

## ***PURE DOCTRINE***

Martin Luther writes, “Above all things we should strive to preserve the true doctrine of Scripture in purity and unanimity.”<sup>1</sup> If anyone emphasized the importance of pure doctrine, it was certainly Martin Luther. It was precisely because the doctrine was not pure that the medieval church had instituted so many practices contrary to God’s Word, practices that deprived the people of comfort as they directed them to various human works for assurance of God’s favor. The practices of indulgences, prayers to the saints, pilgrimages, relics and so on all proceeded from a false and impure understanding of the Scriptures. And of course the practices reflected the theology on which they were based.

The Reformation took place precisely because Luther rediscovered the pure doctrine. The Gospel, with its magnificent comfort in Christ, came once again to shine forth in its glory because the pure doctrine was taught to the people. Ever since Luther, the Lutheran Church has treasured pure doctrine, has considered it necessary for the health and salvation of the church and has strived for it. Our Lutheran Confessions declare, “The true adornment of the churches is godly, useful and clear doctrine...”<sup>2</sup>

From time to time there are those within the Lutheran Church who lament her insistence on the commitment to pure doctrine. Incessant doctrinal purification may deprive the church of her energies and divert her from the task of evangelism. So the reasoning may go. Never mind that the Old Testament frequently warns against false prophets. Never mind that the Apostles in virtually all of the epistles have it as their objective to teach the pure doctrine and to identify and reject the false teachings of their day. Never mind that Jesus Himself is constantly setting forth the pure doctrine and

condemning the false teachings of the scribes and Pharisees. Never mind all this! The complaint about attention to pure doctrine continues to be heard from those who have pietistic or liberal leanings. So it will always be.

In our day the very concept of absolute truth or pure doctrine is denigrated. But Luther says, “If purity of doctrine is to be maintained and the true religious worship is to be commended publicly, it is certainly the duty of all pious teachers to expose again and again the godless doctrine of the papacy and to denounce false forms of worship.”<sup>3</sup>

Luther promotes incessant doctrinal purification. C.F.W. Walther also promotes incessant doctrinal purification. In his essay, “Duties of an Evangelical Lutheran Synod,” Walther states, “It is impossible for a sizable church body to remain in the true faith if there isn’t a **constant check** to see that everything still is as it was in the beginning.”<sup>4</sup>

For myself, I will be content to stand with Luther and Walther and also with the authors of the Formula of Concord who, having taught the pure doctrine, and having refuted the many errors that had arisen in the church since the death of Luther, confessed in these words:

From this our explanation, friends and enemies and therefore everyone, may clearly infer that we have no intention of yielding aught of the eternal, immutable truth of God for the sake of temporal peace, tranquility, and unity (which moreover, is not in our power to do). Nor would such peace and unity, since it is devised against the truth and for its suppression, have any permanency. Still less are we inclined to adorn and conceal a corruption of the pure doctrine and manifest condemned errors. But we entertain heartfelt pleasure and love for, and on our part are sincerely inclined and anxious to advance, that unity according to our utmost power, by which His glory remains to God uninjured, nothing of the divine truth of the holy Gospel is surrendered, no room is given to the least error, poor sinners are brought to true, genuine repentance, raised up by faith, confirmed in obedience, and thus justified and eternally saved alone through the sole merit of Christ.<sup>5</sup>

In my presentation to you today I would like to focus on four main aspects of this subject of pure doctrine. First of all, I would like to spend time on the intimate connection between doctrine and practice. Second I would like to talk about the connection between Scripture's clarity and pure doctrine. Third, I would like to discuss the concept of pure doctrine as salvific or saving. Finally, I would like to point out the importance of identifying error and condemning it as an essential counterpart to the proclamation of the truth.

In his lectures on Galatians in 1535 Luther noted a distinction between doctrine and life that is quite useful.

