

CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL QUARTERLY



Volume 65:4

October 2001

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Evangelical and Catholic – A Slogan in Search of a Definition

David P. Scaer

Where We Are *or* Where Are We?

For years the quintessential expression of evangelical and catholic was Saint Mary's Church–Episcopal in New York City. In the *Saturday Times*, Saint Mary's advertised itself as having evangelical preaching and catholic liturgy, which is about as good a definition anyone can come up with—a church with a recognizably traditional liturgy and a sermon of no more than twenty minutes. Just how many churches fit this definition? I cannot attest that Saint Mary's lived up to its evangelical notice, but claims to catholicity were obvious. The gloomy nave convinced doubters of the creation account that at least Genesis 1:2 might be true: "and darkness was upon the face of the deep." Divine light eradicated the primordial abyss. Saint Mary's had to be content with a few rays of sunlight, which struggled through small roof windows into incense-generated smog. Some speculated the church was a gas warfare training center. Among the ecclesial savants, Saint Mary's was tenderly known as "old smokey's." If incense was the mark of catholicity, Saint Mary's was without peer.

Evangelical and catholic is a positive designation, though one definition does not fit all. In general it expresses a longing for church harmony and is often employed for ecumenical purposes. Evangelical suggests reform and catholic suggests a degree of uniformity and hence, stability. The Reformation becomes a normal event within catholic development. Revival of the term is traced to Mercersburg Seminary in Pennsylvania, whose theologians realized Reformed sacramentology was no sacramentology at all and wanted to set matters right by doing something liturgical.¹ Archbishop Nathan Söderblom of Sweden took catholicity as a reference to visible Christendom and exploited the ecumenical

¹Lawrence R. Rast Jr., "The Influence of John Williamson Nevin on American Lutheranism to 1849," (M. Div. thesis, Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana, 1990).

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potential, something Anglicans had done, but excluded Lutherans. Soederblom reciprocated. He corrected this deficit by ignoring the Anglicans. Orthodox Catholicity emphasizes correct teaching; Roman Catholicity, absolutist government; and Evangelical Catholicity, the gospel.² Söderblom and, recently, George Lindbeck place the Reformed within the evangelical catholic definition.³ Catholicity is the totality of Christendom, in which Luther's and Ignatius Loyola's reforms become movements.⁴ This view "that one church has more than one historical manifestation" is also held by James Nuechterlein and, previously, by Richard John Neuhaus.⁵

Evangelical-Catholic: Does It Ever Matter?

The churchgoing public is hardly concerned with being evangelical and catholic. To them these terms, if they have any real meaning at all, may appear more to contradict, rather than complement, each other. Evangelical needs defining. Protestant is recognizable. Both were Reformation terms for Lutherans. Protestant meant they professed something and not that they were against Rome.⁶ Today the term means non-Catholics and, embarrassingly, includes Unitarians. Catholics knew precisely who they were. Protestants, without real sacraments and priests, were not seen as church. On November 21, 1964 things changed.⁷ Even before evangelical and catholic became popular, cross-pollination spread so widely, the poor bees may not even have known the species from which they collected theological nectar. Hybrids are fascinating,

²"Evangelical Catholicity," *Lutheran Church Review* 43 (January 1924) 1-10.

³Interview: George Lindbeck: Evangelical, Catholic Theologian," *Lutheran Forum* 31 (Pentecost/Summer 1997): 55-56: "The fact is you can accept the case that a high-Calvinist sacramentalism need not be, in some ecclesial context is not, contradictory to Lutheran realism, or, as far as it goes, Roman Catholic transubstantialist realism."

⁴Martin J. Heineken, "A Lutheran Expression of the One Holy Catholic Apostolic Church," *Lutheran Forum* 31 (Easter/Spring 1997): 23-25.

⁵In Defense of Sectarian Catholicity," *First Things* 69 (January 1997): 12-13.

⁶Preface to Augsburg Confession: "We have at various times made our protestations and appeals concerning these most weighty matters, and have done so in legal form and procedure," in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, edited by Theodore Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 27.

⁷*Unitatis redintegratio* 3. "For men who believe in Christ and have been properly baptized are put in a certain, although imperfect, communion with the Catholic Church."

but not always productive. A church with 'union' in its name is destined to oblivion and a 'united' church is united in everything except what it believes.

The nineteenth-century Oxford Movement gave the Anglican Communion a purpose for its existence as a bridge between Catholic and Protestant (evangelical) poles, but in recent years structural engineers looked for alternative routes. Now enter the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) in 1997 as the usurper. In adopting *An Agreement* with the Reformed on the Lord's Supper and a *Declaration* with the Roman Catholics on justification, it grasped for its destiny as ecumenical catalyst. Like the noble colossus of Rhodes, she straddles the Alps with one foot planted in Geneva and other in Rome. Or in Isaianic terms — cages are unlocked and sheep and lions peacefully graze together in time for the third millennium. After making peace with Zwingli's and Leo's descendants, the ELCA proceeded ungraciously to reject the *Concordat* with the Episcopalians, which offered the treasure of unbroken succession to less-than-fully credentialed Lutherans. Never mind that the ELCA could have gotten it from Swedish Lutherans⁸ or that Rome, in the midst of Anglican's heart, rejects her hands and doctrines on the engraved walls of Westminster Cathedral in London. In becoming the missing link in ecclesial evolution, the ELCA did some non-evangelical and non-catholic things.⁹ The *Declaration* with Rome allows the non-evangelical doctrine that justification happens within the believer and not completely in Christ and so she forfeited her right as a Reformation church. By signing onto the *Agreement* with the Reformed, the ELCA rejected that the eucharistic bread was Christ's own body as the only option, a most un-catholic thing to do. Wearing a chasuble is hardly corrective.

⁸ "Flawed Judgment: Ready for Episcopacy," *Forum Letter* 26 (November 1997): 1-3.

⁹ Neuhaus speaks of the ELCA's "gyrations on declaring full communion with the Reformed, turning down the concordat with the Episcopalians, and approving the joint statement with Catholics on justification." *First Things* 77 (November 1997): 82. Also see his "Here I Stand. And Here, and Here: The ELCA in Assembly," *First Things* 78 (December 1997): 71-74.

