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CHRISTIAN ADMONITION AND THE PRACTICAL  
IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CHURCH

SHORT TITLE

**CHRISTIAN ADMONITION**

A Thesis submitted to the  
Faculty of Graduate Studies, York University,  
Department of Practical Theology  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Divinity

by

James H. [Name]

June 1978

Approved by

*[Signature]*

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The problem to be discussed in this thesis is Christian Admonition and its practical implications for the Church. There is evidence of a renewed emphasis on the practice of Christian admonition among the lay members of the Church. This renewed emphasis, therefore, offers valid reason to restudy the Scriptural teachings on admonition and to consider what has been written on this subject in the history of the Church. It appears to the writer that such an emphasis is very necessary in these days when there is a definite need for strong faith among Christian people. Hence, on the basis of Scripture and the writings of the Church, implications will be drawn which have evident bearing on the present situation of the Church.

When speaking of Christian admonition in this thesis, no reference is made to the formal ecclesiastical machinery preparatory to excommunication. Rather this thesis deals with the ongoing, everyday activity of admonishing, warning of sin, strengthening and building up of faith that should go on between Christian brothers at all times.

[This definition] would imply all that the Church does to train its members in living a godly life, all the instruction, admonition, exhortation, and reproof, both by public preaching and in private intercourse of members among themselves and of members and pastor, by which Christians are to be trained to become always better children of God.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>G. L., "Church Discipline," The Lutheran Witness, XV (August 7, 1896), 34.

The Church is a body of Christians bound together in bonds of faith and love, forming a spiritual alliance for the purpose of strengthening and encouraging one another.<sup>2</sup>

The Christian's care for the spiritual life of the fellow Christian extends beyond his meeting of emergencies and setbacks in the life of the brother. It seeks to supply the living Word of God, as the food of life, to the brother richly and continually.<sup>3</sup>

Thus the Christian brother is to be concerned about his brother in the daily affairs of life, always endeavoring to guide him from the path of sin and to bring God's Word to him for the strengthening of his faith.

In preparing this thesis, the writer has employed the Scriptures of the New Testament and the writings of the men of the historical and contemporary Church. The thesis is organized on a fairly rigid chronological basis, except where such arrangement would detract from the thesis. The second chapter considers what Scripture has to say regarding the subject of Christian admonition. The third chapter deals with some of the writings of the Church from the Apostolic Fathers down to the present time. The fourth chapter draws implications from this material that would apply to the Church of today. In the final chapter, conclusions are drawn.

In using the material from the Scriptures, various pertinent

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<sup>2</sup>A. W. Lilly, "What is the Duty of the Church Toward her Delinquent Members?" Lutheran Quarterly, VIII (1878), 230.

<sup>3</sup>Richard R. Caemmerer, The Church in the World (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1949), p. 83.

passages were quoted and explained on the basis of commentaries, notably The Expositor's Greek Testament and The International Critical Commentary.

In considering the vast amount of material available in the writings of the historical Church, the writer has chosen only that which would seem to apply in the most pertinent manner. In doing this, he has tried to give a fair overview of each age and each period of the Church, with a somewhat heavier emphasis on the very early writings and the writings of the contemporary Church.

On the basis of this study, the following conclusions were drawn. The practice of Christian admonition is Biblical, valid, and important for the life of Christians. There have been periods in the history of the Church in which the practice of Christian admonition has not been sufficiently emphasized in her writings. The writers of the Church have tended to be one-sided regarding this practice, putting more emphasis on regaining the brother in mortal sin than on building up the faith of the brother in everyday contacts with him. Finally, there seems to be a change in the writings of the Church of today, putting more emphasis on this daily upbuilding in faith, which happens as one Christian brings God's Word to another.

## CHAPTER II

### THE BIBLICAL TEACHING ON CHRISTIAN ADMONITION

In order to get the final word on any matter concerning Christian doctrine or life, one must always go to the Scriptures to see what God says in His Word. Hence, in order to be sure that it is God's will that Christians edify and admonish their Christian brother, one must see what the Scriptures say on this matter.

The basis for the practice of Christian admonition is the fact that each soul is precious in the eyes of the Maker and Redeemer. God doesn't want any of His children to perish eternally. Of this Christ speaks in Matthew 18:12-14.

How think ye? if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray? And if so be that he findeth it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray. Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.

Under the very forceful picture of a concerned shepherd, the Lord pictures His concern for His children.

Christians, then, should obey the will of God also in the matter of Christian admonition. Since a soul is so precious in the sight of God, should it not be just as precious to other of God's children here on earth, the Christian brothers? "The parable teaches the precious characteristically Christian doctrine of the worth of the



individual at the worst to God."<sup>1</sup> God accepts man at his sinful worst. So also the Christian must accept his brother and help him to improve by admonishing him.

The concern which the Christian is to have for a brother is not something that can be accepted or neglected. God has placed upon each Christian the obligation to perform this service for his brother. That is part of the Christian's life, one of the obligations laid on him when he was made a child of God. Paul, writing to the Romans, Rom  
8 (15:14) speaks of this when he says, "And I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another." Paul takes it as accepted fact that the Christian man has the ability and the duty to admonish his brother. Paul praises his readers by telling them how they excel in goodness and in Christian knowledge. They are also, then, able to admonish one another. "In a sense therefore [these Christians are] self-sufficient."<sup>2</sup>

This is not a unilateral affair, however. The Christian brother is obligated to return this service to the one who has admonished and edified him. There is to be no other way. Just as one Christian returns the love of another, so also he is to return the edification

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<sup>1</sup>Alexander Balmain Bruce, "The Synoptic Gospels," The Expositor's Greek Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, n.d.), I, 239.

<sup>2</sup>James Denney, "St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans," The Expositor's Greek Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, n.d.), II, 711.

and admonishment of another. The great man of God, Paul, told his Roman readers that they must feel the obligation to strengthen him, just as he wanted to strengthen them in their faith (Romans 1:11-12). *Rom*

For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end that ye may be established; that is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.

Thus even Paul does not claim that all the giving will be from his side. He wants to be strengthened by the faith which both of them possess and which they each recognize in the other.<sup>3</sup> Paul does not place himself above these average Christians. If he hopes to give anything to them, he expects to receive in an equivalent measure from them.<sup>4</sup>

Martin Luther puts himself in a similar position when he writes:

I am indeed a Doctor of Theology and many tell me that they were signally advanced in their knowledge of Holy Scripture through my help. But I have also experienced that I was helped and cheered through a single word of a brother who believed himself to be in no sense my equal. There is tremendous weight in the word of a brother which, in an hour of emergency, he adduces from Scripture. For Holy Scripture's inseparable companion is the Holy Spirit who moves hearts in more than one way and consoles through the Word.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 588.

<sup>4</sup>William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam, "A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans," The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1906), XXXII, 21. This set is hereafter referred to as ICC.

<sup>5</sup>Martin Luther, "Commentary on Psalm 90," Luther's Works (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), XIII, III.

Seeing how these great men followed the Lord's command in regard to the practice of mutual Christian admonition, other Christians are to make their admonishments a two-way street of strengthening and encouraging one another in faith and in the exercise of that faith.