...doctrine must be carefully distinguished from life. Doctrine is heaven; life is earth. In life there is sin, error, uncleanness, and misery, mixed, as the saying goes, "with vinegar." Here love should condone, tolerate, be deceived, trust, hope, and endure all things (1 Cor. 13:7); here the forgiveness of sins should have complete sway, provided that sin and error are not defended. But just as there is no error in doctrine, so there is no need for any forgiveness of sins. Therefore there is no comparison at all between doctrine and life. "One dot" of doctrine is worth more than "heaven and earth" (Matt. 5:18); therefore we do not permit the slightest offense against it. But we can be lenient toward errors of life. For we, too, err daily in our life and conduct; so do all the saints, as they earnestly confess in the Lord's Prayer and the Creed. But by the grace of God our doctrine is pure; we have all the articles of faith solidly established in Sacred Scripture. The devil would dearly love to corrupt and overthrow these; that is why he attacks us so cleverly with this specious argument about not offending against love and the harmony among the churches.<sup>6</sup>

Earlier in this same commentary Luther remarks, "Therefore doctrine must be one eternal and round golden circle, in which there is no crack; if even the tiniest crack appears, the circle is no longer perfect."<sup>7</sup> Luther's point is not difficult to follow. Doctrine must be perfect. There must be no error in our teaching. When the teaching is correct, he says, "we do not permit the slightest offense against it." On the other hand, when it comes to people's lives, we are willing to forgive anything. Sin should not be

defended but it should be forgiven. Doctrine comes from God and we do not have the right to tamper with it, change it, eliminate it or deny it in any way. Therefore, when a pastor preaches the teachings of Scripture, there will never be any need for him to ask for forgiveness for the way he has preached. But life is what we do. It is filled with sin and error. We should be understanding when it comes to the way people live and be prepared to forgive.

This distinction between doctrine and life is a helpful one. It was made by Luther to refute the charge that the Lutherans were not loving when they insisted so strenuously that there must be agreement on doctrine. “We are very willing to be loving when it comes to people’s lives,” Luther is saying. “But we have no right to be “loving” when it comes to God’s Word. Here there can be no flexibility, no forgiveness, so to speak. The Word must be taught and preached clearly. A very helpful distinction.

But there is another important distinction that needs to be made, namely the distinction between life and practice. There are many who would like to place the church’s practice in the same category as Christians’ lives. Here, too, it is held, we need to be understanding and forgiving and not be critical if people within the same fellowship have different church practices. As Lutherans, of course, we recognize the validity of our church’s teaching on adiaphora. We recognize that certain practices in the church are neither commanded nor forbidden by God’s Word. That is not the issue here. The questions here are: Does our practice reflect our doctrine? Should our practice reflect our doctrine? Does doctrine form practice? Does unscriptural practice compromise the clarity of our doctrinal confession? The Christian’s life and the Church’s practice are not the same thing. They need to be distinguished from each other.

In 2002 Dr. David Scaer made a presentation to the Council of Presidents of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. It was entitled, “Doctrine and Practice: Setting the Boundaries: An Abstract Essay with Practical Implications.” His presentation took place about five months after the participation of District President David Benke in an interfaith prayer service at Yankee Stadium in New York. This was a very painful time in the history of our church. Although Dr. Scaer’s paper does not address directly the episode at Yankee Stadium, it is clearly an attempt to provide guidance to the Church when difficult decisions are before her and to make it clear that doctrine and practice are intimately connected. Toward the beginning of his presentation, he notes that a distinction needs to be made between the church’s practice and Christian life. Christian life is imperfect and is to be excluded from the concept of the church’s practice. Dr. Scaer then goes on to explain the view of the Lutheran Confessions regarding the relationship between doctrine and practice. He says,

The *Augsburg Confession* and the *Apology* discuss doctrine in the first twenty-one articles and practice in the last seven. This division might suggest that doctrine and practice are two different *things*, but as these confessions show, they are really aspects of one *thing* with each reflecting the other and both deriving their content and form from the same underlying reality, God Himself. So we may begin with doctrine or practice, two sides of one coin. Doctrine expresses itself in certain practices and embedded in our practices is what we believe...<sup>8</sup>

The intimate connection between doctrine and practice ought to be obvious. If I were to say that I accept the 6<sup>th</sup> Commandment as true and correct doctrine but am not so much concerned about how the doctrine of that commandment is expressed in my practice, how would you interpret that? You might conclude that I would not be critical of adultery or fornication. You might conclude that, as a pastor, I would have no trouble with two of my members living together outside of marriage. You might even conclude

that I was a liar who didn't accept the teaching of the 6<sup>th</sup> Commandment at all! What kind of person accepts the doctrine but not the practice? Or if I were to say to you that I accept the teaching of the 7<sup>th</sup> Commandment but am not so much concerned about how the doctrine of **that** commandment is expressed in my practice, how would you interpret **that**? You might want to keep a close eye on your wallet!

