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The Evangelical Way

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THE INDIVIDUAL CHRISTIAN believer, the Christian congregation, and the Christian church intrinsically are involved in the evangelical way of being. Scripturally and theologically this is a valid subject for study and the application of the evangelical principles are critically vital in the life of the Christian church.

This is a timely and urgent consideration in our secularistic culture when the church on every hand is being challenged for reformation and renewal to justify its existence and its claim on the hearts and lives of men. The church with a truly evangelical message and way of life alone can serve effectively as a valid spiritual institution in our troubled world.

An understanding of this subject has unique significance for the Lutheran Church. The challenge to Twentieth Century Lutheranism to be truly Lutheran is a call to be evangelical. Only in a full commitment to the evangelical way can the Lutheran Church recapture her true identity and in mature self-understanding courageously spend herself in the full mission of Christ's Church.

I.

Our introductory remarks assert far-reaching conclusions regarding the Church and her need to be evangelical. It is imperative that we understand this terminology, especially since it is quite obvious that the term "evangelical" currently is being used in a different connotation than its true theological meaning.

The definition given by most dictionaries relate evangelical to the four Gospel accounts in the New Testament, or to their record of Christ's life. They also define evangelical as having to do with the spirit of the Gospel, or teachings of the New Testament. The dictionaries also point out the fact that the term is used as a designation for protestants in distinction to Roman Catholics. Reference is also made to the fact that in more recent years the term is used to designate some of the more theologically conservative denominations in distinction to those labeled as liberalistic or modernistic. There is a trend today among those denominations that have been known as being fundamentalists in their theology to call themselves evangelicals.

This trend is recognized in the definitions we find in the *Lutheran Cyclopedia* (page 349) "evangelical—a term used to denote loyalty to the Gospel of Jesus Christ in contrast to rationalistic and legalistic Christianity. Thus, the Lutheran Reformation was

evangelical. In the course of time, the term was used to describe those who emphasized the doctrine of atonement for sin and the inerrancy of the Scriptures." We find a similar statement in *The Encyclopedia of The Lutheran Church* (page 818) "evangelicalism—an emphasis in the doctrine and work of the Church which stresses the simple proclamation of the Gospel, seeks conscious conversion experiences, and stresses evangelism on the home and world mission fields. Theologically it is usually fundamentalistic." This paper does not operate with such definitions of the word "evangelical".

The word "evangelical" is derived from the New Testament Greek word "*euaggelion*" which means God's good news of salvation for men in Christ Jesus. Evangelicalism, therefore, has to do with the Gospel of Jesus Christ as the center of Christian theology and as the controlling factor in the life of the Christian believer and in the life of the Christian church. This understanding and emphasis is the heart of the Lutheran Reformation with its insistence on the Scriptural teaching of justification by grace through faith in Christ Jesus without the deeds of the Law. This is why the call to evangelicalism is a unique challenge to the Lutheran Church for self-understanding and identity.

In evangelical Lutheran theology, therefore, there can be no room for a legalistic approach to faith and life for the Christian believer and the Church. Legalism negates the Gospel and is therefore contrary to everything that is truly evangelical. In legalism, the center of theology is shifted from God and His saving grace toward man to man and his striving for self-justification on the basis of the Law.

The evangelical way, rather than the legalistic way, offers to man freely and graciously forgiveness, peace, confidence, fellowship, joy, hope, life; truly everything that he by nature lacks and that he desperately needs to be the complete man God designed him to be. In spite of this wonderful Gospel offer, however, it is a curious fact that it is difficult for the individual and for the church to maintain the evangelical way and continue in it.

The reason for this is that man, in his fallen state, is legalistic. He thinks in terms of the Law. This explains all of the religions developed by man. Man strives to justify himself before God on a legal basis, taking pride in his own achievements and seeking in them security. This is such a universal fallacy in the thinking of man that it had to be refuted with the express statement of Scripture that no human being will be justified before God by the works of the Law. Ps. 143:2; Rom. 3:20; Gal. 2:16.

Another difficulty for the evangelical way is that in the minds of most people the legalistic way is more impressive. The man who fearfully lives under the threat of the Law and mightily strives to keep all rules and regulations imposed on him, usually is regarded as the truly pious and Godly man. The pastor in the congregation and the church that make rigid demands of the parishioners fre-

quently are held in higher regard than the pastor and the church that seek to lead the parishoners into a truly evangelical way of life.

It also is true that in theological discussions and controversies, the legalist can easily appear in the role of the great champion of God's truth and "savior of orthodoxy". His stern stand against many things and his rigid insistence on a single human formulation as the only expression of pure doctrine is most impressive, even though the Gospel may be tragically compromised or completely blacked out by such tactics. The evangelical theologian in such a confrontation may appear weak and quite ineffective. The evangelical man may even be considered liberal in his theology in contrast to the legalist. The evangelical way can be difficult.

Let it be stated emphatically, however, that the evangelical way is the better way. The central theme of the Holy Scriptures is the Gospel, the good news that God loved the world and spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for all, that man might have forgiveness of sin and be God's free man for time and for eternity. "These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name". John 20:31. To teach and promote legalism, even a legalistic Gospel, comes under the judgment of Galatians 1:6-9. There is no substitute for the evangelical way for the Christian believer, the Christian congregation, and for the church. Only by personal faith in the Christ of the Gospel can man receive the full blessings which God has intended for him in His Son, Jesus Christ. The evangelical assurance to the believer is this, "God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead through trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him and made us sit with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the coming ages He might show the immeasurable riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus". Eph. 2:4-7. It is only through the Gospel, through the evangelical way, that man can have the abundant life and rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

If the church is to bring these great blessings of God's grace in Christ to all men, then the church must live and work in the evangelical way for only in this way can the church truly fulfill her mission for God and for man. The church, like her Head, the Savior Jesus Christ, has been sent into the world not to condemn the world, but that the world through Christ might be saved. This great purpose of God can be fulfilled for men only in the dynamic of the Gospel, for it is the power of God unto salvation to all who are brought to faith. Since the church is Christ's Church and His mission, the church has a commitment to the evangelical way.

