

Association of Confessing Evangelical Lutheran Congregations

IF NOT NOW, WHEN?

LESSON 2 - HISTORY OF THEOLOGICAL DETERIORATION

(All citations of Holy Scripture are from the English Standard Version.)

INTRODUCTION

It was Spanish philosopher *Jorge Agustin Nicolas Ruiz de Santayana y Borrás* (1863-1952) who said, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Santayana)

This truism also holds true for Lutheran Synods. If we are to understand where we are today as a Synod, we need also to learn and understand the events of our past, or we too will continue to repeat our past mistakes, errantly thinking of them as something new in our own time.

Beginning in 1817 King Frederick Wilhelm III of Prussia (a Calvinist) did his best to unite the Calvinists and Lutherans within his realm. In reality, he sought to change the Lutherans into Calvinists. He began his efforts to form a merger between the two groups on the occasion of the 300th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation by commanding a combined Lutheran-Reformed communion service in his court chapel. Despite his encouragement for others to imitate his efforts, he was disappointed that few did. Growing increasingly frustrated, Wilhelm introduced his infamous *Agende*, or liturgy book with its compromise Reformed-Lutheran worship service. This too was not widely used. In 1830, determined to enforce his will on the Lutherans (who constituted the vast majority of his subjects), the king ordered his *Agende* to be used exclusively, which included a clearly Calvinist form of the celebration of the Lord's Supper. As Rev. Dr. Kurt Marquart wrote:



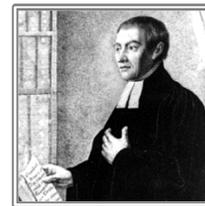
King Frederick Wilhelm III

"Distinctively Lutheran services were now simply forbidden and conscientious Lutherans, like Professor Dr. J.G. Scheibel of Breslau, [were] removed from office and persecuted in various incredibly ferocious ways - despite Prussia's claims that it followed an enlightened policy of freedom of religion! Noblemen and merchants were fined heavily for allowing Lutheran services on their properties. Lutherans had to meet secretly in forests, cellars, and barns. Judas-money was paid for the betrayal of faithful pastors. Midwives had to report the birth of all Lutheran children. Lutheran baptisms were declared invalid, and babies were sometimes forcibly rebaptized in the official union-church under police compulsion. Faithful pastors were imprisoned." (Marquart, Kurt E, *Anatomy of an Explosion*, Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1977, page 13)

Though the Saxon region of Germany was not under the control of King Wilhelm III, the spirit of unionism, rationalism, and Pietism were nevertheless present. Under the leadership of a charismatic pastor, Rev. Martin Stephan, of Saint John Lutheran Church in Dresden, many became attracted to his strong support for the Lutheran Confessions and literal biblical interpretation. Yet detractors remained among his rationalistic parishioners and fellow clergy who criticized him for his conservative stance. Rev. Stephan had a very strong personality that garnered him an almost cult-like following. Many of his followers believed Stephanism was the Church itself. Some even thought that the very existence of true Lutheranism was dependent on him alone. This kind of view justifiably drew considerable concern and

criticism that fostered a view of the Stephanites as a group separate from the Saxon State Church. (Forster, Walter, *Zion on the Mississippi*, Concordia Publishing House, 1953, pp. 63-75)

Eventually, Stephan's followers determined to emigrate to America. This was due to several factors not the least of which was a fear of the influence of the Prussian Union spreading into Saxony, and some unfavorable changes in the Saxon State Church that sought to investigate the Stephanite movement. Settling in southeastern Missouri, the Stephanites established an orthodox Lutheran presence in the United States as did other groups lead by J.A.A. Grabau of Prussia and F.C.C. Wyneken of Hannover. These were literally the first truly orthodox Lutheran church bodies established in the United States. Other refugees from the Prussian Union settled in Australia.



Rev. Martin Stephan

QUESTIONS

1. Mindful of the vow taken at Confirmation "to continue steadfast in this confession and Church and to suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it" (*Confirmation*, Lutheran Service Book, CPH 2006, p. 273), and the great sacrifice of earlier Lutherans in leaving family, career, home, community, and country in order to continue worshipping as Lutherans, to what extent would you go to ensure the same?
2. Would you be willing to break civil law if that law demanded that you worship falsely? (John 4:21-24)

Soon after arriving in America, Martin Stephen was deposed for moral indiscretions, and C.F.W. Walther became the leader of the Missouri Lutherans. In 1847, various Confessional Lutheran groups in the U.S. formed what would become The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) in Chicago.