Whenever one man undertakes to admonish another and tell him that he has done wrong, the danger is always present that the admonishing brother will become puffed up with pride. When this happens, the effect of the witness is seriously curtailed. Paul writes (Galatians Gal 6), "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted." The admonishing Christian is here tempted in two ways, to become proud and to commit the same sins as did his brother. Commenting on this verse, The Expositor's Greek Testament says:

The treatment of offenders belonged to the Church collectively, but each member needed to examine himself individually, in order that he might fulfill his part with due humility and sympathy.<sup>6</sup>

Taking this verse to refer to the temptation for the admonishing Christian to commit the same sins as did his brother, Dr. Berner writes:

Failure to bear witness against wrong will result in a moral breakdown within ourselves. . . . To be silent when we ought to speak is to consent to a wrong. To condone wrong in others leads to condoning it in ourselves.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Frederic Rendall, "The Epistle to the Galatians," The Expositor's Greek Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, n.d.), III, 188.

<sup>7</sup>Carl Walter Berner, Spiritual Power for Your Congregation (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), p. 54.

The Christian is to admonish his sinning brother in the spirit of meekness. This is the only spirit of admonishing acceptable to God and the brother. One is not to raise himself above the brother, but, in all meekness and sympathy, approach him and try to lead him on the way to everlasting life. Only then can the witness to the brother be effective.

In verse two of Galatians six, St. Paul further exhorts the Christians, when he says, "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." This does not mean that the Christian must bear his own and his brother's burdens. Rather it would say that Christian love is always ready and eager to relieve the burden of the brother when the load becomes crushing.<sup>8</sup> This "burden-bearing" also is a part of the practice of Christian admonishing and edifying.

What, then, is the purpose or reason for Christian admonition? Certainly its purpose is and always must be born of a concern for the salvation of a sinner. Paul says in his second letter to the people in Thessalonica that the man who did not obey the apostle's injunctions was not to be classed as an enemy of those of the faith. This disobedience was not to put him out of the brotherly fellowship. Rather it was to cause the other Christians to recognize that this brother was in danger and they were to rally around him to support him. Paul tells his readers (II Thessalonians 3:15) "Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother." Paul wants them

Purpose

II Thes

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<sup>8</sup>Bendall, op. cit., p. 189.

always to realize that these offenders are still brothers.<sup>9</sup> Because they are brothers, and not enemies, "discipline [must] be administered in love and with the sole purpose of repentance and reform."<sup>10</sup>

Disapproval, as a means of moral discipline, loses all its effect if the offender does not realize [sic] its object and reason, or if it is tainted with personal hostility.<sup>11</sup>

This concern for keeping the brother in the faith was also echoed by the Lord in Matthew 18:15-16:

Moreover, if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.

The emphasis is always on gaining the brother. If one fails in his attempt, then he is to take reinforcements. The eternal welfare of the brother is at stake. Nothing is too much effort.

This passage in Matthew does not refer only to sins against a particular person.

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<sup>9</sup>John Cassian, "The Twelve Books of John Cassian on the Institutes of the Coenobia, and the Remedies for the Eight Principal Faults," A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church (Second Series; Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1955), XI, 272.

<sup>10</sup>James Everett Frame, "A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Paul to the Thessalonians," ICC (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1912), XXXVII, 310.

<sup>11</sup>James Moffatt, "The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians," The Expositor's Greek Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, n.d.), IV, 53.

One excuse often offered is that Christ, according to their interpretation, enjoined on them to exercise Christian admonition only in the case that "thy brother has trespassed against thee," that is, if the sin is in the nature of a personal offense. Yet, any sin committed by the erring brother is a trespass "against thee," as long as it comes to your notice, since it affects you as a brother.<sup>12</sup>

There are cases when even this united witness of "two or three" to a brother will not be sufficient. Continuing in his sin, he will have to be put out of the fellowship of the believers. Even in this extreme act, the sole purpose is to gain the brother. If excommunication causes him to see the error of his ways and he repents, the Christian brothers should immediately receive him back into the Christian fellowship. Paul dealt with such a case in Corinth. In his second letter to these people, he warned them not to be too hard on this repentant brother, who now wanted to rejoin the fellowship. He writes (II Corinthians 2:7-8):

So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow. Wherefore I beseech you that you would confirm your love toward him.

This man's grief was evidently great, and there must have been danger that he would despair of ever being received back.<sup>13</sup> They were told to be on their guard, lest he "be driven to despair through overmuch

<sup>12</sup>Herman W. Bartels, "Gain Thy Brother," The Lutheran Witness, XLII (January 16, 1923), 17.

<sup>13</sup>Alfred Plummer, "A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians," ICC (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1915), XXIII, 59.

severity."<sup>14</sup> These Christians were to make sure that their brother knew that they loved him and were ready to forgive him. Again the brother must not be lost.

The Christian's concern, then, in the practice of Christian admonition is not only to be able to point out to a brother that he has sinned, but that the admonishing Christian also be concerned with the strengthening of that brother's faith. Paul writes (I Corinthians 14:26):

How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying.

All other spiritual gifts lose their maximum efficaciousness if they are not used for the building up of the Church. Even so the Christian's admonishing of his brother is to serve to build up in faith, even as the Christian warns his brother of his sin. "Edification must once more be insisted on as the true aim of all."<sup>15</sup>

In Ephesians four, Paul presents the Christian Church under the picture of the Body of Christ. He stresses that there is to be continual growth in this Body and of this Body. This kind of growth is accomplished individually. However, the Christian must be concerned

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<sup>14</sup>J. H. Bernard, "The Second Epistle to the Corinthians," The Expositor's Greek Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, n.d.), III, 46.

<sup>15</sup>G. G. Findlay, "St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians," The Expositor's Greek Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, n.d.), II, 911-12.

enough to see that it happens also by the working of one brother on another. In verse twelve, Paul tells us that this work is not to be done by the pastor alone. The pastor is there primarily to equip the other saints of the Body to build up one another.<sup>16</sup>

Such men as Erasmus, Luther, DeWette, Rueckert, Weiss, and Haupt recognize this interpretation of Ephesians 4:12.

The sense [of the passage] becomes "Christ gave some men as Apostles, some as prophets, etc., with a view to the full equipment of the saints for the work of ministration of service they have each to do in order to the building up of the body of Christ." . . . Each member gets the gift of grace, and each has his part to do towards the upbuilding of the Church which is the great object of Christ's bestowments; and these Apostles, prophets, etc., are the means provided by Christ whereby all the members shall be made capable of performing their several parts in order that at last the whole Church may be built up in its completeness as the body of Christ.<sup>17</sup>

After these Christians are equipped to do the work of the ministry to the brother, then they must be certain that they actually do it. Paul outlines how this gets done when he says (Ephesians 4:15-16):

But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

The emphasis here is on the growth of the whole Body, not of the

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<sup>16</sup>C. August Hardt, "Christian Fellowship," Concordia Theological Monthly, XVI (July 1945), 448-49.