According to David Scaer,

Doctrine and practice draw from the same substance, they are inseparably related: two sides of the same coin.

Doctrinal formulations arose not only as a response to misformulations, as with Arius, (for example, the Nicene Creed), but also because certain practices like indulgences were judged to contradict the foundation of faith, which then may not have been fully formulated. This controversy (practice) allowed both parties to articulate their positions on justification (doctrine).<sup>9</sup>

There is an old song that goes, "Love and marriage, love and marriage go together like a horse and carriage." The same is true of doctrine and practice. They go together. Our doctrine is reflected in our practice. Our practice demonstrates what our doctrine is. If our practice is sloppy or unscriptural, it says something about our doctrine. I quote David Scaer again. "Since both doctrine and practice derive their content and form from the same reality, which is the Trinitarian God in His saving acts, then the strictures required for one are also required for the other."<sup>10</sup>

Thus, when it comes to worship, for example, one cannot take the cavalier view that one can do what one wishes. While it is true that specific forms in worship are not mandated by Scripture, it is nevertheless necessary that the worship of the church reflect its doctrine and that it do so adequately and correctly. We cannot take the time today to address the importance of uniformity in our worship or the desirability of worship that is truly ecumenical in the good sense. We don't have time to discuss the whole matter of

what it means to be a **synod** in regard to our worship. However, we do have the time to say that if, in our worship services, we use hymns which contain Baptist theology or prayers that promote Methodist doctrine, there will be a disconnect between our doctrine and our practice. Our practice will be denying our doctrine. And here I think I need to say also that it is not only what the service **does** contain but also what it does **not** contain that makes a statement about our doctrine. In other words, it is possible that a given service would contain no false teaching whatever, but would also contain very little doctrine at all. If, in the use of whatever liturgy you are using, the proclamation of the Gospel is not clear, for example, if there is little or no reference to the forgiveness of sins or to the atonement, there is still a disconnect between doctrine and practice. In other words, when it comes to the connection between doctrine and practice, there are sins of commission and sins of omission.

To cite Scaer again, "...doctrine and practice do not exist in autonomous spheres. Abraham's sacrificing Isaac (practice) was the evidence or extension of what he believed about God (...doctrine) (James 2:21-25)... We know ourselves and others know us not only by what we say (doctrine), but by what we do (practice)."<sup>11</sup>

I'd like to provide two more quotations from this excellent article by David Scaer and then illustrate a disconnect between doctrine and practice that I find particularly troubling, namely the practice of open communion. First the words of Scaer. "Practices contradicting doctrine are unacceptable. Since both doctrine and practice flow from the same fundamental reality, we can no more be lenient with one than with the other. We cannot allow ourselves a freedom in practice that we would never allow for ourselves in doctrine."<sup>12</sup>

At the very end of his article Scaer concludes, “What Jesus was, *filius dei... homo factus est* (doctrine) is seen in what He did, *crucifixus* (practice). He did this *pro nobis* (doctrine). So also what we believe (doctrine) must be seen in what we do (practice). We can hardly require anything less of ourselves, lest what we do contradict what we believe.”<sup>13</sup>

There are some churches, calling themselves Lutheran, that admit to their altars all who have been baptized and who believe that Jesus is their Savior. The claim will undoubtedly be made that they profess the Lutheran doctrine. Unfortunately, their practice belies that claim. In fact, their practice denies their doctrine. What happens when you admit to the same altar those who believe that the bread is Jesus’ true body and the wine His true blood and that they therefore receive Jesus’ body and blood with their mouths for the forgiveness of sins **and** those who believe that they receive mere bread and wine? Here we deal not just with a minor difference of opinion.

