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Confessional Lutheranism in Today's World

Robert D. Preus

The situation in American Lutheranism today, and to varying degrees within our synods, is not unlike the situation of the Lutheran Church at the time of the Leipzig Interim. We blatantly quarrel over ethical issues (not be confused with the subject of "good works" or the meaning of the Ten Commandments), moral principles and their application, social ethics, church polity (i.e., politics), the vagaries and casuistries of pastoral practice—matters which most of us might not call doctrine *per se*, but which nevertheless affect Christian doctrine, impinge upon it, and in certain cases attack it. We need only consult journals and magazines like the provocative *Religion and Society Report*, formerly edited by Lutheran Richard Neuhaus, and note the scores of books written about the above topics to see how society has imposed an "interim," so to speak, upon our Lutheran Church today, as confusing and oppressive as the Romanist Interim after the death of Luther. And these issues which are debated in our church as much as in secular society are having as much impact upon our doctrine and church life as did the Leipzig Interim in the sixteenth century. Furthermore, the discussions of such issues are uncovering deep-seated doctrinal differences within and between church bodies, differences on the third use of the law, the relationship between law and gospel, creation and the orders of creation, hermeneutics, church and ministry, and many other points of doctrine.

Can we classify in some helpful way these issues—world hunger, ecology, Marxism and other economic theories, feminism, planned parenthood and abortion, gun control, discrimination, genetic engineering, church polity, and so on? If so, how? Can we classify these issues under the philosophical category of ethics—or in a kind of interimist way under the heading of adiaphoria? Can we classify them as aspects of Christian life, or "good works," or application of "the evangelical imperative"? Probably none of these attempts at classification will gain a great deal of acceptance among us. Our culture has caused chaos. It has influenced our doctrine as well as our church life and liturgy and practice, so that in all these areas we are at sea. On this point I suspect that there would be little debate among Lutherans today.

In the light of this situation I address myself to the question, "Can we remain confessional Lutherans in today's world?" Of course, the answer in principle is "Yes." One could give much sage advice on how to go about the present and continuing struggle by remaining faithful to the *sola scriptura*, the *sola fide*, and the *sola gratia*, fundamental principles we all know well, and end the discussion there. But one can deal, I think, with the question before us in a more helpful and relevant fashion by centering our attention briefly on a cluster of issues, spawned and cultivated in our culture, issues revolving around two closely related and hotly debated articles of faith, namely, church and ministry. The issues are (1) church (pulpit and altar) fellowship, (2) open communion, (3) the office of the ministry and "lay ministry," and (4) women pastors.

But first I feel compelled to address myself in a prefatory way to a very common, unclear, and bothersome theological distinction which has tended to obfuscate fruitful discussion on the aforementioned issues, the distinction between doctrine, or faith (*fides quae creditur*), and practice.¹ Where did the distinction originate? It is not found in the Lutheran Confessions and is only adumbrated in Luther's writings.² It originates in the seventeenth century when Lutherans debated Romanists and Reformed on the question whether theology was a theoretical discipline or a practical activity and aptitude (*habitus practicus*). The term "practice" in a different sense came into vogue at about the same time as programs and courses in universities were offered in pastoral theology, or pastoral practice, and books on the subject were written (Dannhauer).

Our confessions use the word "practice," or rather words which can be translated by "practice" (*üben, treiben, leben, tun*), not to distinguish something from doctrine, but in the generic sense in which the New Testament occasionally uses the terms *praxis* and *prasso*. The word "practice" is linked to doctrine, worship, the sacraments, prayer, good works, confession (SA II, II, 1; Tr. 27), the Ten Commandments (LC I, 319), and the Lord's day (by using God's word; LC I, 90). The Large Catechism (90) joins preaching and practice (*predigen* and *üben*) and teaching and life (*lehren* and *leben; doctrina* and *vita*), thus hinting at our modern distinction. Later on the Large Catechism (333) extols the Ten

Commandments above all other commandments and works which we can teach and practice (*lehrt und treibt; docere consueverunt*). At times the term is used merely for a daily practice (*Übung*) or reading and practicing God's word (*zu lesen und zu üben*) (SD II, 16). Often what we would call practice today is called doctrine or considered a matter of doctrine in our confessions. For instance, the "doctrine [*Teil, doctrina*] of penance is taught and practiced [*gehandelt sie*]" by the Lutherans (AC XXV, 6). Now penance is obviously a practice, or activity, like baptism and the Lord's Supper, as well as doctrine. In fact, penance, like baptism and the Lord's Supper, does not exist *extra usum*.

