

9.5 Theses for a Continuing Reformation

30 October 1993

I. THE HEART AND CENTER OF THE CHURCH'S LIFE IS THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST, HER LORD.

Out of all of Luther's 95 theses, the sixty-second thesis is their throbbing heart: *The true treasure of the church is the most holy gospel of the glory and grace of God.* It seems somewhat redundant, therefore to begin with repetition. On the surface it would appear that this first thesis should be self-evident and superfluous, but we dare never take the gospel for granted. In fact, evidence suggests the gospel is becoming a mere shibboleth in the churches of the Augsburg Confession. While continuing to pay lip service to the gospel, we increasingly derive our life not from the gospel, but from the law. While not denying that the gospel is the power of God for salvation to every one who believes, our churches increasingly drive a wedge between faith and practice.

This wedge threatens to dissect the three *solas*... We are left with Grace, and Faith, and Scripture, just as before...but we must have the courage to ask whether it is still Grace alone, Faith alone, Scripture alone. We are in danger of losing our *solas*. When we fail to confess the exclusivity and all-encompassing nature of the gospel, we live increasing out of the law. If the Lutheran Reformation is to be a reality in our day, we must have the courage to face these issues.

We pride ourselves on our conservatism, but it is a conservatism in name only. We continue to hang on to our historic confession in theoretical abstract, but we show an increasing fascination with a practice which comes from another confession. We insist that we are Lutheran, yet our theology for sanctification, evangelism, and liturgical life comes increasingly from Arminian and revivalistic sources.

It seems that doctrine has become a matter of "substance" which can be expressed in any number of "styles." In so doing, however, we are in danger of substituting for doctrine the commandments of men. We have lost sight of the connection between the faith of the church and the life of the church. Wm. Loehe reminds us: "The true faith is not only preached in the sermon, but also sung in the hymns and prayed in the prayers." When we no longer have confidence in the Word and the Sacraments we will look to the commandments of men to do God's work for him. We must be bold enough to ask ourselves a penetrating question: Is it possible that our growing fascination with man-centered methodology is evidence of growing mistrust in the divinely appointed means of grace? Megachurch, metachurch, church extension through leadership development; every new fad of church life which comes our way with increasing frequency seems to lean more heavily on the social sciences than it does the gospel.

It is high time to recover in our midst the spirit of the confessors who have gone before us. To actively confess in word and deed what we believe and teach. If Jesus Christ is our life, then He alone is our life.

II. THE CHURCH'S LORD IS PRESENT IN HER MIDST THROUGH HIS HOLY WORD AND SACRAMENT.

The real presence of our Lord Jesus Christ in His church through His Holy Word and Sacrament is not only our Lutheran distinctiveness, but the reality our world so desperately needs.

This is a prime difference between evangelical Lutherans and evangelical protestants. We do not merely teach principles, but we proclaim a reality; the reality of Christ who lives out His life among His people through His Word and Sacrament. The real presence is not just a doctrine, it is a reality...and a reality not confined to the Holy Supper. We do not merely teach about Christ; we teach Christ. And this has dramatic implications for the Christian life. For example, in warning the Ephesians against sexual immorality, the apostle did not talk about rules for Christian conduct. He did not list six principles for Christian sexuality. He simply said: "You did not so learn Christ." The Christian pastor does not teach about Christ or His will for people as though He were Confucius or Buddha - that is, some departed hero who was a great moralist. The pastor does not teach about Christ; he teaches Christ. This is not merely semantics. This has to do with our fundamental view of the gospel and the means of grace. God actually comes to us in the oral and the visible word of His Gospel; that is, through preaching, absolution, and the sacraments.

We need not ascend into heaven to come into the presence of Christ or descend into the deep to bring Him up from the dead. Rather, as St. Paul remind us in the 10th Chapter of Romans *"The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming:[10:8]*

The very same Lord Jesus Christ within whom all the fullness of the godhead dwelled bodily, who was crucified for our sins, raised again on the third day and ascended to the Father's right hand in glory...this same Lord Jesus Christ is with us in the oral word of His Gospel and tangible word of His Sacraments. He comes with His forgiveness - and much more. For wherever there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation.

Among us today it is the same as it was among the disciples of old: The Kingdom of God is in our midst. For wherever Jesus is, there is the Kingdom. And Jesus is present in the proclamation of His Gospel and the administration of His sacraments. This has profound implications for the work we carry out in His name and in His stead in His holy church.