Evangelicals (Lutherans) and Catholics as Evangelical and Catholic

Lutheran claims to evangelical are found in church names: 'Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church.' Trinity Catholic Lutheran Church does not exist. Lutherans went one step further. The Reformed say "one holy, catholic and apostolic church." Lutherans are content with the "Christian church," except on Trinity Sunday when the Athanasian Creed requires "This is the catholic faith; which except a man believe faithfully and firmly, he cannot be saved." A moment of confusion. Lutherans are Protestants, not Catholics. Catholics use "evangelical" of vows and works of clerics. For most, these are black and white terms. (In the midst of a storm, a Lutheran pastor found the perfect moment to convert the flight attendant. When asked about her religion, she replied Catholic. Then the pastor asked what kind of Catholic, she replied ordinary Catholic. At a loss for words, he was content that in case they did not reach the ground in the accustomed way, she was among the saved.) East was east and west was west and never the twain shall meet, but the ecclesial geography operates with different compasses.

Rome has become evangelical in more than one way. Vernacular masses and preaching are in. Latin requires permission. The sacrament is often distributed in both kinds. On Christmas Eve 1997 the Pope preached on the Son's eternal generation from the Father, the Virgin Birth, the Incarnation and the Atonement—a sermon magnificent in its irrelevancy. Not preaching in these terms, however, hinders justification from coming to its fullest expression among believers.¹⁰ Evangelical things happen in Rome but now often to the extreme.¹¹ White walls take the place of statues. During prayers parishioners lift hands. Priests are "Father Joe." Evangelical-styled hymns are common. (A Roman Catholic

¹⁰See Avery Dulles, "Evangelizing Theology," *First Things* 61 (March 1996): 27-33: "Faith, in other words, saves by reason of its object" (30) sounds Lutheran.

¹¹C. F. W. Walther cites Luther in claiming that Rome is still church. It has baptism, the gospel text in the vernacular, public and private confession and absolution, the Sacrament of the Altar, call or ordination, and finally, in its services, the Psalms, the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, the Ten Commandments, and many fine hymns and songs. One may see C. F. W. Walther, "The True Visible Church: an essay for the convention of the General Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States for its sessions at St. Louis, Mo., October 31, 1866." Translated by John Theodore Mueller. (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1961), 24-25.

friend left a church where a scrub board set in a wash tub with holy water blocked the entrance to the nave.)

Being Lutheran in an Evangelical World

As the first defenders of the Bible against the demythologizing of Bultmann, conservative Presbyterians and Baptists made claim to being the evangelical party. Bultmann's existential interpretation of justification as the only doctrine disrupted the LCMS in the 1970s and surfaced as foundational in the ELCA-Reformed *Agreement*.¹² LCMS soldiers entered "The Battle for the Bible" when a full-scale war broke out on our turf. For the first time among mainline denominations, laurels went to the conservative (evangelical) and not the liberal party. Yet Lutherans were never fully accepted by the new Evangelicals. Lutheran baptismal theology—the necessity of baptism, infant baptism, and the doctrine of baptismal regeneration—directly contradicts the essential Evangelical doctrine of personal faith (decision for Christ). In an ideal LCMS world an inspired Bible and Christ's sacramental presence are complementary, but in the new Evangelical world, the LCMS was irresponsibly adolescent. Our definitions on the Incarnation, baptism, eucharist, universal justification, and faith are unacceptable. Further proof that Lutherans were latent Catholics were candles, altars, vestments, and, heaven forbid, crucifixes and kneeling (genuflecting). Only the Pope was missing. New Evangelicals revere Luther the Reformer, but assign him the authority of a deistic god or an English sovereign. Citing anything besides his *Bondage of the Will* is off limits.¹³ The Catholic Luther must remain *absconditus*. Only Calvin and Wesley's heirs are true Evangelicals.

Lutherans embarrassed over Evangelical concerns began to act and look like them: *Evangelical Form and Lutheran Substance*.¹⁴ *Adiaphora*

¹²In its section "A Fundamental Doctrinal Consensus," Augsburg Confession VII is used to demonstrate that only agreement on the gospel is necessary for church unity. This position was held by the Saint Louis faculty. See Edward H. Schroeder, "Law-Gospel Reductionism," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 48 (April 1972): 232-247. For the *Agreement* this article is the only remnant of the Reformation confessions in force.

¹³Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, translated by Henry Cole, M. A. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1931).

¹⁴David Luecke, *Evangelical Style and Lutheran Substance: Facing America's Mission Challenge* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1988).

becomes an excuse to avoid catholic things. After all, only faith is necessary, a proposition strangely resembling Bultmann's minimal definition of the gospel. Liturgies are difficult. Rousing hymns are better. A church eucharist has no more value than a prayer circle. Home Bible study is more effective than sermons. Chasubles are gaudy and offensive, but not doctoral gowns with multi-colored stripes. Stages with guitars, ensembles, and pianos stand where altars once stood. Pulpits are imperious obstacles to talk-show-style sermons. Evangelical intrusion into Lutheran fibre called for a reaction. Page fifteen in *The Lutheran Hymnal* with Introits, Kyrie, Gloria, Proper Prefaces, Sanctus, and Agnus Dei took on a previously unrecognized beauty.¹⁵ The prettiest girl in town was the one next door.¹⁶

"Evangelicals and Catholics Together": The Quest for Truth Makes Strange Bedfellows

Prominent Evangelicals overcame anti-Roman scruples by joining with an equally significant group of Roman Catholics in identifying a common faith.¹⁷ In "The Gift of Salvation" they tackled the thornier issue of justification by faith.¹⁸ (In the current climate where a Canadian church president sees the ordination of homosexuals to be of no greater import than the deity of Christ and his Virgin Birth, such statements look good.) "Evangelicals and Catholics Together" sets out much larger parameters in defining the Christian faith than had the ELCA, which made a minimal definition of gospel the basis of unity with the Reformed. "The Gift of Salvation" is forthright about differences and offers what sounds like a Lutheran statement: "In justification, God, on the basis of Christ's righteousness alone, declares us to be no longer his rebellious enemies but his forgiven friends, and by virtue of his declaration it is so."¹⁹

¹⁵(Saint Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 1941).

