

REJOICE: THE CHURCH IS BUILT ON THE ROCK

by Berhanu Ofgaa

Hear about how the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus has undergone persecution and suffering and how it has received God's grace even more.

Introduction and Words of Greeting¹

I WOULD LIKE TO BEGIN WITH BRIEF WORDS OF GREETINGS from the church I represent and my own personal salutation. I am a graduate of Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, Indiana. I have been a rostered pastor of the LCMS before rejoining the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (hereafter referred to as the EECMY), where I hold the position of General Secretary. (*Mekane Yesus* means “the dwelling place of Jesus.”) I have been a missionary at-large in the Ohio district for over six years, working among African immigrants. Working in both the EECMY and the LCMS context has contributed towards bridging the relationship between the two church bodies. Thank you for offering me the privilege of being at this great podium and allowing me to deliver this presentation.

Before proceeding with my presentation, I would like to convey greetings from my church. The EECMY has been in partnership with the LCMS in the last few decades. This accompaniment and walk together in God's mission and the partnership we shared during these years has gradually deepened the relationship between the two church bodies. The incredible support the LCMS has rendered to the EECMY especially has meant a lot to us, as the LCMS stood by the EECMY when the EECMY severed her relationship with her former traditional partners, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA) and the Church of Sweden (CoS), because of their legalization of same-sex marriage and ordination. As the saying goes, “A friend in need is a friend indeed.” On top of this, the

visitation made by LCMS President Matthew Harrison two years ago has elevated the level of this partnership. I hereby would like to convey the congratulatory words of my church for the election of the president for the third term and express her best wishes that this term be years of great blessing.

As a result of all these developments, the EECMY has a high regard for the LCMS and her commitment to the Holy Scriptures and her strong Lutheran identity rooted in the Book of Concord. The great contributions the LCMS is rendering in supporting the EECMY seminars, specially strengthening the Master of Arts in Theology (M.A.) program at the Mekane Yesus Seminary (MYS) through provision of faculty members and resources, is so spectacular. At present this joint venture between the two church bodies is moving towards launching a Ph.D. program at the MYS by 2017. Taking this opportunity, I would like to recognize the incredible contribution of

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individuals whom God has used and moved to support this ministry, especially the bridging ministry of Rev. Dr. Albert Collver and the generosity of Mr. Bruce Gilbert, who funded more than forty Master of Theology scholarships at the Mekane Yesus Seminary.

Despite the various challenges and confrontations Christianity today is facing in our present global context, the EECMY is flourishing in all aspects of her growth. For instance, as the statistical report from 2015 shows, in one year alone, over four million unchurched people have heard the good news through the witnesses of the laity,

¹ This presentation was given at the 66th convention of the LCMS, held July 2016 in Milwaukee, Wis.

more than half a million converts have been won and joined the church, and over 1,000 ministers have graduated from the seminaries of the church and joined the ministry. We thank God for this spectacular result.

The EECMY has been blessed with human resources, while the LCMS has been blessed with theological resources and faithfulness to the Scripture, which is something the rest of the Lutheran world needs and desires. Once again, *ameseginalehu*, or thank you. After having said all these as expression of our partnership, I would like to turn your attention to the topic of my presentation.

“REJOICE — THE CHURCH IS BUILT ON THE ROCK”

Rejoicing in the Lord

I would like to begin with the words of Paul, the prisoner of the gospel. He stated, “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice” (PHIL 4:4). As this verse implies, we as Christians are called to rejoice in the Lord. This includes rejoicing both in his suffering and his glory. We rejoice when we suffer for him and with him, and also when we partake in his glory. This shows that there are two types of joy we are called to experience as God’s people. The first is the experience of joy in suffering for him through cross bearing. The second is the joy that comes as a result of it. Peter is right when he stated to those who were experiencing suffering, “After you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you” (1 PET 5:10). Thus, this presentation incorporates both of these joys the church of Christ is called to experience, with special emphasis on the faith journey of the EECMY.