III. THE ARTICLE ON JUSTIFICATION IS NOT ONE ARTICLE AMONG MANY; BUT RATHER THE ARTICLE UPON WHICH THE CHURCH STANDS OR FALLS.

Conservative Lutherans shook their heads in amazement years ago when the Lutheran World Federation could not arrive at a consensus of the meaning of Justification in our world today. Time has shown that we had better not be smug; for adherence to justification is at best tenuous in our own midst. As we have already noted, *sola gratia* and *sola fidei* have lost their *solas*. There is a lack of confidence in the grace of God. Works of Christian service are being promoted to supplement the gospel. As one prominent Lutheran evangelist puts it; Matthew 28:19 has become the material principle of our theology. In other words, our Lord's mission command to go and make disciples

has become the central thrust over against the good news of the salvation He won for us on His cross. That is to say, the law has been substituted for the gospel. Lutheran pastors have been heard to claim that the law must be urged after the gospel in preaching in order to "put teeth into the gospel."

We are of course not antinomians. The Law has its God-given place as it crushes the old Adam and describes the life of the new man. But the Law will never ever breath life into the old Adam. And that's the bottom line for Lutheran Christians: our hope for forgiveness, life, and salvation is always and entirely and exclusively one hope: the gospel - the active and passive obedience of our Lord Jesus Christ, His atoning death and His glorious resurrection from the dead. The preaching of the Law always comes before the Gospel, for our conviction is clear: the Law always accuses.

Yet today the gospel is held to be incomplete without the addition of the law. We are informed that the goal of the gospel is not the forgiveness of sins, but rather to make sinners obedient to the Law. How can this happen in the churches of the Reformation? Why are penitent sinners directed to their own inner wrestling and the striving of their own will for confidence before God? Why is the life of the church governed by opinion polls and the cultural gurus of our day? Is it not because Justification has become just another doctrine among many, rather than the chief article of the Christian faith which permeates all the others?

It is time to take a new stand with the confessors at Augsburg, with Luther and the other reformers, indeed with the church of the apostles and prophets, built upon the foundation of Jesus Christ Himself: Our righteousness before God from now and till the end of time is the righteousness of faith; the free gift of the righteousness of Jesus Christ which God the Father credits to all who believe in His Son by the power of His Holy Spirit. This faith alone saves, and it saves alone. Add anything else to that faith - whether it be human feelings, or human works, or the most holy of God's own commands - add anything to that faith, and it is no longer faith alone.

What would it mean for personal faith, for public proclamation, for our church structure, for the programs of the various branches of our Synodical agencies, if we actually began to practice what we preach?

IV. THE WORLD CHANGES, THE GOSPEL AND MEANS OF GRACE DO NOT.

Innovations in the church are advocated because of the changing times in which we live. Changes in our world call for a paradigm shift, we are told. We can no longer do things the way we are accustomed to. Like all other generalities, there is an element of truth in this claim. Only a fool would claim that because Luther used moveable type technology we should stick with that and not use word processors - or because Luther translated the Mass into German that we should use German as our liturgical language.

Today we are told, however, that the liturgy itself is a cultural phenomenon, and that liturgical style must be a wax nose that conforms to each individual culture it contacts. Similarly, the gospel must be packaged and sold to each succeeding culture on that culture's own terms.

This kind of thinking has not been prevalent among Christians of the confessional churches. It has, however, come to the fore in America in the last century and a half, an era in which anti-creedal Arminianism has become the most prominent Christian teaching in our culture. David Wells, in his important critique of the evangelical movement comments that revivalistic Arminianism was the perfect match for the mood of America in the 19th century: active, confident, expansionist. It effectively stifled the original Reformed protestantism upon which this nation was founded and, in his words, "continued to flow through our own century, losing depth as it has gained breadth, finally spilling out over most of contemporary evangelicalism." [32]

If Wells is right, and I think he is, then it is no wonder that Lutherans find themselves looking enviously in the evangelical direction for a model of Christianity that is compatible with American culture. Evangelicals have shown a remarkable ability to go with the flow, to adapt to the culture.

It is this cultural adaptability, however, that Wells criticizes most severely. For the culture of our age has taken some decidedly non-Christian turns - not merely in its morals, but in its underlying foundational principles. We live in a post-modern age. And whatever else that may mean, at a minimum that means we live in a time in which there is no authority higher than personal choice and there is no force stronger than personal feeling. Pluralism and individualism are the twin hallmarks of our age. That is, there is a common consensus that there is no consensus on who we are and what we are about. Conflicting values or no values at all are equally acceptable. One cannot deny anyone the right to make his or her choice in any and all matters. Pragmatism is the only basis upon which we can critique those choices. In such a system, the only real evil, the only cardinal sin, is to make no choice at all. For it is up to each person to create his or her own world on the basis of his or her own choice.