The condemnations of our confessions indiscriminately reject false doctrine and false practice (AC VIII, 3; IX, 3), and at times the formulation "our churches teach" introduces matters of practice rather than doctrine (AC XXI, 1; XXV, 7; XXVII, 1; XXVIII, 34). The veneration of relics and invocation of saints are articles which conflict with the chief article of salvation (SA II, II, 22, 25), and in the case of the Anabaptists not only their doctrine is hereticized, but their refusal to serve their government and even appeal to the government for justice and help when they have been wronged by wicked people (SD XII, 9, 10). When the Formula of Concord condemns the Leipzig Interim in Article X, it condemns not merely the doctrine of the interim but also the application and false liturgical practices of the provisions of the interim, as well as submission to it by many Lutherans (Epit. X, 8-12).

Luther introduces his Large Catechism as a doctrinal summary of the entire Scripture and urges all Christians and pastors to exercise themselves daily (*sich wohl üben*) and always practice (*treiben*) the same. In the Augsburg Confession both articles of faith (I-XXI) and articles on abuses (XXIII-XXVIII) are called *praecipui articuli*. The list includes not only the doctrines of God, sin, and justification, but also indulgences, pilgrimages, abuses of excommunication, and the like, thus showing the inextricable connection between doctrine and what we call practice. They involve each other like two sides of a coin.

Another term used often in our confessions which bears on the idea of practice is "good order" or "ecclesiastical order" (*ordo, Kirchenregiment*). Clearly practice is a wider concept

than church order. But church order is practiced and it bridges upon doctrine.³ It is clear that in the Lutheran Confessions doctrine and practice according to our modern distinction are so intertwined and intermingled in their discussions as to be virtually indistinguishable.⁴

The same might be said for the relation between doctrine and worship (*cultus, Gottesdienst*) in the confessions. The two are linked in our confessions, but integrally so that they involve and entail each other (Tr. 44, 45, 72; SA II, IV, 9), so that they are neither separated from each other nor confused, but in a kind of Chalcedonian pattern joined inextricably together like the two natures in the personal union of Christ. By worship our confessions do not usually have in mind the ordinary church service with or without communion, but the continual service of God in prayer, confession of the gospel, formal worship, partaking of the sacrament, and the entire Christian life, all *practiced in faith* which receives the gospel and the forgiveness of sins and is therefore the highest form of all worship (Ap. IV, 154, 228, 309).

In recent generations there has arisen a queer dichotomy and divorce, alien to the Lutheran Confessions, between doctrine on the one hand and practice and worship on the other. Since the Enlightenment worship and practice (life, experience, etc.) have been extolled at the expense of doctrine. Such a view obscures the marks of the church (AC VII) and the very gospel itself (Ap. IV). This indifference toward pure doctrine has been the course of classical liberalism, modernism, and at times even pietism. And, of course, neither practice nor worship is God-pleasing without the confession of pure doctrine. On the other hand, those who wish to be touted confessional Lutherans have mouthed the pure doctrine of the confessions, but sometimes abandoned or rejected a practice or worship which conforms with the pure Lutheran doctrine. Pastors, conferences, conventions, and even church bodies fall into this quasi-docetic self-delusion when they give lip-service to the creeds, *pro forma* subscription to the confessions, and reaffirmation of orthodox doctrinal statements, while their practice and worship lapse into Reformed or sectarian or generic forms, disconnected from their high doctrinal assertions. Formal confession (*Bekennntnis*) obtains, but confessing (*bekennen*) the faith wanes.

Years ago an old lady in northern Minnesota, who had little education and had probably never heard of the Book of Concord, said, "*Laere er liv.*" Doctrine is life! The Danish hymnwriter, Thomas Kingo, writing during the age of orthodoxy, spoke in the same vein and put it this way:

'Tis all in vain that you profess
The doctrines of the church, unless
You live according to your creed,
And show your faith by word and deed. . .

