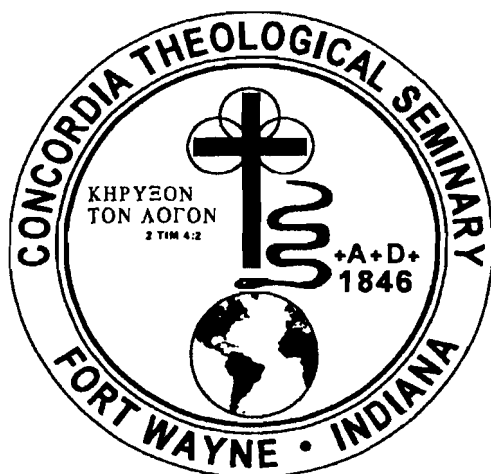


# CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL QUARTERLY



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# Theological Observer

## *The Passion of the Christ* and the "Theology of the Cross"

"He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities." As these words from Isaiah 53 flashed across the screen, an extraordinary cinematic masterpiece called *The Passion of the Christ* began. No movie to my memory evoked as much controversy. Almost daily reviews appeared in print, on television and on the Internet. What can be discerned in the fervor? By "critiquing the critics," can we identify a common issue among them? All have stated reasons for their dislike of the film, but those stated reasons are purely superficial. Underneath these reasons exists a basic presupposition held by three identifiable groups.

First, secularists tend to criticize the movie for its overtly Christian content. For some, the very idea of religious faith in the public arena is repugnant, especially if that religion is Christianity. But along came Mel Gibson and *The Passion of the Christ* right into the neighborhood's secular theater. Mr. Gibson has not only produced a film that takes seriously the central figure of the Christian faith but he also openly admits to being a believer in Jesus Christ. His faith is that of a conservative, even pre-Vatican II, Roman Catholic and he does not pretend to be anything else. The virtue of integrity of faith and public confession, however, is apparently lost on some and a flash point for others.

To the secularist, religious faith of any kind is considered a matter appropriate only for private life, not for public life. One may believe whatever he or she chooses to believe (we are, after all, "post-modern," whatever that means), but one dare not say publicly what one believes privately. The only public discourse on religion that is permitted is the degradation of religion, with the possible exemption of religious faiths seen either as minority religions or as being in active opposition to Christianity. Degrading comments about Jesus Christ are quite acceptable but nothing similar dare be said about other gods, like Allah. That would be insensitive.

Even more to the dislike of secularists, *The Passion of the Christ* takes seriously the historicity of the death of Jesus Christ. Many have decried the historical violence of the movie. It is not violence *per se* that secularists detest since even more violent films have received critical acclaim. It is a particular violence that took place some two thousand years ago and was directed at one who is proclaimed to be God. A Jesus who serves as a sort of guru of social values, a teacher of morality, and example of a man misrepresented by his followers is an acceptable Jesus; a Jesus who is "wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities" is not. When Gibson portrays this Jesus as one who actually lived and suffered for humanity, the secularist fears the outcome.

The secularist cannot allow the foolishness of the bloody religion of Christianity to define the purpose and value of human life. The message of forgiveness and sacrificial love contradicts the very central ethic of this culture, where the human

being is no more than a chance product of improbability, the meaningless end result of an evolutionary process that itself comes from nowhere and leads to nowhere. It is a bleak universe for the secularist. The human being has no real purpose for being and no end other than the oblivion of death. But if Jesus of Nazareth is taken seriously, the secularists' universe is threatened at its very foundation. If the story of Jesus is true and God has redeemed this world by becoming a man, then human beings are not the chance encounter of molecules, but the intentional product of a creator. We have an immense value based upon the decree of the Creator who redeems His creation. The Christ we see in Gibson's film reverses the secularists' universe: God was in Christ, redeeming the world through the cross.

A second group of critics of *The Passion of the Christ* are those who hold a religious faith that is distinctly non-Christian. Most interesting among them, in my opinion, are Jewish reviewers. Some of the film's most vocal critics, as well as some of its strongest defenders, have come from that religious community.

The surface level charge against the film is that it is "anti-Semitic," a charge taken up by secular critics as well. The historicity of the biblical accounts of Jesus' final hours is sometimes challenged, but even when the historicity is not, the appropriateness of the film's portrayal of Jews is. In order to lessen the criticism, certain aspects of the film have been modified. Though the film regularly provides English subtitles to the Aramaic dialogue, one key scene does not provide the necessary translation of the crowd's response to Pilate's words, "I am innocent of this man's blood." In Aramaic the crowd responds, "His blood be on us and on our children" (Matthew 27:25), but no translation appears. The audience is to hear the words but not to understand them. The words of Jesus to the "daughters of Jerusalem" (Luke 23:28-29) also do not appear.

It is true that the film does not portray the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem in a favorable light. But, then again, neither do the Gospels. The simple fact is that it was the decision of those individuals to destroy Jesus. Their witnesses failed to agree with one another. The real charge of blasphemy was altered to insurrection when they brought Jesus to the Roman authorities. This is not anti-Semitism; it is the assertion of the biblical texts recounting the trial and crucifixion of Jesus.

Lost in the charges of anti-Semitism is the positive portrayal of Jews in the movie. A Jewish actress, Maia Morgenstern, the daughter of a rabbi, portrays Mary, the mother of Jesus. Jesus Himself is unquestionably Jewish. He is no northern European-looking man as He so often appears in western films. He speaks Aramaic, follows the Passover customs, and reflects the culture of His Jewish roots. While some Jews plot His death, other Jews seek to protect and comfort Him and mourn His sentence. Even the Jewish leaders' mistreatment of Jesus pales compared to the way the Romans treated him. Gibson does not call the audience to hate Jews because of what happened to Christ but to look within themselves and see the evil residing in all of us.

The real problem, it seems to me, is not the supposed anti-Semitism of the film. Rather, it is that hermeneutic flashed across the screen at the very beginning, "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities." There is the offense of the movie and the offense of the historic cross. This Jew, Jesus, bloody and battered, nailed to a cross, is openly held up to be the fulfillment of Isaiah 53 and, by extension, every Hebrew Scripture prophecy of the Christ. At the end, when Jesus dies, Satan is seen screaming in the agony of defeat. The earth trembles and the Holy of Holies is laid open. This man is the Son of God.