Those who wring their hands about the rise of "secular humanism" only see the tip of the iceberg. The real problem in our culture goes far deeper. Already a decade and a half ago Solzhenitsyn warned the west that it was a "world split apart" from its values by materialism. His comments, dramatically ignored in the media, have proven to be tragically prophetic. A whole new civilization has dawned, David Wells informs us. An all-pervasive world view which has conquered silently and painlessly, aided by increasing reliance on materialism, technology, and urbanization. This new world view, this new civilization in which we find ourselves is what Wells and others label "modernity."

What this means for you and me is that we preach and teach and live in a world that has no center. There are no lasting values, no over-arching principles which are commonly assumed. In such a world each person must create his own meaning by his free choice. Philosophers inform us that words have no meaning other than the meaning the reader chooses to give them. What matters today is not truth, but experience. Individualism and pragmatism have fed a growing privatization of religion. Popular Christianity has been effectively turned on its head. It is no longer top down, but bottom up. It is no longer God-centered, but man-centered.

Is this the culture we want to shape the gospel? Or for that matter, do we want any human culture to shape the gospel? To mold the church to fit any given culture is to seal our own doom. He who dines with the devil must have a very long spoon, Geoffrey

Chaucer once wrote. Os Guinness has written a book entitled *Dining With the Devil: The Megachurch flirts with Modernity*. And in this book he underlines some of the threats to orthodox Christianity brought about by modernity. "We have invented the technology to put God's Word on hold," he writes [38]. The fascination of evangelicalism with meeting felt needs of the consumer public, he remarks, brings "contemporary evangelicalism perilously close to the liberalism criticized earlier by Richard Niebuhr as a 'God without wrath [bringing] men without sin into a Kingdom without judgement through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross.'" [78]

Yes, it is a changing world. Only a blind bat would deny that. But what is mind-boggling is that so many within the church are willing to compromise the faith for the sake of our changing culture. It is time to seriously question the uncritical fascination our church has shown recently with the pronouncements of the pollsters and trend watchers of our age. Do we really want to operate our church on the basis of surveys and opinion polls?

There must be a change in the church in every age, to be sure. But it is a change in the focus of its message, not its content. It is a change in the thrust of its work, but not its shape. The holy things of God which He has given to His church, these things do not change: The holy gospel, the holy sacraments, the holy liturgy - these things may be in the world, but they are not of the world. They are by definition transcultural - that is, they are rooted firmly in this world, but their gaze is fixed on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God the Father. By His blood He has freed us from our sins and made us to be priests to serve His God and Father in His Kingdom. And His Kingdom is not of this world.

Therefore the church is first counter-cultural before she is cross-cultural. That is, the message of the gospel addresses the idolatry that lies at the heart of every human culture. The church has a timeless, transcendent invitation which she addresses to people of every tribe and language and people and nation. She invites them to turn from the living death of sin and to find life everlasting in Him who is her Life. She invites people of every tribe, language, people, and nation to become citizens of the heavenly kingdom, and citizens of a city with foundations, whose maker and builder is God. The city of man changes; the city of God does not.

V. THE GREATEST THREAT TO THE CHURCH IS FROM WITHIN.

The legendary battle of Troy came to a tragic conclusion as the citizens of the besieged city awoke one morning to find the enemy vanished, leaving behind a trophy - a singularly large wooden horse which they promptly dragged into their city in honor of what they assumed to be a Trojan victory. But their victory trophy proved to be their defeat, for hidden within the horse were the enemy soldiers who sacked and burned their city from within.

This epic legend serves as a poignant warning for today's church on several levels. First, to the evangelical movement as a whole, seemingly so eager to claim the trophies of our age and to "christianize" them into service for the church.

Second, and more personally for Lutherans, in terms of the absolutely astounding uncritical adoption of blatantly unlutheran theology in the service of the gospel.

Pragmatism has driven the boat for too long in Missouri, indeed, in Lutheranism as a whole. Our motto appears to be that of Fellowship Ministries: "Whatever Works." But what works in America today is what has always worked in America - a heavy dose of sentimentality laced with subjectivism packaged in a do it yourself framework. This is the evangelical style which, it is claimed, can suit Lutheran substance just as well as its own.