In offering to the sinner the body and blood of Christ, the sacrament acts as absolution. We know and believe this. It declares that the body and blood of the Savior offered for the sins of the world, are received by the mouth of the sinner together with that forgiveness which Christ purchased by His death. The Sacrament of the Altar, therefore, is not merely a divine mandate given by Jesus as a memorial, nor is it simply a token of His love. It is the Gospel itself for it offers and bestows precisely that which the Gospel gives, namely the forgiveness of sins. And where there is forgiveness of sins there is also life and salvation.

Consider, on the other hand, the Reformed view of the Lord's Supper. The Reformed deny the Real Presence. They deny also that the Sacrament bestows the

forgiveness of sins. Why do they attend the Lord's Supper? Simply because the Lord has said, "This do in remembrance of me." They come in obedience to His command. They view the Lord's Supper simply as "a memorial meal in commemoration of the death of Christ." In other words, they view the sacrament as Law rather than Gospel. Regardless of the piety with which their "memorial meal" is celebrated, it remains true that if one regards the Sacrament primarily as something pious Christians do in obedience to Jesus, one sees the sacrament as Law. In their teaching on the Lord's Supper, the Reformed have deprived the Church of everything which our Lord Jesus placed into His precious Testament – grace, absolution, forgiveness, life and salvation. They have bequeathed to the Church instead the hollow shell of pious human obedience – this because they see the Sacrament as law, not as Gospel.

What tremendous confusion then results when such people commune together at the same altar! Amos says, "Can two walk together if they are not agreed?" (Amos 3:3) How then can Lutherans and the Reformed or Lutherans and Roman Catholics come together at the same altar? When this happens, those communing together are not even in agreement as to what they are doing in the Lord's Supper – practice! Do you know why? Because they are not in agreement as to what the Lord's Supper **is** – doctrine! There could hardly be a greater disconnect between the doctrine and the practice than when those who disagree on both the doctrine and the practice come together in the same practice. This practice is all the more egregious because the parties cannot even agree whether the Lord's Supper is Law or Gospel. Does this Sacrament have to do with our obedience or with our salvation? No wonder Luther exclaimed:

In summary, it is frightening for me to hear that in the churches of one party, or at the altar of one party, both parties are taking and receiving

the Sacrament of that one party, and that one group should believe that it is receiving mere bread and wine while the other group believes that it is receiving the true Body and Blood of Christ. And I often wonder if it is believable that a preacher or Seelsorger could be so callous and evil as to maintain silence on this issue and to permit both groups to come, each with its own fancy that it can receive its own kind of Sacrament according to its own belief. Therefore, whoever has such preachers or could expect such from them, let him be warned about them as about the incarnate devil himself!<sup>14</sup>

It is in participation in the Lord's Supper that the contradiction between doctrine and practice can be most evident when so-called Lutheran congregations admit those of other Christian church bodies to the altar regardless of a lack of agreement on the Lord's Supper.

But isn't it simply a matter of interpretation anyway? With this question we address the second aspect of our presentation today, namely the perspicuity or clarity of Scripture. It is precisely in regard to our understanding of the Lord's Supper that we frequently hear that our differences are simply a matter of interpretation. Well, in the first place, that's not true. It is not a matter of interpretation. Everybody knows what the words say – this is my body – and everybody knows what the words mean. It is not a question of interpretation; it is a question of whether or not you believe the words of Jesus who is God and who, therefore, cannot lie and will not deceive.

But secondly, the suggestion that our understanding of the Lord's Supper is a matter of interpretation raises the insidious implication that Scripture is not clear. After all, if the record of Jesus' institution of the Lord's Supper can be included four times in the New Testament and be related more often than practically any other events in the New Testament other than Jesus' death and resurrection and we **still** cannot know for sure what it means, then perhaps many other teachings of the Bible are also up for grabs.

Perhaps the Scriptures are frequently unclear and we may have differing interpretations of Baptism, conversion, election, and so on.