Rejoicing in Suffering

In the above-stated biblical text, Paul brings up special joy God’s people are called to experience in the midst of severe persecution, suffering, and cross-bearing. This is a joy that flows from the experience of the cross. This is a special joy the church of Christ is called to experience in tragic circumstances and hostile environments. This joy is not based on the fulfillment of material blessings, prosperity, health, wellbeing, or success in living. It is a special joy that comes from cross bearing after all these other sources of physical joy are gone. It is a joy in the

Lord and him alone. The mystery of this joy is the security of being in the secret place of the Most High, which is the security of being on the unmovable foundation on which the church of Christ has been built. This essay depicts the secret of this special joy, reflecting on the enormous joy and great blessings the EECMY experienced during severe persecution under the Communist government of Ethiopia a few decades ago. Before dealing with this testimony in depth, it is important to discuss the theme of this convention, “On this rock I will build my church,” to lay a foundation for this reflection. This text was spoken in response to the confession of Peter about Jesus. This text depicts the real foundation on which the church of Christ has been built.

The persecution couldn’t move the church an inch from her firm confession and witnessing to the Lordship of Jesus in public.

The phrase “on this rock” is so significant for our study. In this context the phrase “on this rock” carries deep meaning. Examining what the phrase incorporates is so significant for the interpretation of the theme of this convention. What then does the phrase “on this rock” signify? The dictionary meaning of a “rock” is “a large mass of stone forming a hill.”² The rock in the Old Testament symbolizes security and defense.³ It also means a strong foundation

that no one moves or stands against (MATT 7:24). It signifies the foundation on which Jesus built his church, which is the confession of Peter.

The Book of Concord in the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope interprets this passage:

However, as to the declaration: Upon this rock I will build My Church, certainly the Church has not been built upon the authority of man, but upon the ministry of the confession which Peter made, in which he proclaims that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. He accordingly addresses him as a minister: Upon this rock, i.e., upon this ministry ... For He built His Church not upon man, but upon the faith of Peter. But what was his faith? “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” And Hilary says: To Peter the Father revealed that he should say, “Thou art the Son of the living God.” (Tr 25, 28 [Triglotta, 511–513])

² “Rock,” Dictionary.com, <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/rock>.

³ *The New Bible Dictionary*, ed., J.D. Douglas (Inter-Varsity Press, 1976), 1098.

Therefore, the building of the church is upon this rock of confession; this faith is the foundation of the church.

To further explore what this phrase means, it is worthwhile to investigate the four central themes of Peter's confession. These central themes incorporate Jesus as a living God, Jesus as the expected Messiah, Jesus as the Son of God, and Jesus as the cornerstone (EPH 2:19).

Jesus as a Living God

The first key affirmation of Peter in his confession was the fact that Jesus is the living God. The church is the community that confesses that Jesus is the living God. The phrase "Jesus is the living God" carries a deep understanding of God. First, it implies that he is a living God. This is the very nature that makes him different from the dead idols of the Gentiles. Here Peter affirms that Jesus of Nazareth is not an ordinary religious leader, but the living God. By this he implies that in him there is the same life that is in the Father. This implies the fact that Jesus is life himself, and also the fountain of life to others.

Peter, in this regard, had a profound understanding. He had confessed similar testimony about Jesus at another incident. According to the Gospel of John, the multitude who followed Jesus after the miracle of the bread murmured and drew away because they stumbled over Jesus referring to himself as the "bread of life." Even his own immediate disciples stumbled and struggled with Jesus' difficult word about being the bread of life. Then Peter said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God" (JOHN 6:68-69). This implies how much deeper Peter's understanding of Jesus was. For Peter, Jesus was more than the physical bread. He realized that Jesus is the bread of life. This profound testimony is the real foundation on which the real church of Christ is built.

Jesus as the Christ

The second key affirmation of Peter is the fact that Jesus is the Christ of God. In other words, this means that Jesus is the true Messiah, promised by God, prophesied of by all the prophets from the beginning of the world, and expected by the people of God. This includes all his offices of prophet, priest, and king, for which he is anointed by God, and that this Messiah was not a mere man, but a divine person.