For nearly the first 100 years our Synod enjoyed a remarkable unity in both doctrine and practice. This unity was borne of the desire to give expression to doctrine and practice that reflected the unity of God's person and the uniformity of true orthodox Lutheran theology founded in the biblical belief that God's Church is "catholic," that is, that the same faith is everywhere (universally) held the same in all articles of doctrine if it is to be the true Church. This desire was also expressed in worship forms. Our first Missouri Synod Constitution put it succinctly:

"IV. Business of Synod...

10. To strive after the greatest possible uniformity in ceremonies."

(*Concordia Historical Quarterly*, Vol. XVI, No. 1, April 1943, "Our First Synodical Constitution," p. 5.)

And again:

"II. Conditions under which a congregation may join Synod and remain a member...

4. The exclusive use of doctrinally pure church books and school books. (Agenda, hymnals, readers, etc.) If it is impossible in some congregations to replace immediately the unorthodox ones, then the pastor of such a congregation can become a member of Synod only if he promises to use the unorthodox hymnal only under open protest and to strive in all seriousness for the introduction of an orthodox hymnal."

(*Concordia Historical Quarterly*, Vol. XVI, No. 1, April 1943, "Our First Synodical Constitution," p. 3.)

Maintaining Synodical unity was not without challenges in the early years of the LCMS. In the beginning was the controversy surrounding the deposal of Martin Stephan (1839-1841), then the multi-year controversy, with J.A.A. Grabau of the Buffalo Synod, about the Office of the Ministry. Then came the Chiliasm/Millennialism controversy (1856-1858) and finally, the Predestinarian controversy (1870-1880).

It is the nature of the true Church of Christ to be attacked by false teachings and false teachers. The measure of an orthodox church body, however, is how it responds to such challenges.

QUESTIONS

1. What effect does false teaching have on people's spiritual well-being? (Eph. 4:12-14, II Tim. 1:12-14)
2. What does the retention of false teaching do to a religious organization like a Synod? (I Tim. 6:3-5, II Tim. 2:14-18)
3. What does the presence of false teaching and false teachers do for those who know God's pure doctrine? (I Cor. 11:19, Gal. 1:6-8)

In the above listed doctrinal challenges of the early LCMS, the Synod employed a very specific means of dealing with errors. Generally, this is what happened:

1. The President of the Synod (C.F.W. Walther) examined the false teaching in the light of Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions.
2. The President of the Synod wrote up strong and detailed theses respecting each controversy as it was encountered, and wrote a position paper that defended the true Scriptural and Confessional teaching with respect to the controversy.
3. The theological paper was presented to the Synod in convention and—since it squared with Scripture and the Confessions—it was adopted by the convention and by extension, the Synod itself as the biblical/Confessional position of the Synod.
4. Those who disagreed with the truth of God's Word either left voluntarily or were removed from Synodical membership.
5. The controversy was resolved.

THE STATEMENT OF THE 44

The method of dealing with theological controversy, described above, continued until 1945. At that time a group of 44 well-known LCMS theologians formulated, released, and circulated throughout the Synod their "statements of affirmation" that simply became known as the "Statement of the 44." This was done in order to bolster the position that the LCMS needed to abandon the idea that agreement in all articles of doctrine was necessary for a declaration of Church fellowship with other Lutherans and with non-Lutheran Christians.



This was a period of history when the so-called "Ecumenical Movement" (1948-present) was taking root throughout Europe and the United States. The ultimate goal of this movement was the greatest possible organic union or at least cooperation among Christian church bodies. The "Statement of the 44" was in lock-step with these goals desiring to lead the charge out of the LCMS's Lutheran "ghetto" into greater union and/or cooperation with other Lutherans and non-Lutherans. This spirit of unionism can clearly be seen in the "deplorable" statements they made. A sampling:

- "We therefore deplore all man-made walls and barriers and all ecclesiastical traditions which would hinder the free course of the Gospel."
- "We therefore deplore the fact that Romans 16:17, 18 has been applied to all Christians who differ with us in certain points of doctrine. It is our conviction, based on sound exegetical and hermeneutical principles, that this text does not apply to the present situation in the Lutheran Church of America."
- "We therefore deplore any tendency which reduces the warmth and power of the Gospel to a set of intellectual propositions which are to be grasped solely by the mind of man."
- "We believe that the term "unionism" should be applied only to acts in which a clear and unmistakable denial of Scriptural truth or approval of error is involved. We therefore deplore the tendency to apply this non-Biblical term to any and every contact between Christians of different denominations."
- "We affirm our conviction that in keeping with the historic Lutheran tradition...regarding Church Fellowship, such fellowship is possible without complete agreement in details of doctrine and practice which have never been considered divisive in the Lutheran Church." (Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis, Missouri)

QUESTIONS

1. What is the difference between an ecclesiastical tradition and a doctrine?
2. Is someone who holds that our Lord's body and blood is not present in the Lord's Supper causing a division in the Church? Which other false doctrines would also be divisive?
3. Are doctrines "intellectual propositions"?
4. What false doctrines are not "unmistakable denials of Scriptural truths or approval of error"?
5. If we are not in agreement with the "details of doctrine," then what agreement do we have?

STUDY THE ERROR OR REJECT THE ERROR?

The "Statement of the 44" was mailed to all LCMS clergy over the objection of President John Behnken. This was quickly followed by a letter to all LCMS clergy from President Behnken which read, in part:

"We voiced our disagreement with some of the points in *A Statement* and insisted that they be corrected or withdrawn..."

Director of the Concordia Historical Institute in St. Louis, Rev. Daniel Preus wrote:

"President Behnken then promised that if agreement could not be reached and the signers of the Statement of the 44 would not retract their unscriptural position, they would be placed under discipline according to the constitution of Synod. However, when it became apparent that there would be no resolution agreed to by both parties, Behnken and the presidium chose an approach which brought both parties together to sign an *Agreement* according to which the "Statement of the 44" was withdrawn from discussion, but nobody was required to retract anything...This lack of action established a pretty strong precedent...[it] was a very bright green light to those who wished to see Missouri embrace a more open fellowship practice." (Preus, Daniel, Director of the Concordia Historical Institute, *The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod Holiday From History*, April 7, 1999.)

In his report to the Synodical Convention of 1947, President Behnken wrote of the "Statement of the 44":

"Last January the Praesidium reached an agreement with representatives of the signers of 'A Statement' that the issues should be studied carefully by conferences on the basis of theses sent out under the auspices of the Praesidium." (Mo. Synod Proceedings, 1947, p. 16)

Instead of condemning the obvious doctrinal errors of the "Statement of the 44," the Praesidium of the Synod determined to make those errors the subject of Synod-wide study **setting a pattern for the future of our Synod which we have yet to overcome**. We put error on the stage and invited everyone to study the matter without ever doing what our Confessions do: reject and condemn the error.

THE BATTLE OF THE BIBLE

Is Holy Scripture truly the inerrant and infallible Word of God? The events leading up to the infamous St. Louis Seminary Walkout were, in some ways, directly connected to the controversy surrounding the "Statement of the 44." The signers of the Statement were able to

"...flaunt the doctrinal practice of the church body to which they belonged with no significant consequences. To a great degree the fact that things could proceed so far at the St. Louis seminary was due to the lack of attention to church discipline which had begun to appear already years before the specific problems developed at the St. Louis seminary leading to the *Walkout*. The 44 had 'gotten away with it' and the lack of discipline which began to be evident within the synod undoubtedly contributed to the confidence felt by the faculty majority, confidence which led on to arrogance and finally to exodus. The arrogance exhibited was one that placed these professors above the church and exempt from judgment." (Preus, Daniel, Director of the Concordia Historical Institute, *The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod Holiday From History*, April 7, 1999.)

This controversy shook the LCMS to its foundations. Many of the issues in this matter still rattle the unity of the Synod and have yet to be resolved under God's Word and the Lutheran Confessions.

