-48.

³⁵ Peters, pp. 39-42.

³⁶ See below, pp. 171-73.

respecting our differences of conviction and variety of gifts, but ready to sacrifice our little ends for the sake of the "Big End." Our agreement on the fundamentals of the faith makes possible cooperation in evangelism if we but set our heart on it. If we do not, we may well consider whether we are not sinning against the Lord and against the multiplying millions in Latin America for whom he died.³⁷

Writing some five years later, Strachan gives further evidence that cooperative evangelism is of the essence of EID strategy.

Evangelism in Depth has been hailed by some as a new strategy of evangelism. But in fact it involved nothing basically new. If there is anything different about it, it is perhaps the fact that it represents a formal effort to relate in a long-range programme the best elements of personal witness and mass evangelism, integrated in the continuous testimony of the local church and linked with the entire Body of Christ. It . . . involves a challenge to all Christian bodies to plan and carry out their respective evangelistic programs in a simultaneous, co-ordinated effort aimed at the ultimate goal that the great Commission enjoins.³⁸

Dayton Roberts suggests that Strachan rejected the possibility that perfection in either life or truth maybe attained in this life, although both were the standards God set for us.³⁹ This implies that the Bible is an unclear book and that we cannot know absolute truth. These views, therefore, contain within themselves the decaying roots of relativism which characterize all unionistic fellowship policies. Strachan explicitly denied that "the church's creedal statements and its collective position on certain doctrines" can be the "touchstone of fellowship." Therefore we should not separate ourselves from others "in the face of doctrinal impurity or deviation."⁴⁰

³⁷ R. Kenneth Strachan, "Tomorrow's Task in Latin America," Christianity Today, December 22, 1958, p. 6.

³⁸ R. Kenneth Strachan, "Call to Witness," The International Review of Missions, 53 (April 1964):197.

³⁹ Roberts, p. 77.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 78.

Repeatedly, Strachan, Lores, Roberts and others involved in implementing EID strategy maintain that they were not advocating any kind of "compromise or blurring of the truth" and that their program gave full respect for denominational distinctives,⁴¹ but since there is a description of a concern for sound doctrine as "hairsplitting"⁴² in several documents produced by the movement, we question the final results of this "respect." C. Peter Wagner is right on target when he observes that the "hyper-cooperativism" of EID "tended to reduce the message to the least common denominator."⁴³

So important was cooperative evangelism to the entire saturation strategy that Dayton Roberts expressed "deep disappointment"

. . . whenever an evangelistic movement purports to implement indepth principles, but fails in reality to give adequate recognition to this important element [that is, its pan-Christian, cooperative nature] of Evangelism in Depth.⁴⁴

We call attention to this in view of our premise that Key 73 was an EID program applied to an American context, and as further substantiation

⁴¹R. Kenneth Strachan, "Some Fundamentals," Latin American Evangelist, March-April 1963, inside front cover.

⁴²W. Dayton Roberts, "Thoughts on the Theological Foundations of Evangelism in Depth," EID Handbook, ed. Reuben Lores, August 1966, p. 8. Cited by Glasser in "Confession, Church Growth and Authentic Unity" in Protestant Crosscurrents, pp. 202-203. See also, Strachan's final editorial in Eternity, "The Battle of the Long Pants," April 1965, pp. 5-6, in which he trivializes differences between denominations as being on the level of a little boy who wants to wear long pants like the rest of the boys instead of the short pants his mother insists he wear.

⁴³C. Peter Wagner, Your Church Can Be Healthy, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979), p. 69.

⁴⁴Roberts, "Theological Foundations," p. 8.

to our major contention that Key 73 type evangelistic endeavors are unionistic almost by definition. Such cooperation without unity "in doctrine and all its articles can not promote true unity but merely institutionalizes the disunity of the churches by failing to deal with its cause."⁴⁵

Although Evangelism in Depth was supported by people from a variety of theological views, Rosales records that the Lutheran Church-

⁴⁵ Arthur P. Glasser, colleague of C. Peter Wagner at Fuller Seminary, defends the cooperative evangelism strategy of EID in his essay on "Confession, Church Growth, and Authentic Unity in Missionary Strategy" in Protestant Cross-currents in Mission. His argument for such unionistic approaches to church work is typical of the kind we have met repeatedly in this study. Glasser writes:

"We also need to define a strategy for the individual Christian to pursue when burdened over the fragmentation and disunity of the Lord's people. . . . The following pattern of response is suggested.

1. Follow the example of Christ and translate concern for unity into specific prayer (John 17:15-23).

2. Recognize the futility of seeking to persuade Christians about unity on theological grounds. Their minds have long since been made up. Some will contend that it is a sin to be divided; others that it is a sin to be united.

3. Avoid trying to seek the spirit of unity through discussion. God has commanded that the unity of the Spirit be kept (Eph. 4:3). This involves activity on an entirely different level. . . .

8. Make no efforts to combine groups. When oneness is finally expressed, it should be functional, not structural. Once someone else comes forward with a suggestion for joint actions, respond with a suggestion for limited-objective types of joint service, such as taking a religious census, planning an evangelistic campaign, carrying out a Scripture distribution program, planning a training workshop. . . . Hans Kueng is correct when he says the closer Christians draw to Christ, the closer they will come to one another. To this we may add the corollary: The closer they adhere to apostolic teaching and live in the spirit of Christ, the sooner they will come to manifest the authentic ecumenism for which he prayed." p. 203.

Missouri Synod, at least in Guatemala, did not cooperate with the effort.⁴⁶

Ray Rosales devoted an entire chapter to the interesting debate between Strachan and Victor Hayward of the Division of World Mission and Evangelism of the WCC in the pages of the April 1964, issue of the International Review of Missions. Here we have an insight into the thinking of two men, one representing the neo-evangelical Position and the other conciliar viewpoints.⁴⁷ Commenting on their debate, Martin Convey makes this perceptive observation on Strachan's attempt to blend every stripe of Protestant while ignoring Roman Catholicism:

I also find very disturbing . . . the complete lack of mention . . . of the majority Roman Catholic Church in this country (Nicaragua). Just what is Evangelism in Depth doing with and to the Christian faith -- immature and feeble, no doubt, but whose is not? -- of the already baptized?

Since Strachan was apparently working in fellowship on the basis of an outward profession of faith in Christ and assumed membership in the Body of Christ, why exclude Romanism? The inconsistency, never seemed to be worked out in EID in his lifetime.⁴⁸

Dayton Roberts also perceived this ambivalent fellowship position vis-a-vis cooperation with World Council aligned and Roman Catholic Churches. He informs us of the internal conflict this caused in Strachan himself as he walked a doctrinal tightrope between not wanting to offend either his liberal "brethren" or his supporters among fundamentalistic "separationists." Roberts defended his "separatism" from

⁴⁶ Rosales, pp. 4/7-8.

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 6/10-11. See, The International Review of Missions, 53 (April 1964):191-216.

⁴⁸ Rosales, p. 6/12.

the WCC and its connection with the Roman Catholic Church as "basically existential and not theological."

"The problem, of course, centered in the fact that many of the overseas bodies with whom we wanted to have fellowship were related . . . the WCC. . . . Ken dismissed the possibility of any approval or support of the WCC "because of its liberalism and unscriptural basis of fellowship, the unscriptural centralization of ecclesiastical power, its dedication to other tasks and concerns than those which legitimately concern the Church of Christ. Of supreme concern to us is its virtual repudiation of the Protestant Reformation by its openly avowed wooing of the Roman Catholic Church."⁴⁹

One wonders, however, wherein his position on church fellowship differed in substance from that of the WCC especially when compared with the views of non-extremists such as Beaver, Neill, John Mott and others!

Concerning WCC wooing of the Roman Church, Strachan wrote:

For those of us who have been called to work in the Roman Catholic lands, . . . it is conceivable that we could remain indifferent to the program and activities of a movement which would eventually undermine the very reason for our existence in Latin America.⁵⁰

Rosales, a member of the American Lutheran Church, notes that EID brings together churches of various backgrounds for a "united, coordinated, and sustained impact" on the involved nations.

The EID program takes the ecumenical dimension of the Church seriously and earnestly believes in its vital relation to the evangelistic witness to the world. How thought-provoking that a group that opposes the WCC should call for a united witness of the Church, hurdle some of the difficulties involved, and virtually achieve it, albeit on a temporary basis, in seven different lands.⁵¹

Because of the new "openness" to Roman Catholics and to the Conciliar movement which began to typify EID programs, the large and respected Central American Mission (CAM), which had supported EID in Nicaragua and

⁴⁹Roberts, Strachan, pp. 68-9.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 68.

⁵¹Rosales, p. 13.

Costa Rica, refused to participate in Honduras. In CAM's opinion, they were "flirting with apostasy" both in the Ecumenical Movement and in the Roman Church. In fact, on a television panel program he expressed agreement with Roman Catholic theologian Hans Kueng that both Rome and Protestantism needed reforming and that a reunion in Christian love was possible.⁵²

Practical Results of Evangelism in Depth
in Latin America

Since it is so impossible to separate doctrine and practice, and since the parallel is so close to Key 73, we must take time to say something about the pragmatic results of Evangelism in Depth as an evangelical strategy. Did it work?

Rosales reports much good in terms of unmeasurable results. He notes, however, some doctrinal problems that arose as a result of inter-confessional evangelistic cooperation.

Some local pastors complained that some of the visiting evangelists pressed unduly for decisions, confusing outward manifestations for an inner work of grace and as a result, had offended some of their listeners.⁵³

To our mind, these examples merely show why doctrinal unity must precede evangelistic and other forms of spiritual cooperation.

⁵²Roberts, Strachan, pp. 108-109. For a brief but pointed analysis of EID from a conservative point of view, consult "An appraisal of Evangelism-in-Depth Position Papers," by Dr. Irwin W. Steele, Secretary for Latin America for the Christian and Missionary Alliance, in Biblical Missions, 33 (August-September 1967): p. 14,16.

⁵³Rosales, pp. 3/16-17.

Rosales identifies baptism as another weakness in EID's cooperative ventures. Many (perhaps most) of those who made professions of faith through these saturation evangelism campaigns had already been baptized as Roman Catholics. A Biblical understanding of baptism would not call for rebaptism, for they were really returning to their baptism, "picking up their lay-away," as one Lutheran colorfully put it. Since baptism is so closely related to the evangelistic task of the church, it is clearly an area upon which agreement must be reached before joint evangelism or mission activity can be possible.

Whether saturation evangelism was a success comprehensively or not is still being debated with several opinions offered on the basis of different readings of the evidence. C. Peter Wagner criticized EID at some length in Frontiers in Missionary Strategy.⁵⁴ In his judgment, "Evangelism in Depth was the highest-scale attempt at cooperative evangelism in the history of Latin American Protestantism." Designed "to correct the follow-up gap discovered in crusade evangelism."⁵⁵ Evangelism in Depth

Involved for an entire year all of the participating Protestant Churches in each of ten republics. Behind it were some of the best evangelical minds. . . . But despite all the prayer and money and

⁵⁴Wagner, Frontiers, especially chapters 7 and 8. "Evangelism and Saturation Evangelism" and "Evangelism in Depth a Decade Later," pp. 122-78, on which we have relied greatly. These chapters are essential reading for anyone interested in a practical evaluation of cooperative evangelism on the saturation model.

⁵⁵C. Peter Wagner, Your Church Can Be Healthy, p. 69. "The follow-up gap is the difference between the number of persons who made recorded decisions during an evangelistic effort and those who became responsible church members."

personnel invested, the follow-up gap was still there after the dust of the excitement had settled.⁵⁶

Since Wagner coined the term "hyper-cooperativism" in his analysis of hinderances to church growth, and since his diagnosis of this ecclesiastical illness has implications for the theology of fellowship, his study is worth pondering.⁵⁷ We shall examine his critique in more detail in Chapter IX.

On the other hand, friends of saturation evangelism find much good to report in their studies. Arthur F. Glasser, for example, finds significant and measurable contributions to the evangelization of the world in EID. Here he differs markedly with his famous Fuller colleague:

Participating churches have had their rate of convert intake increase significantly. Stagnant churches in unresponsive areas have begun to grow. In Venezuela some 18,000 people were added to the church during the year long EID program. At the present time most denominations are engaged in programs of extension unprecedented in the history of the gospel in that country. Furthermore, wherever EID programs have been conducted, they have been accompanied by significant increases in the numbers of young people offering themselves as candidates for the Christian ministry. Missionary vision has been enlarged.⁵⁸

In Honduras, 110 new congregations were formed.⁵⁹

Another sympathetic observer, George W. Peters, made this glowing tribute to the EID approach:

It is my deepest conviction that saturation evangelism rightly conceived, carefully organized, wisely supervised, and energetically

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Ibid. See his Chapter V, "Hyper-Cooperativism: Can Christian Unity Hinder Evangelism?" pp. 64-76.

⁵⁸Glasser, "Confession," p. 198.

⁵⁹Rosales, pp. 4/19-29.

executed under the direction of the Holy Spirit can revolutionize modern evangelism. It could result in the total evangelization of our generation.⁶⁰

Writing on "The Record of Evangelism-in-Depth," Peters registers many good results, reporting both churches and regions which indicated growth both in numbers and in new churches planted. How the results would have compared had they not participated in EID is not so clearly defined.⁶¹

In the end, however, after all his statistics are compiled, Peters raises this question:

What do these figures show in relation to church growth? This is what we would naturally expect. However, from records and statistics available there is no appreciable, immediate and measurable acceleration in church growth evident in most churches of Costa Rica, Guatemala, Venezuela and Bolivia in the years following the campaigns.⁶²

This troubling fact baffled Peters.

The discovery that EID seemingly does not result in substantial measurable church growth at first alarmed me; later on it troubled me; and now it has grown into a deep and steady concern.⁶³

Dr. Peters raises another "gnawing question" in his analysis of saturation evangelism: "Why is EID not transforming itself into a persistent movement?" He suggests several factors which militate against it becoming a perennial movement:

1. It is too exhausting in its drive, demands and promotion. It drains the emotional capacity of men to the last, without finding time, ways and means of replenishing them to the degree that people . . . remain refreshed to the end.⁶⁴

⁶⁰Peters, Saturation Evangelism, p. 8.

⁶¹Ibid., pp. 58-60. ⁶²Ibid., p. 62.

⁶³Ibid., p. 74. ⁶⁴Peters, p. 79.

One participant is quoted as saying:

The activity was so intense, that once it was all over, the congregation sat back and rested, glad for a breathing spell when there were not meetings going on every night. . . . Much fruit was lost, due to the fact that the churches either had not prepared adequately for intensive follow-up work, or else were too tired or too busy to do much of it. . . .

2. The role of outside coordinators creates a leadership vacuum after the campaign. . . .

3. Closely associated with the presence of the coordinators is the air of messianic expectation. . . . Somehow, revival and evangelism have become bound up with a name, a program and a team of men, the very factors EID is seeking to undo. Thus, it is defeating the very foundations for continuation. . . .

4. The timing of the national campaign tends to deflate the over-all work.⁶⁵

At this point, Peters asks whether the very fact that a campaign of this sort winds up in a great climatic event does not spell the termination of the evangelistic effort.⁶⁶

Peter Wagner uses the label "evangelistic indigestion" to describe the phenomena Peters discovered.⁶⁷ After all, the Strachan Theorum called for the "continuous propagation of its beliefs" as the key to the growth of the movement. Strachan had written:

in the final analysis, the success of the entire movement would have to be measured, not by attendance at the crusades or the number of decisions, but by the continued dynamic witness of Christians and churches.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Ibid., pp. 79-81

⁶⁶ Wagner makes the same point in Frontiers, p. 160.

⁶⁷ Wagner, Frontiers, p. 160

⁶⁸ Strachan, "Call to Witness," p. 197.

Yet, mobilization and evangelistic effort actually increased after the year of evangelism. Why?

For one thing, the majority of people who participate suffer from sheer exhaustion. The pressure of the program saps the energy from all involved. Some discontinue their regular activities to get into the Evangelism in Depth program, and afterwards find themselves with a huge backlog of work. Some postpone their vacations and then feel that they deserve a double one. In Bolivia [where Wagner was personally involved as a missionary] some leaders came out with a bad case of what might be called "evangelistic indigestion," from which it took them a full year to recover.⁶⁹

Saturation Evangelism critic Peter Wagner is not without praise for this approach, however. The famous church growth expert writes:

Few question the tremendous worldwide impact [of] . . . the genius of Kenneth Strachan. Evangelism in Depth and its offspring have done more to make Christians aware of their evangelistic responsibilities than any other factor I know in our half century.⁷⁰

Wagner's rather controversial polemic was not, he cautions, intended to be "an attack on personalities or as destructive of an institution."

Rather, he argues that because of EID's vast influence on missions and evangelism, "it has become necessary to come to grips with it in a book on missionary strategy, dissecting it at some problem points in order to help avoid certain pitfalls in the future."⁷¹ His same critique of saturation evangelism applies in large measure also to Key 73, as we shall see.

⁶⁹Wagner, Frontiers, pp. 159-160.

⁷⁰Wagner, Frontiers, p. 136. Today perhaps we might be more correct to say that this accolade ought rather to be given to the Church Growth Movement, as formulated by Donald McGavran and C. Peter Wagner himself, especially if effective evangelism is meant!

⁷¹Ibid., p. 139. We would be so bold as to claim the same motivation for our examination of Key 73.

Wagner's "church growth eyes" detect a proclamation rather than a persuasion emphasis on EID.⁷² Since the aims of EID are often subjective the devices for measuring them are also subjective, and often become merely a matter of opinion. EID leaders Dayton Roberts and Ruben Lores, according to Wagner, are saying that Evangelism in Depth has qualitative as well as quantitative goals, and are concerned

That the quantitative, statistically-verifiable results not be considered the only basis upon which to judge the effects of the movement, but that the qualitative, more intangible results be taken into account as well.⁷³

Wagner grants that the qualitative goals of EID were reached for the most part.

Believers have been awakened, mobilized, and strengthened in the faith. The church has been renewed internally. But it is another matter . . . whether these goals . . . properly constitute evangelism in the strict sense of the word. The direct aim of most of them is more to improve the quality of present believers than to make new ones. Rather than "Evangelism in Depth," might not a program with these goals more accurately be labeled "Revival in Depth."⁷⁴

By way of contrast, Wagner follows Michael Green in his definition of evangelism:

Evangelism in the strict sense is proclaiming the good news of salvation to men and women with a view to their conversion to Christ and incorporation in his Church.⁷⁵

⁷²In church growth terminology, the "3 P's of evangelism are Pre-
sence (making the faith credible in our lives), Proclamation, and Per-
suasion, which aims at making disciples and incorporating them into re-
sponsible membership in the visible church.

⁷³Wagner, Frontiers, pp. 140-41.

⁷⁴Wagner, Frontiers, pp. 141-42. See his Your Church Can Be Healthy, for the positive results of Cooperative Evangelism, all of which are unrelated to church growth, pp. 66-69.

⁷⁵Michael Green, Evangelism in the Early Church (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1970), p. 7, cited by Wagner, Frontiers, p. 124.

Likewise, Wagner proposes the following definition of the mission of the church to help us evaluate the results of evangelistic programs:

The mission of the church is to so incarnate itself in the world that the gospel of Christ is effectively communicated by word and deed toward the end that all men and women become faithful disciples of Christ and responsible members of His Church.⁷⁶

Armed with these definitions, Wagner undertook a searching analysis of the hard statistical data produced by *Evangelism in Depth*. Drawing on his own experience in Bolivia, the Fuller missiologist observed that the activity which EID generated gave the impression that the churches were growing tremendously:

An examination of the cold facts three years later however, showed that they hadn't. In fact, the percentage of annual growth of the seven cooperating denominations for which reasonably accurate statistics were available was greater during the year just before *Evangelism in Depth* than it was either during the year of effort or during the two following years. . . .

.....
Careful projections on a logarithmic graph indicate that the total membership of the seven denominations was 27,676 in 1967. However, if the same churches had continued to grow at the rate just previous to *Evangelism in Depth*, they would have totaled about 32,000 in 1967. This does not lead to the conclusion that *Evangelism in Depth* necessarily retarded church growth in Bolivia, but it does seem to indicate that neither did it accelerate quantitative growth.⁷⁷

Saturation evangelism as used in the 1960s in Latin America focused on what McGavran would call a "search" rather than "harvest" theology.⁷⁸ Proclamation had replaced persuasion as its ultimate objective. The great missiologist wrote:

⁷⁶ Wagner, *Frontiers*, p. 134.

⁷⁷ Wagner, *Frontiers*, p. 143. Subsequent pages show that this was a typical, although not uniform, pattern in other areas.

⁷⁸ Donald McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970), pp. 34-48.

Evangelicals agree with presence and proclamation as means, but reject them as ends. . . . Let me say bluntly that mission misconceives its end when it considers either proclamation or presence its basic task.⁷⁹

Wagner listed at least three weaknesses in the Strachan Theorem itself.⁸⁰ He points out, first of all that even with Communism, one of the models of growth of a movement which Strachan used, factors other than total mobilization brought about success. Secondly, EID literature does not reflect the differing degrees of resistance and receptivity of the homogeneous units in areas where this program was implemented. Finally, Wagner questioned the axiom, "Abundant reaping requires abundant sowing" as overlooking the fact that proper stewardship requires an examination of where we sow, rather than just broadcast sowing.⁸¹ Evangelism libraries abound with information on using the "web" relationships of people with relatives, neighbors, and associates as being the most fruitful sources of receptive audiences for the Gospel and ultimately church growth.⁸²

⁷⁹ Donald A. McGavran, "The Right and Wrong of the Presence Idea of Mission," Evangelical Missions Quarterly 6 (Winter 1970):106-107, cited by Wagner, Frontiers, p. 146.

⁸⁰ See above page 164.

⁸¹ Wagner, Frontiers, pp. 148-52. See his discussion of "the law of sowing" on pages 41-43 in the same work.

⁸² See, for example, Donald A. McGavran, The Bridges of God (New York: Friendship Press, 1955); Win Arn and Charles Arn, The Masters Plan for Making Disciples, (Pasadena, CA: Church Growth Press, 1982); Gene A. Getz, Loving One Another, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1979); Wayne McDill, Making Friends for Christ, (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1979); Arthur G. McPhee, Friendship Evangelism, (Grand Rapid: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978); and Rebecca Manley Pippert, Out of the Salt-Shaker & Into the World, (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1979).

Wagner's more popular work, Your Church Can Grow, explains why efforts at "total mobilization" as applied to Evangelism in Depth (and for that matter, to Key 73) are almost bound to fail. First of all, it ignores the differences in spiritual gifts, in effect expecting the whole body to be a leg, to use Wagner's apt and fully Biblical comparison. If our goal were to walk a long distance in a short time,

Would it make any sense to say we could walk faster with five legs than with two, so we will thus change our liver, our tongue and one lung to legs? Of course not. With no liver, one hundred legs would not be able to operate at all.⁸³

In the same way, Wagner asserts, all do not have the gift of evangelism, and it is counter-productive to produce guilt complexes in those who do not. Better to try to discover and develop the gifts God's people do have for the edification of the body and for outreach in the world.⁸⁴

For pragmatic reasons, Wagner questions also "The Disproportionate Stress on Unity" in saturation evangelism, which is a "prerequisite" for the effort. Commenting on the use of John 17:21 by EID leadership, he asks whether it

is not stretching the interpretation of the text somewhat to insist that for effective evangelistic strategy, a cooperative effort is needed, especially one as structured as the Evangelism in Depth program.⁸⁵

On the contrary, "some of the most effective evangelistic efforts in Latin America curiously show not only a lack of cooperation, but seem to

⁸³ C. Peter Wagner, Your Church Can Grow: Seven Vital Signs of a Healthy Church (Glendale, CA: Regal Books, 1976), pp. 72-73.

⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. 78-79.

⁸⁵ Wagner, Frontiers, p. 153.

thrive on church splits." The Fuller missiologist further challenges EID's "tendency almost to scorn groups which, for one reason or another, chose not to participate in the nationwide effort."⁸⁶

In some cases, churches with differences deeply rooted in history and theology found themselves "in unnatural associations" which tended to increase tensions rather than reduce them. Examples Wagner cites demonstrate the thesis of this dissertation:

In one country, for example, the head of the Evangelism in Depth children's effort refused to allow the use of the wordless book [sic] because she was not convinced that the blood of Christ should be presented so clearly to young minds. The representative of Child Evangelism Fellowship refused to obey here and used the wordless book anyway. In this case severe tensions built up because deep-seated theological differences were not erased simply by joint participation in a campaign. In another country, one denomination had to be expelled in midcampaign because one of its members, a regional coordinator, insisted on using Evangelism in Depth as an instrument to promote his own efforts for Catholic-Protestant ecumenism. Incidents such as these at least raise the question as to whether the price for outward unity might not at times be too high.⁸⁷

Wagner uncovers a further flaw in EID strategy in that since it represents no single church or denomination, follow up was left to local churches, making a "follow up gap" almost inevitable. This "thorny problem" which has plagued Billy Graham, Campus Crusade and other parachurch efforts remained unsolved by EID. An essay by Edward Murphy of Overseas Crusades⁸⁸ argues that evangelism is never properly planned

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 154. The Assemblies of God declined to participate in Columbia precisely because they were growing dramatically, and felt participation would slow their growth.

⁸⁷Ibid., pp. 154-155.

⁸⁸Edward F. Murphy, "Follow Through Evangelism in Latin America," in Mobilizing for Saturation Evangelism, eds. Clyde W. Taylor and Wade T. Coggins (Wheaton, IL: Evangelical Missions Information Service, 1970) cited by Wagner, Frontiers, p. 158.

unless follow up is built into the program. It is axiomatic both on theological and practical grounds that no evangelistic method is any better than its follow up. Since church planting and the whole disciple-making process is part and parcel of the evangelistic task, and since "responsible membership" in a local church is a chief goal, cooperative evangelism is intrinsically flawed. Evangelism must be parish centered, not only for the pragmatic reasons Wagner supplies, but also because the disciple making process takes place through teaching people to obey "all things" that Christ taught.

We find it significant, therefore, that Kenneth Strachan reportedly learned two things from his IRM debate with Victor Howard: First, "the statement of EID principles as Ken formulated them was heavily methodological rather than theological." He had begun with his theorem, and then made deductions from it. It remained "a sociologically derived proposition rather than as a theological deduction from the Scriptures." Secondly, Ken came to see that the concepts of EID needed to be set.

appropriately in a broader context of correct, biblical missiology. Of what good is a theorem offering a secret of church growth, for example, if the growth of the church is not acknowledged to be a valid goal of Christian mission? And what does it mean to mobilize all Christians in evangelistic witness when "witness" and "evangelism" can signify everything from a cup of cold water to a city-wide crusade? He realized that a better theological foundation had to be laid for the adequate communication of his burden.⁸⁹

In the light of books like Arthur Johnston's World Evangelism and the Word of God, and Harvey Hoekstra's World Council of Churches and the Demise of Evangelism, these observations are particularly needed. Perhaps

⁸⁹ Roberts, Strachan, p. 117.

Strachan was beginning to see the profound error of his unionistic practices. How can we unite for evangelism if we have not even agreed on what evangelism or even the Gospel is?

We cannot leave our study of Strachan and his theology and practice of mission without a consideration of the depth and vision of this man's faith. His struggle to overcome the "survival syndrome" in local churches, his vision of the layman as key to the growth of the church and his re-emphasis on the importance of the local church as both the means and goal of evangelism makes him a pioneer who was far advanced over many of the faith missions of his day, and even of past mission practice in the LAM under his father's leadership. However, as much as we may criticize his missiology and his misunderstanding of the Biblical theology fellowship, Kenneth Strachan was a hero of the faith, who inspired those who knew him even in his death.⁹⁰

⁹⁰ See R. Strachan, The Inescapable Calling (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1968), for an insight into his vision and faith.

CHAPTER V

THE BEGINNINGS OF KEY 73

Carl F. H. Henry's "Somehow, Let's Get Together" Editorial

We may trace the genesis of Key 73 to an editorial in the June 9, 1967 issue of Christianity Today.¹ Although Carl F. H. Henry, then editor of the well-known Evangelical magazine, did not write it in its final form,² it represents his thinking on Evangelical cooperation.

The urgency of its plea may be seen in its opening paragraph:

This is a rallying cry for evangelicals everywhere. It is addressed to millions of evangelicals in mainstream Protestantism who chafe under the debilitating restraints of conciliar ecumenism and are frustrated by its lack of biblical challenge, and to additional millions who witness as best they can from the fragmented fringes of independency.³

The editorial noted "signs of a fresh longing . . . for dramatic new dimensions of fellowship across denominational lines." It is now

¹The editorial is printed as Appendix II at the end of this paper.

²A detailed account of the genesis of the editorial is found in Carl Henry's opening chapter "The Concept and Historical Background of Key 73" in Yesterday, Today, and Forever, ed., T. A. Raedeke (Washington, D.C.: Canon Press, 1974), pp. 2, 9-10.

³Carl F. H. Henry, "Somehow, Let's Get Together," Christianity Today, June 9, 1967, p. 24.

evident, it continues, that "a greater framework of cooperation" is needed for Evangelicals who "seek to witness to the world." Indeed, there are "secondary doctrines" and other matters on which they differ, and which must not be minimized, but

are not Bible-believing Christians called to rise above these differences in the interest of winning lost men and women to Christ? And if the Scriptures exhort believers to Christian unity, can these differences really be insurmountable.⁴

Once again the Pietistic/Evangelical assumption is evidenced that there are some causes which are more important than the doctrinal content of the message. Nothing is said about the basis for getting together except for "their common ground" of "belief in biblical authority and individual spiritual regeneration as being of the very essence of Christianity."⁵ The editorial merely says "somehow, let's get together!" Not, on the Scriptures, on the truth, on the basis of a newly discovered doctrinal consensus but only "let's get together!" -- "somehow!"