II.

As we discuss the evangelical way, it is important to understand that this subject not only is well suited for intensive Scriptural study and theological research and formulation, but that it has

practical application for the individual Christian in his daily life. It is in this practical every-day life of the believer that the evangelical way really comes into its own and shines forth in all of its beauty and glory.

The evangelical way has to do with living in the Gospel of forgiveness. The Christian man does not live in a land of fantasy, but he realistically faces up to the reality of sin. He has heard the Law of God and its terrifying judgment on sin. He has faced himself in the mirror of the Law and has come to a knowledge of his sin. Rom. 3:20. The confession, "I a poor, miserable sinner" is not just a worn-out churchly formulation, but for the thoughtful believer an honest acknowledgment of his failure of living up to the requirements of the Law. Surprisingly, however, he is not depressed with a destructive guilt complex or self pity. He lives in the evangelical way, accepting God's forgiveness by faith in Christ Jesus at face value. 1 John 1:5-10. He has a good conscience, remembering his covenant relationship to God, established for him by God in holy baptism. 1 Peter 3:21-22. Being assured in the Gospel of reconciliation unto God with all his sins cancelled out, the Christian lives out his life in deep contentment, rejoicing in the peace that passes all understanding. Phil. 4:4-7. There truly is no one who shall judge or condemn him, not even his own heart, because God is greater and He it is that justifies. Romans 8:31-34; 1 John 3:19-20.

The Christian, living in the Gospel of forgiveness, walks with confident steps in his pilgrimage through this complex, hazardous, changing, and challenging world. Being led by the Spirit of God, walking not by sight but by faith, he faces the realities of his existence courageously, for God's love in Christ perfected in him has cast out all fear. 1 John 4:13-18; Romans 8:14-18.

This thrilling security for the believer grows as he lives in the Gospel of forgiveness. This is why the evangelical way becomes a doxological way of life. When a man is free from sin and its damning power, he sings praise and thanksgiving to the God of all mercy and grace.

When a man in faith hears Christ's absolution, "Son, be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee". Matthew 9:2, he not only lives a doxological life, but he begins to live under grace and not under the Law. This is the evangelical way of the sanctified life.

Living in the Gospel of forgiveness, the Christian is motivated to live for God in righteousness and holiness not by compulsion and threat of the Law, but by divine grace. He strives for goodness in living not because he is afraid to be bad, but because he truly wants to be good, living in the warm glow of God's forgiving love in Christ Jesus. The Apostle Paul, in explaining his great striving for perfection in the evangelical way, expressed it in these words, "not that I have already attained this or am already perfect; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me His own." Phil. 3:12.

An interesting study of the evangelical way in sanctification is to examine the numerous passages of exhortation to righteous living in the Epistles of the New Testament and see how these are always related to the Gospel of salvation. See for instance Romans 6 and 12; Ephesians 4 and 5; 2 Corinthians 8; Galatians 5; Colosaians 3; 1 Peter 2 and 4; 1 John 2 and 3. There also are references in the Lutheran confessional writings to this evangelical approach to righteous living. See for instance, *Apology*, Article XII, 82; *Formula of Concord*, *Epitome*, Article IV, 10, 11, 12; Article VI, 2, 6, 7.

The believer thus is motivated in his Christian living by the Gospel. He strives mightily against sin and earnestly seeks to serve God in holiness and righteousness all the days of his life, remembering gratefully that in Christ he has been delivered from the hands of his enemies. Luke 2:73-75. Having been quickened by the Holy Spirit from spiritual death and walking by the Spirit, his life becomes productive in the fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control. Gal. 5:22-23.

There is no law against such spiritual manifestations and they are not the works of the Law. These spiritual characteristics and the good works that accompany them flow out of the Gospel. "Even though the new obedience is obedience to God's Law, the good works are not deeds of the Law, but fruits of the Spirit; they are not products of the Ten Commandments, but of the Gospel." (*Theology of the Lutheran Confessions* by Edmund Schlink, Page 112. See also *Formula of Concord*, *Solid Declaration*, Article IV, 10 to 12). The Christian in the evangelical way lives not under the Law, but under grace.

This does not mean, however, that the believer, living in the evangelical way is lawless. Even though he is free from the Law and Christ is the end of the Law for everyone who is justified by faith (Rom. 10:4), the Christian recognizes God's Law as good and as belonging to God's revealed Word to man. While rejoicing in his salvation, he still contends with his old Adam and hears the judgment of God's Law against all evil, but he lives in the Gospel.

The believer has been delivered through the Gospel from the coercion and threats of the Law, but he still finds the Law useful. By the Law he continues to have knowledge of his sin (Rom. 3:20) and therefore also an understanding of his abiding need for God's forgiving grace in Christ. He also still needs the Law to keep in subjection the flesh with its evil passions and desires. (Rom. 7:18, 19, 23; Gal. 5:17; Cor. 9:27.) The Christian living in the evangelical way, understanding himself as a Christian (Rom. 7:4-25), does not despise the restraining help of the Law in his determined struggle against the forces of evil within and without.