Does God's Word actually mean what it says in the plain, simple language it uses, or can that language be understood in the light of human reason in a way that is significantly different than the plain text

seems to use? Put another way, how can God's Word say something it doesn't actually say? The intellectual answer to this quandary was called *Historical-Critical Biblical Interpretation* (HCBI). HCBI holds that the Bible is just another piece of ancient literature like any other and should be examined as any other such book would be. HCBI was a direct product of the Age of Enlightenment/Age of Reason in which human reason was thought to be the final arbiter of the truth.

As the Rev. Dr. Kurt Marquart wrote:

"In an age of liberty, equality, and fraternity [18th century Europe], it was unthinkable that one ancient book, the Bible, should retain any special privileges. Henceforth it was to be treated exactly like all other ancient documents. Stripped of its special, infallible status, the Bible was now treated as just another ordinary citizen in the great republic of letters, all subject to the same laws and to the supreme court of human scholarship. This and nothing else is the inner essence of the historical-critical method which originated [in Europe] at that time and was perfected in the nineteenth century." (Marquart, Kurt E., *Anatomy of An Explosion*, Concordia Theological Seminary Press, Fort Wayne, Indiana, 1977, p. 37)

The goal of HCBI was to permit man to tell the Holy Scriptures what men wanted them to say and to use man's authority to break down doctrinal barriers to establish fellowship between church bodies which did not agree theologically.

Dr. Hermann Sasse (renowned German-Lutheran theologian) once served as a guest lecturer at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis in 1948. In a letter to a friend he wrote:

"The most shattering [experience] for me is St. Louis. It is a chain of humiliations and deliberate unkindnesses which I here experience at the hands of the leadership of the seminary, aside from the many kindnesses and the human goodness of individuals. But Sieck, L. Meyer, and Fred Mayer are, with others, determined to go the way 'out of the ghetto,' that is to unionism." (Letter of H. Sasse to Prof. Hans Kirsten, 10 September 1948 - copy on file at Concordia Historical Institute.)

The spirit of the "Statement of the 44" was clearly evident in the St. Louis faculty, and the use of higher-critical biblical interpretation was the tool to go where the Synod had never gone before. In 1969, at the Denver convention of the LCMS, the Rev. J.A.O Preus was elected over the more liberal incumbent Rev. Oliver R. Harms. Moving quickly, the liberal faculty at the St. Louis seminary attempted to protect the seminary's ecumenical goals by installing the ecumenically oriented Rev. Dr. John Tietjen as the successor to President A.O. Fuerbringer. With these two events, the Battle of the Bible was on!

Again Dr. Marquart:

"Faced with the loss of accreditation, the Concordia Seminary faculty and administration acknowledged this week that the school's future as a viable academic institution depended on the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod rejecting its conservative leader, the Rev. Dr. J.A.O. Preus, or in revising church laws to check his power...Many faculty members say privately that the ideal solution for the seminary is the defeat of Dr. Preus." (Marquart, Kurt E., *Anatomy of An Explosion*, Concordia Theological Seminary Press, Fort Wayne, Indiana, 1977, p. 84)

At the 1973 New Orleans convention of the Synod, Rev. J.A.O. Preus easily won re-election, and his course of action respecting the on-going investigation of the St. Louis faculty was upheld in Resolution 3-09. The following January, the newly elected Board of Regents for the seminary suspended John Tietjen as President, and the next day the majority of the faculty and student body walked out, later forming Seminary In Exile or Seminex, which in turn was later absorbed into the Lutheran School of Theology, Chicago, Illinois.

Finally, nearly 200,000 people left the LCMS for the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches which ultimately was absorbed into the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA) in 1988. However, not all the laymen, pastors, and professors who ascribed to the higher-critical model of biblical interpretation left with them. Many remain in the LCMS to this day and still hold to their error without correction, and the spirit of the 44 continues among us.

A MISSIONAL MISUNDERSTANDING

Does man grow the church by using proper methodologies and techniques, or does God grow His Church by means of His rightly proclaimed Word and properly administered Sacraments?

During the Second Great Awakening in America (1790-1870) a religious revivalism swept the nation. One of the prominent leaders of that time was Rev. Charles G. Finney. Finney had developed what he termed New Measures in order to impact the world with his moralistic, Pietistic, and Pelagian version of the "Gospel" (Finney denied that Jesus could die for anyone else's sin). His New Measures were methodologies and techniques designed to illicit emotion episodes of repentance leading to an emotional conversion. He insisted that doctrine got in the way of numerical growth and that such growth was simply a matter of doing the right things.