¹⁶Repristination is never perfect. By printing service forms, tradition minded Lutherans became environmentally insensitive by deforestation of the nation's natural resources. The upside was providing employment for lumberjacks and paper mill supervisors.

¹⁷Charles W. Colson, "Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium," *First Things* 43 (May 1994): 13-22.

¹⁸*First Things* 79 (January 1998): 20-23.

¹⁹"The Gift of Salvation," 22.

This brings us to the current activity in Northfield, Minnesota at the Catholic and Evangelical Center. Its *Pro Ecclesia* announces itself as “A Journal of Catholic and Evangelical Theology” and fulfills this task by publishing Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Anglican, Lutheran and Reformed theologians, a paradigm strikingly similar to Söderblom’s definition of catholicity. Its leaders are ELCA theologians who were once thought (thought themselves) to be incurably liberal. However, now they foster a conservative agenda. Advisory council members are “committed to the authority of Holy Scripture, ecumenical dogmatic teaching and the structural continuity of the church.”²⁰ Structural continuity of the church seems to include unbroken episcopal succession. Definition of “ecumenical dogmatic teaching” is less obvious and does not take into account when it may be at odds with “the one apostolic faith and its classic traditions.” Where the ELCA fits within an evangelical catholic definition is problematic for some. Apart from the *Agreement* with the Reformed, which no longer requires identifying the eucharistic bread with Christ’s body as the only option, they ordain women, a total disregard for Saint Paul (evangelical principle) and an offense against the community of believers that knows nothing of this practice (catholic principle).²¹ In addition, the ELCA funds abortions and has an alliance with the United Church of Christ, which has no creeds and ordains homosexuals.

Evangelical and Catholic: A Confessional Attempt at Wording and Definition

The evangelical principle subjects doctrine and practice to the gospel (Scriptures as the message of salvation); the catholic principle sees the church as a continuous historical community with codified doctrine (creeds and confessions). It anchors the church in the historical moment of the cross and sending of the apostles and sees the church as more than a succession of Sunday morning verbal explosions and sacramental apparitions. It is the first line of defense against aberrant innovations, hidden under the cloak of the *adiaphora*, for which gospel freedom is often claimed.

²⁰ Available on: <<http://www.e-ccet.org/pe.htm>>.

²¹ So also Leonard Klein. Cited by Neuhaus, “Here I Stand,” *First Things* 78 (November 1997): 71-74.

Appropriate for initiating the Twenty-Second Symposium on the Lutheran Confessions is submitting "evangelical catholic" to the word study tradition of LCMS exegesis. In calculating word use in the *Book of Concord*, the computer declares "evangelical" the winner over "catholic" twenty-four to fourteen. Before the champagne is opened or Gatorade is poured over worship coaches, the count fails to reach ELCA standards requiring a two-thirds vote to depose doctrine. *Vox populi vox Dei* is the *norma normata*.²² Twenty-four to fourteen has the marks of a Chicago election day and requires a recount. Ten uses apply to the Roman Catholic evangelical counsels that celibacy and monastic life grant special merit. Evangelical once refers to the fanatics who float their absurdities under the banner of evangelical. (Modernity of confessional expression is overwhelming.) Editorial comment to the Apology reduces the number to twelve—a statistical tie. One of the fourteen catholic references is editorial. Catholic is prefaced by Roman, a non-confessional usage used to deny Rome exclusive catholicity.²³ Three references are favorable: (1) the creeds are catholic; (2) the church is catholic; and (3) the Lutheran position is that of the catholic church, a point which Melancthon makes in the Augsburg Confession (1530) and the Apology (1530). By the time of the Formula of Concord (1577), catholic has fallen into disfavor. The *Concordia Triglotta* is subtitled *The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. In its preface, Lutheran doctrine is evangelical. Of course, our exercise is a little disingenuous. Evangelical is the code word for the Reformation theme of gospel as the message of salvation, declaring sinners free from sin on account of Christ, which, like all doctrines, is biblically demonstrable. Gospel is used 317 times! Evangelical is not at issue for Lutherans; Catholic is.

Before the Diet of Augsburg (May 1530) differences with Rome were irreparable, but Lutherans were not ready to concede they had established a new church. They were church and the only church was as much catholic as it was holy and apostolic. Melancthon in the Augsburg Confession, the Apology and Treatise, demonstrates the catholicity of the Lutheran positions by arguing from ancient church testimonies. Catholic

²²Leonard Klein in *Forum Letter* 26 (October 1997) 1-2 calls into question the ELCA doctrinal process. "'Leonard,' a Roman Catholic priest asked me, 'what are the theological requirements for being a delegate?'" The answer might provide some embarrassment.

²³Again see "In Defense of Sectarian Catholicity," *First Things* 69.

is not synonymous with Rome, but Rome gives historic expression to the church catholic. So he concludes the doctrinal articles of the Augsburg Confession: "As can be seen, there is nothing here that departs from the Scriptures or the catholic church or the church of Rome, in so far as the ancient church is known to us from its writers."²⁴ Rome had preserved that catholicity Lutherans claim as their own; however, Rome is not indispensable for maintaining catholicity. "... nothing has been received among us, in doctrine or in ceremonies, that is contrary to Scripture or to the church catholic. For it is manifest that we have guarded diligently against the introduction into our churches of any new and ungodly doctrines."²⁵ This is repeated in the introduction to the abuse articles:

Inasmuch as our churches dissent from the church catholic in no article of faith but only omit some few abuses which are new and have been adopted by the fault of the times although contrary to the intent of the canons we pray that Your Imperial Majesty will graciously hear both what has been changed and what our reasons for such changes are in order that the people may not be compelled to observe these abuses against their conscience.²⁶