<sup>17</sup>S. D. F. Salmond, "The Epistle to the Ephesians," The Expositor's Greek Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, n.d.) III, 331.



individual parts.<sup>18</sup> However, as brothers in Christ, who together form this Body, speak to one another in love, the individual and the Body are edified.

This upbuilding can also be done by one's self. In fact, there is again an obligation to do this alone as well as in the fellowship of the believers. In the next chapter of Ephesians, Paul warns the Christians not to be drunk with wine, but rather filled with the Spirit. After a man is thus filled with God's Spirit, then these wonderful things begin to happen in his life and in the life of those around him. Men begin to grow as these Spirit-directed words are spoken. Paul urges Christians to be (Ephesians 5:19-21)

speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your hearts to the Lord; giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.

In the same breath in which he speaks to Christians regarding their own upbuilding, Paul tells them to submit to one another; to be able to take the Spirit-directed admonishment from the brother.

Certainly it must be admitted that the Christian has an obligation to admonish each of his Christian brothers. However, the primary concern of each Christian must be for the weak brother. For it is the weak brother who is in the greatest danger of losing his faith. Since the Christian's concern is that no man lose his faith, his first concern must be for those for whom this condition is most immediate.

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<sup>18</sup>T. K. Abbott, "A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians," ICC (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1905), XXXV, 127.

The apostle further addresses the Christians in Thessalonica (I Thessalonians 5:14), "Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feeble-minded, support the weak, be patient toward all men." The Greek word here translated as "feeble-minded" would more properly be rendered with the word "fainthearted" or "discouraged."<sup>19</sup> The proper emphasis for this passage then comes to light, namely, support for those who are discouraged or weak in their faith.

Both The Expositor's Greek Testament<sup>20</sup> and The International Critical Commentary<sup>21</sup> take the above passage to refer to the rank and file members of the Church. Hence, the responsibility for encouraging the discouraged and building up the weak in faith devolves upon every Christian. As Luther writes:

Scripture expressly tells us to "encourage the fainthearted" (I Thessalonians 5:14) and that "a dimly burning wick should not be quenched" (Isaiah 42:3) but rather nurtured. . . . Therefore the Spirit reminds and admonishes us everywhere that Christians have authorization from God Himself to teach and console one another.<sup>22</sup>

This admonishing of brother Christians can and should certainly be done whenever and wherever it is needed by anyone. However, in

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<sup>19</sup>William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 567.

<sup>20</sup>James Moffatt, "The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians," The Expositor's Greek Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, n.d.), IV, 41.

<sup>21</sup>Frams, op. cit., p. 196.

<sup>22</sup>Luther, op. cit., p. 111.

addition to this admonishing in the daily intercourse of people, Scripture states that it can be effectively accomplished in the corporate worship service. In fact, that is one of the reasons why Christians should come together to worship frequently. Paul writes of this to the Colossians (3:16-17):

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him.

As Christians sing and speak in church worship services, they are admonishing and edifying the Christian brother. This same thing happens when the pastor speaks, for he is speaking in the name of and in the place of the Christians in the pew. The services of worship can be effective means for accomplishing this very necessary admonishing and edifying.

The passage in Colossians (3:16-17) need not refer exclusively to the public worship. However, worship services are certainly included.<sup>23</sup> The emphasis is on making the singing of every kind of spiritual song "a vehicle of religious instruction and admonition."<sup>24</sup> This can be accomplished within or outside the worship service.

The writer to the Hebrews stresses this same note of admonition taking place in the worship setting. Yet, at the same time he adds a

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<sup>23</sup>Abbott, *op. cit.*, p. 291.

<sup>24</sup>A. S. Peake, "The Epistle to the Colossians," The Expositor's Greek Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, n.d.), III, 511.

new note that places urgency on the matter of the practice of Christian admonition. (Hebrews 10:24-25)

And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

Chrysostom comments on this:

For that day cometh so as a thief in the night. Knowing this, let wives exhort their husbands, and husbands admonish their wives; let us teach youths and maidens, and all instruct one another, to care not for present things, but to desire those which are to come, that we may be able also to obtain them.<sup>25</sup>

In order to carry out the apostle's command (v. 24a), Christians should not neglect such gatherings for worship and encouragement, especially in these last days.<sup>26</sup> Christians are to encourage one another to practice their Christian love. "Since this is only possible when common worship and fellowship are maintained, the writer warns them against following the example of abandoning such gatherings."<sup>27</sup>

The urgency of this business of practicing Christian admonition is born of an eschatological emphasis. The note is always one of

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<sup>25</sup>John Chrysostom, "The Homilies of St. John Chrysostom on the Gospel of St. John," A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church (First Series), New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1890), XIV, 172.

<sup>26</sup>Marcus Dods, "The Epistle to the Hebrews," The Expositor's Greek Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, n.d.), IV, 347.

<sup>27</sup>James Moffatt, "A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews," ICC (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1924), XXXIX, 146.

time running out. Let Christians be about the business of building up brother Christians.

The Christian church... ready to heed... have... referring... witness of the church of England...

From the very beginning... about a brother... April and again the... writings... mutual Christian... He tells his readers... whole group of Christians...

In 180 A. D. the... stating the... states that the poor... brothers. This...

1 Clement, "The First Epistle to the Corinthians" (1887), The Ante-Nicene Fathers (1887), III, 213-14.

2 Eusebius of Caesarea, "The History of the Church" (1891), Northwick's Series, 1891, III, 11.

## CHAPTER III

### THE WITNESS OF THE CHURCH

#### The Church Fathers

As the Christian gladly hears the witness of the Scriptures, so is he also ready to heed the example and witness of the saints who have gone before. In the previous chapter, various words of Scripture regarding the practice of Christian admonition were adduced. The witness of the church of history and of today must now be heard.

From the very beginning, men of the Church have been concerned about a brother admonishing and praying for his Christian brother. Again and again the early Church fathers emphasize this in their writings. Clement, Bishop of Rome in the late first century, encourages mutual Christian admonition in his epistle to the people of Corinth. He tells his readers that through this kind of mutual admonition the whole group of Christians is united to the will of God.<sup>1</sup>

In 110 A. D. The Pastor of Hermas speaks of the early Christians praying for their brother's spiritual welfare. The author specifically states that the poor even prayed for the welfare of their rich Christian brothers.<sup>2</sup> This indicates that there should be no class distinction

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<sup>1</sup>Clement, "The First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians," The Ante-Nicene Fathers (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899), IX, 215-46.

<sup>2</sup>"Pastor of Hermas," The Ante-Nicene Fathers (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899), II, 32.

in the practice of Christian admonition.

The liturgical formulae recorded in The Constitutions of the Holy Apostles have several instances of prayer being made for the brethren. These writings contain prayers for the newly enlightened brethren that they might be strengthened in faith and also for the older Christians that they might be kept in the faith.<sup>3</sup>

Writing in a similar vein in the early third century, Cyprian exhorts his readers to pray for the brethren. Writing to the peculiar situation of that time, he especially asks his readers to pray for the lapsed. However, he includes also those who have not fallen away that they might be strengthened.<sup>4</sup> Cyprian is very specific in stating that only priests are permitted to forgive sins. "Whence we perceive that only they who are set over the Church and established in the Gospel law, and in the ordinance of the Lord, are allowed . . . to give remission of sins."<sup>5</sup> At one point, Cyprian goes so far as to state that the power to remit sins is reserved for the bishop who stands in the apostolic succession.<sup>6</sup>

In the third century the emphasis regarding who is to admonish

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<sup>3</sup>"Constitutions of the Holy Apostles," The Ante-Nicene Fathers (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1896), VII, 118-86.