Finally, a third group of critics comes from among Christians. Ed Schroeder, a Lutheran theologian, provided a most interesting critique of the movie. In an Internet article called "Thursday Theology #305" dated April 15, 2004, Schroeder offers his analysis of the movie.<sup>1</sup> His reactions typify those of many Christian reviewers of Gibson's film. Schroeder is greatly concerned about what he perceives to be Gibson's Roman Catholic portrayal of Jesus' death in the film. He states, "The second hero (possibly the first?) is Mary. That is where Gibson's old-style Catholicism jumped off the screen for me. She too is a suffering servant. Hers is bloodless in contrast to the oozing blood of her son. And if suffering is the *sine qua non* of saving sinners, he presents her to us (almost) as co-redemptrix." Here Schroeder reveals a common Protestant fear of Mary, a fear that has no roots in the biblical or historical structures of Schroeder's Lutheran heritage. As Schroeder himself (with Luther) later asserts in his article, Mary is the *theotokos* or "God-bearer." Mary was exactly like all other redeemed human beings when she rejoiced in God her Savior. Yet her relationship to Jesus was unique in that she alone was chosen to bear, birth, and nourish the very Son of God. Thus she is the one that every generation is to call "Blessed."

Is there, in fact, a Roman Catholic flavor to the movie, especially in regard to Mary? Absolutely. Many of the scenes in the movie are not found in the biblical text but are the product of pious traditions most commonly held by Christians of the Roman Catholic tradition. But are these traditions historically true? Perhaps, but probably not. They are recorded in no biblical text. But one might ask why they developed and what role they actually play in the film. I could not disagree more with Schroeder's concern that Mary is projected as a "co-redemptrix." She is portrayed as a mother who watches her innocent, beloved son suffer and die. What mother would not rush to her fallen son's side? What mother would not follow him through his trials, beatings, journey to the cross and his ultimate crucifixion? She was there, after all, when Jesus spoke to her from the cross (John 19:26-27). The pious traditions, while not historically verifiable, would be actions expected from any mother.

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<sup>1</sup>This article, subtitled "Topic: Gibson's 'Passion' film, one more time," may be found at <<http://www.crossings.org/thursday/Thur041504.htm>>.

The embellishments of the film by the Mary traditions are exactly that: embellishments. Perhaps the offense taken by evangelicals to those traditions is simply rooted in the old fear of Roman Catholicism. I suspect, however, that the real reasons are far more profound. The emphasis on Mary leads the viewer to the startling realization that Jesus is not only the Son of God but He is also the Son of Man. To state it so simply shocks no one familiar with the titles given our Lord. We are accustomed to glibly spouting such words. What we are not accustomed to is pondering the meaning of the assertion that Jesus was the son of a very human mother and thus truly one of our human race.

The suffering of Jesus was no abstract suffering, endured by one who only appeared to be human. It was suffering that few have endured, to be sure. But human beings (even the rest of us who are only human and not, at the same time, truly God) can, in fact, endure tremendous pain if our will is committed to fulfilling a mission. Was Jesus' suffering beyond that which a normal human being might bear? Yes, both in the movie and in historical fact. Every record of the process of crucifixion by the Romans is a story of incredible brutality. That Jesus could have endured it all is made possible by only one thing: His commitment to fulfill the mission He had come to complete — that is, the salvation of the world.

Such an image is most unsavory in our modern Christianity. Sanctuaries once held multiple images of the suffering Christ. Many Lutheran churches had a crucifix as their focal point. There, before the eyes of God's people, was the image of Jesus nailed to a cross. Almost always, however, that crucifix was a work of art, partially hiding the horror of Calvary by depicting Jesus in peaceful death, head bowed after giving up His spirit, encased not in the wood and gore of a Roman cross but in the polished silver, gold, or brass of piety.

Today, many crosses on Lutheran altars are devoid of a *corpus*. Still other church buildings are more barren than the empty crosses on modern altars, with no cross at all to be seen, with or without a *corpus*. The liturgical cross is a rejected symbol since the modern Christian faith is supposed to be a positive experience, an uplifting, if shallow, encounter with God. More tragically, much of what passes as Christian preaching is as devoid of the cross as the building in which it takes place. For too many modern Christians, the message is that no one should feel sorrow by gazing upon an image and hearing words spoken about God suffering and dying *pro nobis*, that is, for us.

What is the common thread that unifies the basic criticism leveled by these varied groups of critics of *The Passion of the Christ*? It centers on the Theology of the Cross. I am reminded of another biblical text that serves as a hermeneutic for understanding human reactions to Jesus' cross. Saint Paul wrote, "Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles" (1 Corinthians 1:22-25 NIV). The cross, with its suffering and dying God, is as much a stumbling block and offense today as it was then.

Only in the cross do we see the hidden God. This is where God is found: hidden in the Christ, hidden in suffering, hidden in the ugliness of the cross. No one would expect to find God there. Not Simon Peter. Not Luther. Not the most ardent secularist. Not the most devout Jew. Not the most liberal Christian. No one. But there and only there do we find Him. Every fiber of our being resists that discovery because it contradicts all of our assumptions about God. How could the Almighty be weak? How could the Creator of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible, suffer, be crucified, and actually die? Human reason revolts against this and human wisdom denies that it could be so.

The opening scene of *The Passion of the Christ* is set in the Garden of Gethsemane. The appearance of Gibson's androgynous Satan there, of course, is not in the biblical account of the Garden, but is another embellishment. Satan asks Jesus, "How can one man bear the sins of the entire world?" It is as if Satan perceived that which we human beings cannot fully contemplate or understand. What was about to happen to Jesus would justify a world of condemned human beings and forever defeat every power of sin, death, and Satan.

But this is where *The Passion of the Christ* forces us to come to terms with our failure to fully comprehend both who Jesus is and who we are. Gibson's Jesus is no frail, beautiful corpse shining on an artistically designed crucifix. And He is certainly not the Christ of positive thinking and glorious, but cross-less, popular Christianity. He is the Lamb of God, the Sin-Bearer of the world. The horror of His scourging, crucifixion, and agony is the horror of our scourging, crucifixion, and agony. That is the great exchange. The sinless One dies; the sinful ones live. The One who kept the law suffers the death of a criminal; the breakers of the law, like Barabbas, are set free. The Holy One becomes sin; the sinful ones become holy.

And we live in the paradox of His power found in the weakness of His passion and cross. The contrast between "good" people and "evil" people seems obvious in the movie. But there is another problem. The Theology of the Cross insists that we see ourselves among those for whom the Passion occurred. Gibson has shown the bloody sacrifice for what it was and still is. As the Roman soldiers gleefully pursue their torture of Jesus, professionally selecting just the right instruments to inflict as much pain as possible, the blood begins to flow. Not just drops of blood but pools of blood. As they strike him, that blood splatters over his tormentors. As Mary kneels down to clean up that blood, it soaks her towels, her hands, her robes. It splatters on those that nailed His hands and feet to the cross. As Mary stands beneath her crucified son, the blood pours over her. Like the rain, the blood falls on both the "evil" and the "good."