As has been stated before, the Christian is not under the Law, but under grace. Nevertheless, he is not lawless or even indifferent to the Law of God. He sees in the Law the immutable will of God. Edmond Schlink in *Theology of The Lutheran Confessions*, Page

110, has a helpful statement in this connection. "The activity of the Holy Spirit is in harmony with the Law. To be sure, the mode of activity of these two is entirely different: the Holy Spirit operates in the sinner; the Law stands above the sinner and in opposition to him. The effect of both too is diametrically opposite: the Holy Spirit produces good works; the Law causes sin to grow in the sinner. 'The law of the mind' is not a demand, but a realized demand. The law of the Spirit comprises the works and fruits of the Spirit, and His law is a gift. The Law in which the believer lives is the product of the Spirit of God in the believers who have been liberated from the Law through Christ. In spite of all these differences, however, God's Law in the Decalogue and God's activity through the Holy Spirit have this content in common—that the Holy Spirit bestows the same gifts which the Law demands. The Law forbids murder, adultery, etc., and the Holy Spirit, likewise does not produce murder and adultery, but gentleness and chastity." A statement from *Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration*, Article VI, 18 is pertinent to this discussion. "According to the inmost self they delight in the Law of God; but the law in their members is at war against the law of their mind. Thus, though they are never without law, they are not under but in the Law, they live and walk in the Law of the Lord, and yet do nothing by the compulsion of the Law".

In connection with the Christian's relation with the Law, even though he lives under grace, something needs to be said about the current agitation in regard to the so-called third use of the Law. Article VI of the *Epitome of the Formula of Concord* shows that this matter was in controversy as early as the Sixteenth Century. This article clearly states that there is according to the Scriptures a proper use of the Law in the sanctified life of the Christian. This usage, however, must be properly understood and carefully stated, lest the Christian who is not under the Law is insiduously sidetracked from the evangelical way and once again brought under the intolerable coercion and terror of the Law. The question arises whether it is proper in encouraging the believer to live a Christian life to insist that he has to meet the requirements of the Law. Many see in this the threat of legalism and therefore urge that the so-called third use of the Law is not compatible with the evangelical way. Rather than argue about the advisability of the use of the term "the third use of the Law", perhaps it would be helpful to direct the Christian believer to the will of God in the Law as goals to be attained in Christian living for the glory of God as Paul expresses it in Philippians 3:12-14. "Not that I have already attained this, or am already perfect; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me His own. Brethren, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."

Another subject of current interest in this connection is the "new morality" advocated for our society by many. This approach

found a ready acceptance in our day, because the popular concept of the Christian religion is that it is a morality religion based on a rigid set of laws which dominate the lives of its adherents with a multitude of "do's" and "don'ts". Without question, many have taught the Christian way in a harshly legalistic, pietistic manner. The term "new morality" is an expression of rebellion against this type of religiosity and that can be said to its credit, even though its vague permissiveness without the true evangelical motivation makes it totally inadequate for the Christian's happy commitment to righteousness and holiness.

In another sense "the new morality" is a felicitous expression for the evangelical Christian. He is a new creation in Christ. His approach to godly living is entirely new and unique. The old has passed away and the new has come. Being reconciled to God in Christ, he now lives no longer for himself, but living in the Gospel of forgiveness, he lives for Him who died and rose again. 2 Cor. 5:14-19. This is the genuine new morality and it is a glorious, free, happy way of life.

A free man in Christ! What a wonderful idea! But, what does it mean? Freedom always implies deliverance from forces or conditions of enslavement and at the same time liberty to be and to do what one chooses for himself. The Christian, living in the Gospel of forgiveness, enjoys a radical freedom. Our Lord gave expression to this in John 8:31, 32, "Jesus then said to the Jews who had believed in Him, if you continue in my Word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free".

Jesus emphasized in this passage that it is the truth that makes free. The truth that makes free is the Gospel, the word of absolution. Christ identifies Himself as the truth. John 14:6. That freedom alone is in the Gospel comes through loud and clear in the Epistle to the Galatians. A fine summary statement in Galatians 5:1 reads, "for freedom, Christ has set us free: stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery".

Man in his native unspiritual condition is in tragic slavery under the rule of sin and its consequences. Aware of his failure and fearful of impending judgment, he strives for escape from the slavery in the only way he knows—through the Law. This worsens his predicament, for the power of sin is the Law. Gal. 3:10, 19; Rom. 3:19; 5:20. For man to seek deliverance under the Law from the slavery of sin is to wind up in a dead end alley.

Only he who truly comes to see the total and eternal tragedy of this enslavement can come to appreciate under the converting power of the Holy Spirit the evangelical way and the glorious freedom in the Gospel of forgiveness. The power of the Gospel can set man free when he believes that "where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord." Rom. 5:20,21. God's gracious pronouncement sets man free, "for

sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under Law but under grace". Rom. 6:14.

Thus, the evangelical way is living in a unique, radical freedom. There truly is a complete break with the system of living under the Law. It is a deliberate turning away from the coercive demands and the defeating threats of the Law to the glorious freedom and the aliveness of being God's own children in Christ. Gal. 3:23-29.

This radical freedom in the Gospel gives the Christian the freedom to be and do what he chooses as he lives it up in the evangelical way. Delivered from the darkness of sin and death, he now lives in joyous response to Christ's salvatory death and resurrection in a consuming commitment to righteousness and holiness before God all the days of his life. Being alive unto God and remembering with joy the full significance of his baptism, he chooses to become a slave of righteousness, happily anticipating in God's saving grace eternal life in heaven. Rom. 6. This is the evangelical way for the believing Christian.

In this great freedom, the Christian life takes on new meaning. There is no longer a wall of separation between him and God. The universe with all its bounties and all its mysteries takes on new dimensions because God, the Creator, is the believer's Father in heaven with Whom he is in communication as a dear child with his dear father, as Luther expressed it. Being led by the Spirit of God, as a son of God, the Christian without fear rejoices in his fellowship with God. Rom. 8:14-16. Conscious of his son-ship in God's family, the Christian finds meaning in his existence and purpose in his life.

The believer, walking in the evangelical way, is humble, understanding that he is what he is alone by the grace of God. 1 Cor. 15:10. This understanding transforms his relationship to all people. He recognizes that before God's quickening grace made him a new creation in Christ, he, too, came under the general indictment of Rom. 3:23, "for there is no distinction; since all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God". This helps him to understand people and see in them, no matter who or what they are, the great possibilities of God's renewing grace to make of them kings and priests of the most high God. Being a recipient of God's forgiveness, eternal life, and adoption into God's family, the Christian has acceptance, love, compassion, and forgiveness for all men. The evangelical way breaks down barriers among men and establishes an openness in relations among men that can undo the devastating estrangement that sin has brought into the experience of mankind.