The lady was right and so was Kingo. Doctrine without life (i.e., practice and worship) is a theory, nothing more. Our confessions are as concerned for orthopraxis and pure worship as they are for pure doctrine. For the three are a trinity—doctrine, practice, and worship—which ought not be confused or divided. With this understanding we can now proceed to the four instances where bad and unsound practice today is threatening to undermine the pure doctrine and practice of confessional Lutheranism, also in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

I. Church Fellowship

In the Lutheran Confessions the term "fellowship" is used in a variety of ways. First and foremost, the church itself is called and is a fellowship. When not employing the creedal *communio sanctorum*, or other descriptions, the confessions call the church itself a fellowship (*Gemeinschaft, societas*) of believers. According to the well-known passage in the Apology (VII, 5), the church is outwardly a fellowship (*Gesellschaft, societas*) of external signs, or marks of the church, the pure teaching of the gospel and the pure administration of the sacraments according to the gospel. In this outward fellowship hypocrites are mingled with the church, as well as evil pastors whose ministry of the means of grace is nevertheless efficacious. But, strictly speaking, the church is the spiritual fellowship (*Gemeinschaft, societas*) "of faith and of the Holy Spirit in the hearts." This is a definition of the church corresponding to others in the Lutheran Confessions (*communio sanctorum*: AC VII, 1; LC II, 49-52; SA III, XII, 2).

A second way in which the term "fellowship" is used in our confessions is for the divine service or Holy Communion. For

instance, Luther (SA II, II, 9) speaks of fellowship (*communio, Gemeinschaft*) as the congregation's service of the Lord's Supper (LC V, 87). And elsewhere he speaks of such fellowship as identical with the divine service without the Lord's Supper.⁵

By far the most common usage of the term "fellowship" derives from the first two meanings. We refer to the outward fellowship which exists on the basis of a common agreement (*concordia, consensus*) in doctrine and practice and worship. I shall delineate the position of our confessions on this issue which arose out of controversy and was most pressing. Melanchthon (AC, Preface, 4) teaches that living in doctrinal concord and unity (*concordia, unitas*) involves fellowship. He warns (Tr. 41) that we must beware and not participate (Romans 16:17) with those who adhere to godless doctrine and not have fellowship (*Gemeinschaft, societas*) with them (Matthew 7:15; Galatians 1:8; Titus 1:10; 2 Corinthians 6:14). He is referring to the papacy and to the avoidance of such *practices* as the papistic practice of confession, masses, penance, indulgences, celibacy, and the invocation of the saints which obscure the glory of Christ and the gospel (Tr. 44ff.). He goes on to point out that the papacy will not allow religious matters (*Religionssachen*) to be judged in the proper way (*rite, ordentlicheweise*), thus frustrating attempts to arrive at God-pleasing consensus. For errors must be rejected and true doctrine embraced (Tr. 52) "for the glory of God and the salvation of souls." By "error" Melanchthon refers to "godless dogmas" and "godless services" (Tr. 51, 59); and those who agree with such false doctrine and worship pollute themselves, detract from the glory of God, and hinder the welfare of the church (Tr. 59).

Luther in his confessional writings takes the same position as Melanchthon. Warning against the papacy, he says (SA II, IV, 9) that the church is best governed when all are "diligently joined in unity of doctrine, faith, sacraments, prayer, and works of love." Again, speaking of the papacy he says (LC I, 84) we must avoid (*meiden*) open sinners and testify openly against them and reprove them. He is more vociferous against Zwingli and the Sacramentarians (SD VII, 33): "I rate as one concoction, namely, as Sacramentarians and fanatics, which they also are, all who will not believe that the Lord's bread in the Supper is His true natural body, which the godless or Judas

received with the mouth, as well as did St. Peter and all saints; he who will not believe this should let me alone, and hope for no fellowship [*Gemeinschaft; amicitiam aut familiaritatem*] with me. This is final."

The writers of the Formula of Concord, struggling under the many controversies which ensued after Luther's death and were aggravated by the interim, spoke often about the subject of external church fellowship, the basis for it, and the importance of having no fellowship with papists, Calvinists, or other sectarians and errorists. The basis for fellowship is agreement (*consensus, concordia, Einigkeit*) in the doctrine and all its articles (SD X, 31). Without this unity fellowship is broken, idolatry is confirmed, and believers are grieved, offended, and weakened in their faith (SD X, 16). For the sake of the gospel and dear Christians, therefore, false doctrine, injurious to the faith, must be avoided with all diligence (SD IV, 39) for their very soul's welfare and salvation (SD X, 16). Furthermore, there can be no fellowship (*communio, Gemeinschaft*) with errorists or their followers since there is no way to come to agreement (*vergleichen, conciliari*) with them. Furthermore, Christians are "to reject and condemn" whatever is contrary to the true doctrine (SD XI, 93) and are to have neither part nor fellowship (*wider Teil noch Gemeinschaft*) with errorists and their errors, be they great or small, but to reject and condemn them one and all as against Scripture and the Augsburg Confession and ask godly Christians to "beware" (*hüten*) of them (SD XII, 8).