Finney's New Measures were the forerunner of the modern day Church Growth Movement. The modern Father of the Church Growth Movement (CGM) is Rev. Donald McGavran. He was an educational missionary to India who dedicated his life to overcoming barriers to numerical growth with respect to finding more efficient methods of evangelism. McGavran was appointed as the founding Dean of the School of Intercultural Studies at Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California. This school has become a mecca for many Missouri Synod pastors and Synodical leaders who had become convinced that McGavran's New Measures were the future for the LCMS.



Rev. Charles G. Finney

Fuller Theological Seminary served as the model on which the Pastoral Leadership Institute (PLI) was founded. Essentially, PLI is an unsupervised, unassociated theological mission graduate school for the promotion of developing leaders among Missouri Synod pastors who wish to approach the pastoral ministry in a way that emphasized doing things in new and different ways in order to numerically grow the Church. As it says on PLI's home page:

"The ministry of PLI is to provide advanced missional leadership training for pastors whose hearts burn with passion for the gospel and who have exhibited potential for leadership excellence. It is an initiative conceived with the express purpose of supporting a strong, viable church for the next millennium." (<http://pastoral-leadership-institute.org/about-pli>)

The Pastoral Leadership Institute was established by Rev. Gerald Kieschnick, Rev. John Johnson, and Rev. Norbert Oesch of the LCMS. Rev. Kieschnick was elected President of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod in 2001, and remained in office for nine years until the election of Rev. Matthew C. Harrison in 2010. To date, it is still possible to receive graduate credit at both of our seminaries for course work taken at PLI.

It was the consistent contention of President Kieschnick that the LCMS had to remake itself into a mission oriented organization giving emphasis to developing congregations as "Mission Out-posts" whose main function was winning souls and increasing numerical growth in the Synod. He developed the *Ablaze!* initiative in the Synod toward that missional end complete with a "Tot-board" on the Synodical website to count "critical events" in which one member of the Synod would share a Christian witness with an unbeliever.

To achieve the Synod's missional transformation, traditional Lutheran liturgical worship was to be replaced or at least augmented with contemporary worship services or blended with more liturgical services to appeal to the culture. Praise bands were formed, multi-media screens were installed in sanctuaries (sometimes right over the cross). Altars were sometimes placed on wheels so that the central symbol of our Lord's sacrifice could be pushed out of the way for the drama group or liturgical dance group. Communion practices had to be loosened up because the official biblical position of the Synod—Closed Communion—was a put off to our culture. Adult instruction had to be less stringent because modern Americans wouldn't sit through sixteen weeks of classes. Some even left the name "Lutheran" off their front church signs thinking that some might not know what "Lutheran" meant and might stay away.

Sadly, in many cases when LCMS members took vacation or business trips and attended worship services at the local LCMS congregation, the worship service they walked into was unrecognizable as being

Lutheran! The Synod that once strove for a high degree of uniformity in worship became a Synod that jettisoned its own heritage, theology, and biblical practices to achieve greater numerical growth and in official resolutions, the Synod recognized "God-pleasing" diversity in our worship.

QUESTIONS

1. Does dependence on men's ideas of "improved" or more "efficient" worship styles make the Word of God more effective? (Isaiah 55:10-11)
2. Is the power of God's Word enhanced or made more powerful by means of contemporary worship? (I Cor. 2:1-2)
3. Since Scripture informs us that those who do not properly discern the body of Christ in the Lord's Supper are eating and drinking God's judgment on themselves, does a justification for lowering the standard of a common confession at the altar to make people feel more "welcome" make sense? (I Cor. 11:27-32)
4. What benefit is provided to a Lutheran congregation if its worship looks just like every other Reformed congregation in town?
5. In adopting the worship forms of Reformed church bodies in our own congregations, is there a danger of importing their theology as well?
6. Is it possible we are raising an entire generation of LCMS Lutherans who can no longer recognize true Lutheran worship if they see it?

DOCTRINE VS. EVANGELISM

In President Kieschnick's first inaugural address in 2001, he said:

"People, this is NOT a game. Our incessant internal purification at the expense of the eternal destiny of the souls of men and women for whom Christ died must stop!"

