

# Lutheran Divergences: How Lutherans are drifting apart

by Edward G. Kettner

“What’s the difference between the Lutheran synods?” Perhaps there is no question more often asked of a pastor and no question more difficult to answer. As the two major Lutheran Church bodies in Canada, Lutheran Church–Canada and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada continue to drift apart, it becomes increasingly important that we understand some of the underlying root causes for those differences. In this article Dr. Kettner explores some of the fundamental differences that now exist between these two synods that bear the name Lutheran.

The fact that there are two relatively large streams of Lutherans in Canada which run parallel to those in the United States is something of an enigma, even to many Lutherans. Looking on the surface, it seems senseless, since it is very difficult to see the differences. The hymnal that is used by most congregations in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC), *The Lutheran Book of Worship*, is used by quite a few congregations of Lutheran Church–Canada (LCC) as well, and the newest of the hymnals in use in LCC, *Lutheran Worship*, bears many similarities to it, from the orders of service down to many of the hymns. Furthermore, in the middle of this century The Lutheran Church–Canada, then a federation of the Canadian districts of The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (LCMS) was actively engaged in discussions with the two other large Lutheran bodies in Canada, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Canada (ELCC) and the Lutheran Church in America (LCA) Canada Section, with merger considered a distinct possibility. Indeed, from 1971 until it went out of existence with the formation of the ELCIC on January 1, 1986, the LCMS, of which LCC was a part, was in full fellowship with the ELCC.<sup>1</sup> Why, it might be asked, were we in agreement one day and out of it the next? Why, in the end, did the LCC decide not to participate in a merger that would have united all three of the major Lutheran bodies of Canada? What are the differences that continue to keep the two bodies apart?

These questions are legitimate, and not all that easy to answer. It is not that there is no absolute truth; rather, it must be admitted that there is a wide variety of practices, and even some differences in theological orientation within both church bodies. Nevertheless, when one looks at convention resolutions, positions taken by theologians and the textbooks used in the seminaries for teaching the future pastors of the respective church bodies, the issues and practice which divide the bodies begin to come to light. In order to provide an orderly view of the differences between the two bodies,

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some of the public statements which have come out of the two Canadian bodies will be referred to, as well as statements from the related bodies in the United States. In this way it can be seen that the differences between LCC and the ELCIC are such that it must be stated that they are not in doctrinal agreement. To serve as an aid to understanding the differences, we first need to look at the root question, that of the proper interpretation of the Holy Scriptures and of the place of the Lutheran Confessions in this interpretation and in the life of the church. From there we can look at some specific differences to show how this difference in understanding plays itself out in the two church bodies, particularly the Lord's Supper and the ordination of women.

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#### **The Key: the interpretation of Scripture**

Throughout the first 1700 years or so of the history of the Christian Church, the Holy Scriptures were unanimously recognized as the only source and norm for Christian doctrine. That is, the teachings of the Church were recognized as coming via divine revelation, and the Scriptures were (and are) faithful accounts as to how God has dealt with His people in history. What St. Paul testified about in 2 Tim. 3:15-16 concerning the Old Testament, that all Scripture is inspired by God (literally "God-breathed"), was recognized also to apply to the New Testament. God's designated representatives were authorized to speak for Him as from His own mouth. In the Old Testament the prophets were His designated mouthpieces; in the New Testament it was the apostles. Throughout his letters, St. Paul appeals to his appointment by Christ as an apostle as the witness to his authority to speak on behalf of Christ.

The Lutheran Confessions are a summary of Lutheran teachings agreed upon in 1580. It is to these confessions that Lutheran pastors and congregations have pledged their loyalty. These confessions themselves declare, "We believe, teach, and confess that the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments are the only rule and norm according to which all doctrines and teachers alike must be appraised and judged."<sup>2</sup> During the Reformation era, the inspiration of Scripture was never called

into question. The issues involved the actual meaning of the text as it stood and the role of the tradition of the Church in determining divine truth. While there were some groups at the time of the Reformation who had abandoned the authority of the Scriptures, there was agreement that such groups were totally outside the pale of Christianity.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, there arose a movement in Europe called the *Enlightenment*. This movement declared that human reason is the judge of all truth, and that God would not and indeed could not break into the world to reveal Himself. From such belief, a method of interpretation known as historical criticism was developed and became, even within the visible church itself, the primary means of interpretation of the Scriptures. Historical criticism seeks to get at the root of the meaning of the Scripture text by treating it as it would any other literary work. It looks to find the sources which lie behind the text which we have, and it eliminates any thought of supernatural origin for the Scriptures. In the end the Scriptures become the work of the believing community rather than the revelation of God. This means, then, that the Scriptures themselves can be subject to the judgement of the Church. They at best are seen to be important guides to the history of the faith and the dogma of the Church, but not necessarily the final word of God.