It is clear from the citations above that external church fellowship involves mutual consensus and confession of the doctrine and all its articles, agreement in practice, and full and uninhibited participation in all worship. It also involves the condemnation of error. Where these factors do not obtain, external fellowship is a capitulation and mockery which obscures the gospel and imperils faith. The refusal to enter into fellowship with false teachers and those who follow them springs from a concern for purity of doctrine and the glory of Christ and the eschatological concern for the salvation of souls.

It seems to me that the pressure of our pluralistic society, of contemporary doctrinal indifferentism, of the welter of religions in our country, and the confusion within American

Lutheranism concerning the doctrine and practice of church fellowship make it very difficult for us who wish to remain confessional Lutherans today to retain our identity. In the LCMS the discussions concerning pulpit and altar fellowship, prayer fellowship, unionism, levels of fellowship (relationship), and interminable casuistic questions have now gone on *ad nauseam*, so that, wearied by all discussion of the issues, each does what is right in his own eyes, a fact which, if true, indicates the imminent breakdown of our confessional position on this point. This leads me to my second point, intimately related to the doctrine and practice of church fellowship.

II. *Open Communion*

Within the Lutheran Church in America there have been three positions taken by congregations, groups, and synods relative to open and closed communion. The first is that of the old General Synod, which recognized Christians in both Lutheran and Calvinistic and Reformed communions and offered the Sacrament of the Altar to those from both groups who desired it (open communion). The second was the position of other American synods in the nineteenth century, the General Council, and later those synods belonging to the American Lutheran Conference in our country. This position recognized that there are dear Christians in Reformed congregations but ordinarily refused them communion because they were identified with a different "religion," with a church body which had a different and false doctrinal position. Those who held this position also at times refused to give communion to those Christians who were members of congregations of the synods belonging to the General Council, and while recognizing, more or less, the so-called Galesburg Rule of 1875, eventually communed indiscriminately all who called themselves Lutherans. The third position was that of C. F. W. Walther and the Synodical Conference: communion was, like much of worship, a confessional act, and should not be offered to those, although sincere Christians, who belonged to Reformed and Roman Catholic communions or who belonged to Lutheran congregations holding membership in un-Lutheran and therefore heterodox church bodies. This position is set forth definitively by Walther in his 1870 essay to the Western District Convention entitled "Communion Fellowship with Those Who Believe Differently."⁶ He bases his

position on Scripture, the confessions, and citations from Luther and other post-Reformation theologians. It is obvious that he is setting forth a position which reprints Reformation practice, but was not the practice of his day among Lutherans in his fatherland.

His starting point in defense of the correct Lutheran practice is specifically the doctrine of ecclesiology, namely, that there is a true visible church or fellowship which preaches, according to Augustana VII, the Word of God purely and administers the sacraments according to the gospel, and is thus distinguished by its marks. Those who will not identify with the true confessing church are, after due admonition, to be avoided,⁷ and if they remain in a false "fellowship" are not be communed. Rather their errors are to be condemned. Walther then goes on to argue as follows: "The main purpose of the holy sacraments is to be a tool and means through which the promises of grace are offered, communicated, and appropriated, as a seal, guarantee, and pledge through which these promises are confirmed. However, within this major purpose, as a secondary goal, the sacrament is to be a distinguishing sign of confession and a bond of fellowship and worship. Therefore fellowship in the Lord's Supper is church fellowship."⁸ Walther then asserts that the sacrament is a mark of pure confession. And if anyone comes to our altar, we must ask him, "Do you believe and confess what we Lutherans believe and confess?"; and if he should answer equivocally, Walther concludes, "It should be known that he is either an unworthy hypocrite or an Epicurean skeptic. We for our part know that we Lutherans alone have the correctly administered communion."

