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## Miscellanea

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## Miscellanea

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### Dr. Behnken's Address Delivered in Columbus, Ohio May 15, 1942

Last spring when this address was delivered, its complete text was not available to us. For the purpose of preserving it in its entirety, because we consider it an important document, we herewith print it in full. Dr. Behnken gave his address this caption: *Statement Re Organization for "Co-operation in Externals."* The occasion was the meeting of the National Lutheran Council at which the co-operation of all Lutherans in America was proposed and discussed. Dr. Behnken's attendance was pursuant to an invitation.

#### Statement Re Organization for "Co-operation in Externals"

First of all, let me state that we hail with keen delight and with gratitude to God every sincere effort toward genuine unity in the Lutheran Church of America. The matter of Lutheran unity is of deep concern to us and the burden of many a fervent prayer sent to the throne of our gracious heavenly Father.

The Missouri Synod has always supported the cause of Lutheran unity. Efforts to unite the Lutheran Church in America date back to the middle of the last century. They found their origin in a question propounded in the Missouri Synod periodical *Lehre und Wehre* in January, 1856. The writer asked whether a joint meeting of all Synods which bear the Lutheran name and acknowledge and confess the Unaltered Augsburg Confession of 1530 as the pure and correct interpretation of Holy Writ would not be advantageous and conducive toward the establishment of one united Evangelical Lutheran Church in North America. On the strength of this question the *Lutheran Standard* proposed and issued a call for such a meeting, which appeared for two months in all the English, Norwegian, and German language periodicals which were friendly to the cause. As a result, meetings were conducted in Columbus, Ohio, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Cleveland, Ohio, and Fort Wayne, Indiana, extending over a period of several years.

This attitude and position of her fathers is the attitude and the position of the Missouri Synod today. We today are sincerely interested in sound, solid Lutheran unity. Such a desire for genuine unity prompted us to accept the invitation to this meeting, though it is known that our Synod is not a member of the National Lutheran Council. We have come because we feel the importance of the situation in the present emergency. We feel in duty bound to make whatever contribution we can make toward a God-pleasing solution of the grave problems confronting us. We welcome the opportunity again to state what we deem to be an essential requirement unto a truly God-pleasing unity.

We are convinced on the basis of Scripture that a healthy union of Lutheran church bodies in America must rest upon genuine unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace as a foundation. Without this foundation,



the structure would crumble and fall. Irrespective of what may have been said and written about an overemphasis on the necessity of doctrinal unity, the fact remains that the Bible throughout insists upon sound doctrine. Our Lutheran Confessions, our Lutheran Church itself, grew out of the deep conviction that sound Biblical doctrine is necessary. Hence, if we, who bear the Lutheran name, desire to contribute something of enduring value to Lutheranism in America, if we are earnestly concerned about a united Lutheran Church in America—and who is not concerned about this?—we should busy ourselves with whole-hearted efforts to establish sound doctrinal unity. Regardless of opinions voiced to the contrary, this necessitates a deeper study of Biblical doctrine and the correct presentation of Biblical doctrine in our Lutheran Confessions, a thorough discussion of the doctrinal differences which have kept us apart, and, under God's blessings, the attainment of doctrinal unity as God would have it.

The meetings of 1856 and the following years were devoted to the study of the Augsburg Confession. One article after the other was thoroughly discussed until agreement was reached. The minutes of the very first session held in this city in Trinity Church state that those present sought to assure themselves that all present were one in faith and confession and subscribed to the various articles, not only in their essential and substantial points, but in all features according to the very wording of the articles.

Even so we today are vitally interested in laying solid foundations for a God-pleasing union of Lutheran Churches. We are convinced that time cannot be spent more profitably than in earnest endeavor, under God's blessings, to lay a firm and solid foundation.

While we are most eager to have Lutherans united, there is one thing which we want more than union, and that is loyalty, steadfast and persistent loyalty, to divine truth as God has revealed it in the precious Bible. We are so vitally concerned about this, because true union can exist only where there is true loyalty to God's Word. Even world emergencies emphasize the need of solid foundations and warn earnestly against flimsy compromises. Any union based upon any deviation from God's Word or any compromise in matters of Biblical doctrine is doomed to deterioration and ultimate failure. For that reason we plead for an earnest re-study of Biblical doctrine and Scriptural practice before any efforts are put forth to effect any new alliance or new organization.