Such a man-centered theology may sell very well given our current cultural climate. There's just one problem; it's not the gospel. Truth dare never be compromised for cultural respectability. Truth will always come out on the short end. Whoever marries the culture is destined for early widowhood.

Anyone with as many grey hairs as I have can remember a very similar argument being raised in favor of historical criticism: we can cleanse it, we can use it with Lutheran presuppositions. History has shown otherwise. But history is a poor teacher - or at least, Missouri Synod Lutherans are poor pupils of history. We seem doomed to repeat the tragic mistakes of earlier generations; always jumping on a bandwagon just as it grinds to a halt; always trying to claim someone else's cast off junk, while throwing away our own treasure.

Twenty years ago a Synod tired of infighting began casting about for some banner behind which to unite. That banner was the great commission. It came with ready made programs and a ready made theological base from some people we had grown to respect because of their high view of the integrity and authority of the Holy Scriptures.

And so, uncritically and with a great deal of enthusiasm, we hauled the Trojan horse of evangelicalism into our midst. The seeds of Arminianism and revivalism have begun to sprout and take root. At the same time, there is less and less confidence in the power of the gospel through the means of grace. The piety and liturgical life of our churches reflect increasingly the piety and worship style of American revivalism. It remains to be seen whether we will retain our Lutheran confession or not.

Our Lord's poignant question is pertinent in our time: *When the Son of Man returns, will He find faith on the earth?*

VI. MODERN INDULGENCES ARE FEELING AND PRAGMATISM

Luther's 95 theses were regarding the power and efficacy of indulgences. These indulgences, it was claimed, would guarantee the holder freedom from the punishment for his sin.

Johann Tetzel wouldn't get far in America. - Or would he? We must ask whether our current fixation on subjective feeling and uncritical adoption of pragmatism isn't a new form of indulgences. A quick perusal of your local Christian bookstore or the catalog of most major parachurch organizations will give you plenty of examples of modern fascination with programs and methods designed to alter human moods or guaranteed to sell. What suffers as a result in 20th Century America, of course, is exactly what suffered in 16th Century Saxony: the true treasure of the church, the most holy gospel of the glory and grace of God.

Luther saw through the show business tactics of the indulgence hawkers and their impressive success. At bottom, it was not a matter of packaging, but of content. The issue lay with the gospel itself. If you prefer evidence, and reason, and feeling over faith, you'll always end up in error. For the gospel is not a matter of rational evidence or experiential evidence; it is a matter of the cross. Six months after the 95 theses he articulated clearly the foundational principles of his theology, the "theology of the cross."

In the 21st Thesis of the Heidelberg Disputation:

A theologian of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theologian of the cross calls the thing what it actually is.

This is clear: He who does not know Christ does not know God hidden in suffering. Therefore he prefers works to suffering, glory to the cross, strength to weakness, wisdom to folly, and , in general, good to evil. These are the people whom the apostle calls 'enemies of the cross of Christ' [Phil. 3:18], for they hate the cross and suffering and love works and the glory of works. Thus they call the good of the cross evil and the evil of a deed good. God can be found only in suffering and the cross, as has already been said. Therefore the friends of the cross say that the cross is good and works are evil, for through the cross works are destroyed and the old Adam, who is especially edified by works, is crucified. It is impossible for a person not to be puffed up by his good works unless he has first been deflated and destroyed by suffering and evil until he knows that he is worthless and that his works are not his but God's. [AE 31(53)]

And so it should not surprise us when pragmatism triumphs over truth or when the gospel and the means of grace are sacrificed in favor of pure emotionalism. For both pragmatism and feeling are works - and the old Adam is especially edified by works.

In the churches of the Augsburg confession it would be especially tragic if we would capitulate to the god of this age, if we should become theologians of glory and call good evil and evil good; if we were to blindly and blithely adopt the "whatever works" mentality in our church doctrine and practice. For we serve a God who has deliberately chosen to address this world by the Word of the cross - Christ crucified - which is by definition folly to a world that is perishing, but to those whom He has called, Christ the power of God and wisdom of God.

VII. EVANGELICALISM AND LIBERALISM ARE TWO EXTREMES OF ONE ERROR

This thesis at first hearing hits us hard, because it strikes so close to home. After all, we Lutherans are among the first who proudly claimed the title "evangelical" at the time of the Reformation, and we are loathe to give it up. Nor need we. We are, after all, determined to be people of the gospel.