Martin Luther, that great Theologian of the Cross, wrote in the "Heidelberg Theses" (1518): "... true theology and recognition of God are in the crucified Christ" (LW 31:53). There is God, hidden, yet revealing Himself and in so doing also revealing who we are. We are not the meaningless result of the course of evolution or simply animals like all other creatures. We are the redeemed creation

of a God who has so loved us that He gave His only begotten son so that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

Yet there is one more aspect of the Theology of the Cross that we cannot ignore. We are called by this same Jesus to take up our crosses and to follow him. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a pastor in Germany during the darkest days of the second World War, wrote, "When Christ calls a man he bids him 'Come and die'" (*The Cost of Discipleship*). To take up our cross has nothing to do with bearing those afflictions that come from being human. The cross of the Christian is properly only that suffering because of the Gospel.

To live with Jesus is to die with Him and to die with Him is also to rise with Him. The final scene of Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* is also one of the shortest. From the "Pieta" scene of Mary embracing the dead body of her Son, the camera shifts first to Satan screaming in defeat and then to a tomb. There the grave cloths lie empty and one sees so very briefly the Risen Christ, glorious in His victory and yet, in His hands, still bearing the tokens of His Passion. It is, perhaps, its very brevity that makes this Resurrection scene so powerful.

*The Passion of the Christ*, like the Theology of the Cross, ultimately leads the people of God to that empty tomb. This is the hermeneutic at the end of the movie, wonderfully balancing the hermeneutic of Isaiah 53 at its beginning. This is the essence of Christian hope in a life lived under the cross and through a call to discipleship. Our death is rooted in Him through baptism. But so also is our resurrection. That same cross of Jesus also leads us to the tomb with Him and to our resurrection with Him. This is in our baptism. This is in the blessed sacrament, that foretaste of the Marriage Feast of the Lamb in the kingdom that shall have no end. This is our past, our present, and our future.

Daniel L. Gard

### **Affirming Our Exclusive Claims in the Midst of a Multi-religious Society: Advice From a Partner Church**

A new wave of immigration has posed a great challenge for Christian citizens of Western nations. These newcomers bring with them distinct beliefs and practices that disrupt the religious homogeneity of many countries. In the past, denominational loyalties and rules for fellowship were treated predominantly as an intra-Christian affair. Now, the circle demarcating denominational identity is drawn in view of other religions as well, and as churches engage in that task, the dilemma of finding an appropriate response to them becomes apparent.

The current state of affairs in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod is a reflection of this shift. Throughout its history, the Missouri Synod addressed and defied the practice of "unionism" and to a lesser extent, "syncretism." Though syncretism, too, was explicitly rejected already in her constitution of 1847, it was



done so perhaps in an almost prophetic and visionary anticipation of things to come, of precisely the situation we find ourselves in today.

How should we advise Lutherans to relate to other faiths? We need to affirm the diverse nature of our multi-religious world. We can no longer heap all those outside the Christian religion into one huge anti-Christian block as we have done in the past, and thereby consider our task accomplished. This simply will not sufficiently address the religious complexity of Western reality. Though Francis Pieper must be commended for bequeathing us with the orthodox classification of the one true religion versus all the other *falsae religiones*, this monolithic front must now be detailed to incorporate the specific peculiarities of each religion. Aside from the influx of immigrants, there is one other compelling reason for doing so.

The tragedy of September 11 revealed this to us. Those who brought this horror upon the Western world were adherents to the Islamic faith. In the aftermath of this event, one apparent predicament surfaced immediately. There is a conspicuous dearth in most denominations, The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod included, of resources to address adequately the characteristics of the Islam with careful scholarship and expertise.<sup>1</sup> So, one lesson to be learned from these events is that schools, churches, and seminaries must step up to the plate. We must address this deficit with a teaching program that goes beyond traditional symbolics and details the distinctive characteristics of other religions in our curricula.<sup>2</sup>

That is not to say, however, that all the additional details about other belief systems should obscure the clear message of the church on the source and finality of salvation itself, Jesus Christ. Yet, there is no guarantee that this will remain to be so. Our *exclusive* claims are constantly challenged from outside our fellowship by more lenient *inclusivist* or radical *pluralist* stances that to varying degrees have asserted the probability or certainty of the salvation of the unevangelized apart from Christ.

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<sup>1</sup>One should, however, commend Concordia Publishing House for its recent publications on the subject: Alvin Barry, *What about Islam?* (2001); Roland E. Miller, *Muslim Friends* (1995); Jane L. Fryar, *The Truth about Islam* (2002); Ernest Hahn, *How to Respond - Muslims* (1995). Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne is also able to utilize further resources in the Zwemer Institute, a non-denominational institute for Islamic research residing on campus.

<sup>2</sup>The once widely-used text produced by the Synod, Martin Günther's *Populäre Symbolik* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1898) and its replacements, Theodore Engelder's *Popular Symbolics* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1934) and F. E. Mayer's *The Religious Bodies of America* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1961), all have their shortcomings in this regard.

The Missouri Synod has not yet reached that point and thankfully so.<sup>3</sup> But its exclusive claims have been blurred by an invocation of complex laws of polity and by a play with words. This, in turn, deludes others, including us also, into thinking that perhaps our own exclusive claims and their rules of practice are unclear.<sup>4</sup>

The missionary task places all pastors before two seemingly paradoxical approaches. On the one hand, pastors should recognize the need to encourage all their members to strive towards a harmonious life with others, a *convivence* or convivial existence,<sup>5</sup> which recognizes the freedom to believe whatever one wishes and the right for everyone to practice it unhindered. On the other hand, they should be intent on committing their members to a missionary task that does not compromise proclamation and conversion with other options such as dialogue and mutual enrichment apart from transformation. Members should be asked to maintain a steadfast course that does not defy the unique status of Christ in the divine scheme of salvation, even if the contrary is stated in media and other publications.

Finding the proper Christian response in our multi-religious context has thus become an important priority for Christianity. Any advice that would give direction here would certainly be welcome. It comes to us from a partner church "The Independent Evangelical-Lutheran Church" (SELK). Their important statement entitled "Guidelines for Evangelical-Lutheran Christians Living Together with Muslims in Germany," responds to the challenge of missionary witness and practice in thirty-seven theses.<sup>6</sup> Though it addresses Lutheran

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<sup>3</sup>In addition to the traditional position of the dogmaticians, J. T. Mueller and F. Pieper, such claims are enunciated in, "Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 15 (1986): 151, 162-163. The recently submitted published "Guidelines for Participation in Civic Events," A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod (April 2004) also affirms the Missouri Synod's exclusive claims (8-9).

<sup>4</sup>The members in CTCR failed to reach agreement in their "Guidelines for Participation in Civic Events" on whether it is permissible for Lutheran pastors to attend those civic events with other non-Christian leaders at which prayers are offered (19-20).

<sup>5</sup>A phrase coined by Dr. Theo Sundermeier, Professor of Ecumenical and Religious Studies at Heidelberg University, Germany, in his article "Theology of Missions," *Dictionary of Missions*, edited by Karl Müller, Theo Sundermeier, and others (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1997), 447.