<sup>4</sup>Cyprian, "The Epistles of Cyprian," The Ante-Nicene Fathers (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1896), V, 310.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 381.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 394.

and forgive sins seems to be shifting. Origen, writing in the first half of the third century, shifts this obligation from the priests and bishops alone to include also the lay people. He states that any Christian who proceeds according to the three stages of admonition of <sup>7</sup>Matthew eighteen has the right to retain the sins of those who do not heed this admonition. His accent in the context, however, is on the fact that the main concern of Christians is to gain and keep the brother through such admonishing.<sup>7</sup>

Speaking as a representative of the Eastern Church of the late fourth century, Chrysostom has much to say in his sermons to his people regarding their duty to admonish one another. He tells his hearers not to spend too much time considering their own condition of being set free from sin. Rather they are to be able to give God ten of their friends whom they have corrected.<sup>8</sup> This Patriarch of Constantinople speaks of the obligation to practice Christian admonition in the home. He advises his hearers to make the practice of Christian admonition a regular practice in the family circle also.<sup>9</sup>

In order that his people might know exactly how to practice Christian admonition, Chrysostom speaks very specifically about a

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<sup>7</sup>Origen, "Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew," The Ante-Nicene Fathers (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899), IX, 493-94.

<sup>8</sup>John Chrysostom, "The Homilies on the Statutes to the People of Antioch," A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church (First Series; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1900), IX, 481. Hereafter this set will be referred to as NPN.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.



method of doing it.

Desest thou wish to correct a brother? Weep; pray unto God; taking him apart, admonish, counsel, entreat him . . . Show thy charity towards the sinner. Persuade him that it is from care and anxiety for his welfare, and not from a wish to expose him, that thou puttest him in mind of his sin.<sup>10</sup>

Chrysostom shows his people what a serious matter is the necessity for admonishing the brother. He further drives home this point by showing how serious a matter it is not to rebuke the brother when such a rebuke is called for. He tells his people that when they do not admonish they are hurting themselves and their brother also. "Seest thou that the not rebuking those that sin is a damage both to the master and the disciple?"<sup>11</sup>

However, this admonishing must not be done just once and then forgotten. Frequently in his writings, Chrysostom tells his readers that the admonishing must be repeated until the brother has been persuaded that he must refrain from his sinning.<sup>12</sup> He further points out that admonishing a brother in his sin and exhorting him to refrain from sin should be as normal and aseasy as saying "Hello" or "Good-bye."<sup>13</sup> Above all, Chrysostom advises his hearers not to be ashamed to continue to admonish a brother. "For to be continually reminding

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 359.

<sup>11</sup>John Chrysostom, "The Homilies of St. John Chrysostom on the Second Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians," NIN (First Series; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1889), XII, 350.

<sup>12</sup>Chrysostom, "The Homilies on the Statues to the People of Antioch," pp. 541-52.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 425.

men of the same topics is not the fault of the speaker, but of the hearer.<sup>14</sup> Chrysostom asks his hearers to consider God's dealings with people and then follow God's example.

Every day God is addressing us, and we do not hear; and yet He does not leave off speaking. Do thou, therefore, imitate this tender care towards thy neighbour. For this reason it is that we are placed with one another; that we inhabit cities, and that we meet together in churches, in order that we may bear one another's burdens, that we may correct one another's sins.<sup>15</sup>

Above all, Chrysostom would have his hearers practice Christian admonition because of a love for the brother.<sup>16</sup> The Christian must be harsh and yet his love for his brother must always shine through.<sup>17</sup> Especially is this true in the case of those who are already somewhat broken in spirit. For a lack of love in such a case might just harden the brother's heart.<sup>18</sup> Commenting on the Lord's words in Matthew 18:15, Chrysostom tells his hearers:

And He saith not, "Accuse," nor "Charge him," nor "Demand satisfaction, and an account," but, "Tell him of his fault," saith He. For he is in a kind of stupor through anger and shame with which he is intoxicated; and thou, who

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 379.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 452.

<sup>16</sup>John Chrysostom, "The Homilies of St. John Chrysostom on the First Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians," NPN (First Series; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1889), XII, 266.

<sup>17</sup>John Chrysostom, "A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles," NPN (First Series; New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1889), XI, 99-100.

<sup>18</sup>John Chrysostom, "The Homilies of St. John Chrysostom on the Epistle to the Hebrews," NPN (First Series; New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1890), XIV, 396.

art in health, must go thy way to him that is ill, and make the tribunal private, and the remedy such as may be readily received.<sup>19</sup>

Chrysostom often impresses it upon his hearers that each one needs the other. God made people in such a way that they need one another to supply those things lacking in themselves.<sup>20</sup> Thus when one admonishes a brother, the brother should realize that such admonition is to be reciprocated when such need arises.<sup>21</sup>

Chrysostom suggests a unique arrangement which he wishes his hearers to employ. He advises them to set up partnerships for this mutual admonishing.

Inasmuch as we are of ourselves too listless, let us make partnerships with each other, and pledge ourselves to contribute counsel, and admonition, and exhortation, and rebuke and remembrance, and threatening; in order that from the diligence of each we may all be amended.<sup>22</sup>

Through all of this, Chrysostom stresses for his hearers that the layman can and should practice Christian admonition. In fact, he says that the layman can often do a more effective job of it than can the pastor because the layman meets his fellow man on a different

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<sup>19</sup>John Chrysostom, "The Homilies of St. John Chrysostom on the Gospel of Matthew," *NPN* (First Series; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1888), I, 372.

<sup>20</sup>John Chrysostom, "The Homilies of St. John Chrysostom on the Gospel of St. John," *NPN* (First Series; New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1890), XIV, 67.

<sup>21</sup>Chrysostom, "The Homilies of St. John Chrysostom on the Epistle to the Hebrews," p. 505.

<sup>22</sup>Chrysostom, "The Homilies on the Statues to the People of Antioch," p. 418.

level than does the pastor.<sup>23</sup>

Ambrose, writing to Christians of the late fourth century, lays an obligation upon them to admonish and reprove even those brother Christians who have committed mortal sin.<sup>24</sup> Ambrose pictures the body of believers as a community of people redeeming the brother from sin by their tears of concern.

And well is it said "Purge," for he [the sinner] is purged as by certain things done by the whole people, and is washed in the tears of the multitude, and redeemed from sin by the weeping of the multitude, and is purged in the inner man.<sup>25</sup>

Unless Ambrose is referring to the Church as a redeeming community in the sense that the mutual exhorting of brothers in the Church is an avenue for the Gospel, the writer would have to disagree, since Christ is the only Redeemer from sin.