Saint Ambrose is cited in favor of the Lutheran position on justification, "The same is also taught by the Fathers of the ancient church, for Ambrose says, 'It is ordained of God that whoever believes in Christ shall be saved, not through works but through faith alone, and he shall receive forgiveness of sins by grace.'"²⁷ Melancthon does not construct doctrine out of Bible passages as autonomous sources (evangelical principle), but throughout the Augsburg Confession assumes the catholic doctrine and hence unity with Rome. Gospel is preaching salvation whereby justification takes place through faith. Some Roman practices contradict the gospel and so hinder justification.²⁸ Celibacy, reception of the

²⁴See John R. Hannah, "The Ordination of Women and Lutheran Destiny," *Lutheran Forum* 31 (Christmas-Winter 1997): 42: "Rome is the source of our tradition and the sole object of our Confession at Augsburg." It might be added that in Article Ten the Lutherans separated themselves from the Reformed in the matter of the Lord's Supper.

²⁵Conclusion to the Augsburg Confession, Tappert, 95.

²⁶Tappert, 48-49.

²⁷Augsburg Confession VI, Tappert, 32.

²⁸So in *Augsburg Confession* XV: "They are also admonished that human traditions which are instituted to propitiate God, merit grace, and make satisfaction for sins are

sacrament under one kind, monastic vows, and temporal authority of bishops are contrary not only to the gospel but Rome's own canons, to which the Lutherans have remained true.²⁹ Rome's expressions of catholicity (as Lutheran ones) are subject to both evangelical (justification) and catholic (church precedent) correction.

The catholic principle is at the heart of a confessional theology: doctrine is a given and not created *ex nihilo*. (If Rome is faulted for not applying evangelical critique, Lutherans often draw from their own experiences and neither listen to earlier Lutheran and ancient fathers, nor seek support from the Scriptures themselves. *Sola Scriptura* sounds a cracked bell.) Doctrine is presented rather than constructed. So in Augsburg Confession I, the Lutherans do not provide a biblical discourse on the Holy Trinity, but simply refer to the Council of Nicea.³⁰ Application of evangelical or catholic principles depends on circumstances. The Roman *Confutation's* challenge to the Augsburg Confession's claims to catholicity did not intimidate Melancthon into abandoning a near total dependency on the catholic principle in the articles on God, Christ, baptism, the Lord's Supper, Christ's return to judgment, and the cause of sin. However, he does turn decisively to the evangelical principle of biblical critique in the controverted articles, for example, original sin, justification, and the Roman primacy (Treatise). In contrast to Melancthon it may be opined that Luther operated from the evangelical principle alone, *sola Scriptura*, however, this is not so. In defending infant baptism against the Anabaptists, who were more dangerous for him than Rome, he avoided detailed exegesis, as required in confronting modern Baptists, but pointed instead to the church's existence — a most brilliant catholic argument.³¹ After Trent (1545-1563)

opposed to the Gospel and the teaching about faith. Wherefore vows and traditions about foods and days, etc., instituted to merit grace and make satisfaction for sins, are useless and contrary to the Gospel," Tappert, 36-37.

²⁹Augsburg Confession XXII: "This custom [Sacrament under one kind] has been adopted not only in defiance of the Scriptures but also in contradiction to ancient canons and the example of the church," Tappert, 50.

³⁰Tappert, 27.

³¹Large Catechism IV, "Infant Baptism": "Now, if God did not accept the baptism of infants, he would not have given any of them the Holy Spirit nor any part of him; in short, all this time down to the present day no man on earth could have been a Christian. Since God has confirmed baptism through the gift of His Holy Spirit, as we have perceived in some of the fathers, such as Saint Bernard, Gerson, John Hus, and

the evangelical principle characterizes Lutheran theology, but this is only an appearance. The great Lutheran dogmaticians, Martin Chemnitz and Johann Gerhard, were as versed as their opponents in the early fathers, especially Roman ones, and often defended their views from these sources alone.

Requiring examination is the Lutheran claim "that nothing has been received among us, in doctrine or in ceremonies, that is contrary to Scripture or to the church catholic."³² The church is a norm of doctrine and more striking is the introduction to the abuse articles where the church, without reference to the Scriptures, is listed as norm: "Inasmuch as our churches dissent from the church catholic in no article of faith."³³ The church as holy, catholic, and apostolic is certainly the depository of the truth, but churches and the catholic church in these references are to the historic, continuous communities of believers, whose doctrines and practices are accessible through the writings of Cyril, Leo, Augustine, Gerson, and others. Melancthon challenges Rome's exclusivity, but not its claim to catholicity. So in the Apology X, the Lutheran eucharistic position is aligned with Rome's, but defended by citing the canon of the Greek Mass.³⁴ Like the Son of God, the church takes form in particular historical realities.³⁵ Incarnation and ecclesiology participate in the same

others, and since the holy Christian church will abide until the end of the world, our adversaries must acknowledge that infant baptism is pleasing to God. For he can never be in conflict with himself, support lies and wickedness, or give his grace and Spirit for such ends. This is the best and strongest proof for the simple and unlearned. For no one can take from us or overthrow this article, 'I believe one Holy Christian church, the communion of saints,' etc.," Tappert, 442-443.

³²Conclusion to the Augsburg Confession: "in doctrina et ceremoniis, quia manifestum est, apud nos nihil receptum contra scripturam aut ecclesiam catholicam," Tappert, 95.

³³"Cum ecclesiae apud nos de nullo articulo fidei dissentiant ab ecclesia catholica," Tappert, 48.

³⁴Apology X: "We know that not only the Roman Church affirms the bodily presence of Christ, but that the Greek Church has taken and still takes this position. Evidence for this is their canon of the Mass, in which the priest clearly prays that the bread may be changed and become the very body of Christ," Tappert, 179.