The editorial speaks of an age of "diminishing denominational loyalties." Is this good, or are they still looking for the sort of "undogmatic Christianity" of which Hermann Sasse wrote so eloquently just two years before in this same journal.⁶ The one venture on which Evangelicals have been able to cooperate is in the Billy Graham crusades.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Since Henry worries over the way inerrancy might rend the Evangelical camp, one wonders about the prospects even for "biblical authority" as a basis for unity! See Harld Lindsell's The Bible in the Balance (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979), pp. 32-36 and our discussion of Henry's position above, p. 51. The other half of this "Evangelical platform" is an illustration of the subjectivity of Evangelical criteria for fellowship.

⁶Hermann Sasse, "Are We forfeiting Our Heritage?" Christianity Today, October 1965.

These crusades alone, however, have shown the hunger of evangelicals to work together as well as their ability to do so, when proper leadership [not, mind you, when proper doctrinal agreement is reached but when proper leadership] is available.⁷

Then an astounding assertion is made:

The problem of establishing an agency for broad evangelical cooperation is probably not so much finding the right creedal and functional base as attracting the necessary leadership.⁸

How un-dogmatic and subjective can one get? Were the liberal critics of Key 73 right? Did it really involve a Madison Avenue "Selling the Lord, 1973" in which the pitch is more important than the product?⁹

That charge was wide of the mark, of course, and unfair to the many dedicated Christians and zealous evangelists who planned and participated in Key 73, but it is true that the "somehow" in the editorial did mean that the important point was to "get together." They were now casting about for a cause or venture on which to cooperate.

The way to begin might be to take an exhaustive poll of American evangelicals. To what extent would they favor greater cooperation, and on what grounds? What are their anxieties about cooperation? . . . Perhaps those polled, if they favored evangelical reapproach-ment, would suggest churchmen who could sit down under an interdenominational umbrella and work out the most likely grounds for co-operation.¹⁰

As one studies the 1967 editorial, one notes that it had a great deal to say about cooperation and unity among Evangelicals, but very little about evangelism.

⁷"Somehow, Let's Get Together," p. 25. ⁸Ibid.

⁹Two examples of this charge are Eugene L. Meyer, "The Selling of the Lord 1973," Ramparts, 11 (May 1973):25-27, 54-58 and Deane A. Kemper, "Another Look Back at Key 73" The Reformed Journal, January 1975, pp. 15-20, written respectively from a non-Christian and moderately conservative standpoints.

¹⁰Henry, "Somehow," p. 25.

Christianity Today had promoted Evangelical cooperation and unity on a similar basis some years before this famous editorial, when, for example, "A Plea for Evangelical Unity" was published in March of 1961.¹¹ But this was an idea whose time had evidently not yet come, for no organized effort resulted. The year 1967 apparently was a more appropriate kairos, however, for responses began to pour into the Christianity Today mailroom.¹² This "massive response . . . was reflected a month later in another lead editorial. "Evangelicals Seek a Better Way."¹³ The Christianity Today editorial writers were now focusing on the form the desired cooperation would take. The format would be evangelism!:

For what reason ought evangelicals to get together, and on what common basis? . . . Surely a key objective will be to coordinate evangelistic and missionary efforts more effectively, The Berlin Congress last fall made very clear the wide-openness of evangelicals to work hand-in-hand to fulfill the Great Commission. . . . National congresses are already being planned in several countries. But we must go beyond evangelism and missions. . . . Evangelicals ought to be making a far greater impact in communications, in the arts, in the inner city, in the small towns and rural areas, and among minority groups. . . . A cooperative body of evangelicals could be the means through which God will decisively demonstrate his truth, love, and power in our age.¹⁴

Thus the seeds of Key 73 had been sown on the basis of a classical Evangelical doctrine of church fellowship with only the frailest of platforms on which to build a major ecumenical-evangelistic advance.

¹¹"A Plea for Evangelical Unity," Christianity Today, March 13, 1961, pp. 24-25.

¹²Henry, "Concepts," p. 3.

¹³"Evangelicals Seek a Better Way," Christianity Today, July 7, 1967.

¹⁴Ibid.

The Key Bridge Conferences

Soon an exploratory consultation was called by Dr. Henry with Billy Graham as co-sponsor. Some forty churchmen from several denominations convened in Arlington, Virginia on September 28-30, 1967.¹⁵ Dr. Robert Preus, at that time Professor of Systematic Theology at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, was the only Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod participant. Key 73 received its name from these sessions, named after the Key Bridge which spans the Potomac between Arlington and Washington, D.C.

The letter of invitation promised:

There will be no planned agenda. Let us open our hearts to each other and to the Spirit of God, and search the Scriptures to learn what the Holy Spirit is saying to the church.¹⁶

The first Key Bridge convocation "reflected interests already voiced" at the Berlin World Congress on Evangelism, but participants had concerns which were broader than evangelism:

In Washington many expressed a degree of impatience with cooperation merely for evangelism . . . and turned their attention as well to questions of follow-up in the broadest understanding of that term. Evangelism must be an outstanding Christian concern, but could it be, many asked, that in many cases evangelism by conservatives is followed up by liberal-minded churchmen for non-biblical ends.¹⁷

¹⁵"Key Bridge: Forty Churchmen signal opening of major new evangelical drive," Christianity Today, October 27, 1967. A list of the participants and their denominational affiliation is included in this news item. Carl Henry reports that twenty-eight others had been invited but could not attend due to schedule conflicts. "Concepts," p. 5. It is significant also that the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association financed this initial meeting.

¹⁶Henry, "Concept," p. 5.

¹⁷"Evangelical Advance at Key Bridge," Christianity Today, October 27, 1967, p. 25.

Several suggestions surfaced at this meeting on other areas of evangelical cooperation. Significantly, "theological and ecclesiastical differences were not discussed" and "participants made no move to compromise present denominational loyalties" during these sessions.¹⁸

Ultimately, however, the September meeting focused on the "feasibility of a formal evangelistic crusade of unparalleled dimensions."

Dr. Henry Bast, of the Reformed Church in America moved a proposal to explore such a transdenominational effort and in 1973 it was adopted.¹⁹

To this end a ten-man committee was appointed. With the encouragement of C. E. Autrey, Southern Baptist Home Mission Board Director, and spearheaded by Pastors Alsteir C. Walker and Jess Moody of West Palm Beach Florida, (all of whom were present at the Key Bridge meeting), the Southern Baptist Convention was already making plans for their own nation-wide evangelistic drive.²⁰

On December 2 and 3 of the same year, Carl Henry and Leighton Ford (on behalf of Billy Graham) moderated Key Bridge II. This time a number of denominational and para-church evangelism directors were present. This was the first meeting attended by Dr. Theodore A. Raedeke, executive secretary for evangelism for the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, and destined to be Director of the Key 73 effort a few years hence. Here again the "transdenominational dialog . . . reached far beyond existing

¹⁸"Key Bridge: Forty Churchmen," p. 42.

¹⁹Henry, "Concepts," p. 5.

²⁰"Key Bridge: Forty Churchmen."

patterns of cooperation." This conference produced the concept of a non-organizational "evangelical Christian coalition" to advance cooperative efforts.²¹

In several other meetings in the Key Bridge series, the shape of what was to become Key 73 developed.²² Finally an executive committee of sixteen was established as well as a larger group involving representatives of a number of participating groups, with Assemblies of God General Superintendent Dr. Thomas F. Zimmerman, chairing both.²³

By Key Bridge III a provisional executive committee was named by Leighton Ford consisting of Harold Lindsey of the Southern Baptist Convention, Sherrard Rice of the Presbyterian Church in the United States and Ted Raedeke of the LC-MS. At the United States Congress on Evangelism in Minneapolis in 1969 delegates from several denominations and other organizations met with Executive Committee members, by now presided over by Dr. Raedeke, to consider participation in the effort. By year's end, twenty-nine denominations were more interested but awaiting denominational clearance. In the fall of 1970, Dr. Theodore Raedeke was approached by the Executive Committee to become executive director of the massive effort. Henry comments:

²¹"Key Bridge II," Christianity Today, December 22, 1967, p. 42.

²²See Henry's "The Concept and Historical Background of Key 73" in Raedeke's little volume, Yesterday, for a more detailed description of the agenda and participants in these meetings. pp. 7-15.

²³The Congregational Resource Book contains a list of the members of the Key 73 Executive and Development Committees on pp. 146-153. and Central Committees on pp. 7-10.

From within the Lutheran Church- Missouri Synod, where he had served for more than fifteen years as secretary for evangelism, there were heavy pressures for him to stay in loco, and from evangelicals outside there were equally heavy pressures to come. I treasure a letter of November 9 in which he requested prayer: 'I'm still wrestling. . . . Ultimately it gets to be a lonely decision and yet not totally alone because He has promised His presence. . . . I bespeak your prayers.' When he accepted the post, Key 73 gained a leader of conviction, competence, humility, and humor, qualities seldom so well-balanced and operative even in the best of men.²⁴

Structuring for Key 73

Thus Key 73 formally began with a small staff under Dr. Raedeke at 418 Olive Street in St. Louis. Their assignment was a huge order, perhaps bigger than they could possibly deliver under the best of circumstances. Their official objectives were massive in scope, bringing together more than 140 denominations and organizations under the rubrics: "Christians working together to share Christ with every person in North America":

1. To share with every person in North America more fully and forcefully the claims and message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
 2. To employ every means and method of communicating the Gospel in order to create the conditions in which men may more readily respond to the leading of the Holy Spirit.
 3. To apply the message and meaning of Jesus Christ to the issues shaping man and his society in order that they may be resolved.
 4. To develop new resources for effective evangelism for consideration, adoption, adaptation or rejection by the participating churches or Christian groups.
 5. To assist the efforts of Christian congregations and organizations in becoming more effective redemptive centers and more aggressive witnesses of God's redeeming power in the world.
- Key 73 proposes to raise an overarching Christian canopy in both Canada and the United States under which all denominations, congregations, and Christian groups may concentrate on evangelism during the year 1973.²⁵

²⁴Henry, "Concept," p. 13.

²⁵T. A. Raedeke, "What is Key 73?" publicity brochure released by the Executive Committee (St. Louis; Key 73, 418 Olive Street, n.d.).

The large number of denominations and evangelistic associations involved in Key 73 were not an unmixed blessing even for the supporters of the movement, according to Dr. Carl Henry's commentary.

Those who governed the denominational channels of communication to the local congregations permitted no independent access of Key 73 to their congregations; they jealously guarded mailing lists. In a few cases an attempt was made to use Key 73 participation to confer new dignity upon an ecumenical posture and upon social activism alongside a program of evangelism, but this was quite the exception.²⁶

Furthermore, Henry recollects, the large number of denominations involved meant that the organization at the top was weak and the overall structure was so loosely knit that it seriously hindered the efficiency of implementing the objectives. "On the local scene too many waited for someone or everyone else to activate a program that was thought to have national leadership."

Effective evangelism builds up from the grass roots, not from the top down; least of all, with a few exceptions, does it kindle through denominational hierarchies, as recent church history makes very clear. From the St. Louis headquarters, . . . Dr. Raedeke and a small staff concentrated on reaching denominations and organizational leaders, taking part in state and regional strategy conferences, tending to committee meetings, implementing decisions, supervising issuance of a vast number and variety of printed materials and helps.²⁷

Very possibly this is an example of the "your goals" and "my goals" syndrome, with the vision and aims of the leaders never getting beyond the denominational level, and certainly not to the lay and congregational level. This is seen also in the very low budget and the lack of funds which constantly limited the national staff of Key 73. Deane Kemper asked:

²⁶Henry, "Concept," p. 14.

²⁷Ibid., pp. 14-15.

Why did some denominations refuse to make available their mailing lists? Why was a national media campaign planned and advertized with the requisite funds neither in hand nor pledged? In short, Key 73 promised far more than it delivered and may stand as a contemporary example of beginning construction of the tower without first counting the cost.²⁸

Kemper is harsh but perhaps not inaccurate when he declares:

Support of Key 73 in many sections of American Christendom was not unlike George McGovern's description of Richard Nixon's following: a mile wide and an inch deep.²⁹

The Key 73 Umbrella: The Phrases of Key 73

Thus was launched what Ted Raedeke called "the greatest thing that has happened to the church since the Reformation."³⁰ Officially Key 73 took into account the various fellowship principles of the participating church bodies and groups:

Each church or group may choose the precise form or extent of its participation. Differences in doctrine will be recognized and respected. Varieties in evangelistic expression are anticipated.³¹

To safeguard the autonomy of doctrine and practice of the participating church groups, Key 73 has three principles of operation - separately developing their own programs, simultaneously carrying them out in 1973 for maximum impact, cooperatively using national television, radio, and the press as the air force to prepare the way for the army of foot soldiers on the community level.³²

Key 73's goal was to reach every person in Canada and the United States with the Gospel.³³ To this end the following six phases were planned under the theme "Calling Our Continent to Christ."

²⁸Kemper, p. 16. ²⁹Ibid., p. 17.

³⁰Carl F. H. Henry, "Key 73 Good News for the Nation," Christian Herald, March 1973, p. 32.

³¹Raedeke, "What is Key 73?"

³²T. A. Raedeke, "Key 73: Calling our Continent to Christ," brochure, (St. Louis: Key 73, n.d.).

³³T. A. Raedeke, ed., Key 73 Congregational Resource Book, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, n.d.), p. 12.

1. Calling Our Continent to Repentance and Prayer -- Thanksgiving to Epiphany 1973.
2. Calling Our Continent to the Word - Thanksgiving 1972 through Lent 1973.
3. Calling Our Continent to the Resurrection - Easter 1973.
4. Calling our Continent to New Life - Easter through late summer 1973.
5. Calling our Continent to the Proclamation - Fall 1973.
6. Calling Our Continent to Commitment - Thanksgiving to New Year 1973.³⁴

³⁴"Key 73: Calling. . ." brochure.

CHAPTER VI

THE THEOLOGY OF FELLOWSHIP UNDERLYING KEY 73

Evangelism for the Sake of Cooperation

C. Peter Wagner's penetrating critique of Key 73 cuts right to the heart of the matter. Coining the term "hyper-cooperativism," Wagner argues that both Evangelism in Depth and Key 73 made too much of the "visible unity of the body of Christ" as "a contemporary guideline for evangelistic methods." The Fuller Seminary missiologist charges the leaders of these movements with a false hypothesis which assumes that "the more cooperation Christians attain, the more effective will be their evangelistic efforts."

Those who accept this hypothesis often tend to confuse priorities. Evangelism slips, sometimes unnoticed, from the top of the priority list and cooperation takes its place.¹

This was Key 73's basic problem from Wagner's standpoint. He notes that the Christianity Today editorial which generated the Key 73 program focused on cooperation, with evangelism meriting only two or three references in the entire editorial.

Key 73 was then adopted as a program which could serve as an instrument for evangelicals "somehow getting together." So without anyone's intending it at all, evangelism was used as a means to the

¹C. Peter Wagner, Your Church Can Grow, (Glendale, CA: Regal Books, 1976), p. 142.

end of cooperation. The effort was referred to as cooperation for evangelism, but deep down it was more realistically evangelism for cooperation.²

The Christian Century detected this thrust very early. In a January 1974 editorial, they observed:

Although Key 73 was labeled an evangelistic effort, its uniqueness lay in its ecumenical character. Key 73 must be assessed on the basis of its being an ecumenical venture as well as a strictly evangelistic program. Its distinctive feature was the cooperation of widely diverse Christian bodies with widely differing views on evangelism. That a common canopy could be erected on such a disparate set of evangelical styles demonstrates a far more significant achievement than does the adding of numbers of souls to the church rolls and in that wise Key 73 was certainly a step forward.³

How was this possible?

Key 73 combined the theological liberal prejudice for ecumenism and the theologically conservative penchant for evangelism. . . . Minnesota Baptist Conference executive Emmett V. Johnson . . . declared: "We are finding it more comfortable to talk to one another across denominational lines. . . . In the year of Key 73, we have learned to work together."⁴

Like Evangelism-in-Depth, Key 73 had more ecumenical than evangelistic success.

The Christian Century predicted as much:

One can no longer accuse Key 73 of being antiecumenical: it has become ecumenical, on terms that differ hardly at all from classical Protestant grounds once opposed by the older evangelicals.⁵

Martin Marty, at that time a member of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, applauded the obvious result of Key 73: "The old lines

²Ibid., p. 143.

³"Key 73 and Constantine," The Christian Century, January 2-9, 1974.

⁴Ibid., p. 5.

⁵"Key 73: A Grasp of Grace?" The Christian Century, January 3, 1973, p. 4.

are blurring" between the Reformed Evangelical/Fundamentalist evangelism as soul winning in a millennialistic "save the world" context of older revivalism and those who see the church's mission as helping people through social concern. Marty's "hopes for 'Key 73' are that it will continue to contribute to that blurring."⁶

The American Baptist Convention had an ecumenical agenda for Key 73. They called Key 73 "good news for the church" for

Key 73 has become the ground upon which those of differing perspectives and theological persuasions can join forces to do together the work of the Lord. Indeed, Key 73 has become the foundation for a new and challenging "ecumenism" which finds those to "the right" and to "the left" in church life joining forces and finding a new sense of oneness in Christ.

In the keynote address to the Key 73 National Training Conference held in New Orleans on April 17, 1972, American Baptist Convention Executive Jitsuo Morikawa spelled out the breadth of the ecumenical vision he had for this nationwide endeavor.

Key 73 appears to be a decisive event in the religious history of America. In unprecedented degree and scale, religious forces from right and left are reaching out toward each other in a common corporate evangelistic enterprise. Whether the initiators had this vision or not, what is occurring is a "happening" rather than a contrived movement, overflowing the theological and historical banks, so that more than 130 denominations and groups are identified with Key 73. And they are an amazing mixture -- fundamentalists, conservatives and liberals, ecumenics and antiecumenics, spanning the whole religious spectrum of America -- a diversity and division nowhere to be duplicated in the world. An initiative arose from the right, a call to an evangelistic ecumenism by those who consistently frowned upon the National and World Council of Churches, and now calling for a collaborative enterprise embracing the whole church around its central purpose of evangelism. Equally surprising

⁶ Martin E. Marty, "Key 73 in Historical Context," Lutheran Forum, May 19, 1972, p. 11.

⁷ Joseph I. Chapham, "The Good News of Key 73," AB The American Baptist Magazine, December 1972, p. 10.

is the response of the left to the initiative from the right. Instead of the hard posture of waiting for brethren to "see the light" and join the ecumenical structure they created, they reflect painful humility shaped by hard lessons of history, that we all "see through a glass darkly," that our fragments of insight need the illumination of others, that collectively we may "know Him and the power of his resurrection." Besides, we have seen God at work in unexpected ways, new creation breaking forth in unlikely places, often bypassing established places where the proper conditions seem met for the creative activity of God to occur. Thus, it may very well be that we are witnessing within our lifetime, what appeared a remote possibility, a new ecumenism, a wide-ranging household of faith, the realization of the high priestly prayer "that they all may become one, so that the world may believe."⁸

Pondering Morikawa's words, we detect the notion that no one may fully know God's truth, that we all at best have only a portion of it, and therefore absolute truth is impossible. Why should we not, then get together? But let's pile our evidence a little higher.

Cynthia Wedel, then President of the National Council of Churches, rejoiced that Key 73 would be part of "the beginning stages of a great revival in religion" which included "a growing commitment to ecumenism." Key 73, she declared, was an example of "a new willingness of main-line churches to join hands with conservative and Pentecostal churches and vice versa."⁹ From a slightly more conservative source comes the observation by Donald G. Bloesch that "Key 73 fits in well with this new mood in ecumenical circles."¹⁰

⁸ Jitsuo Morikawa, "Key 73: Toward An Evangelistic Life Style," AB, The American Baptist Magazine, December 1972, p. 18.

⁹ David Kurcharsky, "Ecumenical Face-Lifting," Christianity Today, January 5, 1973, p. 46.

¹⁰ Donald G. Bloesch, "Key 73: Pathway to Renewal?" Christian Century, January 3, 1973, p. 9.

Evangelical sociologist David O. Moberg had this to say about the "attitudinal ecumenicity" produced by Key 73:

Each denominational group was free to shape its Key 73 activities in its own way. As a result many activities under its label were not truly evangelistic, and there was little cooperation across denominational and even congregational lines in most communities. Its inclusivistic orientation was an outstanding example of "attitudinal ecumenicity" in contrast to "organizational ecumenicity" emphasized in the traditional ecumenical movement, and it simultaneously repelled many fundamentalists while attracting increased attention of evangelicals in general. . . . It also stimulated some liberals to have a more favorable attitude toward mass evangelism and some conservatives to be more amenable to cooperation with others."¹¹

One Fundamentalist repelled by Key 73 was Dallas Seminary systematist Robert Lightner who expressed the fear that "Key 73 will turn out to be the most useful key yet to unlock the door to full-blown ecumenism -- one church for one world." He lamented the tragic paradox "that evangelicals will be responsible for aiding the liberal ecumenical cause."

The noble effort, begun because of concerned evangelicals, soon became so broad and inclusivistic that it now represents . . . the greatest boost ever given to the goal of the liberal ecumenists. My basis for saying this is because with the inclusion of Roman Catholics, evangelical and liberal Protestants, Pentecostals and Charismatics in Key 73, the important theological distinctions between these groups, especially with respect to Christ and the gospel will have been forgotten if not obliterated.

Those involved in Key 73 are saying in effect to the world, "We are all going to do our own thing in our own way. We all embrace the same Christ and the same gospel." This is precisely the concept the ecumenists wish to communicate. Key 73 will serve to break down more barriers which have heretofore hindered the ecumenists than any other single factor.¹²

¹¹David O. Moberg, "Fundamentalists and Evangelicals in Society," in The Evangelicals, eds. David F. Wells and John D. Woodbridge, p. 153.

¹²Robert P. Lightner, "Evangelism Enhances Ecumenism," The Baptist Bulletin, March 1973, p. 9.

Lightner therefore urged a policy of non-cooperation with Key 73.

Bible-believing Christians should not cooperate in the Key 73 program because: (1) it will help advance the liberal ecumenical cause; (2) it will encourage those who do not believe in the Christ of Scripture and His gospel to win more people to their persuasion; (3) it encourages all participants to do their own thing in their own way and this contradicts the clear command of Scripture to preach the one gospel of Christ.¹³

Writing in the same magazine, Ralph Colas provides more evidence that evangelism was the means to "get together" in an over-arching evangelical unity when he cites the Report of the director of Key 73 to the central committee after the first Key Bridge conference that "the only effort in which Christians would possibly consider working together would be in the field of evangelism."¹⁴ Colas warns

Great problems arise when evangelicals in doctrine become ecumenical in the fellowship. It is confusing to God's people, to say the least, when liberals and evangelicals are joined together for any reason.¹⁵

Not everyone joined in Key 73, even traditionally liberal denominations such as the Episcopalians, the United Presbyterian Church and the United Church of Christ, all of whom refrained from participating. Elliott Wright said,

Their lack of affirmative action may, as critics within claim, say something about lukewarm commitment to evangelism. More likely, it speaks to an unhappiness with the roots and conception of evangelism in Key 73.¹⁶

¹³Lightner, p. 9.

¹⁴Ralph Colas, "Examining Expo 72 and KEY 73," The Baptist Bulletin, June 1972, reprinted in Christian News, June 12, 1972.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Elliott Wright, "Raising the Christian Canopy: The Evangelicals' Burden," Christianity and Crisis, March 19, 1973, p. 37.

Dr. Raedeke, Executive Director of Key 73, asserted that

One of the outstanding features of this effort is that it enables all Christian denominations and groups to participate without violating or compromising their doctrinal position or practice.¹⁷

Yet the ambiguity which left the definition of evangelism up to each participant created problems rather than resolved them. The same issue of Christianity Today carried a report of how the National Association of Evangelicals refused to endorse Key 73 while the National Conference of Catholic Bishops at least tacitly approved it at their annual meeting in the Spring of 1972.¹⁸ Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox participation had been invited by the Central Committee in its December 1970 meeting. Christianity Today commented editorially:

Some conservatives in Key 73 have reacted negatively to that decision. Nevertheless, we feel it was wise; there are many in the Catholic and Orthodox communions who are committed to biblical evangelism.

Evangelism and the euangelion are for the whole Church; the Gospel is not a bone to be growled and fought over by segments of the Body of Christ. The planners of Key 73 wisely drew up broad outlines: the common bond for participants . . . is allegiance to Jesus Christ. "Difference in doctrine will be recognized and respected," a policy statement says. "Varieties in evangelistic expression are expected and will range from traditional forms to vastly new, innovative styles of witness."¹⁹

But, are all of these "styles of witness" really the proclamation of the Biblical Gospel? And what is the nature of the "biblical evangelism"

¹⁷Cited by David Kurarsky, "Key 73: A Continental Call," Christianity Today, November 19, 1971, p. 38.

¹⁸"NAE: Key 73 a Key Issue" and Catholic Bishops: "Key 73 Sounds Okay," Christianity Today, May 13, 1972, pp. 34-35. See also the editorial "Who's For Evangelism?" p. 27 of the same issue. Consult Barrie Doyle, "Key Celebration of the Word of God," Christianity Today, September 29, 1972, for another account of Roman Catholics and Key 73.

¹⁹"Key 73: Bridge Over Troubled Waters," Christianity Today, January 1, 1971, p. 21.

to which Roman and Greek Catholic Churches are committed: The editorial does not help us.

In sum, was Key 73 really evangelism for the sake of cooperation, at least in its lasting results, as C. Peter Wagner alleges? Carl Henry is the source of the statement that "Key 73 is but one of many cooperative frameworks through which the vision of evangelical togetherness might have been developed."²⁰ Wisconsin Synod theologian Joel Gerlach perceptively called Key 73 an "evangelistic failure" but an "ecumenical success."

For the first time in history, Key 73 succeeded in bringing together on a national scale for a common endeavor such disparate groups as Baptists, Methodists, Lutherans, Episcopalians, Pentecostals and even Roman Catholics. Both liberals and conservatives shared a hold on the umbrella handle.²¹

The "overarching canopy" became more important than the evangelistic goal during the Key 73 year.

The Key 73 "Resource Book"

Are these judgments justified? Was Key 73 predestined to become a unionistic evangelism program? We shall demonstrate that the theology of fellowship presented in the Key 73 Congregational Resource Book made compromise of the evangelistic message for the sake of pragmatic and even desirable evangelistic goals inevitable. Along with many practical suggestions and resources, the Resource Book contains a lengthy section

²⁰Carl F. H. Henry, "Concept," p. 10.

²¹Joel C. Gerlach, "Key 73 - Evangelistic Failure, Ecumenical Success." Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly, (April 1974), pp. 146-47.

of "Evangelism Topics" by Key 73 leaders. These topics provide the raw material for our theological analysis of this movement.

The lead "Topic" is appropriately by Carl F. H. Henry who picks up the keynote of his "Somehow, Let's Get Together" editorial in "I Had A Dream." Henry argues that 'evangelical Christians have a much larger area of doctrinal agreement than neo-Protestant ecumenists.'" Therefore,

Can we not find a way to do together what would otherwise remain undone, do what all evangelicals agree needs to be done, each doing what a good conscience requires and allows and doing it cooperatively or simultaneously?"²²

Responding to Henry's assertion that Evangelicals have more upon which they are agreed than do ecumenists, one suspects that a comparative study between the theology of cooperation characterizing liberal ecumenism and that of the founders of Key 73 would reveal that the only difference would be on the list of "essential doctrines" on which they based fellowship.

Henry traces the scope of Key 73 in this paragraph:

As recently as five or six years ago evangelical Christians in such denominations as the Southern Baptists, Missouri Synod Lutherans the Christian Church, among numerous others, were not even on speaking terms with each other about the possibilities of cooperative evangelism. Now evangelical energies in over 100 denominations have been committed for Key 73. In every city and hamlet across the United States existing evangelical forces have an opportunity to rally their task forces in a coordinated thrust for the gospel. Together they will point to Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen Redeemer, and to God's gracious offer of the forgiveness of sins and new life in Him.²³

²² Carl F. H. Henry, "I Had A Dream," Key 73 Congregational Resource Book, ed. T. A. Raedeke, (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, n.d., p. 158. Hereafter this volume will be cited as CRB.

²³ Henry, "Dream," p. 157.

We rejoice that the Gospel is preached in diverse denominations throughout our land, but the question remains, is this a sufficient basis for church fellowship?

The second topic is by Joe Hale, Director of Cooperative Evangelism for the United Methodist Church. Notice the ecumenical theology marshalled by this Key 73 supporter:

Through Key 73 we can show our nation the oneness that exists among us in Jesus Christ. There are some things that we cannot do alone. We need one another. A united purpose in Christ is imperative if we are to arrest the attention of literally tens of millions of persons who do not attend churches or relate their lives in any way to God. . . . We belong to one another. We worship the same God. We find forgiveness at the same Cross. We are sent into the world to serve by the one Christ. . . . Beyond the separating fences of our denominations we find our oneness in Him!²⁴

Hale then turns Eph. 2:11-22 into a mandate for ecumenical programs of outward cooperation:

There is a growing Christian consensus that we cannot be divided -- into black or white, brown or red -- reformed or free -- catholic or evangelical. We can move out together to proclaim to the world the One who has broken down the middle wall of partition between us.²⁵

Next Hale offers the following recommendation:

Dr. Rufus Jones, former President of the National Association of Evangelicals, suggests that the old divisions no longer apply. Nothing will be lost if we lay them to rest. We are commissioned to a task by a Savior who hold in His hands all those who "will do his will."²⁶

Baptism, the Lord's Supper, Conversion, Predestination, differences on the Means of Grace and the work of the Holy Spirit, a right

²⁴ Joe Hale, "The Time is Now!" CRB, p. 161.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 162.

²⁶ Hale, Ibid., p. 162.

understanding of the two natures of Christ -- these and other important matters may be set aside and "nothing will be lost!"