Augustine, Bishop of Hippo in Africa in the early fifth century, writes to his people in very strong words telling them how they are to practice Christian admonition. He tells them that the voice of chiding should have tones of terror, but at the same time the spirit of love should always be evident.<sup>26</sup> "Let us reprove with words, and if

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<sup>23</sup>Chrysostom, "The Homilies of St. John Chrysostom on the Epistle to the Hebrews," p. 504.

<sup>24</sup>Ambrose, "Two Books of St. Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, Concerning Repentance," NPN (Second Series; Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1955), X, 339.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 342.

<sup>26</sup>Augustine, "Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament," NPN (First Series; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903), VI, 385.

need be with scourges; . . . [but let] gentleness . . . not depart out of the heart."<sup>27</sup> Augustine goes on to say that if such discipline is relaxed, wickedness will increase and the Christian people will be accused before God.<sup>28</sup>

However, Augustine warns that Christians are not to be concerned only with reproof and correcting the brother. Christians are to help the brother amend his sinful life, rather than merely to find fault with it.<sup>29</sup> In either case, whether one is admonishing or helping the brother to improve his life, the Christian must be extremely careful that he does not become proud. He must never have the tone of insult in his voice when reproofing evil.<sup>30</sup>

Taking example from the Lord Himself, Christians are to make intercessions for one another. In addition to such prayer, Augustine bids his readers continue to confess their sins to one another and receive forgiveness for them.<sup>31</sup>

#### The Reformation Era

In the Protestant Revolt of the sixteenth century, one hears similar notes echoed which have been heard since the beginning of the Christian Church.

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 365.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., pp. 357-58.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., pp. 385-86.

<sup>31</sup>Augustin, "Lectures or Tractates on the Gospel according to St. John," NPN (First Series; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1908), VII, 307.

Dr. Martin Luther, the driving force behind the sixteenth century Reformation, tells his readers that each Christian, in addition to the preachers and pastors, has an obligation to judge and rebuke his sinning brother. This is done on the basis of a love for that brother.<sup>32</sup> Using the picture of a physician's care for a sick person, Luther shows what Christian admonition is to be.

Look what a faithful physician does with a sick child. He does not run around among the people and broadcast it; but he goes to the child and examines his pulse or anything else that is necessary, not to gratify his pleasure at the cost of the child, nor to make fun of him, but with the good, honest intention of helping him.<sup>33</sup>

Luther placed great significance on the universal priesthood of each believer; that each man is a priest before God for himself and also for his brother. Luther points out to his readers that they should confess their sins in secret to their brother Christian. From this brother Christian, they would receive absolution, an absolution as valid as if God Himself spoke it directly.<sup>34</sup>

In emphasizing the rights of the individual Christian, Luther never forgot the fact that the individual Christian is always a member of a group or a body of Christians. In this Church, or Christenheit,

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<sup>32</sup>Martin Luther, "The Sermon on the Mount," Luther's Works (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), XXI, 223.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>34</sup>Martin Luther, "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church," Works of Martin Luther (Philadelphia Edition; Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1943), II, 252, 424. This set hereafter referred to as Phila. Ed.

the prayers and good works of all must serve to strengthen and help each individual.<sup>35</sup> The individual is never alone. The group bears the sins and pains of the individual. From the group, the individual receives strength.<sup>36</sup>

Dr. Luther laid great emphasis on the values received in the Lord's Supper. One of these values is that the individual there takes his needs and weaknesses and in return receives the strengthening of his faith.

We need to come together to enkindle such a faith in one another by example, prayer, praise, and thanksgiving, as I have said above, and through the outward seeing and receiving of the sacrament and testament to move each other to the increase of this faith.<sup>37</sup>

Thus Christ, in like manner, shares His strength with Christians. As Christians partake of Christ in this Supper, so also Christians partake of one another. The entire group of the spiritual body supports the individual.<sup>38</sup>

All of the gifts that God has given the individual, Luther says, are to be used for the upbuilding of the Christian. These gifts were not given for the pleasure of that individual, but for the edifying

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<sup>35</sup>Martin Luther, "A Brief Explanation of the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord's Prayer," Phila. Ed., II, 373.

<sup>36</sup>Martin Luther, "The Fourteen of Consolation for such as Labor and are Heavy Laden (Tessaradecas Consolatoria)," Phila. Ed., I, 165-66.

<sup>37</sup>Martin Luther, "A Treatise on the New Testament, that is, the Holy Mass," Phila. Ed., I, 319-20.

<sup>38</sup>Martin Luther, "A Treatise concerning the Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body of Christ and concerning the Brotherhoods," Phila. Ed., II, 13, 21, 26.

of many individuals.<sup>39</sup> Those strong in faith are to support, undergird, and carry the weak in faith, just as the skeleton carries the flesh.<sup>40</sup>

Menno Simons, a member of the left wing of the Reformation and a contemporary of Dr. Luther's, is very emphatic in his writings regarding Christian admonition. He points up that this admonishing should be done immediately, before the Christian eats, sleeps, or does anything else. The soul of a brother is in grave danger.<sup>41</sup>

### The Lutheran Confessions

The Confessional Writings of the Lutheran Church mention the duty of mutual admonition among Christian. Christians are under an obligation to reprove evil in a sense similar to that obligation under which governments are placed. The Christian is not to gossip about the error of his brother, but rather he is to reprove it.<sup>42</sup> In addition to speaking of the necessity for the Christian to reprove the evil of his brother, The Formula of Concord also urges the Christian to exhort his brother to a more diligent practice of good works.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Luther, "The Sermon on the Mount," p. 218.

<sup>40</sup>Martin Luther, "Commentary on Psalm 90," Luther's Works (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), XIII, 112.

<sup>41</sup>Menno Simons, "A Kind Admonition of Church Discipline," The Complete Writings of Menno Simons (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1956), 411-12.

<sup>42</sup>Martin Luther, "The Large Catechism," Trilot Concordia: The Symbolical Books of the Ev. Lutheran Church (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), 659.

<sup>43</sup>"Formula of Concord," Trilot Concordia: The Symbolical Books of the Ev. Lutheran Church (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), 951.



Although the public minister usually absolves, the Tractatus speaks of the layman becoming a pastor of another in a case of emergency.<sup>44</sup> In The Smalcald Articles, the mutual conversation and consolation between brother Christians is spoken of as an avenue for the Gospel. It is linked up with the Word spoken in the public preaching, Baptism, and the Sacrament of the Altar.<sup>45</sup>

#### The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod

Through the years, the Church has continued to urge her members to practice mutual Christian admonition. The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod of the twentieth century has also written some articles on the practice of brotherly Christian admonition.

Again the same emphasis is given. The Christian, in admonishing his brother, is to be very firm and harsh, but, at the same time, the admonished brother must realize that all of this is a sign of love from his brother. Stern hatred for sin and yet love for the person of the sinner must always be evidenced.<sup>46</sup> The brother must never be led to think that a Christian is being unbrotherly in admonishing him.

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<sup>44</sup>Philip Melancthon, "Of the Power and Jurisdiction of Bishops," Trilog Concordia: The Symbolical Books of the Ev. Lutheran Church (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), 523.