And of course this is precisely the view of many who take the position that in regard to all of the above teachings you can have your interpretation and I can have mine. And since this is so, as long as we all believe in Jesus, we should be able to have fellowship with each other. Apart from our fundamental understanding of the Gospel itself, everything else is subject to one's own interpretation. Such a view, of course, if followed to its logical conclusion will lead to such a speculative view of Scripture that in the end the Gospel itself will be lost. But Jesus says, "If you continue in my word, you are my disciples indeed and you will know the truth." (John 8:31-32)

One of the major controversies of the Reformation revolved around the biblical doctrine of the human will. Is the human will free or is it bound when it comes to spiritual matters? Luther took the position that it is bound. Erasmus took the position that it is free to choose the spiritual good. In the context of this disagreement, when Luther cited Scriptural evidence clearly supporting his view of the bondage of the will in spiritual matters, Erasmus criticized Luther for his over-bold assertions. He wanted a more irenic approach, a less dogmatic approach, an approach which consulted reason and urged people not to let doctrinal difference get in the way of peace. Luther responded forcefully to Erasmus' aversion to assertions. He wrote,

Away now with Sceptics and Academics from the company of us Christians; let us have men who will assert, men twice as inflexible as very Stoics! Take the Apostle Paul—how often does he call for that 'full assurance' which is simply an assertion of conscience, of the highest degree of certainty and conviction. In Rom. 10 he calls it 'confession'—'with the mouth confession is made unto salvation' (v. 10). Christ says, 'Whosoever confesseth me before men, him will I confess before my Father' (Matt.10.32). Peter commands us to give a reason for the hope that

is in us (1 Pet. 3:15). And what need is there of a multitude of proofs? Nothing is more familiar or characteristic among Christians than assertion. Take away assertions, and you take away Christianity. Why, the Holy Spirit is given to Christians from heaven in order that He may glorify Christ and in them confess Him even unto death—and is this not assertion, to die for what you confess and assert? Again, the Spirit asserts to such purpose that He breaks in upon the whole world and convinces it of sin (cf. John 16.8), as if challenging it to battle. Paul tells Timothy to reprove, and to be instant out of season (2 Tim. 4.2); and what a clown I should think a man to be who did not really believe, nor unwaveringly assert, those things concerning which he reprovved others! I think I should send him to Anticyra! (Footnote indicates Anticyra was a health resort on the Aegean coast, famous for hellebore, which was a plant used to treat mental illness.)

But I am the biggest fool of all for wasting time and words on something that is clearer to see than the sun. What Christian can endure the idea that we should deprecate assertions? That would be denying all religion and piety in one breath—asserting that religion and piety and all dogmas are just nothing at all. Why then do you—you!—*assert* that you *find no satisfaction in assertions* and that you *prefer an undogmatic temper to any other*?<sup>15</sup>

Luther lectures Erasmus quite extensively on this matter of assertions and concludes his remarks on this topic with the words, “The Holy Spirit is no Sceptic, and the things He has written in our hearts are not doubts or opinions, but assertions—surer and more certain than sense and life itself.”<sup>16</sup> Luther then goes on to demonstrate that Erasmus’ dislike for assertions was due to his view that Scripture is not clear. The dislike today that people have for those who assert their religious convictions with certainty demonstrates an affinity with Erasmus and exhibits a lack of confidence in the clarity of Scripture and a spirit of skepticism.

Is God’s word clear? Nobody argues with the fact that here and there there are a few difficult passages. But is the Bible, in all its fundamental teachings, clear? If we answer “No,” we must conclude that it is nonsensical to talk of pure doctrine. After all, if

we cannot know what the text means, how can we know whether or not what we are teaching is pure or impure?

In his book, *The Inspiration of Scripture*, Robert Preus demonstrates that the Lutheran theologians of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century followed Luther in their insistence on Scripture's clarity.