The notion that we ought only consider our agreements and quietly put our differences in the background runs like a thread through the "Evangelism Topics" in the Resource Book. (To take a cue from C. Peter Wagner, perhaps they should be called "ecumenical topics!") Executive Committee Chairman Thomas F. Zimmerman's article "A Common Foe, A Common Faith, A Common Task" is another case in point. The Assembly of God chief executive assures us that "We found large and important areas of agreement which could be expressed as a shield against the enemy [Satan]." He briefly catalogues "this shared faith" of Key 73 participants as follows:

1. The Bible is the Word of God through which Christ is made known.
2. God through Christ offers man the way of salvation, wholeness, and meaningful life.
3. Men are to be confronted with Christ's call and through the power of the Holy Spirit come to repentance and faith.
4. Genuine saving faith affects every area of a person's life and engages him in Christ's serving ministry.²⁷

Victor Nelson, chief executive for the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, and like most contributors to these topics, a member of the Key 73 Executive Committee, repeats this reductionistic, sentimental approach to fellowship in his presentation, relating an irrelevant parable of two men discussing the relative importance of pants and belts.²⁸ The absurdity of being a "belt man" or a "pants man" is of little help

²⁷ Thomas F. Zimmerman, "A Common Foe, A Common Faith, A Common Task," CRB, p. 164.

²⁸ Victor Nelson, "Church Membership and Discipleship," CRB, p. 165.

in solving serious theological differences which directly relate to evangelistic proclamation and practice.

In a later selection, Henry Ginder, Moderator of the Brethren in Christ Church, asserts:

What makes this cooperative evangelism experience really great is the fact that beyond the legal and organizational technicalities, we are discovering each other as real brothers in Christ. . . . We rejoice together in what one senses to be an ecumenicity of the Spirit. We believe that God, by His Spirit, will use this sense of oneness to sweep millions into His spiritual kingdom during 1973.²⁹

Sadly, however, as we have already noted in our survey of Evangelism in Depth, cooperation in evangelism without facing the hard issues of what the Gospel is in all of its ramifications is counter-productive to Ginder's mighty goal of sweeping millions into God's Kingdom.³⁰

And so it goes in topics by a Presbyterian executive, a Salvation Army field secretary, Reformed and Anglican clergymen, so that a common ecumenical theology emerges which may be identified as a common denominator approach, reducing the basis for fellowship and cooperation to a few fundamentals. T. A. Raedeke closes this section of the Resource Book with a moving exhortation to evangelism which he links to an appeal

²⁹Henry Ginder, "In Partnership with God," CRB, p. 165.

³⁰Dr. D. A. Waite's analysis of the Congregational Resources Book from a hard-line fundamentalistic perspective contains a severe and often overstated attack on the theology and practice of Key 73 leaders and participants in his What's Wrong With Key 73? A Documentation of Theological Confusion, (Collingswood, NJ: The Bible for Today, 1972) including failure to speak of "God's Kingdom" in millennialistic terms. He is in error here, in our view, but his analysis underscores our point that it is impossible to work together with other Christians without prior doctrinal agreement.

to "join hands with other Christians in this cooperative effort to reach our continent."³¹

The theology of fellowship and evangelism articulated in these "topics is continued in those sections of the Resource Book dealing with the implementation of the phases of Key 73. A clear example is seen in United Methodist Ronn Kerr's section on "Phase 1: Calling Our Continent to Repentance and Prayer." In giving directions for the "Noon Prayer Call" we are told:

Third, the Noon Prayer Call offers unlimited opportunities for cooperation because there is broad agreement on the fundamentals of prayer. It is a universal language that crosses most doctrinal and liturgical barriers.³²

The "Launch Weekend" instructions for January 6 and 7, 1973 also call for "pan-Christian community events" for "every city" for:

Though we may disagree on doctrine and methodology, we are united in the call to express God's love, as evidenced in Christ, to every person.³³

The Theology of Fellowship Undergirding Key 73 was
Reductionistic From the Beginning

In his Preface to the little volume outlining the course of Key 73, ambitiously titled Yesterday, Today and Forever, Billy Graham writes that it "recounts the sound theological basis and justification for effective cooperative evangelism."³⁴ On the back cover, the book claims

³¹T. A. Raedeke, "Tell It Like He Is," CRB, p. 208.

³²Ronn Kerr, "Noon Prayer Call," CRB, p. 35.

³³"Launch Weekend," CRB, p. 39.

³⁴Billy Graham, "Preface," Yesterday, Today, and Forever, ed. T. A. Raedeke (Washington: Canon Press, 1974), p. v.

to be "not merely an account of past events and their immediate results but also an appeal for intensive cooperation between evangelicals in the future."³⁵ It reprints Christianity Today's, "Somehow, Let's Get Together" editorial as an appendix.³⁶

Within its pages, Dr. Thomas F. Zimmerman, Assembly of God head who chaired the transdenominational effort, looks to the future after Key 73.

A bridge of communication has been built over a chasm made hazardous by moss covered misconceptions. We cannot afford to let this bridge fall into disrepair. A wall of separation has been broken down, and on the other side we have found children of God with more similarities than differences, eager to share fellowship. Let us not take up a single stone to raise that wall again.³⁷

Raedeke closes his final essay in the book with a letter from another famous charismatic, Pat Boone, calling attention not to Key 73's evangelistic success, but to its ecumenical accomplishments:

Dear Brother Ted:

". . . I really believe that our efforts in Key 73 this year have been part of the gigantic "mystery of Godliness" and God's own forward moving plan for His Church. Brotherhoods have been formed, barriers have been melted, and doors have been opened.

"The Holy Spirit flows more freely through various parts of His body.

"Your brother in Him,
"Pat Boone"³⁸

As further documentation on the ecumenical significance of Key 73, examine Dr. Zimmerman's catalog of five Key 73 benefits:

³⁵Ibid., back cover. ³⁶Ibid., pp. 102-107.

³⁷T. A. Zimmerman, "Key 73 - Forever," in Yesterday, Today, and Forever.

³⁸Yesterday, Today, and Forever, p. 96.

All of these spring from our recognition of the overriding demand of the mission of the Church over some of the less vital matters of theological interpretation and organizational formats.

Key 73 has been a graphic demonstration of the fact that Christians of varying theological positions and commitments to different ecclesiastical patterns of operation can find a meaningful and satisfying relationship in working together at a common task which is great enough to demand our united efforts. It has also demonstrated that this kind of working together is possible and can be effective without compromise.³⁹

Zimmerman's Second benefit related to the "balancing effect" of showing those who major in proclamation to see the value of practical concern and Christian love, while those who emphasized Christian service "have come to realize that service which does not include clear articulations of the good news of the Gospel falls short of fulfilling the divine imperative."

Thirdly, Zimmerman writes,

Key 73 has given to many participants a new appreciation and love for all our fellow believers, regardless of the church denominational labels they may claim. Having prayed together in a common effort toward fulfilling the mission of the Church, we are not so quick to accept or reject people categorically on the basis of denomination.⁴⁰

Zimmerman did not establish, however, his presumption that declining to cooperate in an effort that involves or implies a compromise of the Biblical message which is proclaimed in evangelism involves a categorical rejection of the participants. He goes on:

Another of the valuable and lasting benefits of Key 73 is the experience gained in sharing, on the broadest scale ever, many of the materials and resources developed by the various denominations, particularly . . . in the Key 73 Congregational Resource Book.⁴¹

³⁹Ibid., p. 99. ⁴⁰Ibid., p. 100.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 100. For our comments on this benefit, see Chapter Nine, pp. 274-75.

The fifth benefit recorded by the Assembly of God leader is "a renewed emphasis on the importance of the Word of God."⁴² The book concludes with Zimmerman's hope that

In the time that is left to us before the Lord of the harvest returns, let us keep the doors open, the bridges repaired, and the walls down so that we may inspire, encourage, and cooperate with one another in the completion of our common task.⁴³

Once again, we find the familiar refrain that we may minimize doctrinal details for the sake of the mission of the church. But the mission of the church has a doctrinal content derived from Scripture itself. Moreover, the question of what is secondary and what is divisive is itself an issue on which Christians are divided.

Arthur F. Glasser, resident theologian at the Fuller Seminary School of World Mission, made this observation about the ecumenical nature of Key 73:

What of the ecumenical emphasis? Those burdened for the reunion of the broken fragments of the Church are on scriptural ground. They need to keep in mind, however, that the ultimate objective should be not ecclesiastical unity or even unity in spirit but rather the conversion of the whole world to Jesus Christ. This was his concern: "I pray . . . that they may be one . . . so that the world may believe that thou has sent me" (John 17:20-21). Do you want to be active in the ecumenical movement today? Don't call churches back to the Luthers or Calvins or Wesleys; seek their reformation in the light of the Gospel. And nothing reforms a church more quickly than for its members to break with their introversion, confess their sins, pray to God for mercy and grace, and then reach out with the Gospel to their unsaved neighbors. That is what Key 73 is all about.⁴⁴

Glasser is right in asserting that unity in the church is for the sake of Evangelism, and he certainly is right in affirming that breaking out

⁴²Ibid. ⁴³Ibid., p. 101.

⁴⁴Arthur F. Glasser, "What Key 73 is All About," Christianity Today, January 19, 1973, p. 13.

of personal and congregational introversion is prerequisite to renewal and outreach, but what does he mean when he says we ought not go back to the Reformation? Did the Reformation really mean that a mere united commitment to evangelistic outreach is enough for the reunion of the church? Such sentiments are typical of the apologists for Key 73.

Such latitudinarianism resulted not in more unity, however, but more divisiveness as even Carl Henry recognized:

The breadth of inclusivism nonetheless frightened away certain groups most concerned about Bible-evangelism; the extreme liberal left and the extreme conservative right voiced the most fervent opposition. As Ted Raedeke put it, "The liberal left feared only proclamation, the conservative right feared only demonstration and social action. The extreme conservative right accused the Key 73 participants of being unequally yoked together with those not in doctrinal agreement. Yet they too thus were unequally yoked with the liberal left and critical Jewry in opposition to a Christ-centered evangelistic thrust." It may be, therefore, that heaven will judge us all for the miscarriage of a magnificent opportunity in the year of Water-gate and the breakdown of American morale one of the most anguished years of the nation's history.⁴⁵

Henry and Raedeke are blaming the left and right for what is in fact their own error: failure to define evangelism and to come to an agreement in the Gospel and the Sacraments before launching the movement in the first place.

From the beginning of Key 73, the minimal standards were drawn broadly enough to enable groups of all kinds to participate. One attempt to define the doctrinal basis of Key 73 was this brief statement:

The Bible is the Word of God through which Christ is made known. God through Christ offers man the way of salvation, wholeness and meaningful life. Men are confronted with Christ's call and through the power of the Holy Spirit comes the repentance of faith. Genuine

⁴⁵ Carl F. H. Henry, "Concept," p. 19.

saving faith affects every area of a person's life and engages him in Christ's saving ministry.⁴⁶

Beyond this, participants committed themselves only to the overall objective of Key 73.⁴⁷ Under the "separately, simultaneously, or cooperatively" rubrics, groups as diverse as Missouri Synod Lutherans and the Assembly of God, and including both Arminian and anti-sacramental Salvation Army people to Calvinistic Christian Reformed churches all linking arms for a common cause.

The exasperation which Key 73 leaders felt over the refusal of many groups, both conservative and liberal to participate is expressed in an April 1973 editorial in Christianity Today. The editorial compared the refusal of the No Other Gospel Movement in Germany to participate in the German Protestant Kirchentag because of the pluralism of this assembly which made the Gospel but one "option" of many, and which would therefore make the Gospel call "next to impossible to discern" to the feeling of many that the message proclaimed through Key 73 "may be compromised or diluted."

Not at all, the editorial announced, for those areas where disagreements may occur will simply not be discussed! Indeed,

If the disparate groups, cooperating in Key 73 were examined as to their underlying presuppositions and the details of their understanding, significant areas of controversy would certainly arise. But Key 73 is not presenting the areas of conflict and urging that the Christian message lies somewhat in a pluralistic confusion. The participating groups have all agreed to silence whatever babble of disagreement might normally exist among them and sound the Gospel clearly.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Cited by Wesley Smedes, "Rules of the Game," CRB, p. 96.

⁴⁷ Smedes, p. 96. See page 195 above for these objectives.

⁴⁸ "On Sitting This One Out," Christianity Today, April 27, 1973,

What should have been clear to the Key 73 leaders was that this very agreement to keep silent on existing areas of doctrinal difference was in part responsible for making a clear Gospel call impossible. Can two walk together except they be agreed? Amos's famous question expected a "No" answer, but Christianity Today decided that they could indeed!⁴⁹

Small wonder that M. H. Reynolds, Jr. should exclaim:

Those who know the facts about Key 73 cannot deny that it is ecumenical to the very core. Those who attempt to deny its ecumenical involvements are either unaware of the facts or are unwilling to admit the truth. Many evangelical leaders attempt to pacify concerned believers in their groups by the argument that participation in Key '73 is purely voluntary and they are free to participate in as much or as little as desired. The fact remains, however, that under the one banner of Key '73 evangelism, many false gospels are being preached and many unscriptural fellowships are being encouraged. Confusion will be the inevitable result.⁵⁰

Commenting on Key 73's "over-arching Christian canopy," Reynolds declared:

Our observation is that those promoting Key 73 are "bridge builders," seeking to bridge the gap between evangelicals and ecumenicals. They have found the key. The key is compromise!⁵¹

As if to answer those who declare that the "variety of evangelistic expressions" under the Key 73 banner will enrich the overall thrust, Reynolds takes this tack:

In most area, Roman Catholic Churches will be participating with their false doctrine of salvation by works and by the sacraments. The liberal Protestant will be there with their false doctrine of the social gospel. The Church Renewal people will be there with

⁴⁹ "On The Bridge Together," Christianity Today, June 18, 1971, which begins with this very citation from Amos 3:3!

⁵⁰ M. H. Reynolds, Jr., Key 73: An Appraisal (Los Angeles, CA: Fundamental Evangelistic Association, 1972), p. 10.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 3.

their programs of sensitivity training. The charismatic movement will be there with their false teachings regarding the "ecumenism of the Holy Spirit." The ecumenists will be there with their false doctrine of a "one-world" church. They will all be "doing their own thing" and calling it evangelism. How could any true believer possibly participate in a program such as that?⁵²

Writing from a frankly Fundamentalist viewpoint, Reynolds is useful for a number of telling quotations documenting further the reductionistic nature of Key 73.

Such attacks and warnings were dismissed as the narrow minded thoughts of those who equate their own groups with the Una Sancta, outside of which no one can be saved. Even Raedeke asserts:

Cooperative evangelism is impossible if we think all of God's people are in our denomination or congregation. It is impossible, too, if we take the challenge of the Great Commission lightly. And it is also impossible if we are more concerned about building our own "empire" rather than the Kingdom of God. But Key 73 proposed to overcome these hindrances to cooperative evangelism. And the record proclaims a success.⁵³

These were never the issues, of course. The question is, was the truth compromised, and were the Biblical prerequisites for church fellowship met? Confessional Lutherans have to say yes to the first question and no to the second.

Harold Lindsell also offered a defense of Key 73. He thanks God that:

Key 73 has shown us something about a biblical unity that transcends most of our differences. I am not suggesting nor am I in any sense approving a spirit of doctrinal indifference. The science of ethics includes the drawing of some boundaries: if you draw no boundaries you can have no ethics. The same is true about theology.⁵⁴

⁵² Reynolds, p. 35.

⁵³ Raedeke, Yesterday, p. 30

⁵⁴ Lindsell, Yesterday, p. 35.

Lindsell maintains:

Key 73 . . . has identified those evangelicals within the various denominations of Protestantism and made them overlook their differences; it has brought them together on the common essentials and given them an understanding and an appreciation of people who have been outside of their particular traditions. Need I say to you that there are no Baptists in heaven? There are no Pentecostals in heaven? There are only Christians . . . there.⁵⁵

But all of this begs the question. Significantly, Lindsell faced the same argument in the wake of his polemical but necessary Battle for the Bible. His critics maintained that he was dividing the Body of Christ on a non-essential! His reply filled many of the pages of his sequel, The Bible in the Balance, as we have already seen. It is impossible to rightly teach or preach the Gospel if certain areas of doctrine are treated as if they are unrelated to the Gospel and are therefore non-essential.

More accurate is the sentiment offered by Joel Gerlach:

We are not sympathetic toward liberals who evangelize with an emasculated gospel, nor are we sympathetic toward conservatives who lose their distinctiveness through ecumenical involvement.

Key 73 certainly did not accomplish what it set out to do. But unquestionably it did help to neutralize whatever antiecumenicalism still remaining in participating church bodies. Like the angels, we rejoice over every sinner brought to repentance through the efforts of Key 73 participants. But we regret whatever contribution Key 73 made to a diminution of confessional consciousness.⁵⁶

In another Wisconsin Synod publication, Rolfe Westendorf pointed the way for those who wished to be evangelistic without compromising the Evangel, the Gospel itself. He urged his readers to "reaffirm" and act on "our oft-repeated intention to preach the Gospel to every creature." At the

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 37.

⁵⁶ Joel C. Gerlach, "Key 73: Evangelistic Failure, Ecumenical Success," Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly, April 1974, p. 147.

same time, however, he explains why his Synod was not participating in

Key 73:

Why not? The reason is clear. "Key 73" involves many contrary doctrines. If, for example, the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod march under the same banner, there cannot help but be confusion of truth and error. Our Lord forbids such participation when He tells us to avoid those who teach doctrines contrary to the ones we have learned from His Prophets, Evangelists, and Apostles. Thus the fact that God wants us to make a distinction between truth and error prevents us from participating in any program that ignores the difference between truth and error.⁵⁷

With regret, therefore, we are compelled to conclude by the overwhelming weight of the evidence that Key 73 was reductionistic and fundamentalistic in its theology of fellowship from its inception.

⁵⁷ Rolfe Westendorf, "What About Key 73?" The Northwestern Lutheran, August 13, 1972, p. 267.

CHAPTER VII

LUTHERAN CHURCH - MISSOURI SYNOD

INVOLVEMENT IN KEY 73

Synodical Convention Actions

Through certain of its members, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod was involved in Key 73 almost from the first.¹ Already at the 1969 Synodical Convention, the Board for Missions took note of the coming 1973 Evangelism thrust. Speaking of interaction of LC-MS evangelism executives with their counter parts in other denominations, the Mission Report declared:

If the current planning toward a nationwide evangelism emphasis among the Christian churches of the United States in 1973 reaches fruition, much interchange with other denominations will occur.²

Therefore, Synodical District evangelism contact men recommended that "the entire Synod involve all its departments and operations in a thorough going evangelism thrust in 1973."³ They proposed:

That the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod declare 1973 a year for a Synod wide evangelism thrust designed to assist congregations in deepening and enriching the spiritual life in their members through

¹See Chapter V, where LC-MS members are noted as participating in the Key Bridge Conferences and in other ways.

²Convention Workbook, 48th Regular Convention of the LC-MS, Denver, Colorado, July 11-18, 1969, p. 23.

³Ibid.

meaningful involvement as Christ's ministers in their daily lives in the world in which He has placed them.⁴

The 1969 Convention in response to this overture took the planning that was to culminate in Key 73 into account in Resolution 1-02, "To Make 1973 Evangelism Year."

WHEREAS, God in the power of His Holy Spirit has graciously entrusted us with the message of salvation through faith in the one and only Savior, Jesus Christ, and commissioned us to be His witnesses; and

WHEREAS, Evangelism will be emphasized on a national basis in 1973 by other Christian denominations in an effort to confront people more fully and more forcefully with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, therefore be it

RESOLVED, That the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod make 1973 a year for a Synodwide evangelism thrust; and be it further

RESOLVED, That the Evangelism Department of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod be instructed to implement the above resolution; and be it finally

RESOLVED, That District leadership be directed to promote the 1973 evangelism thrust on a regional basis and to provide maximum assistance in developing full parish participation.⁵

By the time the 1971 Convention Workbook was published, plans for Key 73 were well underway. Dr. Theodore Raedeke had already accepted the position of Director of Key 73, leaving his post as Evangelism Secretary for the Synod's Board for Missions. LC-MS participation in Key 73 was part of a number of broadening ecumenical endeavors in which the Synod, through its congregations, missions and missionaries, was involved. Its first mention of Key 73 is under a sub-section titled "Joint Action for

⁴ Ibid., Overture 1-07, "To Declare 1973 Evangelism Year," p. 50.

⁵ 1969 Convention Proceedings, 48th Regular Convention, The LC-MS, Denver, Colorado, July 11-18, 1969, p. 77.

Mission: With Others."⁶ The following citation from the Report of the Board for Missions in that year gives us a reading of the theological-ecumenical spirit that characterized the LC-MS Staff and Board:

The Synod has also entered into a new era of inter-denominational cooperation. While the Synod was engaged in continuing reflections of its theologies and relationships with other Christian groups, cooperative work had already begun in the area of evangelism. Many congregations and individuals have been active participants in Billy Graham sponsored Crusades for Christ. Missouri participation was strong in the Minneapolis Congress on Evangelism. Many pastors and congregations are using "The Kennedy Plan," which was developed within another denomination. And the Synod itself, in convention at Denver, decided to enter into ecumenical participation in the nationwide Key 73 evangelism thrust.⁷

The authors of the report were calling for wider and wider ecumenical activity by the Synod and its sister churches home!⁸

At any rate, an overture from St. Peter Lutheran Church of St. Joseph, Missouri asked the Synod "to Commend Key 73" and participate in it "together with other Gospel-centered Christians."⁹ The Synod's response recommended participation "to the extent that our fellowship principles permit" but then asked the CTCR to establish what those principles are in regard to Key 73. Even this caution did not pass

⁶Convention Workbook, 49th Regular Convention of the LC-MS Milwaukee, Wisconsin, July 9-16, 1971, pp. 8-9.

⁷1971 Convention Workbook, p. 18.

⁸It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to get into the controversy that was raging within the Board for Missions at that time, and which is seen in the Minority Report produced by four members of the board (a fifth signed with reservations) and in the extended letter to delegates to the 1971 Convention dated June 15, on Board for Missions Executive Secretary William H. Kohn's letterhead.

⁹1971 Convention Workbook, p. 377, Overture 8-03.

without a fight. Some delegates attempted to strike this resolve, but their amendment failed to carry. The enabling resolution is printed below:

To Recommend Key 73

Resolution 8-02

WHEREAS, More than 80 Christian denominations and organizations in the United States and Canada have considered and approved participation in an evangelism effort known as Key 73; and

WHEREAS, The Denver convention of the Synod resolved that there should be a Synodwide evangelism effort in 1973 to coincide with the nationwide evangelism emphasis by other Christian denominations; and

WHEREAS, Our Synod has been invited to share in this evangelism effort and has had representation on committees planning Key 73; and

WHEREAS, There are certain areas of concern which develop as we consider participation in this important project; therefore be it

RESOLVED, That we commend the initiators in Key 73 for their careful planning and for establishing safeguarding principles to protect the theological integrity of all participants; and be it further

RESOLVED, That the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod participate in Key 73 to the extent that our fellowship principles permit; and be it further

RESOLVED, That we request the Commission on Theology and Church Relations to study Key 73 and publish guidelines for our involvement in this cooperative venture; and be it further

RESOLVED, That we recommend our congregations involve themselves in Key 73 in every way which does not violate our doctrinal positions; and be it finally

RESOLVED, That we request the Board of Directors to appropriate up to \$10,000 per year, through 1973, as our responsible share of this effort to confront our nations with a lively witness to our Lord Jesus Christ.¹⁰

¹⁰ Convention Proceedings, 49th Regulation Convention, the LC-MS, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, July 9-17, 1971, p. 187.

With this action, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod became a full participant in Key 73.¹¹

Guidelines of the Commission on
Theology and Church Relations

In compliance with the 1971 Milwaukee Convention Resolution recommending Key 73, the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) began the work of producing Guidelines for LC-MS participation in the effort. Commenting on that resolution, Joel Gerlach writes:

It is noteworthy that delegates to Missouri's Milwaukee convention approved that Synod's participation in Key 73. At the same time the convention asked the Commission on Theology and Church Relations to study Key 73 to determine the extent of Missouri's participation in line with its fellowship practices. There is something irregular about deciding to participate, lending one's evangelism secretary to the project, and then requesting a study to determine to what extent one may participate without violating one's fellowship principles. At least Missouri's action recognizes that doctrinal differences are still a barrier in church work. But such a procedure also suggests a commitment to a fellowship by degrees. The larger the area of agreement, the greater the degree of joint activity. Rational justification for such an approach is easy to come by. Scriptural justification for it is non-existent.¹²

On March 14, 1972, the CTCR adopted Guidelines on LC-MS participation in Key 73.¹³ LC-MS President, Jacob A. O. Preus, in an accompanying

¹¹For a full cataloging of LC-MS participation in Key 73, consult Convention Workbook, 50th Regular Convention, LC-MS, New Orleans, Louisiana, July 6-13, 1973, p. 308. The same Workbook contains an overture from Trinity, Sturgis, Michigan, encouraging caution in becoming involved in unionistic services or activities through Key 73, p. 311. The Synodical response to this caution is recorded in Convention Proceedings, 50th Regular Convention, LC-MS, New Orleans, Louisiana, July 6-13, 1973, in Resolution 8-04, "To Implement Key 73," p. 197.

¹²Joel C. Gerlach, "Key 73," Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly, 68 (October 1971):275-76.

¹³See Appendix I for the entire text. In a personal note to this writer, Dr. Ralph A. Bohlmann, then my thesis advisor, observed that by the time the CTCR went to work on the Guidelines for Key 73, "the Synod

"Brother to Brother" letter, commented on Synodical participation and the CTCR document as follows:

The document raises certain cautions which we will all want to observe as we take part in this pan-denominational, continentwide effort. Not everything that flies under the banner of evangelism is necessarily good from the Lutheran point of view. Moreover, none of us wants something as positive as evangelism to be destroyed through involvements and practices contrary to the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions.

In keeping with the Key 73 Guidelines, I encourage every pastor, teacher, and layman of the Synod to maintain fidelity to sound Lutheran doctrine and practice as we participate in Key 73. The document suggests that we participate simultaneously but independently. This is in keeping with the organizational structure of Key 73 and makes it possible for us to remain faithful to our own confessional stance.¹⁴

The CTCR Guidelines warn that since not all church bodies participating in the effort are in doctrinal agreement

participating in a venture such as Key 73 involves pitfalls and inherent dangers which ought to be avoided in the interest of the proclamation of Scriptural truth. It was for this reason that Synod's decision to participate . . . was under the explicit condition that such participation "not violate our doctrinal positions" and be "to the extent that our fellowship principles permit."

More than that, the CTCR warned members of the Synod to

avoid any activity that would negate its distinctively Lutheran witness. Care should be taken that we do not implicitly or explicitly convey an attitude of indifference to Scriptural truth and thereby

was already involved in the program. Had the Synod not been, the CTCR might have advised differently. However, our understanding of the fellowship questions raised by participation was that different levels of cooperation were indeed possible. It would be interesting to find out whether those distinctions were actually observed in very many parts of the Country." Personal memo to Curt Peterson, August 2, 1978, from Ralph A. Bohlmann. Dr. Bohlmann was Executive Secretary of the CTCR at the time the Guidelines were developed.

¹⁴J. A. O. Preus, "Brother to Brother," From the Desk of the President, April 24, 1972, p. 1.

negate the witness that confessional Lutheranism can and must make in our day.

The document then explicitly names joint participation in "rallies, worship services, prayer meetings, and such other cooperative activities" as areas "where our doctrinal position may be compromised." As we shall see in our next chapter, this warning was disregarded more than once during the Key 73 year.

In a positive note, the CTCR pointed out that

Lutheran theology has a unique contribution to make in such an evangelization effort. The Christ-honoring proclamation of God's pure grace and of man's need for it because his nature is depraved, the proper distinction and use of Law and Gospel, and the emphasis on the depth of God's love seeking an estranged and alienated mankind when man would have none of Him are such distinctively Lutheran doctrines to which we must bear witness in any evangelism program in which we participate.¹⁵

In the light of these factors, the Guidelines recommend that LC-MS participation be on the separate or at least on the simultaneous level. All worship services should be under Synod auspices and members should "in all things try to uphold and observe the doctrinal position and fellowship policies of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod."¹⁶

In the spirit of these Guidelines, Dr. Armand H. Ulbrich, the Synod's Evangelism Board Chairman remarked:

Some of the Key 73 proposals for cooperative action with congregations of other denominations may not be feasible for us because of our principles of fellowship. Key 73 recognizes that this is the case not only with Lutherans of the Missouri Synod but also with

¹⁵CTCR "Key 73 Guidelines," See Appendix II.

¹⁶CTCR Key 73 Guidelines.

other denominations and religious groups and so is pledged to respect such convictions.¹⁷

Yet, Dr. Ulbrich wrote,

This does not mean that we cannot work together with other Christians in our communities and state. In fact we urge our congregations to take the lead so that they can help to plan programs in which we can participate without negating our distinctive Lutheran witness.¹⁸

In the light of the theological presuppositions of the Key 73 founders, one may doubt whether a clear witness, using Biblical principles of church fellowship would ever be possible through Key 73.

The Missouri Synod's Executive Secretary for Evangelism, and successor to Dr. Ted Raedeke, Dr. Erwin J. Kolb was one of those who expected great things for Key 73. He predicted that 1973 would be "a great year because of Key 73." Although he granted that "you will only be able to determine [this prediction's] accuracy by waiting," yet he looked forward to a great year because so many church bodies and groups pledged to be "doing evangelism" through Key 73. Kolb is fascinated by the diverse initial reactions to Key 73:

- Some have lauded Key 73 for the ecumenical opportunities it offers, yes even pressure to get involved with other churches,
- Some have been enthusiastic about the programs that it will generate,
- Some have criticized it for its unionistic dangers and its emphasis on programs,
- Some have been cautious and will wait and see what develops before they commit themselves in either direction.¹⁹

¹⁷ Lutheran Key 73 Manual, p. 5. Our point in Chapter VI, however, is that Key 73 from its beginning assumed full fellowship for the sake of evangelism and even used evangelism as a means to advance ecumenism.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ LC-MS Key 73 Manual, p. 8.