<sup>45</sup>Martin Luther, "The Smalcald Articles," Trilog Concordia: The Symbolical Books of the Ev. Lutheran Church (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), 491.

<sup>46</sup>Walter H. Bouman, "The Practical Application of Matthew 18:15-18," Concordia Theological Monthly, XVIII (March 1947), 190.

Rather, by their admonishment, the Christians "show that we are concerned about the spiritual welfare of our fellow believers."<sup>47</sup>

A very strange distinction was made in one article in The Lutheran Witness. The author tells his readers that only the serious sins are worthy of Christian admonition.

We are not speaking of small defects and sins of weakness, which cling even to the best Christians. The sin must be of such a serious nature that it excludes from the Kingdom of God.<sup>48</sup>

It seems to the writer that this is a very questionable distinction to make. The writer would think that any sin, whether done out of weakness or committed for any other reason, would be one that should call for Christian admonition from a Christian brother.

Yet, even as a Christian reproves the sin of the brother, he must be ready also to comfort and forgive the brother who is already penitent. This comfort can come only from the Gospel assurance of the forgiveness of that sin.<sup>49</sup>

Again the very familiar accent on pure motives is evident. The only reason for Christian admonition is that the Christian brother might be gained. If this is not the motive of the admonisher, then

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<sup>47</sup>C. August Hardt, "Christian Fellowship," Concordia Theological Monthly, XVI (July 1945), 455.

<sup>48</sup>Theodore Dautenhahn, "Go and Tell Him His Faults," The Lutheran Witness, LI (October 25, 1932), 369-70.

<sup>49</sup>C. A. W., "Absolution," The Lutheran Witness, XIV (April 7, 1896), 162.

he had better seek forgiveness for himself.<sup>50</sup>

In the important task of saving souls from despair and destruction, the Christian must not rely on his own strength, but he must take Jesus with him.<sup>51</sup> In Jesus, class distinctions are forgotten, for in Him men become brothers.<sup>52</sup>

In the New Testament *κοινωνία* the elder shares the simple faith of the child; the learned theologian in the remarkable insights of the humble peasant; the successful pastor in the victory of the experienced Christian in the pew.<sup>53</sup>

This fellowship expresses itself in the local congregation in the desire to work together and to worship together with fellow Christians.

Surely, then, we cannot but feel an ardent desire to be in each other's company, to sing, to pray, to rejoice together over the priceless treasures that are ours, to build ourselves up in our most holy faith, and to work together in the close harmony for the cause which is near and dear to our heart.<sup>54</sup>

In one of the articles in the Concordia Theological Monthly, the author uses three apt pictures to make concrete what it means to practice Christian admonition. The first picture is that of mountain climbers "tied to each other so that when one falls, the others may uphold him. Shall we do less for our brethren?"<sup>55</sup> The second picture is that of

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<sup>50</sup>Herman W. Bartels, "Gain Thy Brother," The Lutheran Witness, XLII (February 13, 1923), 50.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid.

<sup>52</sup>Hardt, op. cit., p. 455.

<sup>53</sup>F. E. Mayer, "The New Testament Concept of Fellowship," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXIII (September 1952), 644.

<sup>54</sup>Hardt, op. cit., p. 441.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 448.

"stones of an arch, strengthened in position by their joint presence and pressure."<sup>56</sup> In the third picture, Christians are shown to be rocks with rough edges and sharp corners. "We need much polishing and chiseling before we fit perfectly into the holy temple of the Lord."<sup>57</sup>

This study of the official writings of The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod in the twentieth century indicates that there has been and still is a dearth of articles on the practice of mutual Christian admonition. Looking at materials written by the rest of the Church of this period, which will be considered in the next section of this thesis, a greater emphasis on the practice of mutual Christian admonition can be documented.

#### The Contemporary Church

In The Lutheran Quarterly, a publication of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the late nineteenth century, several articles appeared which place great significance on the need for constant and ongoing Christian admonition. Any inconsistency in Christian life on the part of a Christian brother is to arouse deep concern on the part of the rest of the Christians, for the body of believers is a holy union.<sup>58</sup> Attendance at worship was again mentioned as a useful means for practicing Christian admonition.

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<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 450.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., p. 456.

<sup>58</sup>A. W. Lilly, "What is the Duty of the Church Toward her Delinquent Members?" Lutheran Quarterly, VIII (1878), 229-30, 240-41.

The Christian's presence at church services, he knows, will cheer his brethren and tend to advance the common welfare, as his absence must discourage others and weaken the sense of common interest in sacred things.<sup>59</sup>

Writing a small book to set forth the history and purposes of the Lutheran Church for the English-speaking people of the late nineteenth century, Joseph Siess, a Lutheran clergyman, spoke out firmly on the necessity of mutual admonition. He emphasized the fact that Gospel absolution must be ministerially conveyed. However, he sees many different people possibly serving as ministers, such as, authors of inspired or uninspired books, or friends speaking to other friends.<sup>60</sup>

If ever any one is to obtain Gospel absolution, the word of that absolution must be ministerially conveyed to him. . . . If he gets it through intercourse with some pious friend, then that friend is the minister who speaks it to him.<sup>61</sup>

Not only a need for admonition, but also doubts should call forth the words of comfort and encouragement from a Christian friend. The Church, individually and collectively, must never treat these doubting brethren harshly, but lead them and admonish them with words of truth and with prayer for the Spirit.<sup>62</sup>

Even though each Christian has this power and authority to pronounce absolution on a penitent brother, this power is usually delegated to one of their group for greater efficiency. The Power of the Keys is

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<sup>59</sup>Charles E. Hay, "Status and Treatment of the Non-Communing Adult Member," Lutheran Quarterly, XXI (1891), 558.

<sup>60</sup>Joseph A. Seiss, Ecclesia Lutherana (Philadelphia: Gaxton Press of Sherman and Co., 1869), pp. 164, 168.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., p. 165.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., p. 186.

then centered in this public minister in a greater degree of intensity than that found in the other individuals.<sup>63</sup> As the public minister speaks the public absolution, each Christian is there speaking the absolution to each brother Christian through the appointed pastor.<sup>64</sup>

Again worship is brought out as a very effective means of admonishing and building up the brother Christians in the faith.

The Church puts "psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs" into the lips of her people, to strengthen their faith, exercise their devotional feelings, and refresh their souls.<sup>65</sup>

Writing in the early twentieth century, S. P. Long, a pastor of the Lutheran Church, points out a need for confession among brother Christians. He even makes confession to a brother a sine qua non for inner peace.

God not only demands of a sinner that he confesses his sins to God, but he demands that that sin must be confessed to some man, some place, somewhere, and you never can have peace until you do that.<sup>66</sup>

Such confession of sin to a brother makes one stronger and less apt to fall into sin in the future.<sup>67</sup>

John Maud stresses a very important point in speaking of man's

<sup>63</sup>At the same time it must be granted that the public minister has also received the Power of the Keys and his office of ministry directly from God, as well as through the group of Christians.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., pp. 167-68, 170-71.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., p. 193.