<sup>6</sup>Original title: "Wegweisung für evangelisch-lutherische Christen für das Zusammenleben in Deutschland. Eine Wegweisung herausgegeben von der Kirchenleitung der Selbständigen Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche (SELK) (2002)." The SELK is a church body of about 36,000 members who live in a country with a total population of about 82 million, of which 3 million are Muslims. The document can be ordered at the church's head office under the address: Kirchenbüro der Selbständigen Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche, Schopenhauerstraße 7, 30625 Hannover, Germany (Tel. 011-49-511-551588/e-mail: selk@selk.de) or downloaded as a file from its website, [www.selk.de](http://www.selk.de) (and proceed from

believers in Germany, this statement reflects the faith of Lutherans on the whole. For this reason, these guidelines are worth noting. Their advice is as follows:

1. Christians are advised not to accept the claim that Islam is a redefinition of a falsified Christian belief (Thesis 10), for Christians "already possess the complete revelation of God in Jesus Christ. They also expect God's final revelation as the fulfillment in Christ, whose return they await" (Thesis 7).
2. On this basis, the statement dismisses any thought that Islam and Christianity believe in the same God: "The confession of Islam knows only God as a single person (Allah), while the Christians confess the Triune God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Allah and the God of the Christians are not identical (Thesis 11). "Contrary to Islamic understanding, Christians believe and confess that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, who died vicariously by His death on the cross. In Him Christians have forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. This good news of salvation for sinful man is not found in Islam" (Thesis 12).
3. There is thus an important distinction in how salvation is attained and worship should be practiced. The statement isolates the problem in the doctrine of justification versus work righteousness, of grace versus law.<sup>7</sup> In terms of worship practices the statement boldly erases a common misconception or temptation that since all have the same God a common worship might just be in order: "Living together in our society can lead to a desire to pray or to celebrate worship services together (e.g., prayers for peace, school-church events, marriage ceremonies). These desires are justified with the assertion that 'there is after all only one God,' to whom all, even with extremely contrasting conceptions, may pray, and that it is important to learn from the wealth of religious traditions" (Thesis 32).
4. For this reason there can be no compromise: "As much as we genuinely desire to approach Muslims by invitation and visitation and to improve human relations with them, we must make it equally clear that we can have no joint worship with them, nor engage in any joint prayer; because Allah in Islam is god other than the Father of Jesus Christ ("denn Allah im Islam ist ein anderer Gott als der Vater Jesu Christi") (Thesis 33).<sup>8</sup>

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there as follows: Interaktiv-Download-Texte-Islam). The unpublished English translation may be requested from the author of this article: schulzkd@mail.ctsfw.edu.

<sup>7</sup>(Thesis 14): "For Islam the relationship between God and humans is seen completely differently. According to Mohammed's teachings man is justified before Allah, if he carries out the prescribed religious duties and is righteous toward his neighbor, that is, he does not deceive, steal or murder. . . . Christians, in contrast, proceed from the biblical statements on man's fallen state because of hereditary sin and they believe that they cannot be justified before God through their own power" (Thesis 13).

<sup>8</sup>This thesis continues: "Muslims reject the Holy Trinity, and as a consequence also the Son of God, Jesus Christ. This is recorded twenty-three times in the Koran. This in turn

5. With statements establishing the proper distinction on who God is and how faith and worship are properly understood and rightly practiced, the "Guidelines" proceed to the nature of missions. They do so by affirming the clear and straightforward message of Jesus Christ that is and will be contested and challenged by Islam<sup>9</sup>: "Whoever gives way here, is ashamed of the Gospel of the Lord Christ, and sacrifices faith and true love. Christian love comes from the faith, and the best that love can create is the passing on of this faith. Whoever claims to love his Muslim neighbor but does not desire his conversion to the Christian faith is deceiving himself. Consequently, Christian witness becomes an important task in a co-existence between Christians and Muslims" (Thesis 23).<sup>10</sup>
6. That clear and unadulterated commitment to her mission, however, does not erase the common things among Christians and Muslims. But the statement cautions us not to tinker with theological differences precisely because we are doing an unloving disservice to ourselves and our hearers: "When it comes to the missionary proclamation of the faith, the tendency to minimize the differences between Islam and Christianity must be resisted. If one speaks of all those things that Islam and Christianity have in common, then one should be alerted to the fact that similar terms do not mean the same thing and that Mohamed lived 600 years after Christ. Names from the Bible appear in the Koran. Also Jesus Christ is mentioned, but precisely here in His person fundamental differences appear. Even if Islam speaks of faith, welfare, and righteousness, it still lacks a Redeemer. It is not truthful to the purpose of the Gospel if one withholds the total biblical truth for the sake of dialogue. We have to speak the truth in all its content clearly to people with love and witness. Nothing is gained even from a dialogue with other religions when Christians compromise their faith and abandon it in favor of a randomly chosen pluralism" (Thesis 28).

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questions the atoning sacrifice of Jesus on the cross because Allah does not need a mediator or a lamb (Sura 518, et al.). Crucifixion would be a disgraceful defeat for Allah and his ambassadors. Truthfulness in this matter requires that Christians, just as Muslims, do not conceal these fundamental differences; confessing Muslims also see them clearly."

<sup>9</sup>"However, there is only one way that leads to eternal life: Jesus Christ. Christian love respects the religion of the Muslim neighbor or one's co-worker as a part of their identity. But Christian faith sees Islam as its competitor and challenger, with which compromise is impossible" (Thesis 22).

<sup>10</sup>Thesis 27 is also worth noting: "In faithful obedience we bring the Gospel in word and deed lovingly and uncompromisingly to all mankind. That applies also to the Muslims, whom we love, because God loved them in Christ. . . . This attitude forbids crusades in any form and differs from Islam, which talks not only about 'peaceful invitation' (Sura 16: 125), but also of 'armed struggle' (Sura 9: 5). It should be noted, however, that this interpretation of the latter Sura (Sura 9: 5) is not unanimously agreed on by Islamic scholars."