LC-MS Leaders Involved in Key 73

The most important LC-MS leader in Key 73 was, of course, its former Evangelism Secretary, Dr. Theodore A. Raedeke. In a standing vote in a St. Louis meeting of the Key 73 Central Committee on December 7, 1970, Dr. Raedeke was elected Director of the year long evangelistic project. After a period of transition from his duties as a Missouri Synod denominational executive, he moved into the newly established national office in St. Louis.

Dr. Raedeke took his new responsibilities very seriously, for he believed that

under God Key 73 could be the greatest thing that has happened to our churches in this generation. Our goal is to confront people more fully and forcefully with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, by proclamation and demonstration, by witness and ministry, by word and deed.²⁰

His goals were noble indeed, representing the goals of Christ for His Church as announced in the Great Commission.

A native of Holloway, Minnesota, and a 1940 graduate of Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, Raedeke is a third generation Lutheran clergyman. Before serving a total of thirteen years, first as associate and then as Secretary for Evangelism for the Missouri Synod's Board for Missions, he served as a pastor in Oklahoma City, and in Duluth, Deer River and Wayzata, Minnesota. He is also a graduate of Concordia College in St. Paul, Minnesota, and is the father of five children.²¹

²⁰ David Kurcharsky, "Unlocking Evangelistic Potential," Christianity Today, January 1, 1971, p. 43.

²¹ Kurcharsky, "Unlocking," p. 43.

According to the Key 73 Congregational Resource Book, four members of the LC-MS served on Key 73's Central Committee. They are:

Arthur Kaul of Concordia Tract Mission
 Lutheran Bible Translators (no individual named here),
 Armand Ulbrich, representing the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod
 and
 Ben Jutzi of the Lutheran Layman's League.²²

In addition (with one overlap), the following are LC-MS members listed as members of Key 73 development committees.²³

| | |
|----------------|-----------------------|
| Ardon Albrecht | Adeline E. Kettner |
| O. H. Bertram | Elmer J. Knoernschild |
| Duane Brunette | Arnold E. Kromphardt |
| Chuch Conner | Louis C. Meyer |
| Eldor Kaiser | Robert Preus |
| Arthur O. Kaul | |

This impressive list is the greatest number contributed by any Lutheran body to this effort.

In the light of the theology of fellowship which we have documented in the planning and design of Key 73, we do well to ponder the widely publicized remarks of Martin E. Marty concerning LC-MS entanglements in this nation-wide effort:

Members of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod have a right to be bewildered about the character of their Church's involvement. One of its most prominent members, the Rev. Dr. Oswald C. J. Hoffmann, has been a spiritual leader of the effort from the beginning, creatively praying up a storm of support for it at the planners' gatherings to date. And we are reminded regularly that the Rev. Dr. Ted Raedeke is the executive head of the drive -- all of this with the full support of the Synod's president who has encouraged Missouri's participation.

This, of course, flies openly, flagrantly and directly, (and I love it!) in the face of a constitutional requirement for membership

²²Key 73 Resource Book, pp. 9-10.

²³Ibid., pp. 146-53. There may be more among names which this writer did not recognize.

in the Missouri Synod, namely (Article VI:2,c of the constitution) "Renunciation of unionism and syncretism of every description, such as . . . participating in heterodox tract and missionary activities." So while Missourians join in and head up efforts involving over 100 denominations, they are being discouraged by the same president and some of his followers from much milder common efforts such as joining worship with the American Lutheran Church, even though that is "canonically legal," or with the Lutheran Church in America (cf. VI.2.b., which enjoins" against "taking part in the services and sacramental rites of heterodox congregations or of congregations of mixed confession," which the LCA is supposed to be!). It is clear that "key 73" represents the end of any conceivably fair or equitable enforcement of Missouri's vestigial antiecumenical canons. On this ground alone, "Key" deserves to be cheered.²⁴

²⁴Marty, "Key 73" p. 9. The first two "conditions for acquiring and holding membership in the Synod" as listed in Article VI of the LC-MS constitution and as quoted in part by Marty are:

1. Acceptance of the confessional basis of Article II.
2. Renunciation of unionism and syncretism of every description, such as:
 - a. Serving congregations of mixed confession, such as, by ministers of the church;
 - b. Taking part in the services and sacramental rites of the heterodox congregations or congregations of mixed confession;
 - c. Participation in heterodox tract and missionary activities.

Handbook of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, 1981, Edition, p. 13.

August R. Suelflow, Director of the Concordia Historical Institute in St. Louis, which is the archives and historical depository for the LC-MS, makes these comments on the historical background of this Article of the Missouri Synod Constitution:

Article VI has appeared in the Synod's Constitution and initially was a part of the present Article II. When one considers this, it is a bit easier to understand.

The Fathers intended the following, as the historical record bears out:

1. All member congregations share a common theological "launching pad" or power pack with each other. This was an affirmation opposing a popular point of view among Lutherans which wanted to disassociate itself from confessional subscription.
2. The words "unionism" and "syncretism" reflected the determination of the fathers to avoid further theological confusion and fuzziness in opposition to those who were seeking the least common denominator. They developed an exceedingly strong aversion to joint worship which denied the fact that there were any theological differences among those worshipping together. The "Union Church of Germany" or the "Unierte" which, by governmental decree tried to force Lutherans and Calvinists to worship and work together was "unionism" in their opinion.
3. "Syncretism" is the translation of the original German "Glaubensmengerei" which can best be translated with the concepts of

Marty's irony is right on the mark. Key 73 was the occasion of numerous incidents of violations of Synod's position on fellowship as the "year of evangelism" went on throughout the country.²⁵

Dr. Marty elaborated further on this theme in an address at the 1973 annual meeting of the Lutheran Council of Metropolitan Milwaukee. A Religious News Service item reported that the associate dean of the University of Chicago Divinity School said that by participating in the Key 73 evangelism effort "once stand-offish Lutherans are showing a new ecumenicity and a new spirit of Christian empathy and sympathy for others." Because the Fathers inserted the kind of constitutional clauses cited above forbidding joint activity with those of other confessions, he said, "the sons have to go through elaborate routines to show how they are keeping the letter of the old law." He then added:

But the spirit is new and different. The old style ecumenism, which turned these traditionalist Lutherans off, is being replaced by a new style in which they are creative pioneers.²⁶

"homogenization" or "intermixing" or "intermingling."

4. The second paragraph lists three examples of such: a - deals with confessional mixtures; b - with the co-mingling and dilution of the Sacraments, and c - in ecclesiastical working together with those who are not on the same theological confessional wavelength. (Letter from August R. Suelflow to Curtis A. Peterson, 15 January 1979.)

²⁵ See Chapter VIII, p. 245 for Documentation.

²⁶ "Dr. Marty Hails Lutheran Cooperation with Key 73," Christian News, February 19, 1973, p. 7.

The price for cooperation in Key 73, such as Marty applauds, was the weakening of our Confessional stance on Church fellowship. But Dr. Raedeke delights in the same phenomenon in this paragraph in his chapter on "Key 73 in the Denominations":

"We've found out that other denominations know who Jesus Christ is too!" So began the enthusiastic testimony of a member of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod as he reported on the success of Key 73 in his community.²⁷

²⁷ T. A. Raedeke, ed., Yesterday, Today, and Forever (Washington, D.C.: Canon Press, 1974.)

CHAPTER VIII

EVANGELISM AND THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO KEY 73

What Kind of Gospel Was Proclaimed

The goal of Key 73 was to "confront people more fully and forcefully with the Gospel of Jesus Christ." But how is this Gospel defined? Since Key 73's purpose is God-pleasing, some argue, shouldn't we support it? But beneath such pragmatic thinking lurks the danger of relativism. Joel Gerlach, the Wisconsin Synod's insightful student of the theology of evangelism reminds us:

It involves the serious mistake of determining the propriety or impropriety of a thing on the basis of human considerations rather than on the basis of divine revelation. The question our people must ask is not, Will good come from it, but rather, Is this the way Jesus asks me to witness for Him?

Our sovereign God will, when it pleases him, cause the stones to cry out. His Word is not bound, and we are thankful whenever He moves by the prayer of His Spirit through Word or Sacrament. But this is not license for us to ignore His clear directions about avoiding errorists.

We cannot promote the truth by making common cause with those who confuse the truth. We can only dilute it, leaving the impression that the particulars of the faith are unimportant, or that God's enlightening Word is unclear regarding the particulars about which it is to enlighten us.¹

¹Joel C. Gerlach, "Key '73': Evangelistic Failure, Ecumenical Success," Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly, April 1974, p. 275.

In this chapter we shall examine some of the different definitions of both the Gospel and evangelism used by Key 73 participants.

The lead editorial in Dialog in its special issue on Key 73 clears away much of the fog on this matter by reminding us that the preaching of the Gospel is a theological exercise, one that cannot be practiced without theological content.

I believe it is irresponsible of the official bureaucracies of Lutheranism to commit their churches to a nationwide evangelism campaign without seeking the counsel of the church's theologians. . . . The theology of the gospel is central in the Lutheran tradition; it is the basis for every decision concerning the praxis of the gospel in the church. The Lutheran Church is not a Johnny-come-lately to this business of preaching the Gospel of Christ as the power of salvation. But its style has been churchly and sacramental, not that of a religious crusade or high powered campaign to pressure individuals into fitful decisions. If the Lutheran churches were to have joined Key 73 in a responsible way, their leaders would have convoked a theological consultation. The way it was, the decision was announced on high without any prior discussion of it in theological circles. It is a spirit alien to our tradition that calls the signals without bothering to check them out in relation to the churches' confessional and theological heritage. Without that, pure opportunism and pragmatism are permitted to run riot in the church.²

Key 73 received its wide acceptance, no doubt, in part because of a sincere feeling that one dare not appear to criticize anything linked to the name of Christ or evangelism. Dare we not, however, ask questions about the content of the "simple gospel" or even ask for a definition of "Gospel" and "evangelism"? Gerhard O. Forde comes from a different theological tradition than this writer, but he is certainly right when he declares

²"Which Key?" Dialog, 12 (Winter 1973):4. To be fair, some evangelicals were looking to the theologians for direction in carrying out their task. Jack Hustad, Evangelism Director of the American Lutheran Church said as much in his contribution to Dialog's symposium on Key 73, "Evangelism Needs the Theologian," Dialog, 12 (Winter 1973):60-61.

"Evangelism" has been far too much of a sacred cow to be allowed to wander about unattended, before which we are supposed to tremble and obediently make way. The issues involved are basically theological ones. The time has come to settle some theological accounts.³

The Lutheran theologian goes on to question the advisability of proposing a "crusade in the name of Christ which anyone can more or less fill with his own content."⁴ He writes:

Key 73, like most such crusades, is just form without content, like most evangelism it seems to think that all we need is new technique, bigger and better strategies, grander schemes. The trouble with Key 73 is that it is another empty box, a slick package with nothing to it, another grand party to which we have to bring our own gifts.⁵

Forde is pointing out something that should be obvious: strategies and programs are of use to the Church only if their content and message is God's message proclaiming the Gospel. Success is important, but we must ask, what is it that is successful? To call for success for its own sake is to fall into a dangerous theology of glory which says "I must be good and blessed because I am successful" or, conversely, "God must be withholding his blessing and favor because we are not successful." As Forde put it, "God does not seem to find it necessary to go running about conscripting followers at the expense of content or the truth."⁶

Elliott Wright also noted the weakness in Key 73's content in a Christianity and Crisis article which talked about the "new ecumenism" which some saw aborning through this effort. True,

Some of almost every group thought the program was a good idea as it began to take shape. Near-fundamentalists are listed as sponsors along with a unit of the National Council of Churches. Para-ecclesiastics from Campus Crusade for Christ and Inter-Varsity

³Gerhard O. Forde, "Once More Into the Breach?" Dialog, 12 (Winter 1973):10.

⁴Ibid., p. 8. ⁵Forde, p. 10. ⁶Ibid., p. 11.

rub shoulders with orthodox Missouri Synod Lutherans. Conservative and not-so-conservative Catholics publish the same summary of purposes issued by Southern Baptists.⁷

Indeed, Key 73

has accomplished good in ecumenical terms. . . . The continent will hardly be the loser for Catholics and officials of the Assemblies of God serving on the same Committee.⁸

Yet, Wright reasons,

Key 73 . . . did not act out to establish a new ecumenism, and it is probably not going to do so. The word "ecumenical" may be completely inapplicable. The trick is for slightly like-minded people who identify a need to get together on themes and general strategies, while leaving interpretation -- especially on the Bible and doctrines -- as well as implementation, to the differing Christian groups.⁹

On the left, American Baptists saw Key 73 as an opportunity to not only present the claims of Christ to individuals but to bring about "change in the power structures of society to the end that the will and purposes of God for His whole creation might be achieved."¹⁰ Baptist executive Jitsuo Morikawa celebrated Key 73 as the occasion for a theology of liberation and the social gospel,

For an evangelistic life style which reexamines with radical reassessment the meaning of Christian conversion, through a radical exposure to biblical insight and illumination in a day when the social sciences have preceded biblical insight -- group therapy replaced Bible study groups, transients replacing transcendentals, conversion to ends and values which may in fact reject and repudiate our cultural values as unqualified good -- and the adoption of values which are redeeming, saving, liberating and humanizing.¹¹

⁷ Elliott Wright, "Raising the Christian Canopy: The Evangelicals' Burden," Christianity and Crisis, March 19, 1973, p. 36.

⁸ Ibid., p. 38. ⁹ Ibid., p. 39.

¹⁰ Joseph Irvine Chapman, "The Good News of Key 73," The American Baptist, December 1972, p. 11.

¹¹ Jitsuo Morikawa, "Key 73: Toward an Evangelistic Life Style," AB, The American Baptist Magazine, December 1972, p. 21.

John DeVries reports of a Key 73 meeting in Pennsylvania in which a Lutheran pastor of the LCA stated, "If Key 73 will be nothing more than going out and telling people about this Jesus junk - forget it."¹²

A friend of the Key 73 program, Donald G. Bloesch of the Dubuque Theological Seminary, presents several reservations about its implementation:

First, it seems to me that the danger of confusing evangelism with promotionalism is very real in this venture of witness. . . . Second, despite the basic doctrinal unity and consistency of Key 73 literature, doctrinal indifferentism is another danger looming on the horizon. We must beware of reducing the gospel to the bare message that Christ died for our sins, or even to four spiritual laws. We are required to explore the theological and practical implications of the faith. Let us remember that the whole gospel encompasses the life of Christ as well as his death and resurrection; and that it includes the law of God, which applies to social as well as personal sin.

True evangelism must bring the imperatives of faith to bear on human behavior; without this prophetic dimension it will almost certainly degenerate into preachment of a kind of folk religion. Though we know that grace can never be merited, the gospel of free grace can never be separated from the call to costly discipleship

.
A final danger threatening Key 73 is the heresy of easy salvation in which the drama of conversion is limited to the initial decision or surrender to Christ.¹³

Many of the more liberal denominational groups criticized Key 73 because most of the material published under its auspices "assumed an understanding of evangelism as personal renewal and salvation, ignoring the institutional and societal implications of the Gospel."¹⁴ Dick

¹² Cited in personal letter to this writer from T. A. Raedeke, May 23, 1979.

¹³ Donald G. Bloesch, "Key 73: Pathway to Renewal?" Christian Century, January 3, 1973, p. 10.

¹⁴ "Perspectives on Evangelism," JSAC Grapevine, 5 (July 1973):6, Joint Strategy and Action Committee, Inc.

Johnson asked whether mainline liberals and conservative evangelicals can ever "get together through a mutual understanding of evangelism."

He thinks not:

The new liberal/conservative cooperation, supposedly represented by Key 73 is an ecumenical umbrella quite unlikely to hold together as participants begin to realize that they have radically different doctrines of rain.¹⁵

Other liberal observers saw evidence of triumphalism and American civil religion in Key 73.¹⁶

Alvin E. Wagner, a former theologian and pastor within the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod was scandalized by the "blurring of the lines" encouraged by Key 73. In a fervent but well reasoned article, Wagner said the results of Key 73 would not and could not be a blessing because

There is not consensus among the participants on a Biblical theology of evangelism, no agreement even on the focal point of the Gospel: salvation or justification by grace through faith in Christ alone.

While well-meaning evangelicals hail the venture as a program for 'saving the unsaved' or 'winning people for Christ,' or 'creating a more livable social order.' And between these two persuasions are the many who would have the churches forge a link between the

¹⁵ Dick Johnson, "The Church of the Amalgamate Deception," Engage Social Action, April 1973, p. 22, cited in JSAC Grapeview, p. 6.

¹⁶ Wright complains about this in the above mentioned article as does Eugene Meyer in "The Selling of the Lord 1973," Ramparts 11 (May 1973). A related question revolved around the evangelization of Jews through Key 73. For the Jewish view see Solomon S. Bernards, "Key 73 - A Jewish View," Christian Century, January 3, 1973, pp. 10-14; Andre' Lacocque, "Key 73, Judaism, and the Tragedy of Triumphalism," Christian Century, May 30, 1973, pp. 629-631; and Paul Mojzes, "Key 73 and Jews," Journal of Ecumenical Studies, 7 (Spring 1973):363-367. See also Barrie Doyle, "Jewish Furor Over Key 73," Christianity Today, December 22, 1972, p. 37 and an editorial in the same journal, "Corpus Christianum?", December 8, 1972, p. 29. If Jews are excluded from the Gospel call, how can we be faithful to the New Testament and the mandate of Christ himself?

two concepts -- promoting both 'salvation' and 'social action' under the one umbrella of evangelism.¹⁷

How can the trumpet give a clear sound, when one supporter of Key 73, Dr. Jitsuo Morikawa of the American Baptist Convention declared "God is calling us to a new understanding of what it means to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ." This new understanding, he declared, does not involve "saving the unsaved" for

Men are no longer lost in a hell of alienation, but already are in the kingdom of fellowship and love. . . . There cannot be individual salvation . . . has more to do with the whole society than with the individual soul.¹⁸

Since such confusion weakens the certainty of God's grace in Christ, participation in "heterodox tract and missionary activities" is prohibited by the Synod's Constitution. The Fathers of the LC-MS knew how false doctrine weakened the Gospel by

the synergistic confusion of conversion with decision. Nor were they to be subverted by recurring suggestions of neutralism, non-resistance, self-determination, right response, because all these imply some contribution of man to his own conversion. And this the fathers saw for what it truly is, the infusion of human merit into God's plan of salvation by grace alone -- in other words, a blow at the very heart of the Gospel.¹⁹

Are such warnings relevant today? If we consider the theology of one of the founders of Key 73, Billy Graham, they certainly are. In his essay The New Birth, we find repeated statements such as "the new

¹⁷ Alvin E. Wagner, "Evangelism: A Force - Or a Farce?" Sola Scriptura, July-August 1972, p. 14.

¹⁸ Dr. Jitsuo Morikawa, in address to the 1963 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, U.S., quoted in Christian News, May 29, 1972, p. 2.

¹⁹ Alvin E. Wagner, p. 16.

birth is something that God does for man when man is willing to yield to God."²⁰ and "Any person who is willing to trust Jesus Christ as his personal Saviour can receive the new birth now."²¹ Such notions are typical of Graham's theology.²²

Given the diversity of participants as well as the theological leanings of Key 73's founders, we should not be surprised to discover evidence of "the Gospel of the Changed Life" rather than the Gospel of the Cross proclaimed through Key 73. After all, "For the evangelical, Christian faith is experiential."²³ Presbyterian church historian John H. Gerstner attests the evangelistic consequences of the heritage of C. G. Finney in *American Evangelicalism and evangelism*.

In the practice of evangelism since Finney's day, the notion of human responsibility has been greatly enlarged and changed.

The price which has had to be paid is a diminished doctrine of grace. Although contemporary evangelists have recoiled from some of Finney's distortions, the evangel is still presented as being of divine

²⁰ Billy Graham, *The New Birth*, from Christianity Today's 'Fundamentals of the Faith' booklets, and excerpted from World Aflame, (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1965).

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

²² For an antidote to Graham's synergism from a Calvinistic point of view, consult Erroll Hulse, Billy Graham - The Pastor's Dilemma (Hounslow, Middlesex, England: Maurice Allen Publishers, 1966), Chapter 2, and two essays from an orthodox Lutheran perspective, Erwin J. Kolb, "Save Us From Synertism" and James T. Nickel, "Adopt or Adapt? An Examination of Evangelism Methods and Materials," both from Concordia Journal, July 1977, pp. 154-64 and 149-53 respectively.

²³ Richard Quebedeaux, The Young Evangelicals, (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), p. 4.

origin but it is seen as needing human cooperation for its realization.²⁴

Later he reports,

In the reformer's formulation and well into the nineteenth century, evangelicalism was God's way to salvation, not only in the offering of it to men but in the applying of it to their hearts as well. Last century, however, the evangel began to be seen more as the divine offer of grace and not so much as the divine application of grace.²⁵

Campus Crusade Founder William Bright provides an example of the experience centered theology of much of Evangelicalism in Key 73's Congregational Resource Book. He lists three ways in which the Christian "may prepare for the filling of the Spirit."

First, you must really desire to be filled with the Holy Spirit. . . . Second, you must surrender your life to Christ in accordance with the command of God's Word. . . . Third, you must confess any sin which the Holy Spirit calls to your remembrance.²⁶

Any number of books on the filling of the Holy Spirit, as well as numerous tracts, pamphlets and popular magazine articles present the same kind of thinking listing more or fewer steps.

John R. Fry attacked the "Gospel of the Change Life" kind of thinking, which unfortunately is sometimes seen as the Gospel message both by its friends and non-Christians as well. Fry characterizes this message as follows:

Thesis One: Lost Souls are in a position to respond to an articulate and passionate Christian witness. They are dying for it.

²⁴John H. Gerstner, "The Theological Boundaries of Evangelical Faith," in The Evangelicals, eds. David F. Wells and John D. Woodbridge, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1975), p. 28.

²⁵Ibid., p. 25.

²⁶William Bright, "The Ministry of the Holy Spirit," Key 73 Congregational Resource Book, ed. T. A. Raedeke (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, n.d.), p. 207. Hereafter this book will be cited as CRB.

Thesis Two: Christian witness is composed of a simple statement of the New Testament story and a simple personal testimony along the lines of, "I used to be a dope fiend/drunk/rotten husband/mother/kid/materialist/pagan.

Thesis Three: Drastic changes occur in the lives of lost souls who accept Jesus Christ. They give up dope/whiskey/materialism and become happy and bursting with salvation.

Thesis Four: Redeemed Christians will in time redeem society.

. . .
Thesis Five: Newly born-again Christians, well nurtured by mature born-again Christians, will want to learn the techniques of witnessing. . . .²⁷

Marching forth with a "theology of glory," Evangelicals were expecting success to prove God's blessings on them and their theology.

Therefore, Fry declares,

On January 1, 1974, it should be clear to the naked eye: The Continent will have been called to Christ, or evangelicals are not to be considered quite the darlings of Christ they modestly claim to be, along the way also a claiming they are Christ's only darlings.

And if the continent is not called to Christ, the theses themselves can no longer be paraded through the streets as the true and only Christianity. While supremely eligible for theological criticism -- as actual culture-Christianity -- God's failure to honor the theses with success will be the real and undoubted criticism.²⁸

Fry is harsh, but his point is well taken as the dangers of placing our certainty on anything other than the word and promises of God are exposed by his satirical pen.

Somewhat less satirical but nonetheless pointed are the comments of Gerhard Forde, whom we cited earlier. Reflecting what is probably a perennial tension between systematician and the practitioner, and between content people and specialists in technique, Forde avows "the medium is the message" in modern evangelism:

²⁷ John R. Fry, "The Testing of Culture-Christianity," Christianity and Crisis, March 19, 1973, p. 44.

²⁸ Ibid.

The truth is that evangelism has always been more form than content, more method than substance, more concern about 'the experience,' 'the conversion,' 'the decision' and how it is produced than who or what produces it. Key 73 is in that sense just another example of the same old thing.

So it is, finally, with this 'same old thing,' not merely with Key 73, that we need to settle theological accounts. For there is, especially in theology, no such thing as pure form without content, method without substance. The form and the method always have a subtle way of altering the content and eroding the substance when we are not looking. "Evangelism" in its pietistic and American forms has done that to us. It has eroded the substance of the evangel to a pathetic shadow of its former self. It has turned the pulpit into a mere exercise of psychological manipulation.²⁹

Dr. Forde focuses on the Evangelical-Pietistic "cult of experience" in this passage.

For years, not to say centuries, evangelism has traded on what William James called the difference between the 'once born' and the 'twice born.' It has put its eggs in the basket of 'conversion' and 'experience,' 'heart knowledge' versus 'head knowledge' and like distinctions. It has bent its efforts in the direction of the most effective methods, the best strategies for producing the desired experiences.³⁰

Forde fires another salvo across the bow:

As William James already knew, there is no necessary relationship between being "twice born" and the gospel of Jesus Christ. Almost any method will do. The world has found us out at last. If "religious experience" is what you want, there is no particular need to mess with Jesus or his church. You can consult your local Maharishi, or even your local pusher. . . . As a matter of fact, it is quite possible that leaving the institutional church will be a necessary step for some to a profound 'religious experience.' For experience must, after all, be a matter of "doing your own thing."³¹

The problem, of course, is not with evangelism per se, for it is the vehicle for carrying the pure Gospel content. The process, evangelism,

²⁹Forde, p. 12.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Ibid. The idea that faith is experience without content has also been attacked in the works of Evangelical apologist Francis A. Schaeffer.

exists for the sake of the content, God's work for us in Christ. But unless this Gospel content is communicated effectively, it does nobody any good. Forde comes close to excluding every evangelistic method or process because of the faulty and erroneous content of many evangelistic approaches and strategies. Yet he expressed a Biblical insight crucial to the nature of the Gospel when he notes that the Gospel has nothing to do with our "decision" to accept Christ but rather it is the "proclamation of what God has decided to do about us in Jesus, the crucified and risen one."³² Here is a great sermon theme: "God's decision for us" based on, perhaps, John 6:44, 1 Cor. 12:3 or Acts 6:14!

Because of the involvement of Pentecostalism at the highest level of Key 73, Present Truth predicted the influence of Pentecostal-Holiness-Arminian errors:

It will also provide considerable impetus to the greatest evangelistic outreach American has yet seen, under the slogan 'Key 73.' In this endeavor, Roman Catholics and more than 130 Protestant denominations are united under the chairmanship of the Assemblies of God president, Thomas Zimmerman.³³

To combat this dangerous trend, Karl L. Barth delivered his 1980 Riess lecture at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. His timely essay warns of the

Calvinistic and Arminian literature that has flooded our church body, in part at least because of the vacuum of positive theological thought in our own church body during the days of our controversy Unfortunately, it is frequently used without discriminating analysis by pastors, teachers, and lay people alike.³⁴

³²Forde, p. 13.

³³Jack D. Zwemer, "The Nature and Extent of the Pentecostal Movement," Present Truth, June 1973, p. 29.

³⁴Karl L. Barth, "Cardinal Principles of Lutheranism and 'Evangelical Theology'", Concordia Journal, 7 (March 1981):50.

Barth compellingly warns against confusing justification and sanctification in preaching, teaching, or witnessing.

In confrontation evangelism, one sometimes encounters appeals like this: "You have called Jesus Christ Savior; now call Him Lord."

Barth responds:

We confess Him as our Lord not only because we confessed Him as our Savior, but when we confessed Him as our Savior. Saving faith, regenerates. Faith and works dare not be separated. To say less is to build a 'class Christianity' that in separating justification from sanctification confounds Law and Gospel.³⁵

Another familiar evangelistic call is: "If you will surrender your life to Christ, God will forgive your sins." Again, what about the Bible class material which calls on the reader first to "Put Jesus on the throne of your life" and then to accept His pardon and forgiveness? Barth directs us to Article XII of the Formula of Concord, where one of the positions rejected is "That our righteousness before God does not consist wholly in the unique merit of Christ, but in renewal and in our own pious behavior" (F.C.Ep. XII, 5). Barth calls on the bell-like clarity of the Lutheran Confessions to demonstrate the powerlessness of man to accept the grace of God and how impossible it is for the unregenerated to do good works.

Geoffrey Paxton is appropriately quoted as saying:

What Satan has done is to bring about a change of emphasis in our thinking and preaching which shifts the focus from the unique saving history of Jesus (the experiences) of Jesus to the history (the experiences) of the believer.³⁶

³⁵ Barth, pp. 52-53.

³⁶ Geoffrey Paxton, "The Evangelical's Substitute," in Present Truth, cited by Barth, pp. 55-56.

A. E. Wagner likewise contrasts the subjective fruit of faith which is so often held up before us as the basis for our assurance and as the focus of numerous "testimony meetings" with the objective certainty of God's promises of God in this passage:

How wonderful if the church's evangelism crusades would run headlines that reach 'Doubtful Hearts Made Certain of God's Grace' rather than 'Dope Addicts Made Free From Addiction.' Perhaps the world would begin to catch the beatific vision and sense that is the crowning glory of the Biblical Gospel! . . . Wouldn't that enable even confirmed skeptics to see that true Christianity is not just something for their brief moment on this fragile, exploited, polluted planet earth, but something that lifts to God and His love eternal in the new heaven and new earth? Wouldn't the hopeless and despondent, lost and depersonalized . . . sense that Christ's Gospel makes every individual beloved of God, so precious that He offers even the greatest sinner an eternal salvation and says: 'there is joy in the presence of angels over one sinner that repenteth.' St. Luke 15:10.