Walther's position, as unpopular today as then, is certainly in accord with our confessional doctrine of fellowship, including Holy Communion, but also with the confessional position in regard to confessing the truth and condemning falsehood and with the concern for the salvation of souls. Never did Luther commune Zwinglians or Sacramentarians, but condemned them. The Formula of Concord concurs with Luther (SD VII, 29-31), quotes him, and with heart and mouth condemns and refuses fellowship to those Romanists, Calvinists, Zwinglians, and *Schwaermer* who do not teach the correct doctrine of the Lord's Supper *and the other articles of faith* (Ep. VII, 21-42; X, 8-12).

Historically the LCMS from its inception has held with the Confessions and Walther on the doctrine of church fellowship and on the issue of open communion. Our pastors and congregations have not communed members of Lutheran congregations belonging to heterodox synods, that is, synods not adhering faithfully to the Lutheran Confessions (e.g., the Anti-Missourian Brotherhood, the General Synod, the ULC, the Augustana Synod, the NLCA, et al.). This was the practice of pastors and congregations belonging to other synods of the Synodical Conference as well. In our circles the practice was adhered to until about World War II. The Galesburg Rule was more or less operative in those synods belonging to the Old American Lutheran Conference, but it was never acceptable to Missouri or the Synodical Conference, inasmuch as it allowed for indiscriminate communing of anyone who called himself a Lutheran.

Today a large number of pastors in the LCMS, ignoring Formula VII and X and Walther's admonitions, have gradually drifted from the position of our confessions to the middle ground of the American Lutheran Conference with its Galesburg Rule. This poses a very vexing problem for our synod, which is itself a fellowship, as congregations, pastors, and officials oppose those pastors who insist on observing confessional Lutheran practice and their God-given right as called pastors to admit or not communicants to the Lord's table. Meanwhile, the synods making up ELCA have officially shifted to the interimist ground and syncretism of the old General Synod, further confusing the fellowship issue among Lutherans.⁹

III. *The Office of the Ministry and "Lay Ministry"*

The article of the office of the ministry is considered by Melancthon in Augustana V where he discusses the work of the Holy Spirit to engender faith through the means of grace. He discusses the call into the public ministry in Augustana XIV. He sets forth the doctrine of the office of minister in the Treatise. I shall describe briefly his discussion there.

A. The public office of the minister (*Predigtamt*) "proceeds from the general call of the apostles," not from any other source, not another apostle (Peter), certainly not the laity (Tr. 10, German text).

B. All ministers (*ministri*; only those who have the *Predigtamt* are called ministers in the confessions) are equal and the church is more than (*supra ministros, mehr sei denn*) the ministers (Tr. 11).

C. Thus, in the church no one rules; only the word rules and has authority (Tr. 11).

D. The keys belong (*pertineant*) to the church, not to some individuals (Matthew 18:18). They have been given and belong (*habet*) immediately (*ohne Mittel*) to the whole church, to all who desire and receive the promises of the gospel (Tr. 24).

E. Final jurisdiction (*Gericht*) is given the church (Matthew 18:17). The pastors "teach" and "rule" with the word (Tr. 30).

F. The office of the ministry (*minister, der Diener des Amts*) is restricted to the public "confession" (*Bekennntnis*; Tr. 25), namely, "teaching the gospel and administering the sacraments" (AC V, 1; Tr. 31), but also including excommunication and absolution. For all this there is a divine *mandatum* (Tr. 60).

G. Pastors, elders, and bishops are equated and hold the same office of minister (Tr. 61ff.).

H. The church as the authority (*jus, jure divino*, Tr. 65, 67) to call, elect, and ordain ministers (SA III, X, 3), since it alone has the "priesthood" (Tr. 69). No human power (*autoritas*) can snatch this authority from the church (SA III, X, 3). According to Ephesians 4:8 ministers are a gift from Christ to the church.

I. The "people" in the early church elected "pastors and bishops." Then a "bishop" confirmed such a call by the laying on of hands. Ordination is "nothing else than such a ratification" (Tr. 70).

J. The *public* preaching of the word and administration of the sacraments is carried out by the "ministers and pastors" (*prii pastores; Pfarrherren*). They also carry out public absolution and excommunication; but the latter only according to due process (*ordine judiciali*).