The implication of his statement was that for some reason the people of LCMS had to make a choice between the maintenance of pure doctrine and evangelistic efforts. He was saying, in effect, that it was the fault of those insisting on pure doctrine who were causing the souls of men and women to be lost! Frankly, this is simply false doctrine! It most certainly is not necessary to choose between the two. Historically, we have always done both.

Under President Kieschnick's leadership, the Transforming Churches Network (TCN) was established. The TCN is a recognized service organization of the LCMS. On the TCN home page:

"Transforming Churches Network (TCN) is a not-for-profit corporation registered in the State of Tennessee which has received 501(c)3 status with the IRS. TCN is a Recognized Service Organization (RSO) of the LCMS. God has blessed us richly by helping us achieve the following milestones:

- Partnership with 32 Districts
- 60 Learning Communities
- 850 congregations in our network
- 240 consultations completed"

(<http://transformingchurchesnetwork.org/about/>)

One of the major emphases of TCN is something called Accountable Leader Governance. Initially, the Bylaws of a congregation are "put into abeyance" and an Accountable Leader Governance model is implemented. Replacement Bylaws are "automatically granted permission without formal review." [By the district.] This restructuring will result in a seven person Board of Directors (including the Pastor) who will govern the church. "The pastor's role will be to lead the church; the role of staff will be to manage the church. The role of the members will be to conduct the ministry of the church."

The pastor whose congregation joins TCN commits himself, "...to take the actions necessary to see our attendance grow by 5% in the next 24 months." Additionally, the pastor agrees, "If we do not achieve the 5% growth goal in the next 24 months, and 5% growth annually thereafter, I will put my name out for a call." (TCN Pastor Survey)

QUESTIONS

1. Is it possible for people to end up in hell because the Church does not do her evangelistic work well enough? (John 10:28-29)
2. Who grows the Church numerically? (John 1:12-13, Acts 2:38-39)
3. Do people come to faith because we use the right techniques or methodologies or because we have a fervent missional outlook? (Romans 10:14-17, I Cor. 2:1-5)
4. Does the Lord guarantee numerical growth in His Church? (John 6:66-71)
5. If a pastor leaves his divine call because his congregation does not grow sufficiently to hit his 5% goal, what does this say about his view of God's call to this flock? (I Cor. 4:1-2, Isaiah 6:8-13)
6. In our Lord's Parable of the Sower, how efficient/effective is the sower? (Matt. 13:1-9)

YANKEE STADIUM - UNIONISM & SYNCRETISM

Can a Lutheran clergyman engage in leading public worship together with unbelievers and other Christians with whom we are not in doctrinal agreement?

The Constitution of the LCMS says:

"Conditions for acquiring and holding membership in the Synod are the following...

2. Renunciation of unionism and syncretism of every description, such as:
 - a. Serving congregations of a mixed confession, as such, by ministers of the church;
 - b. Taking part in the services and sacramental rites of heterodox congregations of mixed confession;
 - c. Participating in heterodox tract and missionary activities." (2013 Synodical Handbook, p.15)

Timeline of Events

- ▶September 11, 2001: Islamic terrorists attack the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and attempt to attack Washington, D.C., with another plane crashing in Pennsylvania.
- ▶September 13, 2001: Atlantic District President, David Benke, and ELCA Bishop of Metropolitan New York, Stephen Bouman, received the Lord's Supper together at an ELCA church.
- ▶September 19, 2001: LCMS President Gerald Kieschnick, ELCA Presiding Bishop George Anderson, Atlantic District President David Benke, and New York ELCA Bishop Stephen Bouman jointly participate at two worship services at an ELCA congregation in Manhattan.
- ▶September 20, 2001: Mayor Rudolph Guiliani announced "A Prayer for America," an interfaith worship service, to be held at Yankee Stadium the following Sunday inviting people to come "worship together." Specifically mentioned in the Mayor's press release as participating in the worship service were "Cardinal Egan, Imam Pasha, and other leaders of the Christian, Muslim and Jewish faiths."
- ▶September 20-23, 2001: Twice President Kieschnick granted permission for President David Benke to participate in "A Prayer for America."
- ▶September 23, 2001: The uninvited LCMS Atlantic District President, David Benke, linked arms with Cardinal Egan (in order to get past security) and thereafter, participated in the joint interfaith worship service along with five Jewish clergy, five Muslim clergy, Sikh and Hindu clergy and other representatives of Christian denominations with whom the LCMS is not in pulpit and altar fellowship. The event was broadcast internationally.