But we must be aware of what has happened to the term in the midst of 20th Century America. The word "evangelical" has come to refer almost exclusively to those Christians who are descendants of protestant fundamentalism. Modern evangelicalism has shown increasing proclivity toward the culture. And herein lies its connection with old fashioned liberalism. Though in many ways they are at opposite extremes in their conclusions, they find a common source in the culture of the day. Evangelicals, no less than the liberals before them, have shown a tendency to abandon doctrine in favor of life.

In David Wells' view, liberalism and evangelicalism have been drinking at opposite ends of the same trough. The trough is modernity. *In both cases, however, confession becomes a casualty because modernity is hostile to all truth claims that are absolute and transcendent in nature. What remains is simply reflection in the academy and practice in evangelicalism.* [127]

Wells documents a gradual loss of doctrinal integrity among the evangelicals, coupled with an increase in cultural relevance. If he is right - and I think he is - Lutherans had better think twice before they hitch their wagon to a star destined soon to become a black hole. He issues a prophetic warning about the growing emptiness at the doctrinal center of the evangelical movement: *The word evangelical has become descriptively anemic. ...It is, I believe the dark prelude to death, when parasites have finally succeeded in bringing down their host. Amid the clamor of all these new models of evangelical faith there is the sound of a death rattle.* [134]

VIII. LITURGICAL CONFUSION IS SYMPTOMATIC OF CONFESSIONAL CRISIS.

We seem to be blissfully ignorant in our circles of something the church has known for centuries: the way you pray determines what you believe - and what you believe determines the way you pray: *lex orandi lex credendi*. Our Missouri Synod fathers were of a more practical bent. They simply built that ancient liturgical rule of thumb into the confessional base of our constitution. Article six of our Synodical constitution includes among the conditions for acquiring and holding membership in the Synod are the following: "Exclusive use of doctrinally pure agenda, hymnbooks, and catechisms in church and school." [1992 Handbook, p. 11] Despite this prohibition we find that church after church, these days are willing - yes even eager - to scuttle doctrinal integrity in favor of emotion. Feelings appear to be the primary criterion in what makes for acceptable liturgical music. If a musical tune moves the heart and there is a mention somewhere in the lyrics of the name "Jesus," then any ditty will do - even if overall the song denies the heart of our confession.

How can this happen? The answer is obvious - it seems to me that our liturgical confusion is evidence of a deeper confessional crisis...we are confused on what it is we believe. We no longer believe that the gospel and the sacraments are tools of the Holy Spirit; otherwise how could we sing hymns and worship in such a way that implies that the human will and emotions are in the driver's seat of our relationship with God?

It should be no surprise, therefore that there is a great deal of controversy in our midst over the liturgy. Many people are pointing their finger at the liturgy as the source of lethargy in our spirituality and impotence in our mission. If we could just get rid of our outdated traditional way of worship we could really be going and growing, is the contention. As the "Worship Toward 2000" survey demonstrated already several years ago, there is a great deal of confusion in our midst as to what in the world is supposed to happen in our churches on Sunday morning. A radical departure from the historic liturgy appears to be waiting in the wings; in some places in the church its already center stage!

Why is it, do you suppose, we find the shallow gimmickry of church growth, megachurch and metachurch so fascinating? Why do even congregations with a well-earned reputation for conservatism turn increasingly away from the historic liturgy and confessional hymnody? We are our own worst enemy. We have lost touch with the heart of the life of the Ev. Lutheran Church: The real presence of our Lord Jesus Christ with His church on earth through the means of His Grace.

The church these days suffers increasingly from dementia; she has lost consciousness of who she is. Sensing herself lost and alone in a very impersonal and antagonistic world, she casts about for something that will make her feel better; anything to give her a religious feeling.

But the church is the bride of Christ. She needs not some sedative to make her forget her predicament in this world; she needs her husband - the Living Lord of heaven and earth - from heaven He came and sought her to be His holy bride; with His own blood He bought her and for her life He died. And this living Lord comes here in this world with His holy Word and Sacrament to feed His bride and care for her in the sacred liturgy.

As I speak in different places around the Synod, I've had some people tell me that I seem to be saying that if we'd get the liturgy right, we'd have the gospel right. That's close, but not quite true. My real claim is that if we'd have the gospel right, then we'd get the liturgy right: we would quit trying to make it over into entertainment or therapy or catharsis.