Evangelism - gearing its entire outreach along these lines - would have a tremendous effect, not only upon the church, but also the world. Instead of being an embarrassing and discredited word, as it is in many circles it would again be honorable, commanding the respect even of the ungodly. It would be a force, not a farce - giving glory to Whom alone it belongs, unto 'The Lamb That Was Slain' - Revelation 5:11-14.³⁷

What Kind of Evangelism Was Practiced

From its genesis, Key 73 promised "varieties of evangelistic expression" and "new, innovative styles of witness." In his place on Phase One, Ronn Kerr predicted "an intense year of evangelism" during which

The nation and the church, Christians and pagans, institutions and individuals - all are to be called to repent for the existence of many personal, cultural, and institutional evils which remain in conflict with Christ's mission to the world. The launch activities in each community can establish clearly that the year of cooperative evangelism is to focus on the need to reform society and its institutions as well as to announce God's love for individuals.³⁸

³⁷A. E. Wagner, p. 21.

³⁸Ronn Kerr, "Noon Prayer Call," in CRB, p. 24.

Even the Key 73 leaders sensed a need to clarify what was meant by evangelism, for they proposed that

an interdenominational weekend setting focusing on the Biblical, theological and methodological implications of cooperative evangelism could begin to develop the pan-Christian relations necessary for effective Key 73 cooperative events.³⁹

The cart is before the horse, again: First Key 73 was launched and then discussions were proposed on the nature of the effort they were launching! This was a major strategic error, not to mention a philosophical-technological one. In spite of assurances to the Missouri Synod, Key 73 literature assumed efforts would be cooperative and trans-denominational in the Evangelism-in-Depth style. Each group was expected to "do its own thing." Henry Ginder assures us that

Part of the premise of Key 73 is that every denomination and organization shall be fully free to carry out evangelism exactly as it wishes during 1973. Resource material from the Key 73 office may be adapted, adopted, or rejected. There is no desire to pour others into any established molds or patterns.⁴⁰

All this emphasis on each one "doing his own thing" did not create the kind of harmony intended, however.

Ironically enough, the very program designed to be a 'coming together' of Christians in a nation-wide evangelism effort threatens to be another occasion to drive the various parts of the Christian community further apart.⁴¹

Carl Henry discovered this the hard way. Reporting on executive planning sessions, he states:

³⁹ Ibid., p. 28-29.

⁴⁰ Henry Ginder, "In Partnership With God," CRB, p. 184-85.

⁴¹ William E. Leshar, "Counter-Renewal in the Churches," Dialog, 12 (Winter 1973):49.

The Broad participation had the advantage of stimulating all associated evangelism departments to fuller engagement through the shared program and materials of every other, yet the disadvantage of inviting ongoing debate over the nature of evangelism. When the population explosion was on the agenda, for example, most committee members urged an acceleration of the preaching of new birth in Christ, while an American Baptist spokesman proposed that churches issue permits of approval to parents qualified to sire more than two children.

The central committee thus became to some extent a mirror of the theological differences constitutive of ecumenical pluralism. . . . Key 73 brought evangelical leaders in contact with representatives of ecumenically related evangelism boards rather than with the denominational hierarchies, but many of these boards reflect through their spokesmen a basic orientation to social change rather than to personal spiritual commitment. This was, on the surface at least, one reason given for Southern Baptist disengagement from Key 73 in order to concentrate on its own evangelistic program.⁴²

In the wake of these evangelical-ecumenical tensions, Henry noted a three-pronged outcome. First,

long-slumbering evangelical dynamisms in several mainline denominations were awakened. Not a few observers believe that Key 73 consolidated an evangelistic concern, for example, in the United Methodist Church. . . .

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On other side, while Key 73 offered NCC-identified denominations an unprecedented opportunity to reassure their wavering evangelical constituencies of a fundamental interest in evangelistic priorities, the ecumenically oriented hierarchies did not notably succeed, since many of them strove to maintain evangelism as one among several priorities. . . .

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Between those two consequences fell a third development, the loss to Key 73 cooperation of many ecumenically unaffiliated churches whose basic dedication to evangelism is indisputable, but who regarded NCC-affiliated denominational participation as either doctrinally dilutive, strategically unsound, or confusing to their constituencies.⁴³

Whatever evangelism approach they desired served to emphasize the unresolved cleavage between ecumenical pluralism and American

⁴²Henry, "Looking Back at Key 73," The Reformed Journal, November 1974, p. 8.

⁴³Ibid., p. 8-9.

evangelicals, and fell short also of promoting any significant para-ecumenical or intra-ecumenical framework drawing evangelicals into a more intimate association of their own.⁴⁴ Since Key 73 was first conceived as a means to "somehow" "get together," this realization must have been painful to Dr. Henry! Others agree with Henry's assessment, although coming to this conclusion from different standpoints. An LCA observer noted that when people from his church body got together with fundamentalists for local Key 73 efforts, "Repeatedly the reports indicated that what they defined as evangelism was not what we define as evangelism."⁴⁵ We conclude, therefore, that on this point also, Key 73 was fatally flawed.

Cooperative Evangelism Under the Key 73 Banner

In the light of evidence marshalled thus far, it is not surprising that Key 73, born and nurtured on a unionistic theology of evangelism and church fellowship, should provide the greatest occasion for interdenominational, multi-confessional church work and worship in American church history. Although maintaining that under his leadership Key 73 was preserved from becoming an "ecumenical hodge podge,"⁴⁶ T. A. Raedeke is our chief source of documentation for this judgment.

His chapter on "key 73 and the Denominations" is largely a collection of quotations from various denominational leaders praising Key 73. Typical is this citation from Bishop Myron F. Boyd, President of

⁴⁵ Carl T. Uehling, "Did Key 73 Work?" The Lutheran, January 23, 1974, p. 14.

⁴⁶ Letter to this writer from T. A. Raedeke, March 26, 1977.

the National Association of Evangelicals and an official in the Free Methodist Church:

I consider Key 73 to be one of the most successful cooperative moves advanced in recent decades. Many ministers have become acquainted with each other at united prayer meetings, many laymen have met each other for the first time in union rallies and crusades because of Key 73. It has brought the church closer together because of one purpose and one drive to evangelize the communities. Calvinists, Arminians, and Pentecostals have met together to pray together, to cooperate in distributing Scriptures together, and have carried on crusades together for the advancement of the cause of Christ. To my mind Key 73 was a success.⁴⁷

Bishop Boyd gives further evidence that Key 73 was an "ecumenical success" even though it was an "evangelistic failure." His examples of success are largely in the area of cooperation, not in evangelism, which, after all, was the whole idea of Key 73.

Raedeke's chapter on "Key 73 Around the Continent"⁴⁸ chronicles the progress of Key 73 as an exercise in cooperative evangelism. Here a sampling of Key 73 activities throughout the United States and Canada are listed. Since Key 73 had no central control on either the carrying out or the reporting of activities, his account is necessarily incomplete. What stands out, for our purposes, is a report of numerous examples of, by Confessional Lutheran standards, unionistic rallies, services and joint church work.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Raedeke, "Key 73 Around the Continent," Yesterday, pp. 68-88.

⁴⁹ Our citations will be necessarily selective, picking out only the more obvious violations of what, from this writer's perspective, are violations of Biblical fellowship practices. We shall reserve comments on the more positive aspects of Key 73 until the next chapter.

In the Northeast, an ecumenical Easter Sunrise service was held in Wilmington, Delaware⁵⁰ and a Pentecost Sunrise Service in Greater Orlean, New York.⁵¹ In the Pennsylvania area wide evangelistic rallies were conducted in Ephrata-Akron and Mechanicsburg.⁵² As in many areas, interdenominational parades were held in some communities.

Moving on to the South, the churches of Jonesboro, Arkansas began the year with a city-wide rally, and ended the year with a city-wide crusade during the last week of October.⁵³ The biggest event in New Orleans, Louisiana was a Key 73 March for Christ which culminated in "a multi-denominational service" at the Roman Catholic St. Louis Cathedral in the French Quarter.⁵⁴ In the Midwest, Wilmore, Kentucky recorded a "united revival meeting" under the Key 73 banner.⁵⁵

Due north in Ft. Wayne, Indiana, over 100 churches participated in a "Key 73 Crusade, which, over eight days, reached an aggregate attendance of 34,000."⁵⁶ In Iowa, the Newton/Jasper County Key 73 Committee sponsored both a David Wilkerson Youth Crusade and a Billy Graham Evangelistic team under Ralph Bell.⁵⁷ In Springfield, Missouri, one could have attended two Key 73 mass rallies, one featuring Bishop Fulton J. Sheen and the other with returned Vietnam POW Colonel Robinson Risner as speaker.⁵⁸

In the far northwest, another mass evangelism crusade under the Barry Moore Evangelism Team was held in the Juneau, Alaska area.⁵⁹

⁵⁰Raedeke, p. 69. ⁵¹Ibid., p. 73 ⁵²Ibid., p. 73

⁵³Ibid., p. 74 ⁵⁴Ibid., p. 76 ⁵⁵Ibid. ⁵⁶Ibid., p. 79.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 80 ⁵⁸Ibid., p. 81. ⁵⁹Ibid., p. 87.

We will say nothing of the impression that may be given by inter-denominational Bible distribution efforts or other less direct examples of unionistic activity, also cited in this chapter.

D. A. Waite, a militant Fundamentalist, supplies documentation of the "Philadelphia Area Christians for Key 73" (PACK - 73), held on January 26, 1973 in downtown Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.⁶⁰ The three major speakers were Bishop J. Graham of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Philadelphia, Congressman Walter E. Fauntroy, from Washington, D.C., who also serves as pastor of New Bethel Baptist Church in the capitol city, and Key 73 Executive Director, T. A. Raedeke. Waite's style, interjecting his own strident comments into the addresses by the speakers, makes reading his documentation difficult, but he does show the wide diversity among Key 73 supporters. These include advocates of the social gospel such as members of the National Council of Churches as well as Congressman Fauntroy, Roman Catholic clergy and nuns, and others. The documentation indicates that Dr. Raedeke tried to provide a synthesis between those who defined the Gospel as offering the cup of cold water to the poor and thirsty and those who stressed proclamation of the Good News in Christ. According to Waite, no effort was made to correct the impression that both were valid ways of presenting the Gospel.⁶¹

An interesting sociological study of how Key 73 worked out in two small New England cities (called Millcity and Riverville) is provided

⁶⁰D. A. Waite, What's Wrong With Key '73? Supplement 2 (Collingswood, NJ: The Bible for Today, 1973), mimeographed.

⁶¹Waite, Supplement 2, pp. 19-21.

by Professors William Newman and William D'Antonio of the University of Connecticut.⁶² The concern of their study was to determine

the degree to which the movement either failed or succeeded in bridging the long-established theological gap between liberal ecumenism and conservative evangelism.⁶³

How would Key 73, which they term "a blend of conservative evangelism and the liberal ecumenism of the 1960s," handle diversity in typical northeastern cities? The net effect in Millcity, as one clergyman remarked, was "business as usual only more so."

Involvement in Key '73 was not necessarily joint involvement with other churches. Several clergymen admitted to a tug of war, in which joint activities were neglected in favor of emphasizing some part of their individual churches' program in the name of Key '73. Non-involvement ranged from liberal groups not wanting to be associated with a fundamentalist movement, to sectarian churches not being able to work with "apostate" denominations, to both ethnically closed and sectarian groups being entirely unaware of Key '73.⁶⁴

Key '73's main impact in Roverville appears to have been an exacerbation of tension among Christian denominations and between Jews and Christians.⁶⁵

The Key 73 events of which this writer has direct information occurred in the Chicago area while he served as a pastor in the Northern Illinois District of the LC-MS. This experience first raised questions in his mind concerning the theological propriety of Key 73. These events began to unfold in an interdenominational prayer rally held at McCormick Place in Chicago on November 12, 1972.

Chicago area Key 73 chairman, Dr. Henry W. Anderson, pastor of First Presbyterian Church in LaGrange and national chairman for evangelism

⁶²William M. Newman and William V. D'Antonio, "For Christ's Sake!; A Study of Key '73 in New England," Review of Religious Research (Winter 1978):139-52.

⁶³Ibid., p. 139.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 145.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 148.

of the United Presbyterian Church, declared that Key 73 was going to be "a bridge between social action and evangelical pastors."⁶⁶ This widely-based effort included groups as diverse as Campus Crusade and Operation PUSH, the Roman Catholic Church and the Salvation Army, both the Missouri Synod and the Lutheran Church in America, all gathered "to do something for Chicagoland for the Lord Jesus Christ." This was indeed "an unprecedented lineup."⁶⁷ For Lutherans, Key 73 climaxed with a Pan-Lutheran Rally, ("Celebrate Jesus - Chicagoland Lutheran Rally") on October 20, 1973. Publicity flyers listed LCA, ALC and Missouri Synod sponsors and participants. The speaker was Oswald Hoffmann of the Lutheran Hour. Sponsors were members of the "Pan Lutheran Committee of Greater Chicago."

After speaking to some of the Missouri Synod people involved, the author of this study wrote to both the Commission on Constitutional Matters of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod as well as the Commission on Theology and Church Relations,⁶⁸ asking for rulings on whether such a rally, which had all the characteristics of a worship service, was in violation of the Synod's Constitution and its fellowship resolutions, and, in the case of the CTCR Guidelines. Dr. Bohlmann, then Executive Secretary of the CTCR, responded in letter dated November 2, 1973:

⁶⁶Chicago Daily News, Saturday-Sunday, November 4-5, 1972, p. 29.

⁶⁷The one LC-MS member listed on the Central Committee letter-head was Mr. Frank Hennessey, at that time Evangelism field man for the Northern Illinois District. He later joined a Pentecostal group.

⁶⁸Both letters dated September 21, 1973.

"Dear Pastor Peterson:

"We have received your letter of September 21 in which you expressed concern about a Pan-Lutheran Key 73 rally in your area. While it is true that our Synod's fellowship principles do not permit us to participate in joint worship services with synods with whom we are not in fellowship, I would hope that those who planned the program would be aware of our principles and would have observed them in the planning of the program. I will endeavor to check this matter with Dr. Happel in the next few days. Thank you for your concerns in this matter. I will keep you informed of any additional clarification.

"Sincerely,
/s/ Ralph Bohlmann

"Ralph Bohlmann⁶⁹

Since Dr. Bohlmann's reply came too late to influence the Chicago area Rally, Good Shepherd Lutheran Church of Rock Falls, Illinois asked the Northern Illinois District, at its next convention, scheduled for June 28 - July 1, 1974, to "end its official promotion and participation" in "unionistic actions and activities" through the following overtures:

(3-13) To End Officially Sponsored Fellowship With Synods with Whom the LC-MS Has Not Declared Fellowship

WHEREAS, The Northern Illinois District helped promote and participate in an inter-Lutheran "Key 73" Rally under the theme: 'Celebrate Jesus -- Chicagoland Lutheran Rally' on October 20, 1973; and

WHEREAS, The Northern Illinois District also organized through its Executive Secretaries of Education and Youth and promoted participation in an inter-Lutheran Conference for Directors of Christian Education, Pastors, and other Professional Educators on October 22-25, 1973 under the joint sponsorship of the Boards of Parish Education of the American Lutheran Church, the Lutheran Church in America, and the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod; and

WHEREAS, The trend toward pan-Lutheran participation in youth rallies, evangelistic endeavors, etc. is increasing both locally and with Synodical support; and

WHEREAS, These inter-Lutheran endeavors involve us in fellowship with the Lutheran Church in America in spite of the fact that the LC-MS has declined to declare fellowship with that church body; and

⁶⁹ Letter from Dr. Ralph A. Bohlmann, Executive Secretary of the CTCR, November 2, 1973.

WHEREAS, the 1969 Convention of the Synod "Resolved, that the Synod urge all its members to honor their fraternal agreement with all members of Synod by refraining from practicing altar and pulpit fellowship with congregations of church bodies with whom the Synod has not yet declared fellowship" (Resolutions 3-18); and

WHEREAS, Many members of the LC-MS find even fellowship with the ALC to be contrary to the Scriptures and without doctrinal foundation; and

WHEREAS, The 1971 Convention of Synod advised "its pastors, congregations, boards, and commissions, because of doctrinal concerns still remaining between the two church bodies to defer new implementation of fellowship with The American Lutheran Church" (Resolution 3-21); and

WHEREAS, Executives and officials of Synodical districts are responsible for the carrying out of the resolutions of Synod; and

WHEREAS, The "Key 73 Guidelines" published by the Commission on Theology and Church Relations explicitly rule out "Key 73" participation in such a manner that is contrary to Synod's doctrinal positions and fellowship principles, and recommend against worship services and rallies with those with whom the Synod is not in fellowship; and

WHEREAS, These pan-Lutheran meetings and worship services involve our district in a fellowship that is both unscriptural (Romans 16:17) and contrary to the Missouri Synod's historic practice; and

WHEREAS, The 1971 (Resolution 3-21) Synodical Convention asked the Synod's Commission on Theology and Church Relations to make a thorough study of selective fellowship, and the 1973 Convention Floor Committee (Resolution 2-32) asked the CTCR to do the same; therefore be it

RESOLVED, That Good Shepherd Lutheran Church of Rock Falls, Illinois, through its Voter's Assembly petition the district to end its official promotion and participation in such unionistic actions and activities, and assure the district that such violations of Synodical's fellowship principles do not occur in the future; and be it further

RESOLVED, That the Northern Illinois District ask its pastors, teachers, and congregations to refrain from such unbiblical violations of Synod's fellowship principles; and be it finally

RESOLVED, That the Northern Illinois District request the Synod's CTCR to consider such joint rallies and programs in its study on selective fellowship which will be reported to the 1975 Convention of Synod.

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Rock Falls, Illinois
Curtis A. Peterson, Pastor
Kim Groharing, Chairman
Bryan E. Niemeier, Secretary⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Convention Workbook, Northern Illinois District, LC-MS, June 28 - July 1, 1974, DeKalb, Illinois, pp. 35-37. See also "Report of

In response to this overture, the Northern Illinois District Convention adopted the following Resolution:

To Decline Overture 3-13
Resolution 4-03
Overture 3-13 (CW, p. 35)

WHEREAS, The Northern Illinois District committee for participation in 'Key 73 Guidelines' prepared by the CTCR and in accord with Synod's doctrinal position and fellowship principles; and

WHEREAS, The Northern Illinois District Board for Parish Education and the District Executives for Parish Education and for Youth followed 'Synod's doctrinal position and fellowship principles' in their preparation and leadership of the Inter-Lutheran Conference for Directors of Christian Education, Pastors and other Professional Educators on 22 to 25 October, 1973; and

WHEREAS, Printed publicity and program were also in accord with 'Synod's doctrinal position and fellowship principles'; and

WHEREAS, Participants and witnesses testify that in neither case did Northern Illinois District leaders compromise 'Synod's doctrinal position and fellowship principles;; therefore be it

RESOLVED, That we respectfully decline Overture 3-13.
Action: Adopted.⁷¹

This resolution passed overwhelmingly. This author in a letter to District President Edmund H. Happel on July 2, 1974, raised these questions about the Pan-Lutheran Rally of October 20, 1973:

1. Is a rally with hymns, sermons and prayers a worship service?
2. Did the LCA participate in this rally?
3. Are we in fellowship with the LCA?
4. If we are not in fellowship with the LCA, is such fellowship contrary to Synod's fellowship principles?

The letter went on;

If this rally was a worship service, and if the LCA did participate in spite of the fact that we are not in fellowship with that Synod,

the key 73 Committee,' Report 2-02, pp. 28-29.

⁷¹ Convention Proceedings, 43rd Convention, Northern Illinois District, LC-MS, June 28 - July 1, 1974, pp. 25-26.

by what stretch of logic and by what interpretation of our fellowship principles . . . can we say it really was in accord with Synod's fellowship principles? Besides this, this rally was . . . contrary to the CTCR Key 73 Guidelines because these guidelines . . . advise against participation in worship services with whom we are not in fellowship! I believe, therefore, that on the grounds of sound logic and for the sake of Biblical truth, . . . Good Shepherd's . . . concerns were not seriously dealt with by the convention but rather ignored by a series of assertions without any evidence to support those assertions.⁷²

Finally, another example was a Pan-Lutheran event, "Discovery '73," held in Houston, Texas, August 4-8, 1973. Publicity brochures proclaimed its purpose:

The Lutheran Church, working together . . . assures a great experience for those who come and proclaim a unique contribution of Lutherans to the movement of God's healing spirit in the midst of the confusion of today's world.⁷³

An "Ecumenical Music Festival" was on the agenda, as well as Roman Catholic Bishop Fulton Sheen and Baptist Tom Skinner as speakers. Christianity Today carried this report of the gathering:

"Discovery '73," the first All-Lutheran Youth Gathering (ALYG) - a major Key 73 event for the three denominations -- was a smorgas-board-style event intended to play down denominational differences and emphasize personal similarities. . . . Such choruses as 'We Are One in the Spirit' and 'For All the Saints' set the spirit on unity on the night that Catholic archbishop Fulton J. Sheen spoke about 'our blessed Lord'. . . . He compared Christ to the hub of a wheel with believers as the spoke. 'The closer we get to the hub, the closer we get to each other,' shouted the archbishop amid applause and whistles.

Dedicated to the memory of the late ALC president Kent Knutson,

⁷²Letter to Dr. Edmund H. Happel, July 2, 1974. In a personal conversation sometime later, these concerns were resolved by Dr. Happel.

⁷³"Come Celebrate Discovery 73" publicity flyer of the "All Lutheran Youth Gathering," Houston, Texas, August 4-8, 1973.

Discovery '73 also heard Mrs. Knutson praise God with alleluias as she and Sheen joined in liturgical prayer.⁷⁴

"Discovery '73" was hardly designed to increase the doctrinal maturity (Eph. 4:14-15) of the youth present or to sensitize them to the consequences of doctrinal error.

⁷⁴"Discovering Jesus, 1973," Christianity Today, August 31, 1973, pp. 43-44.

CHAPTER IX

KEY 73 AS EVANGELISM: A PRACTICAL CRITIQUE

Was Key 73 Successful?

Any organization, program or effort must be evaluated in terms of the goals which it has set for itself. Key 73 must, therefore, be judged on its own terms: what did it attempt to accomplish? Looking back at Key 73, Carl F. H. Henry reminds us:

Key 73 sought primarily to marshal a cooperative evangelistic witness by evangelical believers in their home cities and communities across the United States, irrespective of denominational identifications and ecumenical alignment or nonalignment. It offered evangelicals inside and outside institutional ecumenism an opportunity to concentrate solely on a cooperative proclamation of the gospel with a view to the conversion of individuals -- widely suspected of being more concerned with social change than with personal relationships to Christ -- an opportunity to demonstrate an uncompromised commitment to personal evangelism. Neither institutional ecumenism nor fragmented evangelicalism decisively seized this opportunity.¹

Half way through the Key 73 year, Henry had two observations on its impact on the United States and Canada:

The venture has had gratifying and surprising momentum on a nationwide basis, and that Key 73 must be viewed not as a terminal effort but as an outgoing thrust into and beyond the mid-seventies.²

¹Carl F. H. Henry, "Looking Back at Key 73," The Reformed Journal, November 1974, p. 6.

²Carl F. H. Henry, "Key to the Seventies," Christianity Today, June 8, 1973, p. 60.

Most observers see Key 73 as a failure, at least in terms of its evangelistic goals, which were probably aimed too high in the first place. Deane Kemper's caustic judgment in response to Carl Henry's post-mortem was to remember Key 73 as "an evangelistic Edsel, an idea whose time had truly passed,"³ and even Henry agreed that Key 73 should "be buried with dignity and respect."⁴

The founders of Key 73 had dreamed of igniting the revival fires for a "20th Century Great Awakening," but the process fell short. Why? Part of the problem could be laid at its structure, format and strategy.⁵ Another factor was adopting a much too ambitious goal, thereby inviting failure. As Kemper asserted,

Key 73 promised far more than it delivered and may stand as a contemporary example of beginning construction of the tower without first counting the cost.⁶

Observers such as J. Russel Hale compared Key 73 to the mass evangelistic campaigns of Billy Graham and others which likewise "failed to funnel new converts into the life of the churches."⁷

Another factor which must be added to the post mortem was articulated by the Texas Methodist:

³ Deane A. Kemper, "Another Look Back," The Reformed Journal, January, 1975, p. 20.

⁴ Henry, "Looking Back," p. 10.

⁵ Henry, "Looking Back," p. 7. By using an "organizational umbrella involving denominational identifications, Key 73 may have adopted a strategy which "at once widened opportunities, multiplied opposition, and created unforeseen problems."

⁶ Kemper, "Another Look Back," p. 16.

⁷ J. Russell Hale, The Unchurched, Who They Are and Why They Stay Away (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1980), pp. 188-89.

We believe it is time for Christians to drop the gimmicks and face the facts: our continent is not being effectively called to Christ because relatively few Christians make an effort to share their faith with others.⁸

As Dr. Oswald Hoffmann put it in a Lutheran Hour Sermon supporting Key 73, "Unless the evangelism of the church is lay-directed, lay prepared, and lay-done, it will ultimately have little effect upon our world."⁹ If evangelism does not happen through the day-by-day contacts of dedicated Christians, it is unlikely to happen no matter how much publicity or how high goals are set without it.¹⁰

Christianity Today picks up three other ingredients involved in the failure of Key 73 to live up to expectations. One is today's affluence, causing people to be satisfied with life as they know it. Another factor is the "lack of implementation of Key 73 among youth groups and on college and seminary campuses" which is in their opinion "probably its most glaring defect."¹¹

A third factor introduced by the Christianity Today editorial is reason for pause by those seeking evangelistic success by imitating the charismatic movement:

⁸ Cited by "Key 73: Planning a Sequel," Christianity Today, September 22, 1973, p. 38.

⁹ Oswald Hoffmann, "Every Layman an Evangelist," (St. Louis: International Lutheran Layman's League, 1973), p. 6.

¹⁰ Wayne McDill, a Southern Baptist has made this point extensively and effectively in his excellent Making Friends for Christ (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1979). See especially his pointed first chapter "Whatever Became of Evangelism?" which scores top-down evangelism, evangelistic crusades and evangelism as manipulation.

¹¹ "Key 73: Planning a Sequel," Christianity Today, September 22, 1973, p. 38.

Paradoxical as it may sound, even some aspects of the current surge of religious interest work against authentic evangelism. The charismatic movement is the best example: the emphasis is so introspective that it takes a heavy toll in zealous Christian witness and compassionate concern for the welfare of others.¹²

In the analysis by William Newman and William D'Antonio of how Key 73 progressed in two New England communities, Key 73 is called a failure even ecumenically for not bridging the gap between conservative evangelistic and theologically liberal churches. "The local clergy . . . sensed -- in a way national leaders did not -- the enormous potential of Key 73 to create religious competition and conflict."¹³

From a "cost-benefit" point of view, Key 73 was also found wanting. Key 73 held out the promise of new members for participating churches, but the costs of involvement were very high.

Involvement in Key '73 would count for very little in the denominational career records of most clergy. These systems of professional advancement typically measures success in terms of the ability of clergymen to provide services to dues-paying members of their own local churches. The denominational system of organized religion provides few incentives to the clergy for inter-denominational work, and even fewer incentives for such work that cannot clearly be translated into membership gains.¹⁴

One may recoil from the sociological language here, but the point is well taken. The study concludes:

Social movements developed at the national level that do not resonate with a strongly evidenced desire for change at the local level, do not possess either sanctions or the organizational mechanisms for enforcing them, do not develop a sense of group identity, exhibit inherent ideological contradictions, and lack charismatic leadership

¹²Ibid.

¹³William Newman and William V. Antonio, "'For Christ's Sake! A Study of Key '73 in New England,'" Review of Religious Research 19 (Winter 1978):149-50.

¹⁴Newman-D'Antonio, p. 15.

are not likely to make a significant impact on the social structure. Key '73 appears to have been such a movement.¹⁵

On the other hand, James Engel and Wilbert Norton, ordinarily very hard-headed in their analysis of the results of evangelistic strategies and techniques, find multi-church evangelistic outreaches such as Evangelism-in-Depth and Key 73 attaining generally good results throughout the world. Such "cooperative strategies," in their opinion, are close to "the heart of God's plan for our times."¹⁶ In this case their analysis is governed more by theological presuppositions than by raw analysis of the data. They assert:

The Holy Spirit is at work within the Church and its associated agencies to bring about a strong felt need for such integrative approaches in which firepower can be concentrated with greater results. The future may well lead all of us to put distinctive characteristics aside and unite in a greater sense of purpose to further that one great mission of the Church -- world evangelization.¹⁷

Lyle Schaller, writing from at once a more pragmatic and more liberal stance, comes to a conclusion that is much more in tune with the facts in this analysis:

There is an increasing accumulation of evidence that church growth and intercongregational cooperation are incompatible goals. Or to state it very bluntly, the congregations that are receiving an unusually large number of new members tend to be the churches that are not actively involved in intercongregational cooperative ministries. This is a descriptive statement of how the world appears to be, not a value judgment of how it should be.¹⁸

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ James F. Engel and H. Wilbert Norton, What's Gone Wrong With the Harvest (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975), p. 102.

¹⁷ Engel and Norton, p. 102.

¹⁸ Lyle E. Schaller, Assimilating New Members (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1978), p. 60.

Schaller attempts to answer the why of this phenomenon in a section worth citing at length.