The dogmaticians teach that the divine origin, the sufficiency and the clarity of Scripture are articles of that which ought to be accepted with faith because they are revealed in Scripture. Scripture is clear and sufficient because it is God's Word to men. Unless Scripture is clear, it cannot be said to be sufficient. How can we be saved through faith in the message of Scripture if that message is not clear? Rome taught that the witness of the Church was needed to make Scripture clear. This was also the persuasion of the Lutheran syncretists. The orthodox teachers hold that the Church is the interpreter of Scripture, but in such a way that each Christian searches and interprets Scripture himself. The Bible does not require the interpretation of others. It is not clear merely implicitly: it clearly sets forth all we need to know to be saved. The perspicuity of Scripture consists not merely in the fact that it enlightens the person who already understands its literal meaning; Scripture is itself a light, it is inherently, clear, making wise the simple, namely, those who allow themselves to be persuaded.<sup>17</sup>

The clarity of Scripture is not required simply for Scripture's sake, but for the sake of the Gospel. If Scripture is not clear, who can know how to be saved? If Scripture is not clear, there is no comfort for the distressed sinner. According to Walther, pure doctrine, "...alone is the medicine that gives life to us human beings who are sick, yes dead in sins."<sup>18</sup> Again Walther says, "We regard the pure Word of God as more precious than heaven and earth and therefore would rather lose everyone's friendship than lose this. By this course of action we preserve the dear, precious, saving Gospel, and that not only for ourselves—oh, no; but also for the sake of other souls..."<sup>19</sup>

Only pure doctrine saves. The historic Lutheran commitment to pure doctrine is motivated by a desire to be faithful to God's teaching. But it also flows from the

understanding that only that which is pure can actually benefit us. It is only the pure doctrine that saves sinners. It is only the pure doctrine that effects all spiritual benefits in the Church. Insistence upon pure doctrine is, therefore, indispensable to the life and survival of the church and is especially essential in an age which disparages the very idea of absolute truth. In the end, if we cannot insist that we possess pure doctrine, we can have no certainty; we can have no true hope.

Does this mean that in those churches that teach error nobody can be saved? Of course not. Many will come to a knowledge of Christ also in these churches but it will not have been the errors of these churches that brought them to Christ. Rather, it will have been the truth that shines forth even in the midst of error that brought them into Christ's fold. Again, only pure doctrine saves. If one comes to the saving faith through the proclamation of a message which is not entirely pure, it is not that error is responsible for good, but that the truth, insofar as it has been expressed, has the power to create faith and save. In other words, one is saved in spite of the error.

Thus, far from being loveless in our insistence on the proclamation of only pure doctrine, faithful Lutherans are exhibiting precisely the very love which their opponents insist they so firmly desire. For apart from this insistence on the teaching of pure doctrine, the Gospel dissolves and gives place to pious speculations that will always point sinners to their own works rather than to the grace of God for salvation.

It is actually love that leads the Church to insist upon the identification of error. And so we have arrived at the last point I wish to emphasize in my presentation today. The proclamation of the truth requires the faithful shepherd to identify error for the sake

of the flock. This is a loving thing that he does. In an excellent chapter contained in *The Abiding Word*, Walter Baepler declares,

Whoever teaches the true doctrine, but does not warn against false doctrine and against wolves in sheep's clothing (Matt. 7:15), is not a faithful steward of the mysteries of God, not a faithful shepherd of the sheep entrusted to his care, not a trusty watchman on the walls of Zion, but as the Word of God says, a wicked servant, a dumb dog, a traitor. It is evident that many souls are lost because they are not warned against false doctrine, which is poison to the soul.<sup>20</sup>

Martin Luther insists upon the pastor's duty to protect the sheep from false teaching. In the exercise of his ministry, Luther says, the pastor is committed to battle on behalf of Christ's church.