³⁵Apology VII and VIII: "We are not dreaming about some Platonic republic, as has been slanderously alleged, but we teach that this church actually exists, made up of true believers and righteous men scattered throughout the world. And we add its marks, the pure teaching of the Gospel and the sacraments. This church is properly called 'the pillar of truth' (1 Tim. 3:15), for it retains the pure Gospel and what Paul

earthly substances.³⁶ Her universality (catholicity) is not destroyed by a particular history (apostolicity). Just as the Son of God has His history in the one man Jesus Christ, so the church expresses itself in particular historical communities where the divine truth is manifested and preserved.³⁷ These historic communities are normative for doctrine and practice. The Augsburg Confession sees Rome in this role and the Formula of Concord (Epitome 1.3) gives Luther and the earlier Lutheran Confessions the same honor. An Evangelical critique of the church's manifestations in history requires self-examination (evangelical principle), often with positive results: the New Testament Epistles, the fathers' writings, the creeds, and the Reformation. Evangelical critique is not an external intrusion, but is intrinsic to the church's catholicity.³⁸

Catholic principle has the first word and the evangelical principle the last. So Augsburg Confession XXVIII:28: "Augustine also says in reply to the letters of Petilian that not even catholic bishops are to be obeyed if they should happen to err or hold anything contrary to the canonical Scriptures of God," a statement with the ring of evangelical triumph. Catholic bishops with positions contrary to the Scriptures are not to be obeyed. Obviously, episcopal infallibility is not a Reformation possibility, but neither is Melancthon adopting a radical *sola Scriptura* principle, which claims infallibility for its biblical interpretations. The Reformation fanatics had claimed a biblical manifesto for their abuses and so paraded their programs as evangelical.³⁹ In resolving the tension

calls the 'foundation' (1 Cor. 3:12), that is, the true knowledge of Christ and faith. Of course, there are also many weak people in it who build on this foundation perishing structures of stubble, that is, unprofitable opinions," Tappert, 171-172.

³⁶Johann Gerhard grounds the ministry in the Incarnation and correlates them. See John A. Stoudt, "The Office of the Ministry as *Dispensator Sacramentorum*," *Lutheran Forum* 31 (Christmas/Winter 1997): 50-54.

³⁷Augsburg Confession VII: "Our churches also teach that one holy church is to continue forever. The church is the assembly of saints in which the Gospel is taught purely and the sacraments are administered rightly," Tappert, 32.

³⁸The Episcopal Synod of America, which sees itself as "the evangelical-catholic underground," equates traditional, orthodox, catholic, and scriptural with each other. William Murchison, "Episcopalians: The Leftward Center," *First Things* 77 (November 1997): 16-17.

³⁹Formula of Concord XII, Tappert 632-636. This type of thinking, claiming a direct access to the Scriptures apart from the church as an historic community, found its way into Lutheranism through Pietism and remains characteristic of modern Protestantism

in favor of the Scriptures over the catholic bishops, Melancthon employs the catholic principle. Augustine's allowance for disobeying the bishops in some matters provides the precedent for the reformers. Disobeying bishops is not biblically proven, but based on a particular church history. Lutherans were doing the catholic thing. Scripture as the judge of doctrine (evangelical principle) is a catholic principle. Note should be taken that the Lutherans did not put practices, that is, ceremonies and liturgy, into the category of *adiaphora*. Not only what a church confesses, but what it does in its ceremonies (liturgy) is received from the catholic church and subject to critique of that standard.⁴⁰ Freedom can no more be claimed for practice than for doctrine.⁴¹

Towards a Harmony

Where the Scriptures are regarded as products of a divine inspiration that isolates them from the Christian community or when a community introduces teachings and practices contrary to the gospel, tension is inevitable – the Reformation. Scriptures originate from within and for the historic community of the church. Their historical quality no more detracts from their inspiration than Christ's humanity detracts from his divinity. Scriptures reflect what the church already believes and do not bring new and strange doctrines (catholic principle). Innovations are suspiciously gnostic. Scriptures are not superimposed on the church as alien documents from the outside and church *imprimatur* does not contribute to their authority. Rome's claim to exclusive catholicity did not force the Lutherans to abandon their own claims. Pietism began to undo the Reformation evangelical-catholic harmony by placing individual biblical interpretation on the same level as the church's. Then the Enlightenment took the Scriptures deeper into "Babylonian Exile" by

in both its liberal and evangelical (pietistic) forms. Such individualism has been recognized as gnostic.

⁴⁰Augsburg Confession XXVI: "We on our part also retain many ceremonies and traditions (such as the liturgy of the Mass and various canticles, festivals, and the like) which serve to preserve order in the church," Tappert, 69.

⁴¹One may see David P. Scaer, "Formula of Concord X," *Logia* 4 (Reformation 1997): 27-33 for a fuller discussion of this matter. "Our current definition of *adiaphora* has become so broad that anything beyond 'justification by faith' could be considered *adiaphoron*. In seeking to resolve current differences, we must agree that the ordinary of the Mass, the historical service, was not understood by the confessors to be an *adiaphoron*" (32).

giving hermeneutical rights to the universities, where attempts to bring ancient opinion into the biblical task are still viewed as annoyingly immature. In freeing itself from catholic principle, Pietism and the Rationalistic Enlightenment gave radical expression to the *sola Scriptura* principle in a way that contradicted Reformation theological method. Recently some scholars have challenged the discontinuity between the apostolic and post-apostolic periods, but have largely been ignored.⁴² Exegetical approaches separating the Scriptures from church interpretation are *ipso facto* operating without the catholic principle. Paradoxically those with a high view of inspiration proceed in the same way.