7. Solidarity between Christians and Muslims is nonetheless in order. Christians and Muslims are both beings who have all fallen to sin.<sup>11</sup> Solidarity between the two further exists in the potential of uniting for joint work in pursuit of common civil good in the area of social services in hospitals, orphanages, and other social provisions.<sup>12</sup> Mutuality may also be expressed in uniting around common values against those that challenge them as does abortion, pornography, unrestrained sexuality, drugs, and alcohol abuse.<sup>13</sup> And yet, caution must prevail in this area of common concerns, as well, precisely because Islam, through the claims of the Koran and Shariah, does not separate the religious and the secular as do Lutherans in their doctrine of the two kingdoms. Mosques have and could become potential havens that advocate Islamic law for the world and a change in the democratic order of society.<sup>14</sup>

As Christian churches in Western countries are startled and shaken by statistics revealing the decline of membership, their theological leaders, including those who have formerly abandoned Christianity's exclusive claims, show renewed

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<sup>11</sup>"As Christians we regard the Muslim—irrespective of his nationality, religious affiliation or social status—as a creation of God who is created through divine fatherly goodness and is preserved by Him as well" (Thesis 17). "As Christians we see ourselves in solidarity with Muslims because of our common fallen state as sinners. That is the testimony of God's Word about the world and its people regardless of our own subjective opinion about our state of being. This realization guards Christians against a false sense of superiority over others and enables them to speak with fellow sinners in solidarity" (Thesis 18). "As Christians we look upon all sinners as those who live under the activity and testimony of the grace of God in Jesus Christ. He delivers them from His anger and judgment—apart from their merits and worthiness. This realization, too, guards against arrogance and spiritual pride" (Thesis 19)

<sup>12</sup>"The fact that giving alms is one of the 'Five Pillars of Islam,' demonstrates that Islam has a strong social component that has not only to do with merely fulfilling external duties. The Koran admonishes that one be grateful toward Allah and to care for the needy with one's own income. Hospitals and orphanages are financed and modern social provisions are established. Families, too, support their members in emergencies. We respectfully acknowledge all these services" (Thesis 29).

<sup>13</sup>"The Koran speaks frequently of Allah's love in connection with the moral life. We thus claim that Christian and Islamic values are often shared in common. Both see abortion, pornography, unrestrained sexuality, drugs, and alcohol abuse as harmful and sinful. This joint concern could provide points for discussion that could ease and promote the coexistence between Muslims and Christians, create trust and offer the opportunity to deepen theological discussions" (Thesis 31).

<sup>14</sup>"In principle Islam does not recognize a separation between the religious and the secular realm, the worship service and secular policy. The Koran and the Shariah focus strongly on bringing the world under Islamic law. Because of this attitude, the danger exists that the mosque could become a place where calls for change of the free democratic order of our society are advocated. Admittedly, these goals are not pursued in every mosque or mosque organization" (Thesis 36).

interest in missions. It is thus encouraging to find a concerted commitment to missions espoused by a church body that is also a member of the International Lutheran Council (ILC). The "Guidelines" speak with clarity by using basic and straightforward statements that are lacking in many Christian circles. It takes the centrality of Christ as its vantage point so that, despite the apparently complex nature of missions, Christians do not lose sight of that what matters: A Christian *convivence* with others that at the same time does not compromise the mission. In short, it all comes down to the simple strategic advice that we "consider theologically the advantage of sitting down with Muslims, of shaping meetings in love and of assisting them, as much as is necessary and possible, and finally of witnessing to them the truth of the crucified and risen Christ."<sup>15</sup>

K. Detlev Schulz

### Confessional Pastors Organize Non-Geographical Swedish Mission Province

Swedish Lutheran pastors and laity loyal to the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions gathered on September 5, 2003, in Gothenburg (Göteborg), Sweden, to organize themselves formally as the Swedish Mission Province. The Province is a non-geographical group that covers the entire nation. It is the hope of those in attendance that they will be permitted to maintain and serve parish congregations throughout the country as a fourteenth diocese alongside, but independent of, the present national administration and thirteen diocesan bishops.

The group has been organized in response to the sad theological state of the church in Sweden. On the national and diocesan levels, the official organization is entirely in the hands of theological liberals. The church's self-designation as "Lutheran" was defined by the 1993 Kyrkomöte as simply indicating that the Bible, the three Ecumenical Creeds, the Augsburg Confession of 1530, and the Swedish Church Order of 1571 serve as "the fundamental points of reference for the Church of Sweden as it confesses the Christian faith." In contrast to former times, church membership is now officially stated to be nothing other than the expression of a desire for fellowship. The church is defined as "... the place where people often turn at festive times of the year and for life's major events, occasions when, in happiness or in sorrow, we mark our fellowship with one another and with God." Neither regular attendance at Divine Services nor a strong faith are required or expected.

Life in the church is made increasingly difficult for confessionists. The "conscience clause," which originally allowed pastors to disassociate themselves from the church's unscriptural decision to ordain women to the holy ministry, has

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<sup>15</sup>"Guidelines," 15.

long since been rescinded, and for over a decade all who seek ordination must clearly indicate that they heartily approve and support the ordination of women and are willing to serve alongside them. In many places candidates for ordination are required to receive the Sacrament of the Altar on several occasions from a woman pastor as an indication of their "good faith." No confessional Lutheran pastor who speaks against the ordination of women to the Holy Ministry as contrary to the clear teaching of the Holy Scriptures has been permitted to stand as a candidate for the office of bishop. Pastors who take a stand against the ordination of women are not to be allowed to serve as interim pastors in Swedish parishes. Since the retirement over a decade ago of Bishop Bertil Gärtner of Gothenburg, who, like his well-known predecessor, Bishop Bo Giertz, was strongly opposed to the ordination of women on scriptural grounds, no confessional Lutheran pastors have been ordained in Sweden. A few pastors have been ordained in foreign churches and returned to serve in Swedish parishes, but that is not an option open to many.

Members of the group have been represented by the media and church officials as socially and theology backward and misogynist. Actually, a number of churchwomen, deaconesses, and members of religious sisterhoods are included among its members. The church's decision to accept direction from the politicians and social planners by approving the ordination of women and the present intractable opposition to those who disagree with that decision is seen to be a clear rejection of the Lutheran Church's *sola scriptura* confession in favor of an all-encompassing statement of *sola gratia*, which allows little room for a scriptural doctrine concerning sin and repentance. Modern liberal social attitudes serve as the new *norma normans* of the church's faith and life. The members of the Mission Province stand against this new situation on the basis of the clear teachings of Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions. It condemns the adoption of new hermeneutical principles that reduce the Scriptures to the level of early Christian literature and the denial of the on-going value of the writings included in the Lutheran *Book of Concord* as *norma normata* of scriptural teaching, and the increasing politicization of the church. At present there is a strong movement within the church to approval same-sex marriages and the ordination of practicing homosexuals and lesbians on the same basis as that used to justify the ordination of women. Last year the "special relationship" of the avowedly lesbian sister of Archbishop K. G. Hamer and her lover was "blessed" by the Bishop of Lund, Christina Odenberg, in a ceremony in the Lund Cathedral.

Aware that only a very small minority of Swedes attend church at all and that among them are adults and children who have not received adequate instruction in the Ten Commandments, the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, the person and work of Christ, Holy Baptism, the Office of the Keys and Confession, the Sacrament of the Altar, and christian life, the group recognizes the importance of a strong doctrinal position and clear teaching. The Mission Province confesses the prophetic and apostolic scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Holy Word of God, the only rule and norm of all faith and teaching. As true and

reliable witnesses to that word of God, the Province confesses the confessions of faith that had been passed down from the early church: the Apostles', the Nicene, and the Athanasian Creeds, and the Lutheran Confessions: The Augsburg Confession of 1530, the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the Schmalcald Articles, the Tractate on the Power and Primacy of the Pope, Luther's Small and Large Catechism, and the Formula of Concord.