We are fully conscious of the fact that there are certain fields in which it will be of advantage to have proper co-ordination of efforts. There may be so-called "co-operation in externals" without violation of our principles. By way of example, let us recall the agreement reached in the work of the Commissions for work among the men under the colors. However, such "co-operation in externals" must be kept within proper bounds. It must be limited to actual externals. It must avoid every field which compels others for conscience' sake to decline participation.

We are growing skeptical about "co-operation in externals," because too many either confuse this with the idea of union or else interpret the establishment of co-ordinated efforts as heralds of Lutheran union.



It is unfortunate that there has been some abuse of past agreements and that erroneous information was imparted. Such misuse is very harmful to the cause and gives rise to unnecessary confusion. We regret very much that these things have happened, because people are led to believe that, after all, loyalty to principles of God's Word is a mere fetish, which may be disregarded when any emergency arises. With us differentiation between co-operation in externals and union based on agreement in doctrine and practice is a conscientious matter.

We recognize the advisability of co-ordinated efforts in external matters and are convinced that whatever is necessary in these fields can be accomplished very well without the formation or establishments of a new organization. By way of example, let us think of the work done for the men under the colors. By reaching an agreement which demands that we respect synodical lines and that we avoid unionistic practices by having each group serve its own men, we have confined our joint activities to external matters and have avoided unnecessary complications and difficulties. We are satisfied with such an agreement if it is carried out conscientiously. We are convinced that this is the solution of joint activity in external matters in the field of welfare work among the men under the colors. It was accomplished by conferences between representatives of the two bodies. We feel sure that similar results may be obtained in other fields which afford opportunities of joint activity in mere external matters. They can be accomplished without an intersynodical organization.

We are convinced that an all-Lutheran organization, if effected, should actually represent all Lutherans, otherwise it would fail in its purpose. However, that necessitates serious consideration of the fact that one third of Lutheranism feels in conscience bound to decline participation in an organization which fails to insist upon thorough agreement in doctrine and practice. Surely this fact should weigh heavily in the balances that one third of Lutheranism in America considers doctrinal unity to be the issue of paramount importance.

We are persuaded that the present emergency with all the difficulties and distress which it has foisted also upon the work of the Church, to which we must add the heart-rending appeals, the serious responsibilities, and the enormous tasks of the postwar period, certainly demand a united front in the Lutheran Church. We want such a united front. A united front—God grant that it may actually be a united front, united in faith, united in doctrine, united in unswerving loyalty to every truth of God's Word, united in sound Lutheran practice! To be merely outwardly united, but inwardly disunited, falls short of that God-pleasing goal.

Because the history of the Church furnishes irrefutable evidence that compromises or a disregard for doctrinal unity carry within them the seed of division, disruption, and decay, we plead once more for a thorough re-study of doctrine and practice in our Lutheran Church, and, if God wills, a sound agreement in faith and confession and practice, before we consider the advisability or possibility of any new organization. There is no doubt that our Lutheran Church in America faces tremendous responsibilities. To meet them adequately we must build on solid



foundations. We must teach men to observe all things, whatsoever Christ has commanded us. We must preach the Word, in season, out of season. We must be jealous of the only Gospel, even as St. Paul, who pronounced an anathema upon anyone who dared to preach any other gospel than that which he had preached unto them. We must endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. We must all speak the same thing, that there be no divisions among us, but that we be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. We shall serve the cause of our blessed Redeemer only if we hold fast tenaciously to the truth of Scripture and reject error in every form, both in doctrine and practice. That is soundly Biblical. That is soundly Lutheran. When, by God's grace, such unity is achieved, a God-pleasing union and a wholehearted and unlimited co-operation in all fields of Lutheran endeavor will necessarily follow. May all Lutherans who stand for unwavering loyalty to God's Word and to the precious heritage which we enjoy in our Lutheran Confessions, all Lutherans to whom sound, Scriptural practice is the only correct expression of the faith which we profess, all Lutherans who desire to contribute something of a truly God-pleasing nature and of abiding value to the preservation and expansion of sound Lutheranism, all Lutherans who are vitally interested in the things which, under God's blessings, have made the Lutheran Church a great Church, yes, the true visible Church of Christ on earth, heed the call to watch and to defend the foundations and, by God's grace, build firmly, solidly, genuinely to the glory of God, the extension of Christ's kingdom, and the eternal salvation of blood-bought souls!