There is in this evangelical way a most enriching relationship for all who live in it. It is the fellowship of believers in the body of Christ, the Church. Not strangers or sojourners, but fellow citizens with holy people, brothers and sisters in God's family, acknowledging a kinship regardless of life's situations that have to do with race, nationalities, economics, society, age, or even denominationalism. Eph. 2:11-22. There is in this Gospel fellowship a tremendous

spirit of ministry which finds greatness in following the example of Him, Who came "not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many." Matt. 20:28; Eph. 4:1-16; Rom. 12; 1 Cor. 12.

The man who lives in the Gospel is greatly blessed. He lives courageously and victoriously by faith in the Son of God, who loved him and redeemed him. It is in this Spirit-given faith that the Christian dares to pray the 23rd Psalm, trusting that God, Who spared not His own Son surely will give him all things.

Living in the evangelical way does not exempt the Christian from the hardships and tribulations of life to which all men are subject in this sin-plagued world. There is a significant plus, however, in his life. God has made him in the Gospel more than conqueror over all the testing experiences of life, giving him the full assurance that nothing shall separate him from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Rom. 8:31-39.

Truly, the evangelical way for the Christian is a good way. Whatever his station in life may be, or whatever his circumstances are, he joins with the Apostle Paul and says, "therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through Him we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God. More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us." Rom. 5:1-5.

III.

If the individual Christian is to live on the high spiritual plateau of the evangelical way, then surely his congregation and the church must supply him a supportive ministry to direct him in this way and establish him in it. Ernst Kinder in his *Evangelical—What Does It Really Mean*, on page 26, draws the believer and the church together in this statement, "personal Christianity as well as organized church life controlled by the Gospel and oriented to the Gospel—that is what evangelical really means". Again on page 51, he states, "thus both personal faith and the church stand completely under the Gospel and both are ruled and regulated by it". All this makes mandatory for the church in its preaching and teaching a truly evangelical theology and a church life not all cluttered up with legalistic practices and traditions.

Whether or not a church is evangelical can be determined first of all by its proclamation. Evangelical preaching and teaching gives recognition of Christ and His Gospel as the center and true content of God's revelation to men in the Holy Scriptures. This is not only a basic hermeneutical rule for the interpretation of all Scripture, but it also is the foundation stone for evangelical preaching and teaching and for an evangelical church life. The Apostle

Paul gives expression to this in his declaration "for I decided to know nothing among you, except Jesus Christ and Him crucified". 1 Cor. 2:2.

To be evangelical in preaching and teaching, however, requires not only the proclamation of God's grace in Christ, but also an explanation of why man needs God's saving grace. This necessitates the use of the Law. The evangelical church preaches Law and Gospel; sin and grace; judgment and salvation. The greatest challenge for the preacher and teacher is to understand both Law and Gospel and their proper use in relation to each other.

Francis Pieper (*Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. III, page 232), in discussing the proper distinction between Law and Gospel asserts that the Gospel must be recognized as the "higher word" which is God's final Word to the terrified sinner under the judgment of the Law. He quotes Martin Luther as follows, "both are God's Word, the Law and the Gospel, but the two are not equal. One is lower, the other higher; one is weaker, the other stronger; one is lesser, the other greater. When now they wrestle with each other, I follow the Gospel and say, goodbye Law!" The same comparison in essence is made in 2 Corinthians 3:7-18; Galatians 3:19-22.

Much has been written on the subject and it is important enough to be a lifetime study for all who would properly proclaim the Gospel of forgiveness. It is important to remember that the Law is properly used in service to the Gospel. For evangelical preaching and teaching the Law is used in connection with the salvatory purposes of the Gospel.

Edmund Schlink (*Theology of The Lutheran Confession*, Page 123-124), in discussing the Law in service to the Gospel for justification, explains how the Law must come in for additional use in the sanctified life that follows justification, "no study of the Lutheran Confessions, after going the way that leads from the Law to the Gospel, may omit following the additional path which begins with the unfolding of the Gospel and, by way of regeneration and the new obedience, again leads back to the Law and the revelation of God's wrath. Whoever restricts himself to the first way, as so often happens, falsifies Lutheran doctrine no less than the person who grants validity to only the second way and would like to understand justification on the basis of man's renewal. Only when both ways—the way from the Law to the Gospel and the way from the Gospel to the Law—have been traversed to the end do the questions with which all theology is confronted by the Word of God become clear. Only then can we truly see the problem that must be called the theme of the entire Lutheran theology—the distinction between Law and Gospel. This distinction is the guarantee of the *gloria Christi*".

It is clear that the teaching of justification and sanctification in an evangelical manner requires a careful distinction between Law and Gospel. No one probably can precisely and adequately define this distinction in all of its ramifications and usages. In this we

must be taught by the Holy Spirit. Here it must be remembered that the church's theology is evangelical when the Law and the Gospel is proclaimed in such a way that the repentant, believing Christian rejoices in the grace of God which is in Christ Jesus whereby he has forgiveness of sin and everlasting life and whereby he is strongly motivated to live his life to the glory of God in righteousness and holiness.

As stated previously, the church to be evangelical must not only have an evangelical theology that shapes its preaching and teaching with the proper distinction of Law and Gospel, but that also offers God's people an evangelical church life. It is in this area that legalism can easily rear its ugly head. This must be resisted and it must be remembered that also in practical church life, "the written code (Law) kills, but the Spirit gives life". 2 Cor. 3:4-11.