The data reviewed above merits some comment. It is clear that Melancthon does not recognize the chasm between clergy (priests, bishops, pastors) and laity which obtained in the Roman Catholic Church. His use of the terms "priest" and "clergy" occurs almost always in the context

of false Roman understandings—that priests should not be married, that priests alone should receive Christ’s blood in the Lord’s Supper, and the like; and Melanchthon believed there should be no difference between clergy and laity in such matters. Only once, according to my findings, does Melanchthon call Lutheran pastors “priests” (Ap. XXIV, 48). On the other hand, Melanchthon’s writings and the other confessions hardly ever use the word “laity,” except in the aforementioned polemical context. Rather he and Luther use the term “people” (*populus, vulgus, simplex, der Gemeine Mann, das Volk*). The concept of the “universal priesthood of all believers,” emphasized in our day in contrast to the clergy, or pastors, is unknown in our confessions.¹⁰

One clear conclusion immerses from the confessional discussion of the pastoral office: it is a unique office, conferred upon some men by Christ. The term “minister” is applied only to pastors with a divine call (*Pfarrherr, Prediger*). According to the theology of our confessions, the idea of a “lay-minister” is an inconceivable oxymoron, like sheep being shepherds.

This pattern of church order, or practice, has been that of the LCMS until very recently. Just a couple of years ago the *Lutheran Annual* designated as ministers—“commissioned” ministers, whatever that means!—all kinds of people who are not ministers at all in either the biblical or confessional understanding, people such as school-teachers, directors of Christian education, and those in other categories of full-time church work outside the holy ministry. Such a development is confusing, to say the least. At the Wichita Convention a more serious error compounded this confusion.¹¹ Laymen were permitted publicly and on a regular basis to preach the gospel and publicly to administer the Sacrament of the Altar, something never before condoned in the LCMS. This was to be done in emergency situations, it was said, a practice never approved or even suggested in our confessions.¹² However, emergencies, in the nature of the case, cannot be regularized. Wichita also decided for the congregations of our synod that such a contradiction of Augustana XIV was justified because the lay preachers were to receive supervision. But there is nothing whatever in our confessions about supervision of this kind. If a layman of any age or background desires the office of minister, he should do what he has always done, study

theology and then be rightly called. The *Treatise and Augustana XIV* make it abundantly clear that only ministers are to be called and ministers are always to be called.¹³

IV. *Women Pastors*

The question of women clergy was an unthinkable notion in the sixteenth century just as in the first century for St. Paul or our Lord. There are two reasons for this, the same reasons we bring against the calling and ordination of women into the pastoral ministry today. First, the very idea conflicts with God's order of creation, or the natural order. Luther (SA III, XI) bases his polemics opposing the anti-Christian prohibition of the marriage of priests (pastors) upon the divine ordination of the two sexes, male and female. He argues that such a prohibition is like making a man into a woman or a woman into a man. The same argument would hold, I think, against women ministers.

The second reason why the confessors did not even envisage women ministers was their doctrine of the ministry, which we have just outlined. The ministry is an office which derives from the call and mandate to the apostles and from Christ, who is not only true man, but true God, begotten of the Father. So, although the confessions do not speak explicitly against the false doctrine and practice of calling and ordaining female ministers—just as it does not condemn abortion and other contemporary social aberrations—their entire theology is a malediction against feminist theology and the modern feminist movement.

At this point I might mention that the notion of "equal rights" for women is not some new idea which was first propounded and observed in our enlightened age and country. I cite the words of Jacob Burckhardt,¹⁴ written in 1860 concerning the most enlightened, and also pagan, country in Christian Europe before and at the time of the Reformation, namely, Italy: "To understand the higher forms of social intercourse at this period, we must keep before our minds the fact that women stood on a footing of perfect equality with men." Later he says, "There was no question of 'women's rights' or female emancipation, simply because the thing itself was a matter of course." And then Burckhardt supplies copious illustrations of women excelling in all the works and arts of men, including not only literature and politics, but at times

even warfare, using the eminent Vittoria Colonna as his prime example. But, though she was living in the most nepotistic of all ages and hers was a noble and influential family, neither she nor any other competent woman became a priest or pastor.

Feminism as we know it today did not exist in the open society of Renaissance Italy or in the more closed and primitive culture of northern Europe whence Lutheranism sprang. But today in our Western culture it represents the most powerful and baneful influence of modern society upon the Lutheran Church in America—and also our Missouri Synod. It is a result of pluralism and reflects an ideologically fractured society. This ideology as it enters the thinking and life of our church automatically threatens its confessional character. With its pressure to change the very text of Scripture and our liturgy so as to speak only in inclusive, “non-sexist” language, it attacks not only the *sola scriptura* principle, not only the confessional Lutheran understanding of the doctrine of the ministry and of ecclesiastical order, but also the very doctrine of God as articulated in the creeds.¹⁵

V. Conclusion

This then is my humble description and analysis of four controversial issues having to do with the doctrine of church and ministry, issues which immerge from practice and spill over into doctrine, issues which, if they are not faced boldly by those in the LCMS who wish to retain their confessional Lutheran identity, threaten to overwhelm us, like a great flood, and reduce confessional Lutheranism in our midst to a few little islands peeping out in a great ocean and at the same time reduce the LCMS, like ELCA, to a nondescript mainline church body.