The Ordination of Women: Failure of Evangelical Principle (Also for Rome)⁴³

Women's ordination now provides a test case for evangelical catholicity. New Evangelical and most LCMS circles settle the issue most often by biblical citation. Saint Paul says "Don't do it." This extreme expression of the evangelical principle sees no need for finding a foundation for the prohibition in other doctrines (God [Father-Son], the creation of Eve from Adam, the Incarnation, and Jesus' selecting the twelve male apostles). In spite of the correctness of its conclusion, it fails to take advantage of the Lutheran view that doctrine is a unified totality. It also, embarrassingly, puts the law after the gospel, a point not left unexploited by proponents of the practice. The "don't do it" group is less likely to make use of church example (catholic principle), even though the Confessions approach doctrine in this way. Without the catholic principle as part of the equation, the correctness of women's ordination is left to the whims of the exegetes, who can express loyalty to their church's position on the prohibition and simultaneously disqualify one passage after another from the discussion. Officials who oppose the

⁴²Helmut Koester completely ignores the work the late Belgian priest, Edouard Massaux, who worked with early church references to the New Testament. Arthur J. Bellinzoni, "Preface to the English Edition," Massaux, *The Influence of the Gospel of Saint Matthew on Christian Literature before Saint Irenaeus*, translated by Norman J. Belval and Suzanne Hecht, 3 volumes (Macon, Georgia: Mercer, 1990), vi-x. William R. Farmer, Harold Riley, and Bernard Orchard also see keys to biblical interpretation in the fathers.

⁴³See Conclusion to the Augsburg Confession, Tappert 94-96.

prohibition because of current church policy have already conceded that women's ordination is no more than a problem of interpretation. Without evangelical principle bound to catholic precedent, biblical prohibitions of ordaining women lose force.⁴⁴ Self-styled evangelical catholics who endorse women pastors are nagged by church precedent.⁴⁵ This issue is not the only test case. The *ELCA Agreement* recognized that the Reformed symbolic views on the eucharist are as biblically defensible as Lutheran ones; however, if the commentators find support for both views, some identify the Lutheran position as the orthodox one [read: historic or catholic].⁴⁶ The nearly 500-year history of Lutheran Church opposition to the Reformed position, which belongs to our historic expression of catholicity, is left out of the debate and nothing was included of the pre-Reformation catholic history, incorporated into the Confessions themselves. Unless the LCMS can find room for the catholic argument, she stands in real danger of following the lead of evangelical churches in concluding that the biblical arguments against women's ordination are inconclusive.⁴⁷

Catholic Biblical Principle as Biblical Principle

Resurrecting Vincens of Lerinum (Lerins)

Lutherans are uncomfortable with the rule of Vincens of Lerinum, *quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum est* ["what is believed everywhere, in all times, by everyone"] as a principle of doing theology.⁴⁸ Historical romanticism tends to overlook diversities to

⁴⁴Hannah, "Ordination of Women," 40: "Relevant Bible passages were seriously engaged by all, including the LC-MS representatives. The prevailing Scriptures proved to be neutral."

⁴⁵In place of historic precedence as setting the catholic agenda, Hannah mentions that the LCMS is one of the few Lutheran churches that does not ordain women (40).

⁴⁶*A Formula Agreement*: "each of the churches grounds its life in authentic New Testament traditions of Christ;" One may see W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *Matthew*. The International Critical Commentary, 3 volumes (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 3:471: "The orthodox identification of the elements with the body and blood of Jesus Christ has made much of *estin*: [Greek] it is a word of identification. But others have found here only a figurative representation: the bread symbolizes Jesus or what will happen to him."

⁴⁷The Oberursel faculty of the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church (SELK) of Germany has already reached this conclusion.

⁴⁸Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 3 volumes (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1950),

achieve a holistic totality. However, Melancthon moves along Lerentian lines in the Augsburg Confession. The rule sets up categories, which, like all categories, are not intended to cover each example. Categories exist for the sake of recognition. Without categories, the wheel is always being reinvented. New Evangelicals are forever inventing *Ersatz* formulae. New wheels hardly make it out of the garage without going flat. The Lerintian hypothesis is supported by the existence of creeds, recognizably similar eastern and western liturgies, and early church opponents who could distinguish between authentic Christianity and fraudulent gnostic novelties. More telling is the Apology's claim that the Reformation liturgies not only continued the catholic ones, but improved on Rome.⁴⁹ Liturgies were not fabricated *ex nihilo*. Germans and other Europeans did not go to bed as Catholics and wake up as Lutherans. Andreas Carlstadt did the evangelical thing and Luther returned from exile, threw him out of Wittenberg, and preached in the garb of a monk to make the point that the church would remain catholic. If the Lerintian rule is inexact, its negative is not: the church is not allowed to do what "has been accepted nowhere, at no time, and by nobody."⁵⁰

3:205.

⁴⁹Apology XV, Tappert, 220. "Our enemies falsely accuse us of abolishing good ordinances and church discipline. We can truthfully claim that in our churches the public liturgy is more decent than in theirs, and if you look at it correctly we are more faithful to the canons than our opponents are. Apology XXIV, Tappert, 250: "There is nothing contrary to the church catholic in our having only the public or common Mass. Even today, Greek parishes have no private Masses but only one public Mass, and this only on Sundays and festivals. The monasteries have public, though daily, Mass."

⁵⁰Pieper is right (1:203): "That the voice of the Church and the voice of the Holy Scriptures are not two different voices, but one and the same voice, Luther showed conclusively when Erasmus offered his understanding to the Church, even if he did not understand the Scripture." Looking at the other side of the coin provides an equally important principle: exegetical conclusions requiring innovations in doctrine and practice cannot contradict church precedence. Consider S. M. Hutchen's letter to the editor of *First Things* (April 1997): 6: "Although the Lerentian canon — 'what has been believed everywhere, in all times, but all Christians' — is an intuitive and imprecise rule of catholic faith and unity, it is very hard to understand how someone who regards himself as catholic in an historically meaningful sense would insist upon the orthodoxy of a practice [the 'ordination' of women] that has been accepted nowhere, at no time, and by nobody."