Gentlemen of the Lutheran Church, I have stated our positive and conscientious convictions in the matters under consideration. I have sought earnestly to express the deep solicitude which grips the hearts of such as are vitally concerned about sound doctrine. What I have said is said in a spirit of genuine love and friendship, prompted by love for the truth, and I pray God that this testimony will be received in the same spirit in which it is given.

### Two Misapplied Phrases of Scripture

*"Where there is no vision, the people perish."* (Prov. 29:18.) This phrase is commonly used today as if it meant that a forward look is necessary to human progress. "Vision" is taken to mean an imaginative and optimistic grasp of possibilities. Vision, in that sense, is a vital asset, but this particular verse ought not to be used to prove it. To do so is to overlook or to sacrifice the real and vastly more important meaning of the Scripture.

Vision, in that sense, is not found in Hebrew usage. The word translated "vision" in this passage really means an inspired revelation, information received by a seer, a direct communication from God. It is equivalent to "revealed word." This is clearly illustrated in the record concerning the Prophet Samuel's experiences. In speaking of the first revelation received by him when still a young boy in the high priest's service, it is written, "The word of the Lord was rare in those days,



there was no open (or frequent) vision" (1 Sam. 3:1). Here "vision" is clearly used as a synonym for "word of the Lord." This is confirmed also by the last verse of the same chapter. "And the Lord appeared again in Shiloh, for the Lord revealed Himself to Samuel by the word of the Lord" (1 Sam. 3:21). A vision is therefore equivalent to a revealed word of the Lord.

Our misquoted verse really means, therefore, "Where there is no revealed word of God, the people perish." And that is the correct meaning, as the rest of the verse and its literary form clearly show. The verse contains what is called a parallelism. This is a Hebrew literary form, consisting of two clauses where the second clause is a restatement of the first in a supplementary or, sometimes, a contrasted form. The two clauses in the verse before us are in contrast. "Where there is no vision, the people perish; but he that keepeth the Law, happy is he." Vision in the first part corresponds to the Law in the second part. "The Law" (as the word in the original languages implies) means, of course, God's revealed word, the Torah. No Hebrew ever questioned that the Law (the Torah) was an inspired revelation. Both clauses of this verse, therefore, refer to God's Word, the Scriptures.

"Where there is no vision, the people perish," when rightly understood, is neither a sentimental phrase nor a psychological slogan. It is the statement of a plain fact. It is one of the most significant verses of Scripture. It is being illustrated every day. It means simply and certainly that where the Bible is unknown, or kept out of circulation, or neglected, people are perishing morally and spiritually, whether they realize it or not.

The second part of the verse emphasizes this truth by the contrasted statement that they who live according to God's revealed Word are blessed. This agrees precisely with our Lord's own declaration that "man shall live by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." Is there any truth more timely or more needed today? Keep the Bible in your life. All the moral, social, and political evils that are leading the world on to chaos today are due to the neglect of the teachings of God's Word. "Where there is no revelation, the people perish."

"Charity covereth a multitude of sins." (1 Pet. 4:8.) This phrase is often very superficially taken to mean that kindness to others makes up for a good deal of imperfection in ourselves. It is smugly assumed that love of good works prompted by love offsets personal shortcomings and sins. The real meaning is, of course, that real love overlooks the sins of other people. "Love suffereth long and is kind . . . thinketh no evil . . . beareth all things . . . hopeth all things." Love, in short, covers not my sins, but the other person's sins, so far as I am concerned. The Apostle Peter was doubtless quoting from the Book of Proverbs, "Love covereth all sins," but he had heard the same teaching from our Lord in answer to his own question, "How often shall we forgive a brother if he sins against us?" The answer was, "Until seventy times seven." Without definite limit, so far as we are concerned, that is to say, for "love covereth a multitude of sins."—*The Presbyterian*, Feb. 4, 1943.