The Missouri Synod historically has stood by the understanding of the Scriptures given by the Lutheran Confessions. During doctrinal discussions with the American Lutheran Church earlier in this century, the Missouri Synod reiterated its confession of a number of different articles of the faith, including that of the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures. In the document *A Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod*, passed by the Synod in convention in 1932, Synod declared in the section *Of the Holy Scriptures*,

1. We teach that the Holy Scriptures differ from all other books in the world in that they are the Word of God. They are the Word of God because the holy men of God who wrote the Scriptures wrote only that which the Holy Ghost communicated to them by inspiration, 2 Tim.

3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21. We teach also that the verbal inspiration (that every word in Scripture is inspired by God) of the Scriptures is not a so-called “theological deduction,” but that it is taught by direct statements of the Scriptures, 2 Tim. 3:16, John 10:35, Rom. 3:2; 1 Cor. 2:13. Since the Holy Scriptures are the Word of God, it goes without saying that they contain no errors or contradictions, but that they are in all their parts and words the infallible truth, also in those parts which treat of historical, geographical, and other secular matters, John 10:35.

2. We furthermore teach regarding the Holy Scriptures that they are given by God to the Christian Church for the foundation of faith, Eph. 2:20. Hence the Holy Scriptures are the sole source from which all doctrines proclaimed in the Christian Church must be taken and therefore, too, the sole rule and norm by which all teachers and doctrines must be examined and judged.<sup>3</sup>

This statement, while more detailed than that of the Lutheran Confessions nevertheless is consistent with it. A reading of the Lutheran Confessions indicates that this is precisely the understanding of the Scriptures with which the writers of the Confessions operated.

This understanding, however, is not held throughout North American Lutheranism today. While all Lutherans take the Scriptures seriously and recognize the Spirit of God working through the Scripture, there are differences in the methods of interpretation in the two groups. The North American inter-Lutheran dialogues under the auspices of the Lutheran Council in the USA (LCUSA) have made this evident. In the late seventies this was acknowledged with the publication of a report and accompanying essays on hermeneutical questions (that is, questions concerning how to interpret the Scriptures) put out by LCUSA. This was entitled *The Function of Doctrine and Theology in Light of the Unity of the Church*<sup>4</sup>. This then led to the publication of the study papers in 1979 under the title *Studies in Lutheran Hermeneutics*,<sup>5</sup> which

also showed the diverging views of the two streams of Lutheranism in North America.

For those Lutherans open to the use of historical criticism, the norm for Christian teaching is, to be sure, the Gospel, that is, God’s revelation in the person of Christ which creates faith. But whether particular events described in the Scriptures, even surrounding the life of Christ, actually happened in human history is not deemed all that important. In fact it doesn’t matter if these things are true or not. The Scriptures remain merely the record of the Christian community’s response to being confronted with the “Christ event.”<sup>6</sup>

This in turn also affects one’s understanding of the place of the Lutheran Confessions in the life of the Church. The Confessions describe themselves as a faithful witness and interpretation of the Scriptures and they repeat what Scripture teaches. They are not to be understood as an independent standard of truth, but “merely witnesses and expositions of the faith, setting forth how at various times the Holy Scriptures were understood by contemporaries in the church of God with reference to controverted articles, and how contrary teachings were rejected and condemned.”<sup>7</sup>

The Missouri Synod has always understood the Confessions as they understood themselves: as a faithful exposition of the teaching of the Scriptures. As such, they themselves serve as a doctrinal norm for the Church. To depart from the doctrine of the Confessions is to depart from the doctrine of the Church. The *Brief Statement* makes this clear in its section, *Of the Symbols of the Church*:

46. Since the Christian Church cannot make doctrines, but can and should simply profess the doctrine revealed in Holy Scripture, the doctrinal decisions of the symbols are binding upon the conscience not because they are the outcome of doctrinal controversies, but only because they are the doctrinal decisions of Holy Scripture itself.