The church needs to evaluate its congregational and Synodical life and work constantly to determine whether or not God's people are given the opportunity in all areas of church activity to respond freely and joyfully in responsible service to their Lord and His cause. The evangelical way admittedly appears frequently less efficient and at times less orderly than a rigidly structured program with rules and regulations strictly enforced. The history of the Christian church demonstrates that to drift into legalism is a constant hazard. Voluntary customs easily develop into sacred traditions which after a while are imposed on God's people from generation to generation as though they were of the essence of Christian being and almost automatically impose themselves as legalistic requirements on God's free people whose Christian being and life flows out of the Gospel.

There are many facets of church organization that need to be considered from this perspective. Here we can mention structure and order in the local congregation, in associations of congregations as Synod or denomination, and in inter-denominational organizations on the local, national, and international levels. The Holy Scriptures do not give specifics for the administration of congregation and church business other than that believers should gather about the Word and Sacraments and get the Gospel out to all people. Therefore, in this area Christian congregations and churches have the evangelical freedom to develop structures and administrations that are best suited to carry on the great work of Christ's Church in their particular place and time, appealing in the love of Jesus for a hearty cooperation of their members. In this evangelical freedom, the church has the liberty to be creative in developing new forms, special ministries, and a variety of administrative approaches to be God's Church in mission to the world.

The mission of the church brings us to the subject of stewardship in the life of the Christian in his relationship to the church. This is a broad subject which covers the believer's whole life as Paul expresses it clearly in 2 Cor. 5:15, "and He died for all, that those who lived might live no longer for themselves but for Him who for

their sake died and was raised." See also Gal. 2:20. It is important to understand that Christian stewardship has to do not only with the Christian's material possessions, but with the entire management of life.

A proper instruction in stewardship in the evangelical way brings joy and fulfillment to God's people as they live their lives unto the Lord, remembering that they have been bought with a price and that they are not their own, but the Lord's. Christians need to be given the insight that stewardship is more than bringing weekly offerings of money to the church and participating in some of the housekeeping responsibilities in the congregation. It is a management of their whole life as a sacred trust from the Lord. Vocation is deeply involved here. A woman is a housewife. She becomes a Christian believer in the power of the Holy Spirit—now, she is a Christian housewife and manages her life for the Lord. A man is a musician. He is converted to faith in the Savior—now, he is a Christian musician and serves his Lord and people. 1 Cor. 7:17-24. Thus, the Christian in his varied activities of daily life, and, as his life touches the lives of other people, serves as a Christian steward. His time, his mind, his emotions, his attitudes, his abilities, his energies, his resources, and in fact everything that he is and has becomes involved in a life of stewardship and in a witness that he is one of God's people. In all such stewardship or management of life, the motivation for the Christian is the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Here is the key to proper teaching and practice of stewardship in the church—this is important to remember in all congregational and Synodical endeavors: the church does not need gimmicks and high-powered methods to pressure God's people to "live under Him in His Kingdom as His own and serve Him". Evangelically, the church must use the Law and the Gospel for the stewardship life of God's people. The church also needs to trust God's promise that His Word does not return void. At the same time, the church needs to have confidence in God's people under the Word.

God's people rightfully expect instruction and direction for their stewardship responsibilities in life from the church. The Christian heart asks—"Lord, what do You want me to do?" or "how much money should a Christian give in support of the church and it's mission projects?" The church should have no hesitation in answering such questions and in giving some measuring rod to the earnest Christian on the basis of the Holy Scriptures. There is much encouragement and instruction in the Word of God to give adequate direction to the Christian in his stewardship life and the church need not to be apologetic in teaching this, but always, evangelically. Matt. 25:14-46. A good example of evangelical encouragement for faithful performance of stewardship obligation also is available in 2 Cor. 8 and 9; 1 Cor. 15:58-16:2.

Perhaps some would become critical at this point and state that this evangelical way sounds good and idealistic, but in actual practice

it just doesn't work. The plain fact is, they argue, that you are dealing with imperfect Christians, with sinners and they do not adequately respond to evangelical motivation. This observation could be made about many other areas of congregational life.

The argument against the evangelical way is not acceptable, but it is important to recognize that all Christians, though they have full forgiveness of sin and are saints, are at the same time still sinners—*simul justus et peccator*. The church's ministry must take this into account. This relates to what has been said above in connection with the proper use and distinction of the Law and the Gospel.

From the perspective of the evangelical way, it seems necessary to say that though sinners, believing members of the church are God's people. They are beloved brethren in Christ. They should be addressed as such and they should be valued as such, regardless of provocation at times. The Apostle Paul gives us a remarkable pattern for this in his Epistles to various congregations where there were all kinds of difficulties, including factions, false teachers, laxity in moral standards, questions about his own apostleship, and involvement in worldly things, he still addresses them as "brethren, my brethren, faithful brethren, saints" and he gives thanks to God for them, expressing the longing of his heart to be in their presence again. Where the Gospel rules in a Christian congregation, there is love and forgiveness and this is the evangelical way in the church. This strong note of God's forgiving love in Christ Jesus must come through in the entire ministry of the church. Law and Gospel are to be preached in love for the edification and comfort of God's people.

This Gospel approach is of prime importance when in the congregation or in the Synod, church discipline becomes necessary. Regardless of the offense, be it scandalous life or false teaching, the Christians in such difficulties need the love of their brethren. The evangelical way has the Gospel goal of winning the erring brother for repentance and forgiveness and for restoration to the happy fellowship of the church. Our Savior teaches this in a compelling manner in the three parables in Luke, Chapter 15, even stating that there is joy before the angels in heaven over one sinner who repents. The evangelical spirit in discipline is expressed in Gal. 6:1-2, "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Look to yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ". When such a brother has been restored, he should experience in the fellowship of the church forgiveness, comfort, and a warm love which will bring reassurance and joy to him. This is the evangelical way among those who are *simul justus et peccator*.