First, congregations with a high level of self-esteem, where the members are enthusiastic about their church and where there is a clear identity of role and purpose (three common characteristics of growing churches) rarely participate in cooperative ministries. Second, the time and energy of both the clergy and laity that are devoted to the cooperative ministry often means that much less time and energy is available for reaching unchurched people. Third, cooperative ministries rarely have a strong overt evangelistic dimension. Fourth, for any one of the participating congregations to place a major emphasis on reaching prospective members through the cooperative program might appear to be unfair to others and therefore often is de-emphasized. Fifth, by its nature a cooperative, ministry tends to de-emphasize the distinctive assets, strengths program, and ministry of the participating congregations and to highlight the ministry of this intercongregation effort -- and people unite with congregations, not with cooperative ministries. Sixth, some of the leaders, both lay and clergy, become so enthusiastic about the cooperative ministry that they fail to communicate to people outside any church an equal enthusiasm for what is happening in their own congregation. Finally, and perhaps most significant, there are some responsibilities that can be accomplished most effectively by an intercongregational approach. Issue-centered ministries, the theological education of the next generation of ministers and administration of a pension system . . . fit into the first category. Corporate worship, maintenance of a meeting place for the worshipping congregation, Sunday School, and evangelism usually can be accomplished most effectively by a unilateral approach.¹⁹

Schaller's conclusion is the same as ours:

Key 73 demonstrated that an effective effort in evangelism can be implemented only by individual congregations, not by a cooperative approach.²⁰

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 60-61

²⁰ Ibid., p. 61. Dean M. Kelly has also commented on the diversionary effect of cooperative, united-front tactics of churches from their main job in Why Conservative Churches Are Growing (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), pp. 138-41.

C. Peter Wagner's Critique of Key 73

C. Peter Wagner, as we have already noted in Chapters IV and VI,²¹ was an early critic of Key 73's emphasis on ecumenical over evangelistic goals, severely criticizing its "evangelistic impotence."²² Since Key 73 appeared soon after his penetrating study of saturation evangelism, he was uniquely qualified to see through its pretensions. Early in 1973 he noted the lack of diagnostic research in the Key 73 Congregational Resource Book.²³ Consequently, it had no criteria by which to judge its success or failure when it was over.

Although his critique of Key 73 was of a pragmatic²⁴ and not a theological nature, his judgments have significant theological implications. He makes a case against cooperative evangelism not because of any objections to it but because it is an ineffective evangelistic strategy.²⁵

²¹ See above, pp. 174, 177-82, for his analysis of Evangelism in Depth and page 197, where he characterizes Key 73 as "evangelism for the sake of cooperation."

²² C. Peter Wagner, Your Church Can Grow: Seven Vital Signs of a Healthy Church (Glendale, CA: Regal Books, 1976, p. 16.

²³ C. Peter Wagner, "How to Diagnose the Health of Your Church," Christianity Today, January 19, 1973, pp. 24-25.

²⁴ For his defense of his pragmatism, consult "Fierce Pragmatism in Missions -- Carnal or Consecrated," Christianity Today, December 8, 1972, pp. 13-17, and "Pragmatic Strategy for Tomorrow's Mission," in God, Man and Church Growth, ed. A. R. Tippett (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1973), pp. 146-58.

²⁵ C. Peter Wagner, Your Church Can Be Healthy (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979), p. 76, where he hopes that time will produce effective cooperative evangelistic strategies. A gifted missionary strategist and diagnostician, Wagner makes no claim to being a theologian, although interestingly enough in the light of our inquiry, he pays tribute to the late Edward John Carnell as one of the three men most responsible for his

The 'end justifies the means'²⁶ for Wagner to the extent that he continually examines the means in the light of the goal: to make disciples.

If all a particular evangelistic method has been doing is to register decisions, it is hard to justify continuing it. Why? Because only accomplishing the end -- making disciples -- can justify the means.²⁷

The evangelistic goal for Wagner is explained in his own definition of the mission of the church:

The mission of the church is to so incarnate itself in the world that the gospel of Christ is effectively communicated by word and deed toward the end that all men and women become faithful disciples of Christ and responsible members of his Church.²⁸

This insistence that missionaries and evangelists give an account of their stewardship has much to commend it in terms of avoiding unproductive strategies and techniques, but two dangers are always present. First, that success is equated with having the blessing of God,²⁹

professional and intellectual development because he opened "my mind to theological creativity unfettered by classical systems of dogmatics." Frontiers, p. 134. For an overview of Carnell's theological stance, consult his The Case for Orthodox Theology (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1959).

²⁶ C. P. Wagner, Your Church Can Grow, p. 136.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 137.

²⁸ C. Peter Wagner, Frontiers, in Missionary Strategy (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), p. 134.

²⁹ Os Guinness warns of the dangers of a one-sided pragmatism in this selection from his presentation on "Evangelism Among Thinking People" at the 1974 Lausanne Congress, Let the Earth Hear His Voice, ed. J. D. Douglas (Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1975):

God's truth must be shared on God's terms. This sense of integrity (of being "true to truth") is especially vital in a day like ours with its relativistic values. "Means" have become "ends." The question, "Is it true?": has been replaced by "Will it work?" or, "How will it sell?"

But if Christianity is true, it works only because it is true; it is not true because it works. This is far more than a play on

thereby falling into the trap of promoting a "theology of glory" rather than the "theology of the cross," and secondly, that the cultural and the absolute in the message of the church may be dangerously confused. Peter Wagner, along with other leaders in the Church Growth Movement, sometimes fail at this point. A glaring example of this is his suggestion that among examples of "cultural overhang" which missionaries may carry into other cultures are not only matters such as church polity, absolutizing certain forms of music and days and times for worship but also: "Requiring certain standards of doctrinal orthodoxy on the basis of culturally and historically conditioned creeds."³⁰ Orthodox Lutheran pastors and missionaries will not find Wagner of much help at this point. These facts need to be pointed out, however, in view of the significance of the "Fuller Factor" in contemporary evangelism, church growth and missiology, and especially since so many of our missionaries and pastors are taking advanced degrees and training at the Pasadena Seminary.

Roger Greenway puts his finger on a continuing weakness within the Church Growth movement:

Church Growth writers take seriously the importance of having sound biblical theology underlying mission principles and practices. At the same time it is obvious that most of Church Growth missiology's theological bases have been worked out after the methodological insights and mission principles were arrived at through field observation and experience. Very often they were defined more in opposition

words. The entire uniqueness of Christianity lies in this difference. The living God is there or he is not there. Either he has spoken or he has not spoken. These things are either true or false. They are not merely true for us. If this titanic claim is to be taken seriously, its implications must be reflected in all we say and are. Absolute integrity is the only fitting vehicle for absolute truth.

³⁰C. P. Wagner, Frontiers, p. 105.

to the arguments raised by the opponents of Church Growth than in relation to a recognized system of theology.³¹

Having made these points, we are now ready to examine Wagner's "Autopsy of Key 73."

In coming to grips with Key 73, Peter Wagner places it in the context of three streams of evangelism which have developed since mid-century: Crusade evangelism, as characterized by Billy Graham's cooperative mass evangelistic style; Saturation Evangelism, developed by Kenneth Strachan in Latin America,³² and coming to America under the program of Key 73;³³ and "Body Evangelism," which is not, strictly speaking, an evangelistic method, but rather

helps clarify the goal against which any method must be ruthlessly evaluated. The goal is church growth, and students of body evangelism are taught that if a particular method does not contribute to church growth it should be discarded as quickly as possible.³⁴

Wagner believes that such fierce and consecrated pragmatism is thoroughly Biblical, applying Luke 13:7, wherein Jesus says to the owner of the barren fig tree, "Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?"

In preparing his "autopsy of key 73," the Fuller missiologist zeroes in on a two-fold problem:

The first had to do with the basic concept of evangelism. Evangelism was interpreted as proclamation of the gospel rather than as persuading people to become followers of Jesus Christ and responsible members of the local churches.³⁵

³¹Roger S. Greenway, "Winnable People," Theological Perspectives on Church Growth, ed. Harvie M. Conn (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1976), pp. 45-46.

³²See Chapter IV,

³³C. P. Wagner, Your Church Can Grow, p. 139.

³⁴Ibid., p. 140.

³⁵Ibid., p. 141.

In his seminal Frontiers of Missionary Strategy, Wagner articulated a terminology and concept which has become part of the jargon of the Church Growth movement: 3-P evangelism.³⁶ These three P-s (Presence, Proclamation, and Persuasion) should be considered as

Building blocks which form a total unity of three stories. If Persuasion is the goal, it is the third story, but the third rests on the second which is Proclamation. There is no persuasion without verbal proclamation of the gospel. But proclamation cannot be accomplished in a vacuum. The second story rests on the first, which is Presence. Presence gives relevance and credibility to proclamation.³⁷

Peter Wagner rejects, therefore, any missionary or evangelistic strategy which is satisfied merely to the present with good works (social ministry, medical missions, and so forth), or to proclaim the Gospel (broadcasting without regard to results) without building into the strategy the goal of persuading people to believe in Christ as their Savior in the fellowship of the church. Although only the Holy Spirit can build the Church, it is also true that we reach what we aim for and get that which we measure. Therefore, evangelistic approaches consisting only in broadcasting seed and which measure success only in terms of the amount of seed sown will often result only in seed being sown.

Secondly, like its Latin American precursor, Evangelism-in-Depth, Key 73 was overly concerned with cooperative evangelism. This tendency (which Wagner dubs "hyper-cooperativism"³⁸) results in confused priorities

³⁶C. P. Wagner, Frontiers, pp. 124-34.

³⁷C. P. Wagner, Frontiers, pp. 133-34.

³⁸See above, p. 169. See his Your Church Can Grow, pp. 142-45, as well as his Your Church Can Be Healthy, Chapter V, "Hyper-Cooperativism; Can Christian Unity Hinder Evangelism?" pp. 64-76.

as evangelism slips, perhaps unnoticed, from the top of the priority list with cooperation for its own sake taking its place.³⁹

On the contrary, Wagner argues, effective evangelism begins and ends with the local church.⁴⁰ Joint efforts with other congregations tend to distract from the focus on the local church. Since, ultimately, we can build only one congregation at a time, efforts and energy which could be used effectively to strengthen one congregation become diffused by helping them all a little bit. God wills that people become members, not just of the Body of Christ in general, but of specific local congregations, gathering regularly around Word and Sacrament.

For these reasons Wagner challenges the assumption that the more cooperation that is attained for an evangelistic crusade or effort, the more successful it will be. In fact, precisely the opposite is true, "the more churches cooperate inter-denominationally in evangelistic projects, the less effectively they evangelize."⁴¹ Furthermore, if the evangelistic meetings are held in a neutral place, such as a stadium or a civic auditorium, there will be no natural connection in the mind of the convert between his "decision for Christ" and commitment to a local church.⁴²

Cooperative, city-wide crusades and evangelistic efforts do have some positive results, in Wagner's opinion, such as strengthening or creating faith in the nominal church member (E-O evangelism in Church Growth terminology), as a "rite of passage" wherein people are provided

³⁹C. P. Wagner, Your Church Can Grow, p. 142.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 143.

⁴¹C. P. Wagner, Your Church Can Be Healthy, p. 65

⁴²Ibid., p. 66.

an opportunity to make a public profession of faith, and public exposure for the Gospel, but all of these express lesser goals than church growth and do not make disciples for local churches.⁴³ In the last analysis, Wagner avers, the disappointing results of Key 73 were due largely to hyper-cooperativism.

The Church Growth Critique of Key 73

Another Fuller Seminary professor to criticize Key 73 was Ralph D. Winter who spotted a drastic inadequacy at its inception because it assumed "existing congregations are ends and not means."⁴⁴ Therefore, he doubted that it could possibly fulfill its stated aim of confronting every North American with the Gospel. Such a goal could only be reached by adopting a new strategy involving "planting new congregations in sub-cultures strange to those who are doing the evangelizing."

Wherever we find growth in the Christian portion of the population, it is by the multiplication of new churches, not by the enlargement of old ones. The tragic neglect of this principle in Key 73 planning, Winter charges, also leads to the failure to heed other church growth axioms, such as the one that says "people do not readily join Christian fellowships that clash with their own cultural backgrounds" (the homogeneous unit principle). Only as churches adopt strategies

⁴³

Ibid., pp. 66-68. Wagner also has an interesting section on the "privatized Christians" which are the product of the "electronic church" in our day. "T.V. Christians" with their "surrogate" churches, Wagner rightly points out, clearly involve an incomplete commitment.

⁴⁴Ralph D. Winter, "Existing Churches: Ends or Means?" Christianity Today, January 19, 1973, p. 10.

which deliberately plan to reach those people which are significantly different from themselves will we be successful in evangelizing America.

The Church Growth movement was just beginning to penetrate the American scene when Key 73 was being planned, so it is not surprising that the axiom and principles of this movement were not consulted or addressed in its literature and planning. The first edition of Donald McGavran's Understanding Church Growth,⁴⁵ was only published in 1970 and relied heavily on experience gained on fields far away from North America both geographically and culturally. As one walks through McGavran's magnum opus, however, one is struck by the number of ways in which Key 73 offers examples of how not to conduct an evangelistic effort.

Donald McGavran terms the type of evangelism which characterized Key 73 as representing a "theology of search" rather than a "theology of harvest,"⁴⁶ because it is the search rather than the resulting harvest that gets the attention. McGavran stresses measurable results⁴⁷ so that limited resources may be used most effectively and in order to discover responsive soils⁴⁸ for the Gospel seed. To be fair, we can fault Key 73 on such points only by scrutinizing by the same criteria other forms of cooperative and congregational evangelistic methods. Clearly, we

⁴⁵ Donald A. McGavran, Understanding Church Growth (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1970).

⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 31-48, where the will of God to see a harvest is explored at length, and, we believe, successfully.

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 83-99, for example.

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 216-32, and C. P. Wagner, Frontiers, pp. 41-47.

have learned a great deal about effective evangelism since 1970!⁴⁹

It would take us far afield from our already extensive study to examine in detail the failure of Key 73 to implement the principles of Church Growth theory; it is enough to note that their understanding on the reasons for Key 73's evangelistic failure are of a pragmatic, not a theological nature.⁵⁰ After touching "upwards of 100,000 American congregations," no noticeable change in church growth patterns could be detected.⁵¹

The Positive Contributions of Key 73

Thus far, we have stressed negative factors in the theology and practice of evangelism through Key 73. Yet we remember the promise of God in Isaiah 55:10-11:

As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that

⁴⁹ This writer has treated certain evangelistic and theological implications of Church Growth in "The Tragedy of Comity," Christian News, October 15, 1979, reprinted in The Christian News Encyclopedia, 2 Vols. (Washington, MO: Missouriian Publishing Co., 1982), pp. 1271 and 1273.

⁵⁰ For an excellent Lutheran analysis of the theological implications of the Church Growth movement, consult Hans-Lutz Poetsch, "Thoughts on 'Church Growth Theology'," Evangelium, August 1978, pp. 64-84. Concerns are raised on the extremes Church Growth pragmatism may take in J. Robertson McQuilkin, "The Behavioral Sciences under the Authority of Scripture," Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society, 20 (March 1970); 39-43, dealing especially with the methodology of Charles Kraft of the Fuller School of World Missions. See also the concerns raised by Harold Lindsell in The Bible in the Balance (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979), pp. 95 and 226-28. Only time will tell whether Fuller's School of World Mission will be able to maintain a semblance of orthodox theology in view of the relativism and pragmatism which many see as built into their program.

⁵¹ C. P. Wagner, Your Church Can Grow, p. 141.

it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out of my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

God assures us that whenever the Gospel is proclaimed, people are brought to faith and the name of Christ is glorified. We rejoice that the Gospel is preached wherever it is preached, even when it is done in unionistic assemblies and in an out of focus form. Every revitalization of evangelistic and mission spirit is cause for rejoicing for wherever the Word and Sacraments are, there is the Holy Spirit and there will be the Church, for this is how God calls men and women into his Church.

This is true whether the preacher is Lutheran, Presbyterian, Baptist or whatever. God is Lord and sovereign, always using the Gospel wherever it is. He who can make the stones cry out will not wait for orthodox Lutherans to evangelize the world. God certainly did many good things through Key 73.

One of the most valuable contributions of the entire Key 73 effort is the resources contained in the Congregational Resource Book, including Bible studies, methods of Scripture distribution, and a great number of evangelistic approaches, techniques, and other helpful resources. A fine evangelism bibliography is included.⁵²

C. Peter Wagner lists three things that "went right with Key 73":

1. Scripture portions were distributed in unprecedented numbers.
2. Home Bible study and prayer groups for Christians multiplied and strengthened the faith of many.

⁵² Students of evangelistic methodologies will do well to consult the "Means and Methods" section of Edward R. Dayton and Donald M. Fraser,

3. New levels of cooperation among Christians were reached.⁵³

This list dovetails well with the accomplishments listed in Yesterday, Today and Forever.⁵⁴ Enough has been said on evangelistic cooperation through Key 73. On the second contribution of Key 73, 50,000 neighborhood cell groups were formed for home Bible study and prayer. Here, however, we need to ask whether these groups contributed to church growth, or did they tend to weaken congregational and denominational loyalties by developing new, pan-Christian loyalties to the small groups. Carl Henry says that 50 million Bibles, testaments or Scripture portions were distributed throughout the Key 73 year.

Biblical Evangelism: A Church - Centered Approach

If crusade and saturation evangelism approaches of the Key 73 type are not effective, what is? Anyone who would dare criticize evangelism had better be ready with a substitute lest he be charged with hindering the free course of the Gospel. Fortunately, there are evangelistic approaches today that are both more effective and more Biblical than cooperative evangelism.

In his opening statement in his stirring address to the Lausanne Congress on World Evangelism, Howard A. Snyder said:

Planning Strategies for World Evangelization (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980), pp. 257-307, for criteria in adopting appropriate methods for any given situation. The Resource Book makes no attempt to evaluate either the doctrinal content or the effectiveness of any of its resources.

⁵³ C. P. Wagner, Your Church Can Grow, p. 141.

⁵⁴ T. A. Raedeke, ed., Yesterday, Today and Forever (Washington: Canon Press, 1974), pp. 16 and 96.

The Church is God's agent of evangelism. To speak of the evangelistic task without relating this to the Church is to lose the Biblical perspective and develop an incomplete evangelism.⁵⁵

The missionary professor went on to declare that

The evangelistic call intends to call persons to the Body of Christ -- the community of believers, with Jesus Christ as the essential and sovereign head.⁵⁶

Merely to record "decisions" or the number of calls made is never enough. God has called us to make "disciples" not "deciders," and disciples in the context of the family of God in Christian congregations where the Gospel is preached and the sacraments are administered.

Perhaps the finest contribution of the Church Growth movement to contemporary evangelistic and missionary strategy is this emphasis on the church as both the agent and the goal of evangelistic efforts. Evangelistic methods which do little or nothing to advance the growth of the congregation as God's primary structure are of little value and may even be counter-productive.

Throughout our study, we have been dealing with people who have insisted that church unity is a crucial prerequisite to effective evangelism. Understanding this to mean both doctrinal unity and a fellowship of loving, caring Christians, we agree, especially as it relates to the local congregation. Outreach into the community can only be accomplished by God's people in the context of a vigorous, dynamic "Body of Life,"⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Howard A. Snyder, "The Church as God's Agent in Evangelism," Let The Earth Hear His Voice, pp. 327-67. Later Snyder expanded this essay into a book, The Community of the King (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1977), especially pp. 99-168.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ This term was popularized by Ray C. Stedman's best seller, Body Life (Glendale, CA: Regal Books, 1972).

that is, by people who manifest the love of God to one another in a loving and supportive fellowship in the church and through the church. Without a strong fellowship among believers, evangelism is not likely to be either sustained or effective.⁵⁸ Simmering doctrinal divergencies and smoldering animosities within a congregation will cripple its evangelistic effectiveness.

Nothing is more important in trying to build an evangelistic life-style into a congregation than to train people to be sensitive to people in their own households, families and other relationships who are particularly 'ripe' for the Gospel, that is, going through the kind of transitions which force them to think through life's ultimate questions. The Christian's first responsibility to the non-Christian is to demonstrate the love of Jesus in his life. "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, that you love one another" (John 13:35). Being alert to the people within their own "webs," laypeople with the intention of winning their lost friends and relatives to Christ are the most powerful evangelistic force in the world.⁵⁹ Where this spirit is

⁵⁸ Several of the principles affirmed in this section were published by the author in "On Building a Growth Consciousness," Church Growth: America, November-December, 1980, p. 3, in the form of twelve theses on evangelism.

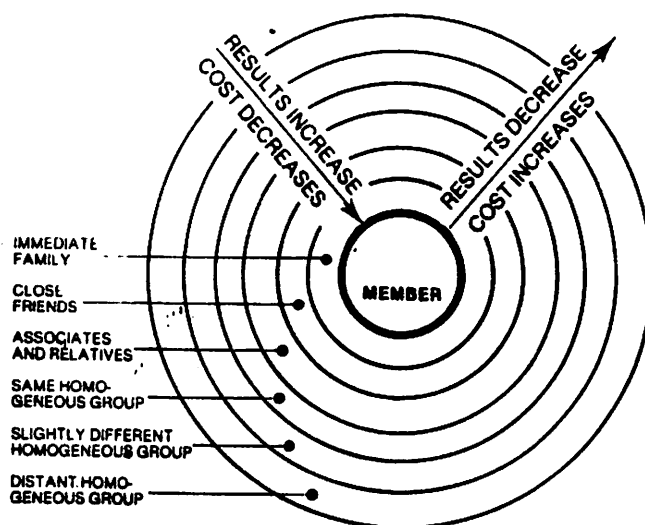
⁵⁹ Nothing is more encouraging and exciting on the modern evangelistic scene than the outpouring of material emphasizing friendship and household evangelism. Probably the pathfinder here is Donald McGavran whose epochal works, The Bridges of God (New York: Friendship Press, 1955) and Understanding Church Growth which presented his research on how people join churches. Other important recent literature on this subject includes Win Arn and Charles Arn, The Master's Plan for Making Disciples (Pasadena: Church Growth Press, 1982) and (with Donald McGavran) Growth: A New Vision for the Sunday School (Pasadena: Church Growth Press, 1980) especially chapter 5, pp. 71-91; Gene A. Getz, Sharpening the Focus of the Church (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974), especially pp. 31-50 and 72-74;

present, virtually any evangelistic program will work. Where it is not, no method will be effective. Against such approaches, there is no law, whether in Scripture, the Lutheran Confessions, or in church body by-laws!

Furthermore, body evangelism, with its emphasis on developing a spontaneous evangelistic life-style among God's people, and focusing on the congregation as the goal of evangelism is not only the evangelistic style that is least liable to unionistic error, it is also both the least expansive and most effective form of outreach. Win and "Chip" Arn provide us with a diagram demonstrating this truism, which we reproduce below.⁶⁰ The closer the prospective member is to the witness, the easier it is to talk about the Gospel to him or her, and the closer this evangelistic effort is tied into the local congregation, the more likely that person is to join the congregation and to remain a member.

and his Loving One Another (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1979); Michael Green, Evangelism in the Early Church (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1970), particularly pp. 180-83, 207-23; Wayne McDill, Making Friends for Christ (Nashville: Broadman, 1979); George W. Peters, Saturation Evangelism (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Co., 1970). As the title indicates, most of this book is a description and defense of one type of evangelism. Part Three, "Household Evangelism and Group Movements" pp. 145-223 is well worth the price of the book; Rebecca Manley Pippert, Out of the Salt Shaker and into the World (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1979). Of the rapidly increasing wealth of periodical articles on the subject of household evangelism, at least one is worth singling out: Tom Wolf, "Oikos Evangelism, the Biblical Pattern," The Church Growth: America, January-February 1978, pp. 11-13.

⁶⁰ Charles Arn and Win Arn, The Master's Plan, p. 169.



The evangelistic witness must grow out of a sincere interest in the person as he is avoiding every form of manipulation in the spirit of 2 Cor. 4:1-2 and 1 Thess. 2:3-12,⁶¹ A fully Biblical, church centered evangelistic approach will also stress reaching whole families, rather than only children or children primarily. It will take place in the world, not in the church,⁶² which means "crusade" and other "come to church" evangelism techniques are of less importance. The church gathers around Word and sacrament for nurture, worship and fellowship, it scatters for service and witness. It is this writer's conviction that this gathering should be, not only in the weekly worship service,

⁶¹ Powerful caveats against any form of evangelistic manipulation are contained in Emory A. Griffin, The Mindchangers, the Art of Christian Persuasion (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1976) (a book which should be required reading for all who desire to share the Gospel), and in John White, The Golden Cow (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1970), pp. 140-53.

⁶² Dr. Gene A. Getz reminds us that 1 Cor. 14:23-25 is the only illustration of evangelism "in the church" in the New Testament. Sharpening the Focus, p. 42, footnote 1. Ironically just when many Evangelicals are casting doubt on the value of crusade evangelism in their circles, some Lutherans are advocating its introduction in orthodox Lutheran groups.

but also in smaller cells or fellowship groups which have as their purpose not only the nurture of members and Christian fellowship on a more intimate level, but also evangelism, inviting non-members, especially the unchurched to participate regularly. Since the essential tool for evangelism is the Gospel (Romans 10:17), the most effective evangelistic method is that which most consistently and thoroughly gets people into the study of Scripture. Therefore, our evangelistic strategy must find a high priority for evangelistic Bible study groups, with Christians and non-Christians gathered together where the non-Christians may see the Christian in an on-going relationship, applying the Word of God to real problems and concerns. In this situation, the Spirit works freely, naturally, in a non-pressured situation, and the process of assimilation, so vital to maintaining people in the faith, begins even before he joins the church.⁶³

What we have been trying to say is aptly summed up by Jack F. Shepherd in his contribution to a Festschrift honoring Donald A. McGavran:

Evangelism is partial, incomplete and truncated, if it is seen as calling men to Christ in terms of an individual, metaphysical, vertical participation in "the invisible Church" without any reference to the local visible company of believers, . . . You cannot call men to Christ in evangelism without calling them into the fellowship of the church with you. . . .

.
 We may think it is more fitting to "win souls" with the Four Laws or some other proven technique and then say it will be good to go to the church of your choice. Or we may refer "our converts" (sic) to the kind of congregation of "mission" (sic) in which they would

⁶³ See Chapter 11, "The Small Groups as Basic Structure" in Howard Snyder, The Problem of Wineskins (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1975), pp. 139-48.

fit socially, economically or racially. If I am hinting at reality here, then I am pointing to a kind of evangelism that is compromising and superficial. Evangelism "in depth" should have a witness that says, "Come and confess Christ as your Savior and Lord and serve Him along with me in this church. Join the family, be part of this "household of God." . . .

.
We must say . . . "You can only properly follow Christ in the ordered fellowship of a congregation of believers where baptism is administered and the Lord's Supper is served." This also means that as churches we must be open to any whom we acknowledge to be in Christ with us. To call what we do evangelism, if it just gets people "saved" but stops there, so as not to get involved in controversial things like the sacraments and church "membership," is to operate below the standard of the New Testament.⁶⁴

This is the "better way" of evangelism in a full, Biblical sense.

⁶⁴Jack F. Shepherd, "Continuity and Change in Christian Mission" in God, Man and Church Growth, ed. Alan R. Tippett (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1973), pp. 88-9.

CHAPTER X

THE ESSENTIAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EVANGELISM AS PROCLAIMED DOCTRINE AND THE GOSPEL

A "Simple Gospel" as Opposed to "Doctrine"

The truism that there is a close and essential relationship between the evangelistic task of the church and sound doctrine is fundamental to the point we have been making in this study. Evangelism is the proclamation of doctrine and that doctrine is the Gospel in all of its fullness. To posit some kind of "simple Gospel" divorced from doctrine, as if there exists a core "gospel" which concerns the evangelist apart from doctrinal systems and teaching of interest only to theologians is an illusion.

Still this notion surfaces in the reductionism of many neo-liberal theologians as in Martin L. Kretzmann's contrast of salvation by grace to a supposed salvation by doctrine:

There are a great many doctrines in the church's library. They are a witness to the earnestness with which men have tried to reduce the mysteries of God, of the world, and of human life, to concepts which we can understand. Unfortunately, they are also often witness to the extent to which theologians have forgotten the gospel and forged systems of doctrine which prevent men from hearing the gospel. We are thus offered a great many propositions, ranging from a specific doctrine of creation to the condition of man's soul after death which we are asked to believe, as if we were saved by doctrine instead of by grace.¹

¹Martin L. Kretzmann, "What on Earth Does the Gospel Change?" Lutheran World, 16 (October 1969):309-21.

Adding weight to his assertions, Kretzmann goes on:

One must ask oneself, for example, what would happen to a "doctrine" of the place of women in the church, or a literalistic doctrine of creation, or some particular doctrines of the inspiration of scripture, or explicit explanations of the mystery of Christ's presence in the Eucharist, or a doctrine of church orders, or of church government, or a host of others, if we would put them to the test of the question, "What has this to do with the gospel?" Would we not quickly see that they have no essential connection with the gospel and therefore find ourselves able to live with many divergent formulations of doctrine in our common understanding of, and commitment to, the centrality of the gospel.²

Rejecting Kretzmann's views, Robert Preus counters:

Since the Gospel is doctrine and the teaching ministry of the church is to propagate and apply and formulate and defend the Gospel, it goes without saying that our Lutheran Symbols never pooh-poo or depreciate Christian doctrine. A deep concern for the purity of the doctrine evangelii is evident throughout the Confessions and was clearly the impetus for the writing of the Confessions. One is therefore alarmed and ashamed to witness modern Lutherans who pledge their loyalty to our Confessions making light of such a concern for pure doctrine and contrasting the Gospel to doctrine. . . . Such an antithesis is never found in our Confessions and would be considered false and a contradiction in terms by the writers of the Confessions.³

Ralph Bohlmann also argues that the Gospel "is integrally related to all articles of faith. As the fathers often said, they are either

²Ibid. Ironically, those who disagree with Kretzmann's view and insist that full doctrinal agreement is a prerequisite to fellowship are often labeled "Fundamentalists." On the contrary, Fundamentalism by definition reduces fellowship to minimalistic doctrinal statements or to a similar "evangelical experience," which is precisely the view the accusers champion! They also fall into the error rejected by C. F. W. Walther in "The False Arguments for the Modern Theory of Open Questions," from Wm. Arndt and Alex Guebert, Concordia Theological Monthly, Vol. 10, 1939, reprinted in Proceedings, 49th Regular Convention of the LCMS, 1971, Appendix A to the President's Report, pp. 227-44.