This event caused offense throughout the Synod prompting nineteen individual clergy and three congregations to press formal charges against David Benke for violations of the First Commandment, and the Constitution of the LCMS. President Kieschnick based his decision to grant permission, "...heavily, if not entirely, on this resolution (2001 Res. 3-07A) of the Synodical Convention, specifically and particularly the section of the report entitled 'B. Cases of Discretion.'" (Email provided to Rev. Schultz prior to a May 21-22, 2002, meeting described below.)

Subsequent to a May 21-22, 2002, meeting between representatives of those bringing charges and President Benke, Second Vice President Wallace Schultz found in favor of the complainants and suspended President Benke from office as Atlantic District President, basing his decision entirely on the basis of Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions.

Upon appeal of the matter to a Dispute Resolution Panel, a question was posed to the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) asking if 2001 Resolution 3-07A and the CTCR document, "The

Lutheran Understanding of Church Fellowship" addressed the question of whether or not an event like Yankee Stadium's "A Prayer for America" was a proper forum in which an LCMS clergyman could participate. **Prior to the final decision by the Dispute Resolution Panel, the CTCR indicated that neither the resolution nor the study document was meant to address such a circumstance as Yankee Stadium.**

Ignoring the CTCR answer to their own question, the Dispute Resolution Panel found Rev. Benke innocent of the charges brought against him and reinstated him in office on April 10, 2003. The basis for the panel's decision was completely based on the bylaws of the Synod without any reference to the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions.

THE SANDY HOOK SCHOOL SHOOTING, NEWTOWN, CONNECTICUT

On December 14, 2012, Adam Lanza (a 20 year old mentally ill person) shot and killed twenty children and six adult staff people at Sandy Hook Elementary School, Newtown, Connecticut. On December 17, 2012, an interfaith worship service was held in Newtown at which Rev. Rob Morris, pastor of Christ the King, Newtown, Connecticut, read Scripture and gave a benediction to conclude the service.

At first LCMS President, Matthew C. Harrison reprimanded Rev. Morris for his participation, which then prompted an apology from the local pastor, who indicated that he did not consider his participation to be an act of worship, but rather an act of community chaplaincy. This prompted an outcry from the secular media against their perception of a heavy-handed Synodical President, and later President Harrison apologized for "mishandling" the matter referring to it as a "debacle."

This confusion left the LCMS in complete disarray as to whether or not it is proper for an LCMS clergyman to participate at such an interfaith worship service. In such an atmosphere of uncertainty and with two precedents having been set at Yankee Stadium and again at Newtown, Connecticut, there really is no impediment for any LCMS clergyman to participate at an interfaith worship despite the very clear language in our Synodical Constitution condemning such acts.

QUESTIONS

1. In what ways do the Yankee Stadium and Sandy Hook cases help us understand how the LCMS got to this point in its history?
2. Are there specific things our congregation, or we as individuals, can do to promote faithfulness to the Word of God and our Lutheran Confessions in our time and place, especially in light of the increasing cultural pressure we are seeing in our generation?
3. What role does Luther's admonition to remember our baptism daily play in our call to faithfulness?

The LCMS is not part of the Church Triumphant, but we remain in the Church Militant. Satan and his minions will always target the Church of the true confession precisely because it holds the truth of the one, true Christian faith. Thus, the LCMS will continue to undergo theological challenges until we either cease to exist or our Lord returns in Glory. The true measure of a church body is how it responds to error. Does the correction come quickly and in line with Holy Scripture, or does it respond to error with an uncertain trumpet sound of theological and institutional equivocation or accommodation?

Tragically, since 1945, our beloved Synod has not been issuing the clarion call to God's truth that it did for its first 100 years. It need not remain unclear in the days that remain before us. We are called to faithfulness to the Word of God and our Lutheran Confessions. To the extent that we return to that fundamental loyalty and act accordingly when we encounter error, we shall be called faithful.