Here the Greek term "Christ"

equals "the Messiah" in Hebrew. In the Old Testament, God never promised a coming "Messiah" — at least the Old Testament prophets never used that exact title. And yet pervading the entire Old Testament was this promise and expectation of a deliverer whom God would one day send to free his people from all bondage and oppression. And so "Messiah" became the title that God's people used to sum up all of their hopes and expectations for the coming deliverer and King — the promised son of David. Now so far in Matthew, the title "Messiah" or "Christ" has appeared only six times. Five of these times are Matthew's own narrative comments (four of which are in the introductory first chapter) and the sixth time is when Herod inquired about

where the Christ was to be born. In all of his preaching and teaching, Jesus had never once claimed this title for himself. And yet Peter, having listened to Jesus' preaching and teaching, and having understood the meaning of his miracles, now for the very first time assigns this title to Jesus, implying that Jesus is not simply one of the prophets ... He is not one among many ... He is not a forerunner preparing the way.⁴

Peter affirmed that Jesus was the true Messiah, the deliverer. This affirmation is the other key statement on which Jesus built his church. The real church is founded on the testimony that Jesus is the Christ of God.

Jesus as the Son of God

The third affirmation of Peter in his confession is the fact that Jesus is the Son of God. This affirmation, as some scholars state, connotes the interpretation that his being is not by creation, as angels and men are, nor by adoption, as saints, nor by office, as magistrates, but by nature, being his own Son, his proper Son, the only begotten of the Father, of the same nature with him, being one with him, and equal to him.⁵ As the apostle John states, the main purpose for which the gospel was written was to disclose this very secret about Jesus. It was to disclose the secret that Jesus is the true Son of God (JOHN 20:31).

⁴ "Matthew 16:13-18," *Living Word Bible Church*, 11 March 2012, <http://livingwordbible.org/Sermons/Matthew/Matthew16.13-18.pdf>, 2.

⁵ *Ibid.*

The church was counted worthy to suffer and to sacrifice for Jesus.

As it has been stated in Hebrews 5:5, the Father said to Jesus, “You are my Son, today I have begotten you.” This implies that Jesus is “begotten” as the “Son of God” at his royal coronation and at his appointment as the high priest of his people.

This confession, as uniform, is what all the disciples of Christ agreed in. They took him, one and all, and acknowledged him to be the Son of God, a phrase expressive of his divine nature and distinct personality. They indeed judged him to be a prophet, but not that prophet that was to come, superior to all prophets. Here he is owned to be the Christ, which not only takes in his prophetic office in a higher sense than they understood it, but all his other offices, and declares him to be the promised Messiah, who they thought and spoke most honorably of.⁶ This is another ground on which Jesus has built his church.

Jesus as the Cornerstone

Peter affirms that Jesus is a cornerstone that carries this whole foundation in his first epistle. He states, “You come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood” (1 PET 2:4–5).

This text implies that Christ is the living stone. It also implies that those who believe in him are also living stones. In a similar way, the apostle Paul stated to the church in Ephesus, “You are built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone” (EPH 2:20). This text implies that Christ Jesus is the cornerstone that carries the foundation.

It is this cornerstone (Jesus) and faith in him that sustains the church to endure in the midst of suffering and persecution. More than that, it enables the church to rejoice in suffering, as Saint Paul affirms based on his personal experience, “... we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance” (ROM 5:3). In light of this, I would like to share with you about the sufferings the church in Ethiopia in those tragic circumstances and hostile environments has undergone and the joy that generated from this painful experience.

REFLECTION ON THE SUFFERINGS OF THE EECMY

As the EECMY is a church born in the midst of opposing circumstances and has walked through a painful path since the days of her formation in confrontation with

various forces of evil working against her, reflecting on the experience of this church would better demonstrate the practicality of the above biblical teaching.

Thus we will deal with the faith journey of this church classifying it into two parts. The first part discusses the joy in the experience of suffering. This is what the church has gained during the severe persecution by the Derg Communist government of Ethiopia. The second part deals with the blessing that thereafter follows, which means the present flourishing growth of the church.

The Joy in the Experience of Suffering

The journey of the EECMY quite from the days of her formation has been full of experiences of strong confrontations because of opposing circumstances and challenging environments she passed through, especially the duration of the experience of suffering severe persecutions and various sorts of trials that threatened her survival had been so horrible. Those days had been moments of walking in the shadow of death. This deep experience of suffering had a tremendous contribution towards the spiritual formation of the church. It had much contribution in shaping the life of this church.