The historic liturgy is consonant with the gospel. For the church on earth has no life apart from Christ. Her motto is the same as Paul's: *For me to live is Christ*. The liturgy is the church's life first of all because it is in the liturgy that the living Lord comes to meet His holy Bride. The liturgy is the church's life also because in the liturgy the Bride gives herself to her heavenly husband. The liturgy has no life of itself, but only because it is filled with the life of Jesus Christ in His Word and Sacrament. The liturgy is the both the source of the church's life and the shape of the church's life. It is the place where she draws her breath and where she gives it back again. It is where she inhales the life-giving power of the Spirit and where she exhales in the power of the Spirit. It is where she receives forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation through the means of Grace and where she offers her sacrifice of worship to the Father through the Son in the Spirit.

IX. THE ROAD TO REFORMATION BEGINS WITH REPENTANCE.

Where do we begin cleaning up the church? We begin with ourselves. And where do we begin cleaning up ourselves? We begin where the church always begins; with repentance. Among us it is no different than it was in first century Ephesus: *You were dead... But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved.* [2:1, 4-5] And so where do we begin the road to a 20th Century reformation in America? Exactly where Luther began the 16th Century reformation in Saxony with thesis number one:

"When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said *Repent ye*, He intended that our whole life be one of repentance."

It is so easy to point out the speck in our brother's eye and overlook the beam in our own. It is so easy to point out the errors of the Church Growth movement, or Evangelicalism, or the metachurch methodology, and yet to overlook the sin in our own heart.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we must begin by searching our own hearts to see where we have lost confidence in the gospel, how we have despised preaching and the word of God, how we have fostered or supported the substitution of the commandments of men for the doctrines of God. We must look to our own parishes for evidences of apostasy from the faith once delivered to the saints, examples of focusing on the works of man rather than the works of God, instances substitution of human social sciences for the means of Grace, general concentration on the vagaries of human experience rather than the sure promises of God's pure Word and Holy Sacraments. This is sin. And sin calls for repentance.

It is no different for churches than it is for Christians. Daily the old Adam must be drowned by contrition and repentance that a new man can daily emerge to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.

For wherever there is repentance and faith, there is forgiveness and life. And this is our hope, our only hope in our time.

IX.5 THE CHURCH'S UNCHANGING HOPE IS THE ONLY HOPE FOR OUR CHANGING WORLD.

But it is not only the only hope for the church, our only hope is also the only hope for our world lost in sin. Therefore my last thesis is only half a thesis. The other half is yours, for this thesis calls for a response; a response of repentance which leads to life. For when we believe God's holy Word we also lead a godly life according to it. And when the church believes the gospel, she will also live of the gospel, and evangelize of the gospel, and worship of the gospel.

In 1817 Claus Harms proposed 95 theses for the revival of a Lutheran church with confessional integrity in the face of unionism, rationalism, and pietism. His first thesis addresses repentance as well. What was number one for him a hundred and seventy six years ago echoes what was number one for Luther four hundred and seventy six years ago and is also number one number one which intends to be Lutheran - that is to say, apostolic and Christian - in our own postmodern age:

When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ says, "Repent," he wills that men should be conformed to his teaching; he does not conform his teaching to men, as is now done in accordance with the altered spirit of the times.

In proclaiming the gospel to our age, we dare not conform our teaching to the altered spirit of the times. Rather than packaging the mysteries of the faith in throwaway wrappings of our godless age, it is high time to provide our dying world with stronger medicine; for though that medicine may not go down smoothly in our idolatrous age, it is the only medicine that will bring life.

When dining at the table of our culture, Os Guinness reminds us, the church needs a very long spoon. Our world doesn't need any more "McChurch." It needs the church to be the church: "Spread throughout all time and space, rooted in eternity, terrible as an army

with banners." [Lewis] Our world needs no meta-, mega-, or para- church; it needs church - Christ's holy bride, the company of the redeemed in time and eternity, in heaven and earth, the stewardess here in this world of the sacred mysteries of the Holy Trinity. Though we are not of the world, we are very much in the world. We do not despise the good gifts of God in this world. The church needs her experts in technology and the social sciences, to be sure. But what we need more than that are more seven-year old children who know what the church truly is: *holy believers and sheep who hear the voice of their Shepherd*. [Smalcald Articles, XII. The Church]

+ in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit +

Rev. Harold L. Senkbeil
Elm Grove Ev. Lutheran Church

Bibliography

David Wells, *No Place for Truth (or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?)* [Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1993]

Os Guinness, *Dining with the Devil (The Megachurch Movement Flirts*