Saint Paul as Vincens of Lerinum: in omnibus ecclesiis sanctorum

Saint Paul's stance on women preaching is a test case in how he does theology. Of course, for support he calls upon the evangelical principle: written and oral sources including himself. In 1 Timothy 2:13-14 he refers to Genesis 2 and 3, even naming Adam and Eve and citing the creation and fall. In 1 Corinthians he claims his view is that of Torah's (14:34), a reference to Genesis or maybe the entire Old Testament. He claims the Lord's command, which suggests that Christ had made a specific command (Matthew 28:20). Then he calls on his own apostolic authority with the threat of excommunication for those who do not conform (37-38). By putting his oral word in written form, it becomes a scripture for the Corinthians. What concerns us here, however, is Saint Paul's use of the catholic principle. His comparison of the man and woman's relationship to that of Christ's with the church may be a dogmatic conclusion (Ephesians 5:24-25; 1 Corinthians 11:13), drawn from Jesus' own preaching, but 1 Corinthians 11:2 can only mean that Saint Paul is not depending on his own experiences or logical conclusions, but is drawing on the common faith of the church. This is not an isolated case. Women are not to preach because all the other churches do not know of such a practice (1 Corinthians 14:33). Marriage regulations for the Corinthians are binding in all of Saint Paul's churches (7:17). Decorum is the same in all the churches (11:16). Not only must private (marriage) and public behavior (preaching) conform to the catholic principle, that is, what the other churches are doing, but so must the doctrine, what the other churches are teaching. Saint Paul does not invent the formula for eucharistic celebration (11:2, 23) or the creedal foundation of the church and gospel (15:3), but he gives to the Corinthians what he has received from the Jerusalem church. Even the practice of collections are standardized. They are to follow the example of the Galatians for giving on Sundays (1 Corinthians 16:1). The catholic principle is biblical: *et sic in omnibus ecclesiis doceo* (7:11).

Bishops and Catholicity

Reformation hope for episcopal reform rarely materialized. Lutherans recognized ordination as the bishops' right to distinguish them from presbyters (elders or priests).⁵¹ Rome's refusal to ordain Lutheran pastors

⁵¹Treatise 62. "And Jerome observes: 'One man was chosen over the rest to prevent

led to "The Power and Jurisdiction of Bishops" paragraph in the Treatise, an appendix of sorts to the Augsburg Confession, which had skirted the issue. Episcopal ordination was not as necessary as providing churches with pastors. Luther and Johann Bugenhagen ordained students before they assumed their posts throughout Europe. Certain aspects of the office were retained by the Reformation superintendents or assigned to princes and town councils. Ironically, Lutherans who had objected that bishops had become princes gave episcopal responsibility to princes with disastrous results, for example, the Prussian Union. It is quite arguable that the Lutherans have never freed themselves from this dilemma. North American Lutherans did not know of bishops until the ELCA used the title for regional presidents, though real episcopal authority was diluted by the ELCA's giving quotas confessional standing in choosing its bureaucracy. Anglican consecration of future ELCA bishops, promised in the *Concordat*, was intended to fill in the gaps. In the midst of religious turmoil, authentically consecrated bishops appear as panacea. So Carl Braaten, "The Church must have not only normative sources written down on paper but all authoritative officeholders ordained to teach the whole church."⁵² Right! Confessions lose their authority where no qualified person enforces them.⁵³ Part of the bishop's rite of ordination includes responsibility for a candidate's preparation and certification that he (not *she!*) shares the church's faith, but this assumes that the church has a recognizable faith (confession). On this account, vows to the Scriptures, creeds, and confessions are as essential to ordination as they are to baptism. They assure the people that the ordained will preserve the church's faith (catholic principle) and protect them against doctrinal innovations. Ordination by one presbyter in the role of bishop symbolizes the unity of faith (catholicity), since he represents the

schism, lest several persons, by gathering separate followings around themselves, rend the church of Christ. For in Alexandria, from the time of Mark the Evangelist to the time of Bishops Heracles and Dionysius, the presbyters always chose one of their number, set him in a higher place, and called him bishop. Moreover, in the same way in which an army might select a commander for itself, the deacons may choose from their number one who is known to be active and name him archdeacon. For, apart from Ordination, what does a bishop do that a presbyter does not do?"

⁵²Quoted in Leonard R. Klein, "Catholicity and Protestant Survival," *First Things* 71 (March 1997): 50.

⁵³In church conventions supervision is partially exercised by the laity. See note 19 above.

Ministerium in himself.⁵⁴ Whether or not bishops are in place in a particular church, the function of regional supervision belongs to the church's catholicity.⁵⁵ Church officials with the title of bishops do not guarantee that the required regional supervision is being carried out or the church's catholicity will be maintained. The Treatise does not challenge the office of bishop, but those who have deprived the churches of the office's functions. Problematic for the ELCA bishops is that the *Agreement with the Reformed* deprives them of doctrinal standards to carry out supervision. If churches with confessions, but without regional supervision [bishops], are criticized for having laws with no enforcement officers, churches with bishops, but without confessions [Anglicans and now the ELCA], can be criticized for having enforcement officers without laws. For example, an ELCA layman can hardly ask his bishop to intervene where the pastor permits use of the Reformed liturgy for communion. Bishops cannot symbolize the unity of catholic faith when it is no longer present. Without "normative sources written down on paper," to borrow Braaten's phrase, bishops are figure heads or easily evolve into tyrants. The reverse is equally problematic. A layman in a confessional church, but without regional supervision, finds himself in the same dilemma. Catholicity is only an unenforceable abstraction and, hence, not fully catholic.

***Confessio Catholica*: Unexpected, Irrefutable, and Joyfully Welcomed Support**

Johann Gerhard, the greatest of the seventeenth century Lutheran dogmaticians, published *Confessio Catholica* for the expressed purpose of showing that Reformation teaching was found in all ages of the church. Lutheran churches were catholic. Rome had no monopoly. In demonstrating "Roma enim Ecclesia particularis est, Catholic vero universalis," Gerhard proceeds from the catholic principle alone using

⁵⁴Augsburg Confession XXVIII, Tappert, 84: "According to divine right, therefore, it is the office of the bishop to preach the Gospel, forgive sins, judge doctrine and condemn doctrine that is contrary to the Gospel, and exclude from the Christian community the ungodly whose wicked conduct is manifest."