On the one hand, this horrible experience the church had undergone in those days was so devastating and destructive. The brutal action taken against Christianity in general: The closing down of congregations, banning of worship services, detention of many ministers, severe trials and death of many ministers and church leaders, and loss of church properties had severely damaged the church. It was a duration when church properties were confiscated and the existence of God and his church were totally denied. It was a duration when many believers had been brutally tortured, beaten, harassed, intimidated, lost their jobs, detained, and faced various sorts of sufferings and trials. Those evil moments were when many leaders and ministers of the gospel were brutally tortured to death, when many top leaders like the Rev. Gudina Tumsa suffered repeated imprisonments and faced a cruel death. Especially, it was the moment when many young people were atrociously tortured and faced various sorts of trials, including being forced to deny Christ. As I myself have been a partaker of these trials and sufferings, I testify this as a living witness.

Nevertheless, all these horrible actions didn't and couldn't stop the church from boldly declaring the Lordship of Christ. Although heavily challenged, the survival of the church was certain because of Jesus' promise.

⁶ Ibid.

The persecution couldn't move the church an inch from her firm confession and witnessing to the Lordship of Jesus in public. The church was counted worthy to suffer and to sacrifice for Jesus. All these challenges and confrontations from the forces of evil couldn't prevail against this church, as Jesus said. The words of Jesus, "the gates of hell cannot prevail against it," have been demonstrated and proven in the experiences the church in Ethiopia underwent. This severe persecution and test of faith endured by the EECMY in those horrible days, even though it shocked and rocked her foundation, did not move her an inch from her firm confession.

The experience of this atrocious suffering, on the other hand, made a great contribution towards the qualitative and quantitative growth of the church. The experience of persecution as stated above has contributed to the growth of the church in many other aspects. First, it had a tremendous contribution to the numerical growth of the church. The experience of persecution invigorated Christian witness. The testimony of heroes of faith during their trials was a moving and powerful experience of witnessing for Christ. It empowered the witness of the victims of this suffering. Here, the words of the Rev. Tumsa, who was the General Secretary of the EECMY, are worth mentioning. He stated, "We as Christians cannot simply tolerate a bad situation and keep quiet. It is our duty to act, to speak, and even risk our life. The power of the resurrection is experienced only through death."⁷ Such bold and powerful witness has impacted many people and has drawn many, even the persecuting cadres, to Christ.

There were instances where the cadres sent to congregational services for spying and closing churches ended up joining the church, having been touched by God's power.⁸ As the ancient saying goes, "The blood of martyrs is the seed of the Gospel." In a similar way, through the seed sown during this horrible experience, the church experienced a blooming growth and expansion.

⁷ Johannes Launhardt, *Evangelicals in Addis Ababa (1919–1991): With Special Reference to the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus and the Addis Ababa Synod* (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2004), 248.

⁸ Launhardt, *Evangelicals in Addis Ababa*, 266. "A different approach was used to close the Entotto Mekane Yesus Church. During 1986... A man from the Security office called the pastor Qes Belina Sarka on the telephone and asked him to bring the keys of the church. Belina answered that he had to come himself and close the church if he had an order to do so. The security agent called three times, but Belina did not act. Finally, the man came himself with the intention to get the keys of the church. Since the church was packed with people, the agent had to wait for the end of the gathering. In the end of the service, however, he decided to join the congregation."

As statistical reports show, the church had demonstrated tremendous numeric growth during those years of persecution. Numerically, the church increased in membership by 1.1 million during those seventeen years of persecution.⁹

Second, the experience of persecution had a great contribution towards qualitative growth of the church. Qualitatively it had a great contribution to the spiritual formation of the church, both on individual and community levels, enhancing the purity of faith. Persecution detaches believers from the natural world and attaches them to the supernatural world; it detaches from the things of this world and attaches to the heavenly.¹⁰ It relegates the victims to the experience of losing things of this world in order to gain Christ. Such a journey of faith draws believers to the life of the cross with its absolute dependency on God. Paul has spoken in support of this view while sharing his own personal journey of faith to the Philippians. Here he states that he sacrificed everything for Christ in order to gain him. He says:

