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Theological Observer

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THEOLOGICAL OBSERVER

Dr. Oliver R. Harms, president of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, has released the following "Guidelines for Publishing and Reading Religious News." The guidelines were prepared by the Synod's Commission on Theology and Church Relations "in response to many requests from parish pastors."

Guidelines for Publishing and Reading Religious News

Our time in history is distinguished by an unprecedented supply of news, speedily made available to everyone. This makes it imperative that we publish and read news as responsible Christians. News media can provide valuable service to the church by leading Lutherans to rejoice in the unity that Christ has given us; by seeking to preserve the doctrinal unity, which is also His gift; and by helping people to understand world developments.

Lutheran Christians can only be grateful for the news media that the Giver of every good gift has placed at their disposal, and they will be eager to employ these media of communication as fully and responsibly as possible to the glory of Christ, the spreading of His name, and the welfare of His church.

Yet it must be recognized that in recent years the bonds of fellowship within The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod have been adversely affected by various news media.

Since this is today a problem of significant doctrinal and moral dimensions, our people need sound pastoral guidance in this regard. Therefore the CTCR, together with the President of Synod, offers the following guidelines for the publishing and reading of religious news.

I. *Doctrinal Marks of Genuinely Lutheran News Media*

A. The editors and publishers reveal their clear understanding and working

knowledge of the difference between the church's doctrine, which cannot be altered, and pious opinions, customs, and traditions, which though valuable and important, have never been considered divisive of fellowship. They seek to restrain their readers from passing judgment on the orthodoxy of others, and from reaching decisions concerning fellowship, on the basis of customs and traditions alone. (See "The Theology of Fellowship," *Proceedings, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod*, 1965, pp. 275 f.)

B. Also, editors and publishers will reveal in the general selection and tone of articles, as well as in express words, their understanding of the truth that the doctrine of Justification by Faith is in all respects the central doctrine of Lutheran theology, the article by which alone the church stands or falls, and the key "which alone opens the door to the entire Bible." (Cp. Apology IV, 2f.; FC, SD III, 6.) The editorials and the tenor of articles will likewise distinguish between Law and Gospel in a practical and edifying way.

C. The editors and publishers will make it evident to their readers that they understand that the pure Gospel is essentially the divine Word of forgiveness, the Good News of God's grace in Christ, and not a series of opinions that create the impression that the Gospel demands or depends upon a specific political viewpoint, full agreement in all matters of Biblical interpretation, or unanimity of opinion on matters to which the Bible has not spoken.

D. Lutheran editors and publishers will reflect to their readers their understanding that Word and Sacraments are given by God to function as means of grace in the lives of Christians.

E. Editors and publishers will encourage their readers to rejoice in their salvation through Christ, to appreciate the unity they have with each other in Christ, to shun and oppose whatever teaching or practice is destructive of unity in the Gospel, to participate in God's mission through Christ, and to give positive and enthusiastic glory to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

F. Where these emphases are consistently absent or obscured, Lutherans will not read such media as though they represent the Lutheran viewpoint. They may of course choose to read them for other valid reasons.

II. *Ethical Principles of Lutheran News Media*

A. Lutheran news media will show respect for standards regarded as minimal in journalism generally. They will therefore clearly strive:

1. Candidly to distinguish editorial opinion from factual reporting and not allow the former to slant or color the manner in which the news itself is presented.

2. To report facts only in meaningful context.

3. To offer readers a constructive picture of the church's work rather than to select only items calculated to arouse passionate reactions.

4. To honor the principle that an accused person is innocent of any charge until proven guilty in a prescribed and proper way.

B. Lutheran news media will cheerfully meet more than minimal standards in re-

porting or editorializing on the church's life and work. Among such standards are these:

1. Assuming faithfulness on the part of those who in Synod are constitutionally responsible for the supervision of doctrine and life.

2. Assuming that ordained members of the Synod hold their ordination vows with utmost sincerity and that their personal integrity deserves respect.

3. Putting the best construction on everything.

4. Making sure that a brother under criticism has been correctly understood and his position fairly represented.

5. Disavowing the use of propaganda devices such as imputing guilt by association, by opprobrious labeling, by misleading quotation, and the like.

III. *The Pastoral Dimension*

Lutheran pastors can help their people to read wisely and profitably by sharing the foregoing principles with them. In addition:

A. They will make clear that sins against the Eighth Commandment are committed not only by publishers and editors but also by those who, with itching ears, read and repeat such news reports and editorial opinions as manifestly violate the standards set forth above.

B. They will remind their people of the accepted channels for voicing their theological concerns and will endeavor to dissuade them from supporting media which tend to divide the church.

C. They will by instruction and example help their people to understand the proper role of positive criticism and constructive evaluation in all aspects of churchly life and work, teaching and practice.

D. They will lead their people to appre-

ciate the nature and extent of the unity that exists in the Synod by God's grace, as this unity is evidenced by our common devotion to the truth of the Gospel; our common and proper administration of the

sacraments; our willing subscription to the Lutheran Confessions; our honoring of synodically adopted doctrinal statements in conformity with the Confessions; and our ready obedience to every Word of God.