For a pastor must not only lead to pasture by teaching the sheep how to be true Christians: but, in addition to this, he must also repel the wolves, lest they attack the sheep and lead them astray with false doctrine and error. For the devil does not rest. Now today one finds many people who can let the Gospel be preached, provided that one does not cry out against the wolves from coming and leading the sheep astray. For what is built if I lay stones and watch someone else knock them down? The wolf can surely let the sheep have good pasturage. The fatter they are, the more he likes them. But he cannot bear the hostile barking of the dogs. Therefore to him who takes this to heart it is important to tend the sheep in the right way, as God has commanded.<sup>21</sup>

In the face of danger, then, the faithful preacher will not flee. He will stay to protect souls, lest they perish.<sup>22</sup> Nor can the faithful pastor pick his battles. Whenever the flock is in danger, he must be ready to stand in its defense. This duty to defend the flock is the most compelling reason for the identification and refutation of false doctrine. There are certainly other reasons to identify false doctrine and to avoid it. As Baepler points out,

Every errorist transgresses the Second Commandment, for he lies and deceives by God's name, which as our Catechism informs us, is done by teaching false doctrine and saying that it is God's Word or revelation. The errorist sins against the First Commandment, for either he is trusting

his own reason in matters of religion or he is following someone who is erring and whom he is holding in greater esteem than God. In either case he is committing idolatry... False doctrine is a sin against the Third Commandment, which demands that we hold the Word of God sacred, in other words, that we tremble at God's Word in holy awe. Changing this Word either by adding thereto or by taking away therefrom is despising the holy Word of God.<sup>23</sup>

Surely these are sufficient reasons for pastors to point out error to their members to keep them from grave sin. The teaching of false doctrine violates the entire first table of the Law. But then Baepler goes on to point to the same duty of the pastor that Luther identifies – the duty to identify false doctrine for the sake of souls. This care of souls is of utmost importance. “To commit murder is generally considered a heinous crime,” Baepler says. “But worse than destroying the body is the destroying of a soul. But just that is done when the pure Word of God, which is able to save souls (James 1:21), is taken from someone and he through error is led on the path that leads to destruction.”<sup>24</sup>

No wonder Walther commended the early Saxons because, “There a pastor was bound by oath that as soon as he became aware that a fellow pastor had apostatized and was attempting to mislead his congregation he would report this to the superintendent.”<sup>25</sup>

The identification of error serves another salutary purpose. When error is identified, the truth is better understood. When I was a young pastor in my first congregation, I was teaching a youth Bible Class on comparative religions. One of the girls in the class got very upset because there was so much focus on falsehood and error. She actually quit coming to the class as a result. She thought it was too negative. All the other young people loved it. They recognized that when error was exposed and contrasted to the truth, they understood much better the value of the truth. They understood why they believed what they did. This growth in appreciation of the truth after having studied

error is something I have seen repeatedly throughout my ministry. So it is no surprise to read in our own Confessions, “Every simple Christian can perceive what is right or wrong, when not only the pure doctrine has been stated, but also the erroneous, contrary doctrine has been repudiated and rejected.”<sup>26</sup>

St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13:6, “[Love]... does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth.” The Lutheran pastor and layperson both need to understand that it is not negative, it is positive; it is not unloving, but loving, to identify and reject that which is false. To neglect this essential aspect of the office of the pastor especially, is inexcusable. Imagine the following conversation: You go into a restaurant. The waiter arrives and asks if you would like a menu. You say, “No, thank you.” “So you already know what you would like,” the waiter says. “No,” you say. The waiter is puzzled, hesitates and finally asks, “So – what would you like?” You say, “I don’t care. Just bring me anything. It doesn’t matter.” Nobody would go into a restaurant with that attitude. How much less ought you to go into a church with that attitude! How grateful you should be if you have a pastor who feeds you with pure doctrine and does everything he can to warn you about that doctrine that could harm you!

The *Formula of Concord* employs a very effective way of teaching. It identifies controversies, describes the biblical doctrine and then identifies false doctrine. It does this in its first 11 articles. But the 12<sup>th</sup> article is dedicated only to the identification and rejection of heresies and false doctrine. It provides a whole list of false teachings to be rejected, false teachings about Baptism the Lord’s Supper, the office of the ministry, the person of Christ, the Trinity and so on. It then says,

These and like articles, one and all, with what pertains to them and follows from them, we reject and condemn as wrong, false, heretical, and

contrary to the Word of God, the three Creeds, the Augsburg Confession and Apology, the Smalcald Articles and Luther's Catechisms. Of these articles all godly Christians should and ought to beware, as much as the welfare and salvation of their souls is dear to them.<sup>27</sup>