After lengthy and thoughtful discussions over an extended period of time, the members of the Province, which consists of several diverse groups, including low and high churchmen and Pietists, determined that they should maintain the traditional ecclesiastical polity of the Church of Sweden. A bishop will be elected in the near future, to be confirmed and set in order in the episcopal ministry by foreign Lutheran bishops who are loyal to the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions. Until the Province has in place its own bishop, Bishop Walter Obare, Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya, will be asked for assistance. The church that Bishop Obare serves in Africa is the fruit of the work of Swedish Lutheran Pietist missionaries.

The first priority of the Mission Province is the fulfillment of the Lord's missionary mandate to His apostles and church by the preaching and teaching of the pure word of God and the right administration of the sacraments, that the Swedish people may come to confess their Savior. To this end, candidates faithful to the Scriptures must be enabled to serve as deacons/deaconesses, pastors, church rectors and bishops, churchly structures must be set in order, and congregations must be gathered around the word and sacraments. Future plans include the division of the province into regional units, the establishment of a college of bishops, a consistory (church council), and directorate for mission activity. The group also seeks the establishment of a international group built upon the foundation of confessional Evangelical Lutheranism and contact with other confessions, when and where such contact is appropriate.

The leaders and members of the Mission Province have maintained the hope that their new province will be permitted to live and work within the framework of the Church of Sweden, but independently of the ecclesiastical and theological control of the Archbishop of Uppsala, the Church Council, and the diocesan bishops. This is both a practical and theological concern. The members of the Mission Province do not want to be labeled a sectarian movement, since they confess the faith that the Church of Sweden faithfully held until recent times and their ecclesiastical order is that which the Church of Sweden has traditionally maintained. The status of pastors, co-ministers, and parish property is also a matter of concern. However, all recognize that it is unlikely that the Archbishop and the other bishops will allow them a place in the official church structure, since they refuse to obey the directives of the official organization and do not practice pulpit and altar fellowship with women priests and bishops. The leaders of the Church of Sweden have consistently sought to represent the movement as hopelessly bourgeois and simply out of tune with the times. In an interview on



Radio Sweden late in October, Bo Larsson, Archbishop K. G. Hamar's chancery chief, stated that the ordination of women is so right that no reasonable person could ever oppose it. When asked why the public has not expressed its gratitude for the church's modern approach by attending services, he stated that even though they do not generally come to the services, it is important that the Swedish people have a good feeling about the church. Consequently, it appears unlikely that the Mission Province will be recognized by the present leaders of the Church of Sweden as anything more than another sectarian group completely separate from the church, on a par with the Baptists and other small groups.

Charles J. Evanson  
Klaipeda

### The End of Theological Amateurs in Global Missions

A remarkable event took place February 16-19, 2004 in the lush tropical hill country on the eastern shore of Lake Victoria. The Fourth International Confessional Lutheran Conference was hosted by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya and brought together 180 bishops, pastors, professors, and missionaries from Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia, Malawi, Congo, Rwanda, Uganda, Sudan, Ethiopia, Norway, Sweden, Finland, and the United States.<sup>1</sup> One participant noted two significant aspects of the gathering: "The conference was a solidifying moment in the process of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya becoming more confessional and at the same time it brought together many other Lutheran Churches from East Africa who share a strong confessional potential."

The conference theme "The Three Witnesses" was drawn from 1 John 5:6-10, which reads in part, "This is he who came by water and blood — Jesus Christ; not by the water only but by the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree." The conference sent a strong message to those Lutheran churches in Europe and North America whose missionaries established and continue to support Lutheranism in East Africa. That message was that mission practice that marginalizes the Spirit's testimony through the water and the blood, which gives mere lip service to word and sacrament, leaves the church in a very vulnerable, weakened, and chaotic state.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Conference speakers included Dr. Naaman Laiser from Tanzania, "The Work of Christ and the Means of Grace"; Dr. Kurt Marquart, "The Double-edged Sword of God"; Bishop Walter Obare, "LWF and Homosexuality"; Dr. Reijo Arkkila, "Baptism — the Beginning of New Life"; Dr. Timothy Quill, "The Presence of Christ in the Liturgy," and "Liturgical Preaching"; and Dr. Anssi Simojoki, "Christ — Key to the Bible."

<sup>2</sup>Recent statistics released by the Lutheran World Information in Geneva report that the number of Lutherans world-wide has climbed to 66 million. "The highest regional growth (9.3 percent) was recorded among churches in Africa, where an additional 1,115,141 Lutherans were registered, pushing the number of Lutherans on the continent from 11,953,068 in 2001 to 13,068,209 by the end of 2003." During the same period, Lutheran

It is time for liberal intolerance and western patronizing attitudes to be replaced with respect and humility. It should start with a moratorium on the importation of unLutheran mission paradigms, which undermine the gospel, sacraments, church, and holy ministry. It should also start with a moratorium by those who would impose their higher critical exegesis and unbiblical social agendas (ordination of women and homosexuals, same-sex marriages, etc.) on fellow Lutherans against their will. But above all, it is time for us to listen our brothers in the faith.

Bishop Walter Obare welcomed the participants with an eloquent and unequivocal opening address challenging all the Lutheran churches in Africa and all foreign missionaries to uphold confessional Lutheran theology and practice. His sentiments were shared by the majority of the participants. A few quotes from Bishop Obare's address provide a good place for us to begin to listen. Obare began with a thoughtful exegetical treatment of 1 John 5:6-10 in which he emphasized that the "Spirit, the water and the blood" are more than mere historical references to Christ's baptism and crucifixion; they are also "a present day reality in the Apostolic Church. . . . The water giving its testimony about the truth of God cannot be anything else but the Holy Baptism. The blood witnessing to this very same truth of God cannot be anything else but the true blood of Christ in the Holy Eucharist administered together with the keys of heaven, the powers of the forgiveness of our sins." He then offered a passionate warning against efforts to undermine the agreement of which these three testify.