The real test for the evangelical way in the church is in matters that are neither commanded nor forbidden. Christian congregations and church bodies, in the interest of good order and efficient operation, have the liberty to establish voluntary practices and rules in the area of adiaphora and request the membership in Christian

love to cooperate. Christians must exercise care that customs and manmade regulations do not become legalistic requirements in the church and at the same time that a spirit of disorderliness and irresponsibility in such matters be not tolerated. Both such abuses would be contrary to the evangelical way.

Here, we quote from "Instructions to The Weak And The Strong According to Romans 14", *Concordia Theological Monthly*, XXI, Page 659, "Legalism and license always have been and still are the implacable foes of Christian liberty and ultimately of the Gospel itself". A summary statement from this same paper on Page 673 is helpful in this connection, "let us so teach the Word of God that all our members will be 'strong Christians,' understanding their Christian liberty in things neither commanded nor forbidden. If a brother is 'weak in the faith,' let us bear with him and deal with him according to Christian charity and receive him into our Christian fellowship as a fellow servant of Christ. Adiaphora will then cease to be a problem, and all members of the congregation, the weak and the strong, will work together in a God-pleasing manner. Everyone will then live unto the Lord and die unto the Lord, holding precious as the essentials of his faith righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost."

Much could be written about various practices in contemporary church life which in many instances have become unevangelical, that is legalistic. We shall merely list a number of such areas in church life and suggest that it would be profitable to explore the actual practice with a test of whether or not it is compatible with the evangelical way.

Here we think of liturgical practices; registration for the Lord's Supper and practices that developed around the concept of "close" communion; extra-Biblical qualifications for church membership; confirmation instruction and public examination of catechumens; homemade rituals for the public reception of new members by transfer from sister congregations; fiscal matters, such as use of weekly envelopes, annual pledges, quarterly reports of individual contributions; practices connected with the sacrament of baptism—who is to be baptized by a pastor? are sponsors or godparents a requirement for infant baptism? who can serve as an acceptable sponsor?; rules and regulations for the pastor's service for marriages and funerals; membership in auxiliary church organizations; the pastor's involvement in community life and civic responsibilities; nursery care for small children during worship services, etc.

✓ One facet in contemporary church life that has become a great challenge for evangelical ministry has to do with the many cases of marital problems, divorces, single divorced members in the church, and additional marriages for divorced people. A rigid, legalistic handling of such problems can quite readily eliminate them from the congregation, because the people in such involvements either leave the church or are excommunicated from it. The pastor and his congregation in such unevangelical practice can even be tempted with

pride in their strict enforcement of what they consider Biblical standards. But, what about the Gospel of forgiveness for these many people caught up in the web of domestic discord and marriage failure? Surely, here there must be room for what Luther called "God's higher Word", if the church is in the evangelical way. There are important questions to be answered in this connection. Can a divorced person who confesses fault in the failure of marriage and who finds it impossible emotionally to reestablish the marriage relationship with the former spouse be truly repentant and receive absolution and continue in membership in the church, a saint in God's family? Is it possible where the Gospel rules in a congregation for both former spouses in the same situation, forgiving each other but not being able to reestablish the marriage, to continue in the fellowship of the congregation, receiving absolution and the blessings of the Holy Supper? Is it right for divorced people to be stigmatized in the congregation when in a spirit of repentance and faith they have found forgiveness and peace with God in Christ Jesus? Such questions do not arise out of idle speculation. They have become difficult challenges in the mutual ministry of God's people in the church. There is no room for legalism and license in these matters, but there is a call for a truly evangelical ministry in the proper use of Law and Gospel. The increasing frequency of marriage failure in our contemporary culture makes it mandatory that the church develop an adequate evangelical ministry for such children of God enmeshed in the disaster of marriage failure. (See a number of articles on this subject by Harry C. Coiner in the *Concordia Theological Monthly*, XXXIV, page 541; XXXIX, page 367; also by Walter J. Bartling, *CTM* XXXIX, page 355)

Another sensitive area of church life for American Lutheranism that poses questions concerning evangelical practice has to do with unchristian and antichristian associations, including a number of fraternal organizations known as lodges. It should be recognized with gratitude that Lutheran Churches have a common commitment to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. There is general agreement that any organization, having a religious character, that teaches in its rituals and has in its principles a way of salvation other than by God's grace through faith in Christ Jesus comes under the judgment of Galatians 1:8-9, "but even if we or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a Gospel contrary to that which we preach to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone is preaching to you a Gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed." An uncompromising stand on the truth that there is salvation in no one else except Christ Jesus, for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved, is absolutely basic to evangelical practice in this matter. Acts 4:12.

A number of questions may arise in this connection—can a man be a member of an evangelical church and at the same time be a member of an association that in teaching and practice is in con-

tradition to the Gospel of Christ? How can the church develop an evangelical practice in this matter that safeguards the Gospel and at the same time adequately helps the Christian to the spiritual maturity to avoid involvement in unchristian and antichristian associations and, in the event he is involved, to disassociate himself in a happy loyalty to Christ and His Gospel?

There are twin dangers in meeting the problems of people involved in such antichristian associations. One is to put institutional policy above all other considerations and in a legalistic manner make "either, or" demands on individuals without consideration for their spiritual maturity and understanding or lack of it. The other danger is to ignore the problem and the implicit denial of the Gospel in such associations in their religious rituals and give license to church members to continue affiliation in a religious system that is in contradiction to the Gospel. Neither approach is truly evangelical and in practice many congregations have been guilty of one or the other.

It is at this time that all Lutheran Churches in America need to reevaluate their practice in this area of concern and together develop an approach that in practice is truly evangelical and that can consistently and effectively be applied. In striving for such an effective, consistent evangelical practice, a number of the following basic principles must be respected.