In conclusion, pure doctrine is a treasure. We should dedicate our lives to the use of this treasure. Thus, Paul urges Timothy, "Continue in the things you have learned." (2 Timothy 3:14) He urges the Thessalonians, "Brothers, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught." (2 Thessalonians 2:15) Let us all heed Paul's advice, continuing in what we have been taught and learned, knowing that God will generously bless our study of and our commitment to His pure doctrine. Let us be faithful to the Scriptures and to the Lutheran Confessions. Then perhaps one day they will say of us what Dr. Richard Lenski of the Ohio Synod wrote about the Missouri Synod in 1922.

If there ever was a strictly conservative body, it surely is the Missouri Synod. Nevertheless, this growth! Here is a historical fact that refutes all talk trying to persuade us that we must be liberal, accommodate ourselves to the spirit of the time, etc., in order to win men and grow externally. The very opposite is seen in the Missouri Synod. Missouri has at all times been unyielding; it is so still. In this body the Scriptures and the Confessions have been, and still are, valued to their full import. There was no disposition to surrender any part of them. With this asset Missouri has been working in free America, abounding in sects and religious confusion, and now exhibits its enormous achievements. What so many regard as Missouri's weakness has in reality been her strength. This fact we might write down for our own remembrance. It is a mark of the pastors and leaders of the Missouri Synod that they never, aye, never, tire of discussing doctrine on the basis of Scripture and the Confessions. That is one trait that may be called the spirit of Missouri. People who thus cling to doctrine and contend for its purity are of an entirely different nature from the superficial unionists who in the critical moment will declare five to be an even number. God will bless all who value His Word so highly. Gratitude towards God, who has granted this division of American Lutheranism so much glorious blessing, and through Missouri has communicated this blessing also to other parts of the Lutheran Church, will be the basic note of this festival celebration. May God keep Missouri and us and all Lutheran Christians faithful in the doctrine and confession of His Word and grant us His blessing for our external growth and prosperity.<sup>28</sup>

That was our past. By God's grace may it be our future.

By Rev. Daniel Preus, March 2, 2011 – *Soli Deo Gloria*

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<sup>1</sup> Ewald Plass, *What Luther Says*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), 411.

<sup>2</sup> *Concordia Triglotta*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), 401.

<sup>3</sup> Plass, 415. Emphasis added.

<sup>4</sup> Matthew Harrison, ed., *At Home in the House of My Fathers*, (Lutheran Legacy, 2009), 249. Emphasis added.

<sup>5</sup> *Triglotta*, 1095.

<sup>6</sup> Luther, Martin; Pelikan, Jaroslav Jan; Oswald, Hilton C.; Lehmann, Helmut T., eds. *Luther's Works*, (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), Vol. 27, 41. (Subsequent references to this edition of Luther's Works will be abbreviated LW.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, 38.

<sup>8</sup> David Scaer. "Doctrine and Practice: Setting the Boundaries: An Abstract Essay with Practical Implications." *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, vol. 66, 4 (October 2002), 308. Italics in the original.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, 309-310.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, 310.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 311-312.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, 312.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 314.

<sup>14</sup> Martin Wittenberg, "Church Fellowship and Altar Fellowship in the Light of Church History", *Logia: A Journal of Lutheran Theology*, (Fort Wayne, Indiana: Luther Academy, 1992), Volume I, Number 1, 2.

<sup>15</sup> J. I. Packer & O.I. Johnston, eds. *Martin Luther on the Bondage of the Will*, (Westwood, N. J.: Revell, 1957), 67.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 70.

<sup>17</sup> Robert Preus, *The Inspiration of Scripture*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955), 156.

<sup>18</sup> Harrison, 239.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 254.

<sup>20</sup> Theodore Laetsch, ed., *The Abiding Word*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947), vol. 2, 508.

<sup>21</sup> LW, vol. 30, 135.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 277.

<sup>23</sup> Laetsch, 502.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>25</sup> Harrison, 243.

<sup>26</sup> *Triglotta*, 837

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, 1103.

<sup>28</sup> Laetsch, 515-516.