Secondly, my comment on this question of the three witnesses to the same and one truth. It has been fashionable for years in the field of the New Testament exegetics to try and distinguish between various supposedly contradictory teachings and doctrines in the Bible. This would, again, spell the end of the classic Lutheran doctrine concerning the Holy Scriptures, namely the divine authority (*auctoritas*) of the Bible, perfection or sufficiency (*perfectio seu sufficientia*), perspicuity (*perspicuitas*), and efficacy (*efficacia*) of the Holy Scriptures. It is fashionable in the New Testament exegetics to play various supposed doctrines and theologies against each other, John against the Synoptics, Matthew and Mark against Luke, Paul against Peter, James and Jude, indeed, part of Paul against himself as if St. Paul would not have been the author of all his epistles in the New Testament. Following this kind of historical criticism of the Bible the entirety of the sacred canon is ripped and cut into pieces, which have only little if nothing to do with each other. With this kind of theological pieces and fragments any error, heresy and abomination, can be advocated in the church as has happened so many times. How would we, then, even dare to discuss the three witnesses to one truth? Therefore it is extremely important that we train able exegetes and scholars of systematic theology who can successfully tackle all the

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Churches in Europe continued their dismal decline in membership—down a staggering 640,000. Lutheran Churches in North America lost 84,179 members.

epistemological problems behind modern critical scholarship of the Bible. We are grateful for the beneficial work of various Bible schools and centers of the past and present. Simultaneously, it is, however, of extreme importance to acknowledge the urgent need for higher confessional theological education in Africa. We also need more missionaries of significant theological caliber. The time of theological amateurs is over in the global missions if we are going to prevail. Unless this can be achieved, the future field of theology as a whole, will be seriously handicapped, since the foundation of all true theology, the Sacred Bible, will still be found in the Babylonian Captivity of liberal critical German, Scandinavian, English, and American theologies with their limited and yet strict philosophical presuppositions and categories.

Bishop Obare went on to criticize the so-called postmodern rejection of truth as absolute and the devastating consequences it holds for the future of the church.

The Apostolic ordained ministry of men cannot be genuinely translated or interpreted into androgyny, a man-woman or otherwise gender-sensitive ministry against the plain texts of the Bible. Homosexuality, amongst other vices of ours, is indicative of mankind's wickedness in the state of original sin. It is a corruption of God's creation. It cannot be "interpreted" as an alternative positive manner of realizing sexuality and matrimonial relations as the trends run today and the jargons of a Western media controlled by a very limited and arrogant group of omniscient opinion builders.

Against the tide of postmodernism and all fallacies of ancient paganism, we as biblical Christians maintain that above all varying and changing human truths there is God's eternal truth revealed to us in his Word. Parting ways with the Bible, thus, means separation from the living God. It is just because of the word of the living God that we can claim that the three witnesses testify in unison about the one same truth in Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior.

Again, it is my intense desire that the clergy of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya, and of other Lutheran churches in Africa and elsewhere, as well, would be strengthened in this one scriptural truth of God and made wise and bold in their witness to the truth of God's testimony about his Son, Jesus Christ.

Bishop Obare's visionary words are a clarion call especially to us in the United States. We would do well to listen to them.

Timothy C. J. Quill

## Kenyan Bishop Responds to Swedish Archbishop

In Sweden there are no longer any Lutheran bishops who will ordain men opposed to the ordination of women. Before a candidate will be ordained, he is required to receive communion from a woman priest. As a result, confessional pastors have organized a non-geographic mission diocese and requested Bishop Walter Obare of Kenya to ordain new pastors. Bishop Obare agreed to their request. This has caused quite a stir in the Swedish Lutheran Church, in the public media, and at the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) headquarters in Geneva. On March 2, 2004, the Swedish Archbishop K. G. Hammer wrote to Bishop Obare objecting to his participation. Hammer wrote:

Within the Church of Sweden there are many inner-church movements with different perspectives. Today they exist side-by-side by a wish to stay together even though there are different opinions regarding many of these perspectives. We seem to have reached a painful situation where the wish for some to stay together is no longer as strong as the need to stress one's own perspective.<sup>1</sup>

Bishop Obare responded to Archbishop Hammer with the following letter on March 16, 2004.

In the Name of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ

"If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it," 1 Cor. 12:16.

The reason of my writing in response to your letter, the Most Reverend Primate of the Church of Sweden, is a delicate and serious one. I do it only after serious considerations and prayers.

Lutherans as well as other Christians in growing numbers and in various parts of the World are becoming more and more aware of the anomaly situation in present or former Lutheran state churches in Scandinavia and Germany. With this lamentable and anomaly situation I mean the fact that classic Christianity, set forth especially in the Lutheran Confessions, has come under oppression and even persecution in those historically established Lutheran churches. For years, indeed, for decades, men called by God and qualified by theological studies have been denied ordination and full participation in the service and the life of the church. Behind these young men there are Christians of the rank and file who suffer together with them. Simultaneously with this kind of oppression and persecution the whole world testifies how—measured with all religious, cultural and sociological indicators—historical Protestantism is rapidly crumbling in these countries.

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<sup>1</sup>For the full text of Archbishop Hammer and Bishop Obare's letters see <<http://brogren.nu/eng/index.htm>>.

The reason to resort to this kind of extreme disciplinary measures seems not to be in the first place biblical and confessional but political. Yet, as the example of Dr. Martin Luther shows before the emperor at Worms, and the crystal clear teachings of the Lutheran Confessions univocally confirm, the sole valid source of authority to discipline someone in the church by divine right (*iure divino*) is the word of God. Everything else falls into a category of adiaphora by human right (*iure humane*). My dear Brother and illustrious Colleague in the office of the ministry, where are these legitimate divine statutes in the Church of Sweden? Or are we witnessing, as I fear with many other Lutheran colleagues, the rise of a secular, intolerant, bureaucratic fundamentalism inimical to the word of God and familiar from various church struggles against totalitarian ideologies during the 20<sup>th</sup> century? It is a well-known fact that the reason of the denial of ordination is the refusal of these men to acknowledge and comply with a novelty concerning the divinely instituted office of the ministry, namely the ordination of women. Yet, the Holy Scriptures as well as the majority of the Christians do share the same biblical faith with these men, and the Christian of the rank and the file behind them. Ordination of women to the Apostolic Office of the Ministry is a novelty known historically solely from various Gnostic heretic churches, not from the Catholic Orthodox Early Church as the Swedish theologian of universal acclaim, the Bishop of Lund, Prof. Dr. Anders Nygren, pointed out in Sweden in 1958. This Gnostic novelty is now obviously claiming not only autocracy in the church, but also tyranny, since it cannot tolerate even minimal co-existence with classical Christianity, especially set forth in the Lutheran Confessions.

My purpose is, by no means, to instruct you in these matters, which you should know much better, but only to motivate my writing to you. Today we know far better than before that the ordination of women is not an isolated question of gender and equality in the church. It is intimately connected to the Holy Scriptures, to theology and anthropology.

Failure to obey the word of our Omnipotent Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 14:33b-38 et passim) in this question has flung the floodgates wide open for God and to classic Christianity. You might remember our serious exchange of words concerning the advocacy of homosexuality on the platform of the 10<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation in Winnipeg last year 2003. We know how this kind of debate has shaken the Anglican Communion and where the African and Asian churches stand.