But all those things that I might count as profit I now reckon as loss for Christ's sake. Not only those things, I reckon everything as complete loss for the sake of what is so much more valuable, the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have thrown everything away and consider it as mere refuse, so that I may gain Christ and be completely united with him. (PHIL 3:7–9)

Third, persecution of faith has a great contribution to transformation of life. It purifies faith like gold. In this regard it is important to consider the words of Peter to those who were facing persecution. He states:

In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith — more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire — may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (1 PETER 1:6–7)

According to Peter, suffering refines faith as gold is refined by fire. It increases the vitality of faith.

⁹ Gudina Tumsa, "Report on Church Growth in Ethiopia" in *Witness and Discipleship* (Gudina Tumsa Foundation: Addis Ababa, 2007), 138.

¹⁰ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, trans. R.H. Fuller (New York: MacMillan, 1949), 73.

Fourth, the experience of persecution transformed the ministry of the church. The closing down of the churches and stopping of public worship by the government order forced the church to operate underground where small groups of people gathered for worship. This unique practice of ministry born in the midst of suffering in those days continued effectively and is still in operation. As a result, today most members of the church are structured into small groups. Small group or cell group ministry is a new experience the church explored during this horrible time. The development of small group services contributed to the growth and multiplication of members. It enhanced the growth of the church in two aspects. First, it enhanced the numerical growth of the church as it provided better access to reach out to family members and other unchurched people, as these small groups were among the community and they were so close to individuals interested in the program. Second, it enhanced the qualitative growth of the church as it was the best forum of edification and nurturing of faith through the Bible studies conducted, reflections, and sharing of testimony of life. It also developed a strong mutuality as it was a forum for sharing one another's burdens through prayers.

Fifth, persecution introduced the victims to miraculous signs and wonders. During the time of persecution, events occurred that had no natural explanation. Under torture, courageous Christians bore witness and stood firm in the face of their adversaries. To stay firm in the confession under threat of death is a miracle and a gift of God. The bold witness of these Christians even at times of their trials led their tormentors to Christ. Some victims were tortured to the point of death, yet lived even when medical science said they should not recover or even that they should die. These people were healed through the prayers of the church and lived to continue to share the gospel.¹¹ All these testimonies demonstrate the secret of

¹¹ Launhart, *Evangelicals in Addis Ababa*, 246. "One day an armed cadre entered the room of the prisoners and asked for a girl called Gennet. Since two girls among the detained had that name, both were taken out of the room. At first the younger Gennet was cross-examined, threatened, and beaten. When the cadre failed to get the answers he was expecting, he took his pistol, drilled it into Gennet's acoustic duct and deafened her. Next Gennet Leul Seged was interrogated. She was stripped of her clothes, thrown to the ground, and beaten. When these measures did not work one of the most cruel torturing methods, called *wofei lala*, was applied. Gennet Leul Seged claims that she felt, consciously, only the first hard blow on her feet. Then she experienced that even in this situation Christ was close to her. After two months of imprisonment and harassment the Bethel youth group was released. None of them had given up their faith. The two girls called Gennet, however, were badly injured. They saw many doctors but without success. Finally, the hearing of the younger Gennet was restored while

rejoicing in suffering. The apostle James affirms this fact in his writing to the saints undergoing tests of faith:

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (Jas 1:2-4)

This was the secret that turned things upside down and resulted in this great victory in the midst of severe suffering. It was the fact that the church is founded on a strong base, Christ.

The Joy in the Experience of His (the Lord's) Glory

The second joy, as it has been stated above, is the joy in the glory of the Lord. This was the experience that followed the suffering. As a result, today the EECMY rejoices in this special joy of celebrating the glory of the Lord. This part deals with this special joy we experience in the Lord.

The EECMY, established in the late 1950s after a century-old labor of the western missionary endeavor with 20,000 baptized members, has now skyrocketed to 7.8 million members, organized into 8,500 congregations and 4,000 plus preaching places (mission stations). This incredible growth from 20,000 to 7.8 million members taking place in so short a time span is another proof of the strength of the foundation on which the church has built and the mighty power working in the church.