⁵⁵For a full discussion see Allen C. Hoger, "Bishops for the Church: Apostolic Origins and Lutheran Affirmations," *Logia* 6 (Reformation 1997): 35-40. "New Testament evidence suggests that there never was a time when churches knew of no regional supervision."

only Roman Catholic sources.⁵⁶ The full title speaks volumes: *Confessionis Catholicae, in qua Ecclesiae Augustanae Confessionis addicti profundius, ex Romano-Catholicorum Scriptorum suffragiis confirmantur.*⁵⁷ He cites Pope Gregory's answer to a question from Saint Augustine to show that Rome is not equivalent with Catholic: "However it is my opinion, that you can find the church in Rome or Gaul or in any place." Gerhard simply follows in the steps of Melancthon, Luther, and Chemnitz – and more so. His massive two-volume work went through several editions. A telling section is his citing the Roman fathers to demonstrate Rome's fallibility.

Where is Evangelical Catholicity?

["Lord, Where Shall We Go?"]

We have already set forth a definition of evangelical and catholic as sides of one reality, a modalism in doctrine and practice, where one informs, reflects on, and, where necessary, corrects the other. Rome's aberrations were innovations that had the support of neither Scriptures, nor tradition, including the ancient canons. Rome had introduced innovations that could not pass the evangelical catholic norm to which the Lutherans had submitted themselves. The Lutheran confessors and fathers were the true catholics.⁵⁸

Where is Evangelical Catholicity found now? Finding the answer to this question has led migrations of clergy and people. Some Anglo-Catholics and Lutherans have left for Rome and Byzantium.⁵⁹ Autonomous dioceses are being established within the established Anglican communion. The few defections from the ELCA to Rome and to the LCMS reflect a growing belief that women's ordination, *Agreement with the Reformed* on the Lord's Supper, and the refusal to insist on

⁵⁶Particular church for Rome means dioceses which are in communion with Rome and whose ministers are in the apostolic succession. Catholicity is derived from connection with the Roman church (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraph 833).

⁵⁷Concordia Theological Seminary's rare book collection contains the 1634 and 1662 Jena editions. Another edition is known to have appeared in 1690. The two volumes of the 1634 edition contain a total of 2251 pages. Rome's fallibility is discussed in volume one, pages 209-306.

⁵⁸See David S. Yeago, "The Catholic Luther," *First Things* 61 (March 1996): 37-41.

⁵⁹Richard John Neuhaus, "The Unhappy Fate of Optional Orthodoxy," *First Things* 69 (January 1997): 59-60. This article was at the heart of the debate over whether Rome was the only catholic expression (57-60).

creedal uniformity *inter alia* are robbing that church of its ability to express the catholicity by which the church is unified in doctrine and practice. But for some, the LCMS is too conservative, too confessional, too anti-ecumenical, and hence, separatist and not an attractive alternative. So Neuhaus *et alii*.⁶⁰ Others see an increasing exclusivity in the use of evangelical principle (fundamentalism). Deviations from traditional (catholic) liturgies give further credence to this impression, as false as it may be. Still others see in the current definitions of the ministry an allowance for the ordination of women, so that at least it is no longer seen as divisive of fellowship.⁶¹

Rome's catholicity is open to challenge. Some priests deny the Virgin Birth, bringing them in line with classical Protestant liberalism. "Liturgical anarchists" have come alive and flap their fins in Saint Peter's nets.⁶² Anecdotal evidences are confirmed by open resistance to the Pope John Paul II's apostolic letter (May 1994) opposing the ordination of women. Roman Catholic theologians voted 216 to 22 for a report demanding further discussion on the issue. Matters appear more serious, when it is considered that the call for the reevaluation was made after the doctrine was declared infallible by the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith (November 1995), led by Cardinal Ratzinger. The same source reported that "the American theologians cited biblical scholarship to say

⁶⁰Neuhaus, "Here I Stand," 74.

⁶¹Commenting on the position of Johann Gerhard, John Stoult writes (51): "Furthermore, our Lord himself has bound the administration of the sacraments to the office of the Ministry. As Gerhard insists a number of times, it is in their very institution that Christ has joined these two. The church simply has no authority ever to remove the distribution of the sacraments from the ordained Ministry, or to place such distribution into the hands of those who are not rightly called and ordained. Any attempt to separate the sacraments from the office entrusted with their administration does violence to the dominical institution of both and disregards the Christological nexus." See Johann Gerhard, *Loci Theologici*, edited by Edward Preuss (Berlin: Gustaf Schlawitz, 1866), 18:28: "In regard to Baptism and the Lord's Supper, it is clear from the *sedes* of their institution that Christ committed the administration of these Sacraments to the apostles and their successors." Gerhard cites Luther for support. In case of impending death a lay person can baptize, but not administer the Lord's Supper (18:28-29). So also Stoult. One may also see David P. Scaer, "Johann Gerhard's Doctrine of the Sacraments," in Carl R. Trueman and R. Scott Clark, editors, *Protestant Scholasticism* (Carlisle, United Kingdom: Paternoster Press, 1999).

⁶²The title given a letter submitted by Gil Costello in *First Things* 79 (January 1998) 7-8.

that Christ chose only men as Apostles because they have a 'symbolic role as patriarchs' in Israel at the time, not because he intended them to be prototypes for a single-sex priesthood."⁶³ Even Roman scholars do theology without catholic precedent and hence with the predictable results that current cultural standards become normative for the church. Wherever the catholic principle is no longer factored into doctrine and practice, aberrant innovations are likely to arise. Without the catholic principles, churches insisting on contradictory opinions have no other choice but to canonize their own particular set of scholars. Sectarian exegetical interpretation, for the moment, replaces ancient practice.

The task was "Evangelical and Catholic: A Slogan in Search of a Definition," not where to find it. Some, with Saint Peter, have asked or are still asking, "Lord, where shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."⁶⁴

in omnibus ecclesiis sanctorum

⁶³Hugo Gurdon, "Catholic Leaders Urge Open Mind on Female Priests," *Daily Telegraph* (Britain), 9 June, 1997.

⁶⁴Certain sources were provided by Professors Lawrence R. Rast and John R. Stephenson and Mr. Christopher Esget, the department's graduate assistant. Also offering assistance was seminarist Ralph Tausz.