How do we respond to this cultural interim of our day, this onslaught which has engulfed entire denominations? We must respond as our confessions responded to the Leipzig Interim, not by closing our eyes to facts, not by *pro forma* reaffirmations of old and neglected synodical resolutions which may or may not speak to the issues, but by confession and teaching the whole counsel of God and, like the confessors, bearing in mind always that the gospel and the salvation of souls are at stake. And we must respond, like our confessions, by rejecting error at every point, whether it be false practices of fellowship,

open communion, lay ministry, or the ordination of women pastors. All this requires wisdom, courage, and much humility.

I shall conclude with a little story. When my wife and I were traveling in Scotland shortly after World War II, we found ourselves on a train bound for Edinburgh which took a wrong turn and we wound up stopping at a bombed-out bridge. There was only one way to get back on track: back up! Backing up involves admitting that we took a wrong turn in the first place. I pray that God in His infinite mercy may graciously give to us all the wisdom and courage and humility to back up, to return in repentance to the "old paths, where is the good way [the way of the Lutheran Confessions]; and walk therein, and find rest for our souls" (Jeremiah 16:16).

ENDNOTES

1. The 1938 Sandusky Declaration speaks of the Scriptures being the source, rule, and norm for "faith and life." See *Documents of Lutheran Unity in America*, ed. by Richard C. Wolf (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), p. 395. The constitution of the ULC of 1918 has "faith and practice" (*ibid.*, p. 273). See also the Minneapolis Theses of 1925 (*ibid.*, p. 340). The Chicago Theses of 1925-1928 has "doctrine and faith." The United Testimony of Faith and Life (1952) speaks of "doctrine and life" (*ibid.*, p. 501). Obviously there is no uniform terminology in respect to this distinction. Pieper uses the term "Doctrine and Practice." See *Unsere Stellung in Lehre und Praxis* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1896). Under practice Pieper mentions church discipline, church fellowship, stewardship within the church, lodgery, and the actual public preaching of the Gospel.
2. This seems to be the case. Note what Luther says in his Galatians commentary (WA, 40 II, p. 51): "For this reason, as I often advise, doctrine must be carefully distinguished from life. Doctrine is heaven; life is earth. In life there is sin, error, impurity, and misery—with vinegar, as men are wont to say. There love should close an eye, should tolerate, should be deceived, believe, hope, and bear everything; there the forgiveness of sins should mean most, if only sin and error are not defended. But in doctrine there is no error, and hence no need for any forgiveness of sins. Therefore there is no similarity at all between doctrine and life. One point of doctrine is worth more than heaven and earth. This is why we cannot bear to have it

violated in the least.” In this passage Luther by the term “life” does not mean practice as the term was later understood, but the Christian’s life of love and good works. In antithesis to Luther’s position is the modernistic aphorism of a few years ago, “Not creeds, but deeds.”