The history of the EECMY after the downfall of the Communist government has been a history of great success and achievement. It was the moment when the power and authority Jesus granted to his church has been publicly displayed. It has been when the closed down churches resumed their public worship. It has been the duration when the formerly confiscated properties of the church have been returned.

This moment after the downfall of this evil government has been the duration when the church upheld high the keys of heaven entrusted to her in declaring Christ in public loudly, making use of facilities the Communist government built for running its evil purposes, like revolutionary squares, stadiums, and big meeting halls. As a result, this moment has been a duration of flourishing growth and expansion, when the former persecutors and cadres joined the church, repenting of their former

a Bethel youth group prayed for her, and Gennet Leul Seged's leg was restored to health during a prayer meeting in the Bole Meserete Kristos Church, on 21 December 1978."

sinful actions and practices. This duration has been when the EECMY demonstrated spectacular growth in all aspects, especially in membership growth. As the statistical reports of the church show, the growth in the last twenty-five years since the downfall of the Communist government has been explosive. By the end of the downfall of that government, there were 1.5 million members. Today, the membership of the church, according to the 2015 statistical report, is over 7.8 million.

Especially, the present numeric growth of this church since the launching of her “Five Year Strategic Plan” was so spectacular. This strategic plan, which is the first of its kind, launched as of January 2013 and has had a very significant effect on the growth of the church, especially in increasing the involvement of the laity in mission. Among the many strategic goals incorporated in this plan, the mission of sharing the gospel with thirty million unreached people in that time span (2013–2017) within and outside the nation has shown fabulous and fruitful results. The comparison of the results achieved before and after the implementation of this plan, which means contrasting before and after 2013, shows a tremendous difference. It increased the yearly numeric growth of the church from a three percent to an eight percent average. The major factor for such drastic change was the mobilization of the laity in evangelism. In this regard it is worthwhile to mention the participation of the laity in summer evangelism, which has displayed spectacular results. The mobilization of the laity in summer evangelism has been conducted in the last three years as part of the strategic plan. This summer, from 15-30 August 2016, it has been planned to share the gospel with five million unchurched people through mobilizing 5,000 congregations and receiving one million new members into the church. This spectacular accomplishment is another source of our joy. We therefore rejoice in the Lord for this great blessing. We rejoice in him in both our pains and blessings.

Conclusion

The above enumerated facts in our essay, based on the reflection on the experiences of the faith journey of the EECMY, depict the secret of rejoicing in the Lord in every circumstance, good or evil. It calls upon the contemporary church to keep on rejoicing in the Lord and him alone, standing firm on the unwavering solid foundation on

which she has been established, the rock that no earthly power can move and overcome, neither hell nor heaven can prevail against it. It calls upon the contemporary church surrounded with multiple strange doctrines and confusing philosophical thoughts to stand firm, adhering to her sound biblical doctrine (EPH 2:19) and shining to the decaying world, full of darkness and despair, upholding the message of the cross without shying off and retreating. It calls upon the contemporary church to strongly resist the devil and principalities of evil forces operating in our global context from snatching the keys of the kingdom out of her hand, standing firm on her confessional ground. It calls upon us to be watchful of the signs of the time and be careful on how we walk, as Paul says, “so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and

Rejoice in the cross of Jesus; the gates of hell will not prevail against the church!

carried out by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes” (EPH 4:14). It also calls upon the contemporary church, drowned in the sea of the globalized world, to reclaim the keys of the kingdom entrusted to her in earnest prayer and repentance.

Furthermore, this essay calls on the contemporary confessional Lutheran churches to be watchful and critical of the evils of the day with spiritual discernment and join hands in fighting them. Especially it is a time when we, churches of the same theological position, need to join hands and wrestle against these forces of evil, holding up high the banner of the cross, declaring boldly in public the Lordship of Christ and the unchanging gospel in the changing world without any retreat that Jesus is still a living God, the Christ, the Son of God, and the only way of salvation. Rejoice in the cross of Jesus; the gates of hell will not prevail against the church!

Therefore:

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. (HEB 10:23-25)

May the gracious Almighty God bless the convention!

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