✓ There must be an over-riding concern for the salvation of the individual Christian who may be enmeshed in this problem. There must be patient instruction related to the issues involved. God's truth, including Law and Gospel, must be taught consistently in love. Through the means of grace, the Christian believer should have every opportunity to grow in knowledge and in grace, to enable him in the assurance of faith to separate himself from antichristian entanglements, and glorify Christ as Lord and Savior. In all this, those who minister to such individuals must manifest the kind of patience, understanding, compassion, and love which is born out of the Gospel of forgiveness. The evangelical way also in these matters leads in the way of the Good Shepherd who, leaving the flock of ninety-nine, patiently and lovingly reaches out to rescue the sheep that is in danger of being forever lost.

The church whose teaching and life is centered in the Gospel will not only demonstrate a deep concern for its own membership, but will also live and work in a conscious awareness of its kinship in the Gospel with all believers in Christ, the Savior. The Gospel is the life source and the heartbeat of the one church of our Lord, Jesus Christ. There can be no separatistic spirit in the evangelical way for the church. There are many helpful statements on this subject in Ernst Kinder's book, *Evangelical—What Does It Really Mean?* Some of which we now quote.

"Whoever is genuinely convinced of the Gospel as the divine creative power for life and believes that it is the real heart and true center of the church can believe in only one church . . . The one-

ness of the church is by no means some desirable quality for which to strive as if it were part of its *bene esse* or *plene esse*, but it belongs to the church's very essence, to its *esse* pure and simple. For the church is essentially a unity by virtue of the one Gospel of Christ creatively working through God the Holy Spirit." (ibid, page 59). "It is wrong when the terms 'evangelical' and 'catholic' are placed in opposition to each other, as often occurs . . . An evangelical attitude that does not include a truly catholic perspective and a sense of genuine catholic responsibility is not genuinely evangelical and on the other hand, catholicity that is not motivated and determined by the Gospel as a genuine center of the church is no genuine but forced catholicity". (ibid, pages 60 and 61).

The Scripture speaks only of the one true church, the body of Christ and the unity that is in Him. "So, we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another". Romans 12:5. Our Savior in His high priestly prayer, prayed for the manifestation of this unity, "I do not pray for these only, but also for those who believe in Me through their word, that they may all be one; even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also be in Us, so that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me. The glory which Thou hast given Me I have given to them, that they may be one even as We are One, I in them and Thou in Me, that they become perfectly one, so that the world may know that Thou hast sent Me and hast loved them even as Thou hast loved Me". John 17:20-23. Believers are exhorted to maintain this unity in the church, the body of Christ. "I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, Who is above all and through all and in all" Eph. 4:1-6.

The unity of the church is in the Gospel of Christ and the Lord of the Church addresses strong admonitions to His believers to safeguard this Gospel from all those who deny it or compromise it. "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves". Matt. 7:15. "I appeal to you, brethren, to take note of those who create dissensions and difficulties, in opposition to the doctrine which you have been taught; avoid them for such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by fair and flattering words they deceive the hearts of the simple minded". Romans 16, 17 and 18. See also 1 John 4:1-3; 2 John 9 to 11. Although frequently these passages have been applied incorrectly against fellow Christians, these warnings like the entire Epistle to the Galatians are in reality directed against those who seek to destroy the evangelical way, denying the Gospel of Christ and seeking to substitute another way of life.

The catholicity of the Christian faith and church is confessed in the ecumenical creeds. A careful study of the Lutheran symbols will show that they are evangelical, that is centered in the Gospel, and that they are ecumenical, calling for all Christians to be united in the Gospel and its articles of faith and in the Sacraments. The Augsburg Confession, Article Seven, clearly states that the unity of the church must be established in the Gospel. "For it is sufficient for the true unity of the Christian church that the Gospel be preached in conformity with a pure understanding of it and that the sacraments be administered in accordance with the divine Word".

When the Gospel of forgiveness controls the life of the church and the doctrine of justification is the center of its theology, there will be found a deep yearning in the hearts of God's people for fellowship with all believers in the body of Christ and a true Scriptural desire for unity in Christ's church here on earth. Such convictions under the leadership of the Holy Spirit surely will be manifested in responsible involvements in ecumenical endeavors.

The lack of a manifested spiritual unity among Christian believers has caused suffering and heartache for many. False teaching, disagreements in the interpretation of Scripture, theological controversies, and disturbing diversities in church practice have caused many divisions among Christian churches. Those true to the evangelical way have no desire to perpetuate these divisions, but under the guidance of the Holy Spirit must seek aggressively to promote unity in the Gospel of Christ. The evangelical church needs to understand its role of ministry to the church, the body of Christ. Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12. See *Affirmations on God's Mission*, adopted by The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod at Detroit, 1965, specifically "The Church is Christ's Mission to The Church".

A commitment to true ecumenism for the church does not in any way detract from a complete loyalty to the Holy Scriptures. The same loyalty to God's Word also demands an evangelical approach to ecumenical involvements and guards against legalism in these matters. Lutheran Churches, in their proper concern for Scriptural teaching, have to guard against unevangelical practices in church unity endeavors. A failure to remain evangelical has led some churches into separatistic practices which are not compatible with Scriptural teaching.

Here, we wish to refer to an essay by J. Ph. Koehler entitled *Gesetzlich Wesen Unter Uns*, published in the *Quartalschrift* of the Wisconsin Evangelical Synod in October, 1914 to July, 1915. In 1959, the *Wisconsin Synod Proceedings* published this essay in translation by the Reverend Alex Hillmer. This essay deals with the problem of legalism in the church. In the first of four statements on this subject, Dr. Koehler states, "Gesetzlich Wesen among Christians consists in their taking the motivations and the forms of their actions from the Law instead of letting them flow freely out of the Gospel. This proceeds out of our flesh, which injects this trait into every act of the Christian and externalizes it." In his second