3. AC XIV, 1: “Of ecclesiastical order they teach (*docent*),” just as they do concerning doctrine and the articles of faith.
4. In his pastoral epistle St. Paul at times includes both doctrine and practice as he uses the term *didaskalia* (Titus 2:1,7,10; 1 Timothy 1:10; 4:1,6; 6:1).
5. The Formula of Concord (SD VII, 57) speaks of *Gemeinschaft* or *communicatio* with Christ through eating His body and drinking His blood, obviously in Holy Communion.
6. Translation by Laurence L. White, 1980.
7. Walther cites Luther (*LW*, 38, p. 304): “Because so many of God’s warnings and admonitions have simply had no effect upon them [the Sacramentarians, etc.]. . .therefore I must leave them to their devices and avoid them as *autokatakritoi* (self-condemned), Titus 3:11, who knowingly and intentionally want to be condemned. I must not have any kind of fellowship with them, neither by letters, writings, and words, nor in works, as the Lord commands in Matthew 18, whether he be called Stenkefeld, Zwingli, or whatever he is called. I regard them all as being cut from the same piece of cloth, as indeed they are. For they do not want to believe that the Lord’s bread in the Supper is His true natural body which the godless person or Judas receives orally just as well at St. Peter and all the saints. Whoever does not want to believe that, let him not trouble me with letters, writings, or words and let him not expect to have fellowship with me. This is final.” Compare the Preface to the Book of Concord, Tappert, p. 23.
8. Again Walther quotes Luther (*LW*, 41, p. 152): “Now we shall speak of the proper manner of communicating the people. . . Here one should follow the same usage as with baptism, namely, that the bishop be informed of those who want to commune. They should request in person to receive the Lord’s Supper so that he may be able to know both their names and their manner of life. And let him not admit the applicants unless they can give a reason for their faith, and can answer questions about what the Lord’s Supper is, what its benefits are, and what they expect to derive from it. . . Those, therefore, who are not able to answer in the manner described above should be excluded and banished from the communion of the Supper since they are

without the wedding garment (Matthew 22:11-12). . . For participation in the Supper is part of the confession by which they confess before God, angels, and men that they are Christians. Care must therefore be taken lest any as it were take the Supper on the sly and disappear in the crowd. . .”

9. See *Lutheran Perspective*, September 8, 1986, p. 12. Also James E. Andrews and Joseph A. Burgess, eds., *An Invitation to the Lutheran-Reformed Dialogue, Series II, 1981-1983*. Because of this action of the ALC, now accepted by ELCA, Concordia Theological Seminary at two synodical conventions has tried to clarify the issue and our own synodical stance vis-a-vis ELCA and open communion, but to no avail. (See *Convention Workbook*, 1989, Memorials 3-33 and 3-50.)
10. The one exception may be Tractatus 69 cited above, but it cannot be a conclusive reference to the priesthood of all believers in any technical sense.
11. See Resolution 3-05B, *Convention Proceedings*, pp. 111ff.
12. An emergency situation (*casus necessitatis*) is mentioned only once in our confessions as an example to justify the *necessary* right of the church to call pastors. Augustine is cited as narrating the story of two Christians in a ship, one of whom baptized the catechumen, who after baptism absolved the baptizer (Tr. 67). Notice that this casuistic example cited by Melancthon speaks neither of the public preaching of the word or the public administration of the sacrament.
13. Much of the confusion on this issue springs from the crisis in the spring of 1974 when graduates and candidates approved by Christ Seminary-Seminex were prevented from entering the LCMS ministry because they were not, according to the LCMS *Handbook*, qualified by one of the LCMS seminaries. Subsequently four district presidents, duly elected by their districts in convention, were deposed for allowing these candidates to be called and ordained contrary to the *Handbook* of the synod. Ironically Wichita Resolution 3-05B allows for district presidents again to send into the ministry men who are not approved by either of the two seminaries (against the synodical *Handbook*) but, more seriously, who have no call and are not ratified by ordination. The majority of delegates at Wichita seemed to think it proper that, if a leading theologian stated qualifiedly that a resolution allowing lay ministers was not *per se* false doctrine, the resolution could be adopted, even if it flew in the face of the doctrine, practice, and church order of the Lutheran Confessions. Thus, by one grand, highly-motivated step, the

LCMS changed its practice and church order and became in this issue Methodist, although stubbornly resisting in principle such a practice for over a hundred and fifty years.

14. *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, trans. by S. G. C. Middlemore (London: Phaidon Press, 1950), p. 240.
15. For further discussion on this point and some of the others considered above, see the Opinion of the Faculty of Concordia Theological Seminary (February 11, 1987) rendered to questions from the Alexandria (Minnesota) Circuit Pastors' Conference, which concludes on the subject of women ministers as follows: "At its last convention the LCMS once more reaffirmed 'its conviction that the Scriptures prohibit women from holding the pastoral office or carrying out the distinctive functions of this office (1 Corinthians 11:11; 1 Corinthians 14; 1 Timothy 2)' (1986 *Proceedings*, Resolution 3-10, p. 144). Since the attempt to place women into the public ministry of the Gospel and Sacraments is contrary to the express Word of God, all such attempts should be regarded as null and void, and of no effect. Such women are not pastors. Their public 'ministerial' acts are in fact the acts of private persons, although, of course, the means of grace are in and of themselves valid even when administered improperly."