<sup>66</sup>S. P. Long, The Way Made Plain (Columbus, Ohio: The H. J. Heer Printing Co., 1913), p. 153.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., p. 168.

relation to man in a Christian brother relationship. He points out that God uses man to pour out His love and power to other men.

"God's way out to men is always through man."<sup>68</sup>

In the year after the formation of the World Council of Churches, Sydney Cave points away from these great united movements to the individual and his responsibility for fulfilling the Christian task. The official ministry cannot handle the job. It is the work of all to all.<sup>69</sup> Thus as men face the problems of the modern world, "we may do so not in isolation but in association with those who have experienced God's mercy and are seeking to do His will."<sup>70</sup> The individual must be in association to get strength from and to give strength to his Christian brothers.

Writing in the same year, Richard Caemmerer strives to show Christians that they can operate and grow only as they live and work in a close relationship with one another in a Christian fellowship that shows itself in love. This love is not just a pious sentiment, but an active searching for ways to build up the brother in his faith. This can be accomplished in worship or outside it, but it must be accomplished for this is "the Church at work to itself."<sup>71</sup> What is meant by Christian fellowship?

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<sup>68</sup> John P. Maud, Life in Fellowship (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1924), p. 77.

<sup>69</sup> Sydney Cave, The Christian Way (New York: Philosophical Library, Inc., 1949), pp. 272, 276.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 263.

<sup>71</sup> Richard R. Caemmerer, The Church in the World (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1949), pp. 7, 12-3.

We mean that Christ, the Head of and the Life in each of the Christians, makes a difference in their mutual relation and causes each one to become a source of supply for the love and message, the witness, of the other.<sup>72</sup>

The Swiss theologian, Emil Brunner, accents the need for faith in the strengthening of the brother Christian in the Church. This faith, made possible through the Word of God, is the act of sharing in the process of restoration of a brother to the divine fellowship.<sup>73</sup>

This faith must manifest itself in love and service to the Christian brother. "The communio must become the communicatio omnium bonorum."<sup>74</sup>

"God summons us to serve Him and therefore to serve His world. . . . There is no individual Christian ethic. . . . God's command places us in relation to our neighbour, not to ourselves."<sup>75</sup>

One of the foremost theologians of the Swedish Church, Gustaf Aulen, emphasizes the importance of worship and the Lord's Supper as a strengthening agent in the life and fellowship of the brothers. In these the Christian receives strength for a new and richer fellowship with his brother.

The inmost character of the activity of the church is revealed in Luther's statement that the Christian is to be "a Christ for the neighbor." In other words, that the neighbor through Christians apprehends something of the blessings of divine love.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>72</sup>Ibid., pp. 81-2.

<sup>73</sup>Emil Brunner, The Divine Imperative (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1947), p. 302.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., pp. 233, 534-35

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., p. 189.

<sup>76</sup>Gustaf Aulen, The Faith of the Christian Church (Philadelphia: The Muhlenberg Press, 1948), pp. 392-420. Explanation of the phrase "Christ for the neighbor" p. 370.



Having experienced in a very unique and real sense what it means to live a life in community, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German pastor and modern-day Christian martyr, shares his feelings of the value and meaning of the life in fellowship. In Christ, Pastor Bonhoeffer says, and in Him alone, can the Christian have access to his Christian brother. The fellowship exists only because there is a connection for each of the brothers to Christ.

[Spiritual love] will find full fellowship with the Christian brother in the Christ who alone binds us together. Thus the spiritual love will speak to Christ about a brother more than to a brother about Christ.<sup>77</sup>

This membership with others in the Body of Christ is a very necessary thing, for "it is the unity of the whole Church which makes each member what he is and the fellowship what it is."<sup>78</sup> This fellowship is not a figment of someone's imagination, but a very real thing in which Christians participate. As Christians participate in this fellowship, they are serving the whole body, either to its welfare or to its destruction.<sup>79</sup> This makes each Christian responsible for the sins of his brother.

We may suffer the sins of our brother; we do not need to judge. This is a mercy for the Christian; for when does sin ever occur in the community that he must not examine and blame himself for his own unfaithfulness in prayer and intercession, his lack of brotherly service, of fraternal reproof and encouragement, indeed, for his own personal

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<sup>77</sup>Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Life Together (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1954), pp. 21, 36-9.

<sup>78</sup>Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1957), p. 187.

<sup>79</sup>Bonhoeffer, Life Together, pp. 30, 89.

sin and spiritual laxity, by which he has done injury to himself, the fellowship, and the brethren?<sup>80</sup>

Bonhoeffer pictures for his readers the various areas and means given the Christian for this witness to the brother to build him up in his holy faith. This is done as a Christian speaks God's will to his brother, whether it be the judging Word of God or the sweet word of salvation. In both the Christian is serving his brother. "Nothing can be more cruel than the tenderness that consigns another to sin. Nothing can be more compassionate than the severe rebuke that calls a brother back from the path of sin."<sup>81</sup>

As the Christian witnesses to a brother, he must recognize the difference between the strong and the weak faith. To both he must show great patience. As he speaks to the brothers and bears them, he is also assured that they are bearing him. In this he finds strength to go on.<sup>82</sup>

Pastor Bonhoeffer becomes very specific in giving various avenues for the Christian brother to become an aid to another brother. First, one Christian brother is to listen to another.<sup>83</sup> Prayer together and singing together in worship and outside of worship are also valuable aids to witnessing to the brother.<sup>84</sup> The highest type of fellowship,

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<sup>80</sup>Ibid., pp. 102-3.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., pp. 23, 105-7.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., pp. 100-3.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., p. 97.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., pp. 61-2.

with its accompanying strengthening of the brother, is found in the Lord's Supper itself.<sup>85</sup>

Brotherhood is very important for the Christian, Bonhoeffer writes. The sinning brother impresses the fact upon the Christian that neither of them can live without the other. In this brother the Christian finds God, and in this brother the Christian meets the whole congregation. Confession of sins to an individual is confession of sins to the whole congregation and to God. For as the brother speaks forgiveness to the sinning brother, then, and only then, can the Christian be sure of God's forgiveness. Only before the brother, then, can a Christian dare to be a sinner, because only in the brother can the Christian find God's mercy in Christ.<sup>86</sup> "In the presence of a psychiatrist I can only be a sick man; in the presence of a Christian brother I dare to be a sinner."<sup>87</sup>

Dean Pike of the Episcopal persuasion presents the idea of mutual admonition under the picture of the Kingdom of God. The persons united in this Kingdom have united their lives and talents in such a way that a maximum relationship between them exists for the strengthening of each.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup>Ibid., p. 122.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., pp. 28, 92-3, 111, 113, 116-7.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid., pp. 118-19.

<sup>88</sup>James A. Pike, Doing the Truth: A Summary of Christian Ethics (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1956), pp. 37-8.

Writing for the Moody Press, Godfrey Robinson speaks for the necessity for a sharing relationship among Christian people. They are to share Christ. They are to share their problems to receive strength from the brother. They are to share their Christian experience.<sup>89</sup>

Robinson Crusoe Christians, however, are just not possible; for Christian fellowship is not an optional extra, but is an essential part of the Christian life. To be a Christian is to share the common life of the Body of Christ.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>89</sup>Godfrey C. Robinson and Stephen F. Winward, The Way: A Practical Guide to the Christian Life (Chicago: Moody Press, 1957), pp. 63, 65-6.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid., p. 62.