statement, he takes up the matter of legalism in areas of the church's doctrinal concerns. He states, "in the Lutheran Churches this characteristic manifests itself first of all and primarily in the noisy self-satisfied to-do about pure doctrine. Paralleling this is a clamorous insistence on sanctification that exerts itself especially in church government regulations". In discussing this matter, he states that legalism becomes a hindrance to the Gospel. In making a comparison between the Lutheran emphasis with the Reformed approach, he states, "On account of the Lutheran emphasis on justification in faith it is natural in our midst that exposition of doctrine takes preeminence for the sake of the heralding of the Gospel; whereas the Reformed put their main effort into the development of the external life in church government and social welfare, we lay greater stress on doctrine, purity of doctrine. Legalism obtrudes itself here in the form of harping on orthodoxy. Hereby is meant the insistence on the 'right faith' where the emphasis has shifted from 'faith' to 'right' . . . This noisy ado about orthodoxy flourishes on petty parochialism which is opposed to the ecumenical spirit, for that reason it clings to the lees of the letter instead of living in the facts. The end result is traditionalism, which has lost the spirit of language, the spirit of the Gospel. There you have legalism, which opposes the Gospel and shows that the insistence on orthodoxy during the course of a doctrinal controversy has forsaken the basis of the Gospel".

Dr. Koehler has many statements which emphasize the necessity of being true to the teachings of the Holy Scripture. In his sharp statements against legalism he does not approve of a watered down theology. He emphasizes, however, that to be evangelical has as its primary aim the heralding of the Gospel and faith in Christ the Savior. He insists that this spirit must characterize the evangelical church's interest and involvement in ecumenical affairs. He writes, "now the ecumenical spirit, a heart for the whole household of God, for the other sheep, not a part of the immediate fold, flows immediately out of the Gospel . . . True ecumenical spirit is something within one, peculiar to the individual through the Holy Ghost . . . If I at any time meet up with someone that believes on the Lord Jesus, then the very fact of his faith and that, through his faith, he has become a child of God, member of the body of Christ, becomes the main thing and warms the very heart. To this I will give expression by emphasizing those things that unite us in faith and not open up with reproach and criticism on those things that still divide us. Intellectualism and the lack of the ecumenical sense, each conditioning the other, on the other hand express themselves predominately in judgment and condemnation, thus showing the character of the works of the Law. It goes without saying however that evangelical sense does not sacrifice truthfulness. Therefore, criticism will not be ruled out but it will be colored by the Gospel".

In taking a strong stand against legalism in matters ecumenical, Dr. Koehler shows how the Confessional writings originally were

confessions of faith, preachments of the Gospel. Later, he explains, in the course of time legalism entered into the matter of the Confessions and spoiled the Christian's consciousness of the one church. In discussing this, he states, "What is meant here is the party spirit that stresses the external crowd of confessionalists over against the other. When our doctrinal discussions are carried on in such a tone that we are out to show the other; you are wrong, your position is incorrect, ours is correct; when correcting holds the spotlight and the regard for the growth of the unifying bond of faith is crowded into the dim background, then by all orthodoxy in Gospel matters there is present an intermingling of Law and Gospel, the art of the legalist". In developing his argument against legalism in ecumenical affairs, he also has something to say about traditionalism, claiming that it can easily become the decisive factor in discussions and arguments rather than the Gospel.

Enough has been quoted from the cited essay to indicate that well meaning Christians can easily drift into a legalistic stance over against ecumenical endeavors and can be more intensely exercised about safeguarding certain formulations and traditions than for the healing work of the Gospel of forgiveness among Christian people. If the Lutheran Church truly is evangelical, then the Lutheran Church under God can make a salutary contribution to the ecumenical movement and has a great responsibility to do so.

From the above discussion it is obvious that a church can be evangelical only if its theology is truly evangelical. This places a heavy responsibility on the church's theologians, especially those who train future pastors and teachers for the church and those whose writings are published in periodicals, study materials and books.

Theologians are truly evangelical when they are caught up in the Gospel of forgiveness and are Christ-centered and Gospel-oriented in their personal faith, their life and their theological work. The ultimate aim of their labors coincides with the purpose of Christ's "sent" church and the Holy Scriptures, that men everywhere may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing they may have life in His name. John 20:31.

The theologians in a church are in vital service to the church. It is important, therefore, that the church's expectations of its theologians also be evangelical. This expectation, if it is evangelical, will not restrict the theologians in their academic growth and in their scholarly research. It will not put a prize on obscurantism, nor rob them of creativity in expressing the infinite truths of God revealed in the Holy Scripture in formulation and language that are meaningful to their contemporaries and that can be addressed to their specific needs. The church's evangelical expectation of its theologians is simply this, that they bring all of their learning and all of their teaching and productivity into captivity to the obedience of Christ, to the glory of God, and for the edification of His Church.

The Church in the evangelical way not only centers its theology in the Gospel and shapes its life by the Gospel and treasures the

Gospel, but it is happily and gratefully committed to sharing the Gospel of forgiveness and everlasting life in Christ with all the world. The evangelical church is conscious that it is Christ's mission to the whole world, still responding to the significant Word of the resurrected Savior, "Peace be with you. As my Father has sent Me, even so I send you". John 20:21. See also Matthew 28: 18-20.

The evangelical church in its mission to the whole world proclaims the love of God in Christ not only in preaching and teaching and witnessing in the articulation of the Gospel, but also in the role of servanthood, making real to men in every segment of society the compassion and love of God in Christ Jesus by being in mission to the whole man. It is the Gospel that leads the church into social action, into a ministry that reaches out with understanding hearts and helping hands to man wherever he is in all of his shattering needs in a world of sin where so many are cruelly crushed and are existing without hope. ✓

There can be forgiveness, peace, hope, joy and life, abundant and eternal, for men in God's world, if the church be truly evangelical. ✓

CONCLUSION

The evangelical way is not just another gimmick, nor is it a novel, new approach for a surfeited, bored people. It is the heart-beat of the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ and God's gracious answer to man's continuing need. It truly is the only power for renewal and reformation and for a justified continuation of the Christian Church in mission in God's world. Only by living in the evangelical way can the individual Christian, the Christian congregation and the church truly come alive to the glory of God and for the redemption of all people.