³Robert D. Preus, "The Confessions and the Mission of the Church," Springfielder, 39 (June 1975):37, n. 12.

antecedent or consequent to the doctrine of justification by grace."⁴
 "Gospel reductionism,"⁵ to use a phrase which became popular in Missouri Synod circles during the 1970's, is theologically untenable simply because there are no doctrines unrelated to the Gospel. Referring to John 3:16, Bohlmann shows the error in appealing to agreement on a "simple" Gospel:

Questions like the following lead to a consideration of all the theology from creation to eschatology, and indicate why agreement in the Gospel involves full doctrinal agreement: Who is "God"? Where did the "world" come from? Why did it need God's "love"? Who is God's "Son" and why is he called "only-begotten"? What did he do when the Father "gave" him, and how did this really change man's situation? What is meant by "believing in Him" and how does one get such faith? What does it mean that the world would "perish" without him? What is "eternal life"? On what basis can we be sure that our answers are God's?⁶

Faithful preaching proclaims a Gospel with a rich dogmatic content. Hermann Sasse helps us clear away the fog:

There is not such a thing as "undogmatic Christianity" because Christianity is essentially a dogmatic religion, perhaps better, the dogmatic religion. None of the great religions of India or of the ancient world has known anything like a dogmatics. Not even the "testimony" of the Mohamendans for the "Hear, Israel" of Judaism (Deut. 6:4; cf. I Cor. 8:6) is "dogma" in the sense of the Christian Church. . . . It is the blinding doctrinal content of that confession which Jesus demands from all men -- from his disciples when he asks them, "Whom say ye that I am," and from his adversaries when he asks them, "What do you think of Christ? Whose Son is he?"⁷

⁴Bohlmann, "The Celebration of Concord," in Theologians Convictions Formula of Concord Essays, St. Louis: CTCR, p. 63.

⁵This phrase apparently goes back to a paper by John Warwick Montgomery reprinted in his Crisis in Lutheran Theology, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1967)1:120.

⁶Bohlmann, "Confessional Ecumenism," in Evangelical Directions for the Lutheran Church, eds. Erich Kiehl and Waldo J. Werning (Chicago: Lutheran Congress, 1970), p. 90, n.8.

⁷Hermann Sasse, "Are We Forfeiting Our Heritage?" Christianity Today, October 22, 1965, p. 21.

This full and unqualified confession of faith is not something made under threat or duress, but is something that the Gospel preacher makes joyfully and freely, because the confession of the Church is his personal confession. We therefore find rather strange the question of M. L. Kretzmann:

Do we preach the gospel which sets man free from the slavery of sin and then proceed to make them slaves of the church, of doctrine, of biblicism, and of religion instead of slaves of Jesus Christ in whom alone there is true freedom.⁸

Much more in the spirit of the Lutheran Confessors is this affirmation by Robert Preus:

The pastor who pooh-poohs purity of doctrine, who squirms when false doctrine and teachers are condemned, who cannot be certain of his own doctrinal position cannot subscribe the Lutheran confessions and forfeits all right to the name Lutheran.

The notion has been expressed for various reasons by theologians ever since the Reformation that subscription, total, unconditional and unqualified subscription to the Lutheran confessions is legalistic, a violation of Christian freedom, etc. Opposition has centered especially against the condemnation of false doctrine so common in our confessions. Such a reaction not only manifests an ignorance of the spirit of confessionalism which puts the truth of the Gospel above every other consideration, but is itself a kind of insidious crypto-legalism, a pressure (using such pious phrases as "law of love," "freedom of faith," "tolerance," etc.) exerted to divert one from making total commitment to an articulated Gospel, a definite doctrinal position.⁹

Moreover, we reject attempts to search for a consensus on which groups of various types may be grouped together on a political model which may be useful or even necessary in the political or legislative arena. Rene Williamson has a timely warning when he says

There is a danger that creeds will become watered-down doctrinal statements developed much as political party platforms are. This

⁸ M. L. Kretzmann, "What on Earth," p. 311.

⁹ Robert D. Preus, "Confessional Subscription," Evangelical Directions for the Lutheran Church, p. 49.

essentially political way of arriving at truth is out of place in the Christian Church.¹⁰

Holsten Fagerberg confronts the view of Anders Nygren and other twentieth century Lutherans that the Confessions of the Lutheran Church do not demand pure doctrine as a condition for the unity of the church on the grounds that the Gospel is not a doctrine, but a dynamic, powerful Word, namely, Christ himself. Nygren had written, "If the Gospel and the sacraments are in operation, there it is that Christ is found, and He is Himself the unity of the church."¹¹ Fagerberg dissents:

If this solution were correct, it would eliminate a large number of hindrances to church unity in a single blow. For then such controversial questions as the meaning of justification, the number of sacraments, the propriety of infant or adult baptism, and the meaning of the Lord's Supper could be set aside as non-essential. But the problem is not solved that easily. The "Gospel" certainly is an act of the will, but the Gospel, the promise that gives birth to faith, must . . . be true in order to be able to awaken and sustain faith. The doctrinal element is to be found as soon as justification by faith is proclaimed. The Gospel is at one and the same time a proclamation and a doctrine.¹²

The German theologian is on solid confessional ground when he declares that "unity . . . involves not only the fact that the Word is proclaimed

¹⁰ Rene de Visme Williamson, "Negative Thoughts about Ecumenism," Christianity Today, August 30, 1968, p. 13. In the same spirit, Kurt Marquart asserts "The worst church-politics is not honest, 'divisive' leadership, but the unctuous Sadducean 'churchmanship' which sidesteps truth for the sake of togetherness, 'peace', and, of course, the budget!" Anatomy of an Explosion (Ft. Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1977), p. 77.

¹¹ Cited by Holsten Fagerberg, A New Look at the Lutheran Confessions, 1529-1537, trans. Gene J. Lund (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1972), p. 270.

¹² Ibid., pp. 270-71.

and the sacraments administered, but also what is proclaimed and administered."¹³

Theology Is Always Theology for Evangelism

If the article by which the church stands or falls is justification by grace through faith for Jesus' sake, then a basic and irreplaceable purpose of the church is to proclaim that message at home and to the uttermost parts of the earth. Biblical theology is always mission theology; it is always theology not only of but for evangelism. That which we confess and teach we also proclaim to the world. Christian theology is always a theology which is meant to be proclaimed.

In his Lutheran Congress essay in 1970, Ralph Bohlmann asserted:

Confessional ecumenism is both evangelical and evangelistic. It knows that the Gospel of Jesus Christ creates, sustains, and enlarges the church and therefore spares no effort to preach and administer that Gospel. It keeps the Gospel central (evangelical); it shares it with others (evangelistic). To be sure, Christians must be concerned with the great moral and social questions of our time, but not as a substitute for the Gospel or a means to promote true Christian unity, for the church's primary mission to itself and to others is fulfilled only by giving the Gospel pre-eminence in all it does. In fact, confessional ecumenism can be correctly understood as the practice of evangelism within the visible Christendom.¹⁴

Ideally, therefore, the church's theologians should be its evangelists and its evangelists should be its theologians. Unfortunately, "most evangelists are not very interested in theology; most theologians are not very interested in evangelism."¹⁵ Thank God, there are many

¹³Fagerberg, p. 271.

¹⁴Bohlmann, "Confessional Ecumenism," p. 86.

¹⁵Michael Green, Evangelism in the Early Church (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1970, p. 7.

exceptions to this rule. Robert Preus has served us well with an excellent essay on "The Confessions and the Mission of the Church" spelling out how central the proclamation of the Gospel is to the Lutheran Church and its theology. "In fact, the entire Reformation is an answer to this question: What is the church supposed to be doing?"¹⁶ With Paul and the Psalmist, we declare: "I believed; therefore I have spoken" (2 Cor. 4:13).

W. Paul Bowers is therefore right on target when he declares

A careful study of the New Testament may show that missions is so intimately interwoven with the great truths of the New Testament that any failure of theology to relate itself to missions is really a failure to represent New Testament teachings correctly.¹⁷

Karl Barth likewise insists,

Doctrine without evangelistic action is a tragedy. It represents a sterile and barren Christianity that belies the profession of our lips. And outreach that does not have as its basic the sure prophetic Word is equally tragic. It looks for conviction without sure and eternal roots.¹⁸

The evangelistic task of the church is not an option; it is the very reasons for its existence. In his exegesis of 1 Peter 2:9-10, missiologist Johannes Blauw points out "that a 'theology of mission' cannot be other than a 'theology of the Church' as the people of God

¹⁶Robert Preus, "The Confessions and the Mission of the Church," p. 20. For the attitude of early Lutheranism towards missions, see Werner Elert, The Structure of Lutheranism, trans. Walter A. Hansen (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1962), pp. 385-402, as a corrective to the assertions of Gustave Warneck and others that orthodox Lutheranism was uninterested in missions.

¹⁷W. Paul Bowers, "Why Are Evangelicals Overlooking Mission Theology?" Christianity Today, September 10, 1965, p. 7.

¹⁸Karl Barth, "Together in Christ," p. 68.

called out out of the world, placed in the world, and sent to the world."¹⁹ Bishop Leslie Newbigin adds: "Missions are not an extra; they are the acid test of whether or not the Church believes the Gospel."²⁰ If Christ is the only way of salvation (John 14:6; Acts 4:12; John 3:36; 1 Tim. 2:5; 2 Thess. 1:8; John 8:23-24) with the Gospel of salvation by grace through faith alone the only means to acceptance by God, then a church that does not proclaim the Gospel to the lost world is denying the Gospel, operating, "on the assumption that there may be other ways of salvation than through faith in Jesus Christ."²¹ This was not the style or the missionary philosophy of the early Christians, as we see in Paul's message to the Ephesian Elders (Acts 20:17-35) or in Romans 9 and 10, to cite just two instances.

Lutherans should not have lagged behind the Evangelicals, Pietists and Calvinists in missions and evangelism. We should rather have led the way both in theology and practice in these disciplines. Christ once said that the stones would cry out if his disciples remained silent (Luke 19:40). God will not wait for the orthodox to be on the move in order to reach the world with the Gospel. The fact that he by-passed us ought to cause us to repent.²²

¹⁹ Johannes Blauw, The Missionary Nature of the Church (New York: McGraw Hill, 1962), p. 126.

²⁰ Lesslie Newbigin, Is Christ Divided? (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1961), p. 32.

²¹ One of these rejected in Article I, A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles, adopted by the LC-MS in 1972.

²² This writer has made this point at some length in "Evangelism and Confessional Lutheranism," Christian News, December 22, 1975, p. 6.

The flames of evangelism are not fanned by a truncated message. It grows out of the conviction that the evangelist carries the very word of God, crying "Repent and believe the Gospel!" The certainty that we have full forgiveness of sins and the assurance of eternal life in the Gospel while eternal damnation awaits the unrepentant sinner must be part of every missionary's equipment. In the long run, an ecumenism which does not resolve differences but merely declares them irrelevant does not help the cause of world evangelization. Harold O. J. Brown chronicled the weakening of theological conviction in the churches some years ago when he wrote:

All too much Christian tolerance today is not based upon the biblical principle of love, but upon the anti-biblical principle of indifference to questions of truth, and upon the feeling that right must always be found in compromise. Luther's 'Here I stand!' is as out of date among Protestants as Leo X's 'Anathema sit?' is among Roman Catholics, and to the extent that both have let them go out of date, they are in danger of disloyalty to the professed Lord, who claimed, 'I am the truth (John 14:6).'²³

The opening sentence of this study noted that the Great Commission speaks not only to the need to go and baptize, but also to teach, to nurture, and if you will, to indoctrinate (the Latin doctrina, after all, merely means teaching), therefore linking evangelization and teaching the new disciples to obey all Christ taught (Matt. 28:11-20).

²³ Harold O. J. Brown, "The Protestant Deformation," National Review, June 1, 1965, p. 465. So also Luther to Erasmus, "To take no pleasure in assertions is not the mark of a Christian heart; indeed, one must delight in assertions to be Christian at all. . . . By 'assertion' I mean staunchly holding your ground, stating your position, confessing it, defending it and persevering in it. . . . Take away assertions, and you take away Christianity. Why the Holy Spirit is given to Christians from heaven in order that He may glorify Christ and in them confess Him even unto death -- and is this not assertion?" Bondage of the Will, trans., J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston (London: James Clarke & Co., 1957), pp. 66-67.

Paul, the greatest missionary as well as the greatest theologian the Christian Church has yet produced, had the connection between pure doctrine and evangelism clearly in his mind when he spoke to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:18-35. He reminded them of "how I have not hesitated to preach anything that would prove helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus." Both theology and evangelism suffer if concern for theological integrity and evangelistic zeal are placed in antithesis to one another. Notice how Paul intertwined them:

I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God. Guard yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears (Acts 20:27-31).

Another example of the marriage of evangelistic concern and sound doctrine in Paul's theology is seen in 2 Timothy 4:5 where the great Apostle urges Timothy to "do the work of an evangelist" in a context that is concerned about maintaining sound doctrine based on the Scriptures over against the false doctrines of men (2 Tim. 3:1-4:41). What God has joined together let no man put asunder!

Evangelism Needs a Sound Doctrinal Foundation

"If the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself for the battle" (1 Cor. 14:8 KJV) said Paul to the Corinthians who were all too capable of making the Gospel unintelligible. We too

must emphasize content²⁴ in preaching, making sure that the message we proclaim has substance. The world will not be evangelized without a fully Biblical and complete theology of the Gospel and a correct understanding of the mission of the church. By reminding us that the Epistle to the Romans is a missionary document, exegete Martin Franzmann broadens our missiological and theological horizons in his The Word of the Lord Grows:

The breadth and depth of this exposition of the Gospel of Christ is a perpetual warning against the temptation, which the church has not always resisted, to make of its missionary endeavors a vague and sentimental humanitarian activity, in which penicillin became a substitute for the power of God, the Gospel. . . . Romans is the church's salutary monitor concerning the primacy of the word. The letter is therefore a reminder too that the content of missionary preaching is of critical importance, that a perversion or dilution of the divine word is no more permissible here than anywhere else in the life of the church, that co-operation in mission work on the basis of an ill-defined or undefined minimum of agreement on the substance of the missionary proclamation is a perilous and unpardonable procedure, that the confessional question is an acute question just in missionary work.²⁵

Mark Noll exhorts Evangelicals:

The twentieth-century heirs of nineteenth-century revivalism need very much to put evangelism back under the control of a full-orbed biblical theology rather than letting evangelistic practice dictate the shape of Christian doctrine.²⁶

When the first fruits of the church were gathered by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel and in the waters of baptism at Pentecost, they

²⁴Francis A. Schaeffer has this timely recommendation in "Form and Freedom in the Church," Let the Earth Hear His Voice, ed. J. D. Douglas (Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1975), p. 368.

²⁵Martin H. Franzmann, The Word of the Lord Grows, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1962), pp. 117-18.

²⁶Mark A. Noll, "Catching Up 'The Evangelicals,'" Christianity Today, December 5, 1975, p. 21.

"continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine" (Acts 2:42). We find no satisfaction with spiritual obstetrics here, but with the nurturing of the new-born Christians in the whole counsel of God. If we permit a shallow minimum of teaching to follow evangelization, we are planting the seeds of the destruction of the church. Argentine Rene Padilla reminded the Lausanne Congress in 1974 that "faithfulness to the Gospel should never be sacrificed for the sake of quantity. When the Gospel is truncated in order to make it easy for all men to become Christians," he declared, "from the very outset the basis is laid for an unfaithful church."²⁷

Christ has promised to build his Church, but he does so with the Word, and he calls on us to speak that word faithfully, without compromise (Jeremiah 23, especially verse 28) or dilution. John Warwick Montgomery recalls the axiom of the ancient Greek philosopher, Heraclitus, "Out of flux nothing but flux comes."

This ancient aphorism applies equally to modern ecumenical flux. The only hope for a true and solid ecumenicity is (contra Soderblom) a definite Word from God revealing to us the nature of His truth and distinguishing that truth from error. With such a Word, ecumenical effort builds on rock; without it (and this is the tragedy of so much contemporary ecumenical activity) the result is sand, flux and the general muddying of the Water of Life.²⁸

Students of church growth have discovered that this principle also relates to the ability of churches to grow. In a dialogue between

²⁷ Rene Padilla, "Evangelism and the World," Let the Earth Hear His Voice, p. 138.

²⁸ John Warwick Montgomery, Ecumenicity, Evangelicals, and Rome (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1969), p. 107.

Arthur Johnston and C. Peter Wagner published in Christianity Today, Johnston cites McGavran's phrase to emphasize that

what really determines growth is the intensity of belief that any group has in the particular doctrine it holds. What we have seen occurring from the time of Constantine in the fourth century has been a general watering down of belief in our views of salvation and of the Church.²⁹

Johnston was referring to McGavran's assertion that "There is a definite relationship between the intensity of belief, often expressed in absoluteness and exclusiveness, and the rate of growth."³⁰ Dean M. Kelley, a National Council of Churches executive wrote an entire book, Why Conservative Churches Are Growing, to document this very point. The "indispensable function of religion," asserts Kelley, is to explain "the meaning of life in ultimate terms."³¹ In successful churches, Kelley writes, meaning is the most important and the one absolute element in the life of the member.

If meaning is to be central and ultimate, it will take precedence over all other things, including persons. If it does not take precedence over other things, including persons, it will no longer be central and ultimate. When it is no longer central and ultimate, meaning will be vulnerable to compromise, "balancing," trade-offs, dilution, lip-service, apathy, and neglect in relation to other values and considerations, and the meaning-system will proportionately recede in importance.³²

²⁹ Arthur Johnston and C. Peter Wagner, "Intensity of Belief: A Pragmatic Concern for Church Growth," Christianity Today, January 7, 1977, pp. 13-14.

³⁰ Donald A. McGavran, How Churches Grow (New York: Friendship Press, 1966), pp. 58-59.

³¹ Dean M. Kelley, Why Conservative Churches Are Growing (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), pp. 36-37.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 162. In the light of Kelley's thesis, it is interesting to read the thoughts of his fellow United Methodist, Lyle

Kelley provides us with four "Minimal Maxims of Seriousness (Strictness): typical of groups providing meaning for their followers and believe that their beliefs make a difference:

Those who are serious about their faith:

- (1) Do not confuse it with other beliefs/loyalties/practices, or mingle them together indiscriminately, or pretend they are alike, of equal merit, or mutually compatible if they are not.
- (2) Make high demands of those admitted to the organization that bears the faith, do not include or allow to continue within it those who are not fully committed to it.
- (3) Do not consent to, encourage, or indulge any violations of its standards of belief or behavior by its professed adherents.
- (4) Do not keep silent about it, apologize for it, or let it be treated as though it makes no difference, or should make no difference, in their behavior or in their relationships with others.³³

Kelley makes no distinctions between the content of the strict views described here (thus Mormons and other cultists are listed on the same level as orthodox Lutherans or other Christian groups) but the implications of his comments for church fellowship are obvious. Those who take their faith seriously, Kelley continues, put their seriousness into practice according to these rules.

- a. Be in no haste to admit members.
- b. Test the readiness and preparation of would-be members.
- c. Require continuing faithfulness.

Schaller contrasting behavioral and ideological churches, the first being organized around doctrine and faith, and the other around relationships and the love of members for one another. We submit that they are not mutually exclusive, that churches emphasizing meaning can and should also be relational churches, but that relationships must grow out of and be based upon a sound doctrinal foundation or they will eventually be subverted. Sanctification is based upon justification (a doctrinal concept) and is nourished by the Gospel through Word and sacrament. Lyle E. Schaller, "Idiological or Behavioral?" The Parish Paper (The Yokefellow Institute, 920 Earlham Drive, Richmond, IN 47374) Vol. 12 (August 1982).

³³ Ibid., pp. 121 and 176.

- d. Bear one another up in small groups.
- e. Do not yield control to outsiders, nor seek to accommodate their expectations.³⁴

Kelley has uncovered a paradox: those who have minimum membership requirements and the least discipline are likely, in the long run, to grow the least, other things being equal. We are reproducing a useful chart³⁵ of "strong" and "weak" groups because it substantiates our point.

WHY CONSERVATIVE CHURCHES ARE GROWING

CHART D: "STRONG" AND "WEAK" GROUPS

| Social Dimensions | | GOALS | CONTROLS | COMMUNICATION |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------|---|---|--|
| "STRONG" GROUPS | A Evidences of Social Strength | 1. <i>Commitment</i> —willingness to sacrifice status, possessions, safety, life itself, for the cause or the company of the faithful —a total response to a total demand —group solidarity —total identification of individual's goals with group's | 2. <i>Discipline</i> —willingness to obey the commands of (charismatic) leadership without question —willingness to suffer sanctions for infraction rather than leave the group | 3. <i>Missionary Zeal</i> —eagerness to tell the "good news" of one's experience of salvation to others —refusal to be silenced (Acts 5:26) —internal communications stylized and highly symbolic: a cryptic language —winsomeness |
| | B Traits of Strictness | 4. <i>Absolutism</i> —belief that "we have the Truth and all others are in error" —closed system of meaning and value which explains everything —uncritical and unreflective attachment to a single set of values | 5. <i>Conformity</i> —intolerance of deviance or dissent —shunning of outcasts (<i>Meldung</i>) —shared stigmata of belonging (Quaker garb and plain talk) —group confessions or criticisms (Oneida) —separatism | 6. <i>Fanaticism</i> (outflow > inflow) Flood (or) Isolation —"All talk, no listen" —"Keep yourselves unspotted from the world" —cloister |
| "WEAK" GROUPS | C Traits of Leniency | 7. <i>Relativism</i> —belief that no one has a monopoly on truth; that all insights are partial —attachment to many values and to various modes of fulfillment (not just the religious) —a critical and circumspect outlook | 8. <i>Diversity</i> —appreciation of individual differences (everyone should "do his thing") —no heresy trials; no excommunications; no humiliating group confessions of error —leadership is institutionalized, not charismatic | 9. <i>Dialogue</i> —an exchange of differing insights, an exploration of divergent views —appreciative of outsiders rather than judgmental (inflow > outflow) |
| | D Evidences of Social Weakness | 10. <i>Lukewarmness</i> —"If you have some truth and I have some truth, why should either of us die for his portion?" —reluctance to sacrifice all for any single set of values or area of fulfillment —indecisiveness even when important values are at stake | 11. <i>Individualism</i> —unwillingness to give unquestioning obedience to anyone —individuality prized above conformity —discipline? for what? —leave group rather than be inconvenienced by its demands | 12. <i>Reserve</i> —reluctance to expose one's personal beliefs or to impose them on others —consequent decay of the missionary enterprise —no effective sharing of conviction or spiritual insight within the group |

³⁴ Ibid., p. 176

³⁵ Ibid., p. 84.

Scripturally and confessionally there can be no separation between evangelism and indoctrination, between outreach and nurture. The Gospel which converts also nurtures, and the Word that edifies also re-generates. The means of grace are in operation in either case. The two tasks of evangelization and edification are distinct actions, but they cannot be separated. Indeed, evangelization often takes place through indoctrination.

No rigid separation should exist between evangelism, teaching and edification, for in almost every audience (whether in church, in a family living room, or on a street corner) the listeners will represent a wide variety of religious backgrounds, ignorance, confusion, indifference, and in some cases hostility.³⁶

In the church of the apostles and during the Reformation era, no such artificial distinction existed; rather it is a fairly recent development. Carl Wilson claims this separation took place under the influence of Bushnell and others. Up until 1850 evangelism did not even exist as a separate word in English. Taylor writes:

The proclamation of the good news of the gospel has been an integral part of the ever-expanding Christian religion through the centuries. However, the word evangelism, from which the terms gospel and good news were derived, was not incorporated in the terminology of Christian theology until the recent past.³⁷

Michael Green shows how the Apostles used a very deliberate, if zealous appeal, cutting no corners and never watering down the message. Teaching and evangelizing were cut from the same cloth and carried on simultaneously.

³⁶ Roger Greenway, Discipling the City (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), p. 101.

³⁷ Mendall Taylor, Exploring Evangelism (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1967), p. 19, cited by Carl Wilson, With Christ in the School of Disciple Building (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), p. 219.

It is interesting to note the nuance of words like diamarturesthai 'to testify strenuously', kataggellein 'to proclaim forcefully', dialegesthai 'to argue', diakatelenchein 'to confute powerfully' when applied to the apostolic evangelistic preaching. Sometimes we read of joyful proclamation of good news (euaggelizein), at other times of patient comparison of scriptures as inquirer and evangelist examined the Old Testament (suzetein, paratithesthai, sumbibazein), sometimes of the utter defeat of the objector in argument (sunchunein). Primitive evangelism was by no means mere proclamation and exhortation; it included able intellectual argument, skillful study of the scriptures, careful, closely reasoned teaching and patient argument. It was no doubt because of the careful teaching instruction they were giving that the authorities were worried about this new movement: 'You have filled Jerusalem with your teaching.' If it had had an inadequate intellectual basis it would not have lasted long. The fashionable separation, derived from Professor Dodd. of separating kerygma from didache, preaching from teaching, in primitive evangelism is misleading and unconsciously perhaps supports this suspicion that the Apostles appealed primarily to the emotions. In fact evangelism is called teaching in several places in Acts.³⁸

Nothing superficial about evangelism of this type. Kenneth Korby speaks for us in a passage which in part treated Key 73 as evangelism in an essay on the office of the keys as key to church renewal: "Nurture and evangelism are connected: to lose one key is to lose both. Lutheran congregations are to be disciplined in both nurture (edification) and evangelism."³⁹

Evangelism is Precisely Where Doctrinal
Differences Make a Difference

In his contribution to the Key 73 follow-up volume, Yesterday, Today and Forever, Leighton Ford expresses his frustration that so often the aftermath of a united evangelistic effort is a divisive falling out

³⁸ Michael Green, Evangelism in the Early Church, p. 160.

³⁹ Kenneth F. Korby, "The Key to the Renewal of the Church is the Office of the Keys," Mimeographed paper delivered to the Central Regional Pastoral Conference on the Northern Illinois District, September 30, 1975, p. 9.

of the participants who united in the campaign.

Revival and evangelism have almost always had ambiguous results. First comes the awakening with all of its joy and fellowship; and then often the devil plays his trump card. Pride comes in; devisiveness over one particular gift, or method, or doctrine enters; and the lines harden again. Sometimes we've gone into a city where people join together for a great evangelistic thrust. Then the devil comes in like a wolf, separates the sheep, and picks them off one by one. Already there are danger signs. There are different factions in the Jesus movement. Some evangelicals are divided over the relational versus the propositional, as if we must choose one over the other. With the new political consciousness in evangelization there are differences over liberal versus conservative positions. It would be a tragedy to let the enemy divide us in the aftermath of Key 73. May God help us to maintain unity in the balance of truth and freedom.⁴⁰

The real tragedy with Key 73 and other cooperative evangelistic endeavors is not that they fell into disunity after the crusade was over, but that they entered the joint work without achieving unity in a God-pleasing fashion in the beginning. The resulting breakup of the apparent outward fellowship is the inevitable result of a failure to find a unity in the first place.

Indeed, it is precisely in evangelism that doctrinal differences are most likely to become apparent. An example is the doctrine of baptism. Some time ago a Baptist pastor proposed to this writer that we unite for a common evangelistic effort. I pointed out that if we did unite for such an effort, as soon as we got one convert our differences would surface: should we baptize him or not, and if so, how?

⁴⁰Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow, p. 47.

A moment's thought will show that it is exactly here, in the evangelistic task of the church that the differences between church bodies makes the most difference.⁴¹ Consider any controverted article of faith among Christians, and differences surface most quickly in evangelism: baptism, conversion, the distinction between and the right use of Law and Gospel in preaching and witnessing, the nature of the atonement provide examples of this sort of thing. Consider the matter of what happens after death . . . is there a hell or purgatory or not? One's position would come out in evangelism. Or think of the means of grace: does the Holy Spirit work with or independently of the Gospel? How one answers will vitally affect his evangelistic methodology. Calvinist theologian, R. B. Kuiper takes up this matter and proves our point in more ways than one as he points out that certain doctrinal differences between Calvinist and Arminian directly affect the presentation of the Gospel:

The Arminian will tell each sinner that God designed by the death of his Son to save him; the Calvinist will insist that Paul never once addressed a sinner thus, and that he could not have done it because this would have implied that mere man could thwart the plan of the Almighty. The Arminian will tell unregenerate man that he has the ability to believe in Christ and that, if he exercises that ability of his own free volition, he will be born again; the Calvinist will insist that unregenerate man, dead in trespasses and sins as he is (Eph. 2:1), will not and cannot come to Christ in faith except God draw him by the irresistible regenerating grace of the Holy Spirit (John 6:44). Let no one term these differences minor or ridicule them as mere hairsplitting. On this matter Benjamin B. Warfield says in The Plan of Salvation: 'The issue is indeed a fundamental one, and it is closely drawn. Is it God the Lord that saves us, or is it we ourselves? And does God the Lord save us or does he merely open the

⁴¹Curtis A. Peterson, "The Relationship Between Evangelism and Pure Doctrine in the Light of the Mission Controversy," Affirm, October 14, 1976, p. 5.

way to salvation, and leave it, according to our choice, to walk in it or not? The parting of the ways is the old parting of the ways between Christianity and autosoterism' (p. 108).⁴²

One hardly needs more argumentation to see why it is impossible for confessional Lutherans to unite in the Lord's evangelistic mission with either one of them!