## CHAPTER IV

### PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

In order to get the most value from a study of Scripture and history such as this, it would seem logical that the practical implications be drawn for the Church of today. Only then can history and Scripture become relevant for Christians of a later time, such as the present.

First, there seems to be a definite need for a more diligent practice of brotherly admonition among Christians today. As Christians learn to admonish their brother, they must also be as ready to accept his admonition. Sensing this need for a more diligent practice of brotherly admonition, C. August Hardt writes in the Concordia Theological Monthly,

Would to God that brotherly admonition were practiced much more diligently in the Church than it is and that all were as ready to accept reproof as they are to administer it.<sup>1</sup>

Second, all Christians must realize that the practice of Christian admonition is the concern of all, not of the pastor alone. Christ has plainly assigned to each Christian the duty to watch over and strengthen his brother Christian.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>C. August Hardt, "Christian Fellowship," Concordia Theological Monthly, XVI (July 1945), 455-56.

<sup>2</sup>Theodore Dautenhahn, "Go and Tell Him His Fault," The Lutheran Witness, LI (October 25, 1932), 369.

It is not the institution of official inquiry, not the setting in operation of disciplinary machinery that is first needed, but the quick, warm protest of personal concern.<sup>3</sup>

The official public disciplinary action in a Church is often undertaken much more readily than the daily, private Christian admonition.

The latter is to be encouraged.<sup>4</sup>

Third, Christian people have an obligation to all the members of the Church to nurture and strengthen them, but especially is this true in regard to the newly confirmed members. This sort of thing can be accomplished through example, as well as by words. The kind of example necessary includes regular attendance at worship and the Lord's Supper, daily Bible study and prayer, consecrated giving, and an eagerness to work in the Church.<sup>5</sup> In this way, the members of the Church by their example can give a powerful witness to their fellow members.

Fourth, Christians should welcome opportunities to get together with their fellow Christians. Any such gathering can and should

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<sup>3</sup>Charles E. Ray, "Status and Treatment of the Non-Communing Adult Member," Lutheran Quarterly, XXI (1891), 571.

<sup>4</sup>The writer realizes that, in most cases, the official disciplinary action is undertaken very reluctantly, if at all. However, at the same time, he thinks that there is an even greater reluctance to practice private Christian admonition. If any action is taken in a given situation, it is usually an official action, rather than a private matter of one Christian admonishing another.

<sup>5</sup>David A. Davy, "The Church's Obligation to the Newly Confirmed," The Lutheran Witness, XXXIV (January 12, 1915), 83.

result in a mutual edification. "In Hebrews 10:25 Ἐπισυναγωγὴν is more than just worship. It is any gathering for mutual edification."<sup>6</sup>

In the present age, there is a stress on companionship in every area of life. The Church can well utilize this desire on the part of its members to get together. These gatherings can become opportunities for mutual up-girding. It must be granted that not all such gatherings of Christians serve the purpose of edification. However, any time Christians get together, in small groups or large, there can and should be such edification.

Fifth, it would seem that the pastors of the Church today are going to have to take the lead in helping their members to see their duty in the area of mutual Christian admonition. By education, by example, by providing opportunity for this type of Christian admonition to be practiced, the pastor can do much in helping his members to help one another to a more vital faith.

Sixth, part of the education program of the Church in helping its members to grow in the practice of Christian admonition might be a discussion of the qualities needed for living with other Christians in close fellowship. Some of these qualities are: 1. loyalty (no gossiping), 2. candor (speaking the truth in love), 3. responsibility (no parasites in the Body of Christ), 4. co-operation (learning to give in), 5. patience and forgiveness ("The Church is not a fellowship

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<sup>6</sup>Hardt, op. cit., p. 450.

of perfected saints, but of forgiven sinners."), 6. humor (able to laugh with others and at one's self).<sup>7</sup>

As the writer sees it, these are some of the implications for the Church today of a study of the Scriptural and historical writings on the practice of Christian admonition.

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<sup>7</sup>Godfrey C. Robinson and Stephen F. Winward, The Way: A Practical Guide to the Christian Life (Chicago: Moody Press, 1957), pp. 68-9.



## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS

Having considered some of the writings of the Christian Church through the ages and the words of Scripture on the practice of Christian admonition, it is well that one draw conclusions on the basis of this study.

It is readily apparent that mutual Christian admonition is a Biblical concept. This practice of Christian admonition is repeatedly stressed in the Scriptures. The Scriptures relate Christian admonition to the universal grace and love of God in Christ and to the need for mutual upbuilding of people in the fellowship of the Church. A cross section of these passages has been discussed in the second chapter of this thesis.

Since Scripture speaks of the practice of Christian admonition as an integral part of God's plan of bringing His grace in Christ to people for the upbuilding of their faith, this practice becomes a valid part of the Christian life. Through the centuries, men of the Church have taken this Scriptural emphasis and presented it to their people as a necessary aspect of the Christian life.

The practice of mutual Christian admonition redounds to the eternal welfare of people. Hence, this practice becomes important in the life of each Christian. It is a basic part of the Christian life. It should, therefore, be practiced by all who bear the name Christian.

Judging from materials read in preparation for this paper, it would seem that Christian admonition among Christian brothers possibly has not been emphasized in the past as much as it should have been. The accent in the writings of the Church Fathers seems to shift gradually from speaking of lay admonition and forgiveness to an emphasis on the clergy alone granting forgiveness. This becomes apparent the farther one moves from the Apostolic Age and the closer one comes to the stricter hierarchy. This trend becomes somewhat more evident about the time of Eusebius (Born about 260 A. D.).

The emphasis in the official writings of The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod likewise seems to lean away from ongoing brotherly Christian admonition. They seem to place more emphasis on the work of the Church Council and the pastor. Quoting from the Northwestern Lutheran, The Lutheran Witness recognizes this lack in the life of their church. "One of the great weaknesses of our modern church life is the failure to practice brotherly admonition."<sup>1</sup>

In the writings of the past in the Church, it is evident that her leaders tended to be one-sided in regard to the practice of Christian admonition. Writing about Christian admonition, these writers reveal an emphasis on the regaining or holding in a status quo position, rather than emphasizing, in addition, that Christian brothers are to build up one another in their faith.

Happily, there seems to be a renewed importance attached to the ongoing mutual Christian admonition. This becomes most apparent in

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<sup>1</sup>I. P. F., "Private Admonition," The Lutheran Witness, LXV (August 13, 1946), 65.

reading the materials written in the second half of the twentieth century. It seems to the writer that this is a very welcome change and a very necessary one, since the Church, through such renewed emphasis on mutual Christian admonition, can experience a new vigor and life. If the Church ever needed to be strong, it is in these days of the twentieth century. One of the most effective ways of becoming and remaining a strong Church with a united witness to the world is a continued practicing of Christian admonition among all brother Christians for the upbuilding of the faith of each.

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