It is very hard and painful to me to imagine how any conscientious Church leadership could stand against the Word of God and the Lutheran Confessions even though political authorities and media princes of various descriptions would temporarily be in support or threaten them. All example of the Church history should warn us from following this biblical faith in Scandinavian countries during popular Lutheran revivals in the 19<sup>th</sup> century,

we should have left this kind of Erastianism and compelled conformism behind us a long time ago. Furthermore, your church should be in a better position than those of Denmark and Norway, since you have finally shaken away the burdens of a state church: "It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in man. It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in Princes," Psalm 118:8-9.

The Lutheran doctrine in the confessional books and Dr. Martin Luther's writing is very clear, indeed, at this point. Where ecclesiastical authorities dare the ordination with reasons that are not legitimate in the light of the Word of God, this kind of denial is canonically not valid. It only gives the right of reforming the church (*ius reformandi*) and the right of ordaining (*ius ordinandi*) to those who are ready to obey God's Word rather than men.

For this reason, I write this serious and cordial appeal to you, my most Reverend and Illustrious Colleague! Because of Christian love I do this in deepest humility. However, demanded by the biblical and Lutheran truth, I want to be as straight forward and candid as necessary. Hence, I ask you to do what must be considered as an absolute minimum in a church, namely to protect those who faithfully obey the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions for Christ. I earnestly appeal to you, that you would remove all the obstacles imposed on the above mentioned ordinations and to do this with your own example as an ordaining Bishop and as true Shepherd and Courageous Primate of your Church.

Otherwise, I must with other Lutheran bishops take upon myself the heavy and historic burden to heed the call of oppressed Lutheranism in your Church and to ordain bishops and pastors in the Church of Sweden on the basis of emergency legitimacy set forth in the Lutheran Confessions. As Lutherans we must also understand that this kind of calling comes from the Head of the Church himself. Who dares disobey him?

Looking anxiously forward to receiving your positive answer

Walter Obare Omwanza

The Most Reverend Bishop Of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya

Timothy C. J. Quill

### Antinomian Aversion to Sanctification?

An emerited brother writes that he is disturbed by a kind of preaching that avoids sanctification and "seemingly question(s) the Formula of Concord . . . about the Third Use of the Law." The odd thing is that this attitude, he writes, is found among would-be confessional pastors, even though it is really akin to the antinomianism of "Seminex"! He asks: "How can one read the Scriptures over and over and not see how much and how often our Lord (in the Gospels) and the

Apostles (in the Epistles) call for Christian sanctification, crucifying the flesh, putting down the old man and putting on the new man, abounding in the work of the Lord, provoking to love and good works, being fruitful . . .?"

I really have no idea where the anti-sanctification bias comes from. Perhaps it is a knee-jerk over-reaction to "Evangelicalism": since they stress practical guidance for daily living, we should not! Should we not rather give even more and better practical guidance, just because we distinguish clearly between Law and Gospel? Especially given our anti-sacramental environment, it is of course highly necessary to stress the holy means of grace in our preaching. But we must beware of creating a kind of clericalist caricature that gives the impression that the whole point of the Christian life is to be constantly taking in preaching, absolution, and Holy Communion – while ordinary daily life and callings are just humdrum time-fillers in-between! That would be like saying that we live to eat, rather than eating to live. The real point of our constant feeding, by faith, on the Bread of Life, is that we might gain an ever-firmer hold of Heaven – and meanwhile become ever more useful on earth! We have, after all, been "created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). Cars, too, are not made to be fueled and oiled forever at service-stations. Rather, they are serviced in order that they might yield useful mileage in getting us where we need to go. Real good works before God are not showy, sanctimonious pomp and circumstance, or liturgical faldral in church, but, for example, "when a poor servant girl takes care of a little child or faithfully does what she is told" (*Large Catechism*, Ten Commandments, paragraph 314, Kolb-Wengert, page 428).

The royal priesthood of believers need to recover their sense of joy and high privilege in their daily service to God (1 Pet. 2:9). The "living sacrifice" of bodies, according to their various callings, is the Christians' "reasonable service" or God-pleasing worship, to which St. Paul exhorts the Romans "by the mercies of God" (Rom. 12:1), which he had set out so forcefully in the preceding eleven chapters! Or, as St. James puts it: "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world" (1:27). Liberal churches tend to stress the one, and conservative ones the other, but the Lord would have us do both!

Antinomianism appeals particularly to the Lutheran flesh. But it cannot claim the great Reformer as patron. On the contrary, he writes:

That is what my Antinomians, too, are doing today, who are preaching beautifully and (as I cannot but think) with real sincerity about Christ's grace, about the forgiveness of sin and whatever else can be said about the doctrine of redemption. But they flee as if it were the very devil the consequence that they should tell the people about the third article, of sanctification, that is, of the new life in Christ. They think one should not frighten or trouble the people, but rather always preach comfortingly about grace and the forgiveness of sins in Christ, and under no circumstances use

these or similar words, "Listen! You want to be a Christian and at the same time remain an adulterer, a whoremonger, a drunken swine, arrogant, covetous, a usurer, envious, vindictive, malicious, etc.!" Instead they say, "Listen! Though you are an adulterer, a whoremonger, a miser, or other kind of sinner, if you but believe, you are saved, and you need not fear the law. Christ has fulfilled it all! . . .

They may be fine Easter preachers, but they are very poor Pentecost preachers, for they do not preach . . . "about the sanctification by the Holy Spirit," but solely about the redemption of Jesus Christ, although Christ (whom they extol so highly, and rightly so) is Christ, that is, He has purchased redemption from sin and death so that the Holy Spirit might transform us out of the old Adam into new men . . . Christ did not earn only *gratia*, "grace," for us, but also *donum*, "the gift of the Holy Spirit," so that we might have not only forgiveness of, but also cessation of, sin. Now he who does not abstain from sin, but persists in his evil life, must have a different Christ, that of the Antinomians; the real Christ is not there, even if all the angels would cry, "Christ! Christ!" He must be damned with this, his new Christ ("On The Councils And The Church," *Luther's Works* 41:113-114).

What are the "practical and clear sermons," which, according to the *Apology*, "hold an audience" (XXIV, 50, p. 267)? *Apology* XV, 42-44 (p. 229) explains:

. . . the chief worship of God is to preach the Gospel. . . . in our churches all the sermons deal with topics like these: repentance, fear of God, faith in Christ, the righteousness of faith, prayer . . . the cross, respect for the magistrates and all civil orders, the distinction between the kingdom of Christ (the spiritual kingdom) and political affairs, marriage, the education and instruction of children, chastity, and all the works of love.

"Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, unto Thy Church Thy Holy Spirit, and the wisdom which cometh down from above, that Thy Word, as becometh it, may not be bound, but have free course and be preached to the joy and edifying of Christ's holy people, that in steadfast faith we may serve Thee, and in the confession of Thy Name abide unto the end; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen."

Kurt Marquart