A conservative Lutheran, Alvin E. Wagner shows the evangelistically disastrous consequences of divorcing the Word from the Holy Spirit in preaching

The unspeakable tragedy of this divorcement of the Word from the Spirit which downgrades the Gospel to an attending circumstances is that both new converts and faithful Christians are misled to look for the certainty of their salvation beyond the clear objective Gospel promises in the Scripture to some immediate operation, illumination or experience of the Holy Spirit in their hearts. Certainty of salvation they seek, not like Abraham in the sure "promises of God" (Romans 4:20-21), but in all the exotic forms of subjectivism we are witnessing today, viz, getting high spiritually, really turned on, baptism of the Spirit, inner light, special revelation, with shouting, agonizing, praying and wrestling till the senses reel. Nor are the more sophisticated forms of neo-orthodoxy and new theology far removed from these crude extravaganzas of emotionalism. For in maintaining that the inerrant Gospel must be divorced from the erring Scripture and is the Word of God only when it becomes the Word to you, they are forcing Christians to look for certainty within themselves.

The net result of all this theoretical and practical denial of God's own ordained means of grace is not certainty but a welter of doubt concerning that which is to be the Christian's crowning glory and dynamic: the grace of God. It teaches him to rely on his past experience, his present feelings, his current emotions and to build his faith on faith or inner attitudes, all of which can only make him more uncertain. Would we have genuine faith and authentic feelings, we must, in the words of Luther 'soar above ourselves and base our faith in God's grace on the means of grace lying outside us, the Word of the Gospel and its seals, Baptism and the Lord's Supper'.⁴³

⁴² R. B. Kuiper, God-Centered Evangelism (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1961), p. 185.

⁴³ A. E. Wagner, "Evangelism: A Force - or a Farce," Sola Scriptura, July-August, 1972, p. 18.

A contemporary German Lutheran speaks a similar warning that also the Biblical and Confessional teachings on "the radical nature of man's hereditary corruption" and the Confessional rejection of any form of synergism or free will on man's part in salvation are also part of our evangelistic theology.

Participating in the redemption that is in Christ Jesus is possible for us exclusively through God's decision for us, not on the basis of any conceivable decision of man for Jesus.⁴⁴

Only full agreement in doctrine and all of the articles will permit Lutherans to work together with other Christians in a way that creates a certain faith in God's promises as the end result of our evangelistic efforts.

C. Stacy Woods adds another prerequisite to cooperation in evangelistic work: not only must we preach whole counsel of God, but we must be sure that those involved in evangelistic follow-up are also sound in the faith.

If care goes into the preparation of an evangelistic campaign, surely equal - and even more - care should be given to ensure that those professing Christ are received by Bible-believing Churches, and not by apostate congregations that falsely bear the name of Christ. These New Testament Churches must instruct babes in Christ more fully. Therein lies the failure of many evangelistic campaigns and of many Churches involved in the task of evangelism. The root of this problem is doctrinal, not situational. There are those whose evangelistic activity betrays an essential pelagianism, and whose Augustinianism commences once a decision has been made.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Hans-Lutz Poetsch, "Thoughts on 'Church Growth Theory,'" Evangelium, August, 1975, pp. 66-67.

⁴⁵ C. Stacey Woods, "Some Modern Temptations," in One Race, One Gospel, One Task, Vol. 2, eds. C. F. H. Henry and W. S. Mooneyham (Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1967), p. 204.

He is right: no evangelistic method is any better than its follow-up, and this involves indoctrination and nurturing in all that Christ taught through the Scriptures.

Nor are we helped by the plea, sometimes made of and by those working in young churches on the frontier of the Gospel in the world's mission fields, that we cannot go into detailed doctrinal distinctions in such missionary situations, nor can we impose creeds developed centuries ago in Europe on the new churches of the Third World. We reply that Paul, the source of our warnings about wolves invading the flocks, and who taught precisely and in great detail about doctrinal specifics, always wrote as a missionary in the thick of the work of planting new churches and grounding new Christians in the whole counsel of God. To those in similar situations today, we would argue that they especially are charged with the responsibility of laying a sound, doctrinal foundation in God's Word, and every warning of errorists ever expressed by Paul or Peter has special application to them. Scripture nowhere lists doctrinal indifference as a fruit of the Spirit, who is the Spirit of truth, not error. On the contrary, every new Christian is to be brought to maturity, and that involves ensuring that they are safeguarded from being tossed back and forth by the waves as infants, "blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming" (Eph. 4:14).

CHAPTER XI

A REMAINING PROBLEM FOR LUTHERAN THEOLOGY

How May We Make Use of Non-Lutheran Sources and Remain True to God's Word and Our Confessional?

We have concluded that cooperation in any aspect of church work, and especially in the area of evangelism and missions, is possible only where prior agreement on doctrine and all of its articles has been achieved, including accord on what constitutes the Gospel and the mission of the church. Anything less inevitably dilutes the Gospel and contributes of a gradual or immediate short-circuiting of the mission of the church, and is therefore counter-productive.

A problem remains for missionaries and mission oriented churches, however: to what extent is the use of material or techniques produced by groups or individuals who do not share our confessional commitment ever permissible? How may we use the contributions of other outside of our Lutheran circles, that is, by those who are heterodox to one extent or another? Is it possible to learn from other Christians without compromising or violating our Biblical/Confessional principles of church fellowship? How may we retain our heritage intact and yet recognize the good that comes from other sources and other traditions? This becomes particularly an important point for those engaged in evangelism

because being more experienced in missions and evangelism, Evangelicals have written much more than orthodox Lutherans on these subjects. How, for example, could one study Church Growth without the concepts and materials of Donald A. McGavran or C. Peter Wagner? Everything that is written or said these days in this area either comes from them or depends on their thought, procedures and approaches. The same problem exists in missiology, evangelism and church planting.

If we must use heterodox sources, what guidelines determine the limits of such use? The solution to such a question is found in our Lutheran self-understanding in relationship to the rest of the Christian Church. According to the Lutheran Confessions, the church of the Augsburg Confession does not see herself as just one sect among others, but

by virtue of the pure Marks of Christ's Church, the legitimate outward expression and representative of Christ's one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. As such she is the rightful heiress of the whole Christian patrimony, and gratefully treasures her own even the historic practices of the Catholic Church.¹

and therefore considers herself to stand in the train of Athanasius, Ambrose, Augustine, Bernard, Dominic, Francis and other Fathers of the Church. Never planning to be a separate church body, she saw herself only as the reformed Medieval and Ancient Church, and thus heir of all that went before. The Confessors often argued that they had much more in common with the ancient church fathers than with the Church of Rome. Rejecting the errors of both Rome and the Calvinistic, Zwingilian and

¹Kurt E. Marquart, "The Church of the Augsburg Confession as the True Ecumenical Movement," Lutheran Synod Quarterly 8 (Winter 1967-68):82.

Anabaptistic groups, they held fast to the truth they shared with each.

The Preface to the Book of Concord affirms solidarity with believers in other groups "who err ingeniously and do not blaspheme the truth of the divine Word."² They rejected only those who persistently taught "false and seductive doctrines" contrary to Scripture and subversive to the Gospel. When teachers of the past or present speak the truth, they speak as members of the Una Sancta and thus speak the same truth which we also confess and teach. We are not only willing to learn from such persons³ but rejoice in including their contributions as part of the richness of the Christian faith which we share with them to the extent that they too confess God's truth.

These gifts are the possession of the entire Una Sancta, and every member shares in every testimony of the Gospel, wherever witnessed, in the mission work for Christ in every part of the globe, in every God-pleasing exegetical and dogmatical contribution, no matter by whom offered, in short with every victory for Christ made by any Christian, regardless of denominational connection. That is implied in the very term 'fellowship.' It means that all Christians share each other's joys and sorrows. We rejoice with those who gain conquests for Christ. We grieve with those who for the Gospel's sake must endure hardship.⁴

In contrast to the radical Reformers who wanted to remove any semblance of the Church of Rome from their churches, Luther retained much of the liturgical and architectural heritage of the Medieval Church. Unlike men like Carlstant, Zwingli, or Calvin, Luther saw himself as

²Preface to the Book of Concord, ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), pp. 11-12.

³Hermann Sasse, Here We Stand, trans. Theodore G. Tappert (New York: Harper and Bros., 1938), p. x.

⁴F. E. Mayer, "The New Testament Concept of Fellowship," Concordia Theological Monthly 23 (September 1952):637.

part of a continuing tradition which included the truth which was retained and preserved in Rome, even while rejecting the paganism, legalism, and anti-evangelical features he also found there. Even today we include liturgical forms and hymns in The Lutheran Hymnal and the newer Lutheran Worship produced by people who were in many ways heterodox. But when their hymns and forms exalt the Gospel and proclaim the truth they speak as part of the Una Sancta itself. The Lutheran church can therefore afford to be the broadest of all churches, recognizing truth wherever it is found, whether in Rome, in the Church Growth or church renewal movements or anywhere else.

On the other hand, the Lutheran Church is not inconsistent with its basic principles when it rejects in strongest terms the errors of these same groups and persons, for only the truth edifies and only the truth they teach has its source in the mind of Christ through the Holy Spirit. Error never edifies but only subverts the Gospel, and is unfaithful to God's Word and thus weakens the Christian faith. Such errors never have their origin in the mind of Christ, but are pagan elements introduced by Satan (compare the response of Christ to Peter, who had just confessed him as "the Christ, the Son of the living God" in Matt. 16:16-23).

We have relied heavily on Hermann Sasse's chapter, "The Lutheran Church and the Una Sancta"⁵ in his classic Here We Stand as a guide here. Sasse notes a paradox which continues to bewilder people outside of the Lutheran Church. On the one hand,

⁵Sasse, "The Lutheran Church and the Una Sancta," Chapter V of Here We Stand, pp. 171-80.

We are confident that the Evangelical Lutheran Church which is faithful to its Confessions is truly the church of Jesus Christ; that its office of teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments is an office instituted by Jesus Christ; and that it is effectual by reason of the institution and commandment of Christ, even if it is exercised by weak and sinful men; that Christ, the Lord, is really and personally present in the Word and Sacraments of our church, and that the communion of saints, the fellowship of justified sinners, is built up in our midst by the Word and Sacraments.⁶

And yet, Sasse contends that

The Lutheran Church has perhaps outstripped all the other churches in acknowledging that the true church of Christ is present in other denominations too. Our church speaks advisedly when it says, with Luther, that the pope -- not the person of a single pope, but the papacy as an institution -- is the Anti-christ. But it does not fail to recognize that the Antichrist is seated in the church. The 'abomination of desolation' -- the papacy with its monstrous, blasphemous claims -- has its seat in St. Peter's in Rome. And yet sins are forgiven there, and men are reborn there to eternal life through Holy Baptism.⁷

There seems to be a contradiction here: On the one hand, the Reformed are refused the right hand of fellowship along with Rome, and yet, because other Christians also are part of the visible church,

The Lutheran Church is one of the very few churches in Christendom which has never under any circumstances, engaged in propaganda for itself or conducted missions among Christians of other persuasions.⁸

⁶ Ibid., pp. 172-73.

⁷ Ibid., p. 173.

⁸ Ibid., p. 175. At this point this writer parts company with Sasse and apparently with Luther as well, particularly as this issue involves the adherents of Roman Catholicism as well as certain modernistic Protestants. True, their pastors are responsible for the spiritual welfare of their flocks, but can a refusal to witness where the Gospel is denied be squared with 1 Peter 3:15 and other passages which tell us to be ready at any time in any context to witness to the truth? Other issues are involved as well.

For one thing, it is interesting to note the use of 2 Cor. 6:14 in the Lutheran Confessions ('Do not be yoked together with unbelievers for what fellowship can light have with darkness'). This is quoted four times, according to Tappert's index, each time in a way that at least includes the Roman Church (Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope, 41; F.C. X, Ep., 6; and twice in F.C. X, S.D., 6 and 22) in each case in reference to fellowship. Two comments are in order on this use of the

If the participant believes he is defending the Word of God and not merely searching for a truth not yet attained, he is obligated to press for a mind change in his opponent. If that is not evangelization, what is?

Guidelines for Adopting and Adapting From
Non-Lutheran Sources

What has been said thus far is that, since the Holy Spirit also works among other Christians (for otherwise they would not even be Christian, 1 Cor. 12:3; Rom. 8:6-9), Lutherans may use whatever they contribute to the whole Christian Church with joy and thanksgiving. This does not give one the right to join in church work with errorists, or violate our Lutheran principles of church fellowship for the sake of any expediency.

passage: In the first place, the context (2 Cor. 6:14 - 7:1) calls upon the hearer to 'Come out from them and be separate' (v. 17, also cited in F.C. X, S.D., 6) which, if applied to the Roman Church, would mean calling upon the Christians to leave that church body and go in an orthodox Church! Secondly, the passage class the errorists 'unbelievers,' part of an unrighteous' fellowship in 'darkness.' Moreover, a parallel passage, Rev. 18:4, ('Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues') refers to fallen Babylon the Great, understood to be a code-word for Rome and traditionally applied by orthodox Lutherans to the papacy, would also require a message to the victims of Romanist error to 'come out of' that body and to reject her errors.

Granting the Mark of Baptism is present even there, we wonder if we may speak with such certainty about the true Christian Church being present in certain syncretistic cultures in Latin America which even Roman Catholic missionologists admit is often 'Christ-paganism,' (See R. Ross Kinsler, 'Mission and Context: The Current Debate about Contextualization,' Evangelical Missions Quarterly, January 1978, pp. 22-23.

Finally, we raise the question about whether repudiating anything that smacks of proselytizing nominal Christians does not in fact involve an artificial distinction between evangelism and confession of faith, as takes place in religious dialogue.

Moreover, two errors should be avoided: first, to say that only Lutherans can produce good materials. One must avoid objecting to all evangelism or church growth on the ground that some proponents are errorists. Secondly, that one may cooperate with error in any form or tolerate it.

One must also avoid the naive notion that programs, methods, and techniques developed outside of our fellowship are produced in a theological vacuum. Any well thought out methodology will be supported by profound theological presuppositions. We must learn to listen critically, sorting out the good from the bad. The Bible tells us to "test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil" (1 Thess. 5:21-22). Laymen must be taught to distinguish truth from error. Someone has said, "The ability to think is the ability to make distinctions." Maturity includes the ability to separate the wheat from the chaff. "Solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil" Heb. 5:14. Test every program, method or technique by the touchstone of the Scriptures and the Confessions. We dare not forfeit our heritage,

Hans-Lutz Poetsch's warning is timely and well-taken;

We note in their efforts to make up for lost time the churches take lessons from the "Evangelicals" and strive to adopt as much as they can from them - including evangelistic methods. Churches often do this without seriously considering the question whether this is feasible in every case, especially in the presence of deep-etched doctrinal differences. This is true especially with regard to Evangelical-Lutheran churches. It can be demonstrated almost without exception that Pietistic-Evangelical associations are influenced by a Calvinistic understanding of the means of grace, sometimes in exaggerated form. For the present we will not deal with extreme groups like those who have been influenced by Charismatics and

Pentecostals. In the case of most Evangelical groups a strong emphasis on the Word as means of grace is counter-balanced by a devaluation or even rejection of the sacraments.⁹

Earlier the same author had written,

Evangelization endeavors in Lutheranism, where they actually existed and led to systematic activity, as a rule adopted methods of the Evangelicals, sometimes cautiously adapted to the requirements of Lutheran congregations. Only rarely did they consider whether the basic confessional and theological differences between Lutheranism and Pietism -- especially with regard to the doctrines of sin and of man's enslaved will, of conversion, of the sacraments, and with a view to ecclesiology -- necessitate establishing a different theological basis for Lutheran evangelization. At present the Christian book market throughout the world is swamped by a flood of evangelical-Calvinistic literature, while it is difficult to find any genuinely Lutheran position. Where courses in evangelism are taught - at theological academies, seminaries, and Bible schools - there is practically no knowledge of Lutheran publications on this theme.¹⁰

Tragically, Poetsch is right. His essays are a step towards developing a full-fledged Lutheran theology of evangelism, and deserve a wider readership than they have received thus far. This paper is an attempt to help fill in the void Poetsch pointed out.

Epilogue

Two points bear repeating in summation. It is our earnest prayer that the words spoken by our Lord to the church at Philadelphia, recorded in Revelation 3:7-8 may be said of our Lutheran Church when our history is recorded in the Book of Life.

There are the words of him who is holy and true, who hold the key of David. What he opens, no one can shut; and what he shuts, no one can open. I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.

⁹ Hans-Lutz Poetsch, "Means of Grace and Evangelization," Evangelium, April 1979, p. 37.

¹⁰ Poetsch, "Thoughts on 'Church Growth Theory,'" Evangelium, August 1978, p. 65.

We will note but two points from this rich section of this letter to one of the seven churches of Asia. First, Christ sets an open door of opportunity before his Church. With three billion people who do not know Christ, no generation has had greater responsibilities or more doors before it. Whatever else may be said about John Mott, about Kenneth Strachan, about Billy Graham, and about the fathers of Key 73, they were determined to enter the door of missions which Christ set before them. Joel Gerlach's words to his own (Wisconsin) Synod must be heeded by us as well:

As for us, we cannot and will not be participating in Key 73. We could, however, do worse than to participate. We could sit idly in the bleachers on the sidelines watching the parade go by. We can see the same moral rot and decay resulting from a lack of salt which prompted the planning of project Key 73. If it impels others who have not the whole truth to action, how much more ought not we to be impelled. It is time for us to attune our ears diligently to the directives of the One who marshals us with a call to carry on His project.¹¹

Secondly, Jesus says to the Christians in Philadelphia, "I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my words and have not denied my name." We have a great task. The temptation is great perhaps especially for us who believe God's Word and trust Christ as our Savior, to say, "Let's get on with it! Let's stop the squabble over doctrine, and reach out with the Gospel!" But the only tool we have with which to reach a lost world in his Word! As we consider how little our strength is, and as we are tempted by the siren song which calls on us to compromise a bit for the sake of our cause, let's pray that Christ will say to us also: "You have kept my word and have not denied my name." A

¹¹ Joel Gerlach, "Key 73: Evangelistic Failure, Ecumenical Success," Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly 71 (April 1974):276.

long generation ago, as war clouds gathered over his German homeland, Hermann Sasse recalled to our minds that the same hymn that prayed "Send peace and unity on earth" also prayed "Lord, keep us steadfast in They Word." That is our prayer also as we bring this project to a close. It is only as we keep the two words of Christ in creative tension "I have placed before you an open door" and "You have kept my word and have not denied my name." The first depends on the second. Sasse wrote:

It is quite possible that the history of the church will demonstrate . . . that confessional loyalty, which is so often stigmatized as "sectarian mindedness," has contributed more toward true church union than the kind of tolerance which, in the name of brotherly love, has received every type of error with open arms. The Lutheran churches . . . pray with each other, and for each other, and at the same time for all Christendom on earth, in the words of the Reformer's hymn: "Lord, keep us steadfast in They Word!"¹²

¹²Sasse, Here We Stand, p. xi.

APPENDIX I

APPENDIX KEY 73 GUIDELINES (CTCR)

We thank and praise God for all those who with us realize that the Gospel of Christ is His power unto salvation to all who believe it and for the opportunity that the Key 73 program presents to proclaim that saving message in "Calling Our Continent to Christ." Unfortunately, not all church bodies are in doctrinal agreement. Therefore participating in a venture such as Key 73 involves pitfalls and inherent dangers which ought to be avoided in the interest of the proclamation of Scriptural truth. It was for this reason that Synod's decision to participate in the Key 73 program was under the explicit condition that such participation "not violate our doctrinal positions" and be "to the extent that our fellowship principles permit" (Resolution 8-02, 1971 Proceedings, p. 187). To aid members of the Synod, the Commission on Theology and Church Relations was directed to draft guidelines for participation in the Key 73 program. Under the theme "Calling Our Continent to Christ," the Key 73 program is so structured as to provide for participation on essentially three levels:

a. Separately: Those parts of the program done by the churches on their own.

b. Simultaneously: Those things done by the individual church concurrently with other participating churches.

c. Cooperatively: Those things done jointly by the churches. Each church has the privilege of determining for itself the degree and level of participation.

The greatest degree of tension would arise for members of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod on the cooperative level of participation. It is especially urgent that The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod avoid any activity that would negate its distinctively Lutheran witness. Care should be taken that we do not implicitly or explicitly convey an attitude of indifference to Scriptural truth and thereby negate the witness that confessional Lutheranism can and must make in our day. This concern would apply particularly to joint participation in rallies, worship services, prayer meetings, and such other cooperative activities where our doctrinal position may be compromised. But the principle must also be applied to all aspects of the program.

Lutheran theology has a unique contribution to make in such an evangelization effort. The Christ honoring proclamation of God's pure grace and of man's need for it because his nature is depraved, the proper distinction and use of Law and Gospel, and the emphasis upon the depth of God's love seeking an estranged and alienated mankind when man would have none of Him are such distinctively Lutheran doctrines to which we must bear witness in any evangelism program in which we participate. In light of the above factors, it is the recommendation of the CTCR that;

1. The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod's participation be principally on the separate level. Many things for which The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod assumes separate responsibility, however, may well be

carried out simultaneously to maximize the impact on the community.

2. The Synod's Board of Evangelism provide literature, tracts, worship, and publicity materials which communicate what is distinctively Lutheran.

3. The training of callers, canvassers, and counselors be carried out by our own personnel, using materials recommended by the Synod's Board of Evangelism.

4. Worship services, prayer meeting, rallies, and such gatherings be conducted under Lutheran auspices, either by members of the Synod or with others with whom the Synod is in fellowship.

5. The Board of Evangelism provide Bible study materials suitable for neighborhood Bible study groups of use by our people.

6. The members of the Synod in all things try to uphold and observe in the doctrinal position and the fellowship policies of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.

7. The members of the Synod implore the blessing of Almighty God that the efforts of the Key 73 program, under His grace and by the power of His Holy Spirit, may lead many to faith in Jesus Christ and salvation.

APPENDIX II

A plea to all evangelicals:

"SOMEHOW, LET'S GET TOGETHER!"¹

This is a rallying cry for evangelicals everywhere. It is addressed to millions of evangelicals in mainstream Protestantism who chafe under the debilitating restraints of conciliar ecumenism and are frustrated by its lack of biblical challenge, and to additional millions who witness as best they can from the fragmented fringes of independency.

To all these we plead, "Somehow, let's get together!"

There are signs of a fresh longing, particularly among younger evangelicals, for dramatic new dimensions of fellowship across denominational lines. Increasingly the need becomes evident for a greater framework of cooperation as evangelicals seek to witness to the world of the sovereignty of Christ. The fullest possible impact of evangelical Christianity upon the world in the remaining portion of the twentieth century can come only through coordinated effort.

This is not to say that evangelicals now lack a conscious identity. There is no more recognizable block in all of Protestantism, despite their mass-media invisibility. Their common ground is belief in biblical authority and in individual spiritual regeneration as being of the very essence of Christianity. They are people of the Book, alive to God's good news.

¹Christianity Today, June 9, 1967, pp. 24-26.

But this common ground is crisscrossed by many fences. Evangelicals differ not only on secondary doctrines but also on ecclesiology, the role of the Church in society, politics, and cultural mores. No honest observer would minimize the extent to which they are divided.

Yet are not Bible-believing Christians called to rise above these differences in the interest of winning lost men and women to Christ? And if the Scriptures exhort believers to Christian unity, can these differences really be thought insurmountable? If evangelicals keep the Bible in the forefront of their preaching, what are they to do with its emphasis on unity and its requirement of all-encompassing evangelical loyalty to Jesus Christ?

I therefore . . . beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all (Eph. 4:106).

Paul's classic passage on Christian unity loses no inspiration or authority because conciliar ecumenists appeal to it *ad infinitum* to promote mergers and remergers in the absence of renewal. Independent evangelicals intensely fear an inclusive church, and for this reason their preachers often ignore the theme of unity; yet this passage remain as much God's Word as John 3:16 - and no Christian dare neglect it.

Evangelicals tend to emphasize the spiritual unity they already have, not organizational and structural prospects for the future. They

prize a unity, moreover, that has its focus not merely on subjective considerations but on the objective realities of the Christian faith. Yet they are increasingly impelled to ask whether, in an age of diminishing denominational loyalties, they may not also need some more visible framework through which to confront the world with the Gospel.

A minority of evangelicals have already grouped under a structural umbrella; 2.5 million belong to the National Association of Evangelicals. There is a question, however, whether NAE, if its present structure is not altered, will be able to attract the large number of evangelicals in mainstream denominations.

The current posture of NAE notwithstanding, there is growing evidence of the uneasiness of evangelicals over their fragmentation, both in North America and abroad. A leading Southern Baptist clergyman, Dr. Jess Moody, has publicly urged a cooperative evangelical thrust for world evangelism, "not an organic union but a mutual pooling of our collective forces." Moody made the plea in an address prepared for delivery before the Southern Baptist Pastors Conference May 29. He said:

All over the world there are large evangelical fellowships made up of brethren who have nothing to do with liberal Christianity or the present ecumenical movement. They are fagots just waiting for a match to set them afire.

If the Holy Spirit burns the New Testament mandate upon the hearts of evangelicals, they may be led to seek a corporate manifestation of biblical faith. Such a new manifestation should include not only evangelicals related to NAE and independent groups outside its ranks, from the so-called left wing of the Reformation (such as Southern Baptists), but also those from conservative denominations deriving from

a Reformation tradition (Missouri Synod Lutherans) and, perhaps most importantly, those from the great Negro churches and other ecumenically aligned mainstream denominations (Presbyterian, Episcopal, Methodist, and so on).

It is appalling to think that millions of American evangelicals who believe alike on the essentials of Christianity have never linked themselves together for any venture of faith other than Billy Graham crusades. These crusades alone, however, have shown the hunger of evangelicals to work together as well as their ability to do so, when proper leadership is available. Yet countless persons of "like precious faith" continue to go it alone. Is it really the will of God for his children who share the same faith to go on competing with one another for the same coverts?

If under the aegis of the ecumenical movement and its conflicting ideologies so many churchmen can claim a unity, ought not evangelicals, bound together not only by God's grace but also by like mindedness on the supreme authority of Scripture and doctrinal basics, to claim a much more wholesome and realistic unity?

The reasons for evangelical cooperation are increasing as the rationale for isolation declines. Although evangelicals will continue to disagree, certainly there are a few major objectives on which they can cooperate. The problem is to arrive at a consensus on these.

Ecumenical leaders often suggest that it is more important to avoid organizational overlapping and competition and the image of division than to stand for certain fundamentals. This approach repels many evangelicals. But if evangelicals really have a common faith to protect, they should be able to project it in common. More and more

evangelical leaders are voicing the hope of working together on points of agreement, however limited. Some ask whether, in reaction to unity for the sake of unity, evangelicals, by indifference to wider cooperation, may not actually be promoting a disunity for the sake of disunity.

The evangelical penchant for individualism being what it is, rapprochement will be neither easy nor fast. It will meet still opposition. It will probably be painful. But the cost will hardly be as high as the cost of evangelical fragmentation.

No one will deny that the ecumenical spirit is in the air. The pressures to identify are mounting. CHRISTIANITY TODAY fears that unless evangelicals form a more solid front, the ecumenical movement will begin to fragment them further. Geneva is waving the olive branch at what it terms the "conservative evangelicals." It is not enough to ask where and how the conciliar movement really responds to evangelical priorities. Many churches within ecumenically aligned denominations, and many more individuals within these churches, are not comfortable in the conciliar environment. They may be expected to cooperate fully on a broad evangelical base if the opportunity comes.

The answer may well lie in a church-by-church identification in addition to, if not in place of, present conciliar ties. This would have the advantage of more direct involvement at grass roots. Part of the failure of the present ecumenical movement is the great distance between the man in the pew and the officialdom that is responsible for all programs. The gap is so vast that laymen are largely indifferent.

Also, church-by-church membership would obviate direct competition with the conciliar movement. Some objectives might even be shared, but in many areas evangelical distinctives would conflict with conciliar aims.

Whatever a broader cooperative evangelicalism does, it should provide valuable, objective, tangible services to local congregations and individual church members. It should put something in the parishioners 'hands' - not just posters and bulletin covers to advertise the movement but material that is immediately useful, desirable, and indeed indispensable.

One possibility might be a mass-circulation weekly evangelical newsmagazine to keep constituents abreast of developments; another, a weekly newsmagazine or sophisticated evangelical book programs, insurance and pension plans for independents, financial pools for new building construction, and so on.

The way to begin might be to take an exhaustive poll of American evangelicals. To what extent would they favor greater cooperation, and on what grounds? What are their anxieties about cooperation? What services would they like to have? In what ways would they be willing to participate? Perhaps those polled, if they favored evangelical reapproachment, would suggest churchmen who could sit down under an interdenominational umbrella and work out the most likely grounds for cooperation.

The problem in establishing an agency for broad evangelical cooperation is probably not so much finding the right creedal and functional base as attracting the necessary leadership. Where are the selfless, talented evangelicals who would be willing to sell themselves in order to sell this idea and develop strong grass-root motivation? It is probably at this point that the prospect of greater evangelical unity is most vulnerable.

Those chosen to lead the evangelicals must not only be dedicated and able men who arouse public confidence; they must also be idea men. Wider evangelical cooperation depends on a succession of good new ideas. Ideas that will catch the imagination of the man in the pew. Anything less will be subject to dismissal as a reactionary movement.

Evangelicals have a lot going for them. Theirs is more than a church; it is Christianity with a cause. Evangelicals have a wide area of agreement on doctrinal essentials. They are the most active and aggressive of all Protestants. They have the highest per-capita giving. They turn out the most ministers and missionaries. They are the most faithful in prayer, in Bible study, and in witnessing to their faith.

Why ought not they also be able to point to a tangible fellowship? Is it not time for evangelicals to stand up and be counted together for things that matter most, for a commitment to fulfill more perfectly Christ's will "that they may be one, even as we are one"?

We urge laymen and clergy alike to speak up in their churches and to pray that God will see fit to call out initiators. We invite evangelical leaders to begin immediate discussion of the merits and methods of establishing wide cooperation. We hope that many evangelical editors will react to this editorial in their own pages. We trust that officials of all Christian organizations and mission boards will communicate with their constituencies and draw out opinions. And we solicit comment and criticism in the hope that responsible discussion will lead to action.

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