47. Those desiring to be admitted into the public ministry of the Lutheran Church pledge themselves to teach according to the symbols not “in so far as,” but “because,” the symbols agree with

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Scripture. He who is unable to accept as Scriptural the doctrine set forth in the Lutheran symbols and their rejection of the corresponding errors must not be admitted into the ministry of the Lutheran Church.<sup>8</sup>

In North America, those church bodies which held to this understanding of the Confessions formed the now-disbanded Synodical Conference of which the Missouri Synod was the largest member. The members of the Synodical Conference held to the understanding that the Lutheran Confessions must be accepted “because” they agreed with Scripture. Those Church bodies which became part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and ELCIC held to differing understandings. These Church bodies agreed with the Confessions “in so far” as they agreed with Scripture. In general, the more liberal churches held to a view of the Confessions which saw them as historically significant, and as documents which should be taken seriously by interpreters of Scripture, but in no way normative.<sup>9</sup> The implication of this is that they were unwilling to be pinned down to definitely believing or “confessing” some of the plain truths of Scripture. Perhaps of greatest significance today is the view that sees the Confessions only as “ecumenical proposals,” a view promulgated by two prominent ELCA theologians, Carl Braaten and Robert Jenson. This view is evident in the *Christian Dogmatics* which they edited and which was published in 1984, and which is the primary dogmatics textbook in use in the ELCA and ELCIC. In contrast to Missouri’s view that doctrinally the Confessions simply reflect the teachings of the Scripture and add nothing that had not been taught in the Church in the past, this view sees the Confessions as breaking new dogmatic ground and proposing new dogma for the Church.<sup>10</sup> While such an understanding has merit in so far as it recognizes that the Church must confess its faith in ways understandable to an ever changing world, it leaves open the danger of accommodating the truth to the changing world rather than faithfully proclaiming the unchanging truth to the world. A short look at some of the issues now in controversy in the two Lutheran bodies will show how the two views lead to different conclusions which have significant bearing on the life and the teaching of the church.

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## The Lord’s Supper

Traditionally, Lutherans have begun any look at the theology of the Lord’s Supper with a look at the words of institution, those very words which Christ spoke on the night on which he was betrayed. When Luther explains the Sacrament of the Altar in the Small Catechism, he cites those words, recorded (with slight variation) in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and also in 1 Corinthians. For Luther, these words declare clearly that Christ is giving His true Body and Blood to the communicants to eat and to drink. Testimony to the Real Presence can be found in many parts of the Lutheran Confessions, such as the Augsburg Confession, Article X, and in the Apology to the Augsburg Confession, Article X.1-2. In such places the confessors note that Lutherans stand firmly with Rome and with the Greek Church.<sup>11</sup> Over against the Reformed theologians who denied the Real Presence, the Formula of Concord VII defends this article of faith in detail.

Such an interpretation makes sense only if one holds to a “precritical” understanding of the authority of Scripture, as did Luther and the other confessors, an understanding which 1) sees these words as the actual words of Jesus, and 2) declares that “is” means “is”. While the different Scriptural accounts of the Words of Institution do vary, they all contain the word “is”. This important word makes clear to the Church what is being given and received. It demands that we treat the Words of Institution as Christ’s Words and not merely a later interpretation of Christ’s original action.

This traditional Lutheran focus on the gift given in the elements is radically changed when one interprets the texts in an historical critical way. A look at a study on the Lord’s Supper by the ELCA theologian John Reumann, for example, shows both important insights relating to the background of the texts, but problems as well. In his work the Scriptures are treated as only the first layer of the Church’s tradition, and as such, subject to critical study themselves. Though the Supper is recognized from the beginning as the *Lord’s Supper* (1 Cor. 11:20), it is nevertheless also described in a way which seems to make it first and foremost the *Church’s Supper*. For example,

Reumann states, “‘The Lord’s Supper’ refers to the rite involving bread and wine, which *the early church developed*, originally in the context of a proper meal, according to 1 Corinthians 11, at the Lord’s command.”<sup>12</sup> The Words of Institution, then, are understood as “a set of interpretative sayings, indicating the significance of bread and wine,”<sup>13</sup> that is, that they reflect the Church’s understanding of the purpose of their continued obedience to the actions of Christ as it pertains to the bread and wine. An interpretation, or exegesis, of the Lord’s Supper does not start with the words which Christ spoke on the night when He was betrayed but with the setting of the Lord’s Supper in the first-century congregation.

The analysis of the Lord’s Supper thus proceeds to move to the place of the Supper in the context of the other meals over which Jesus presided, the place of meals in fellowship among Christians (and even in other cultures and religions), and what happens when the Church celebrates this meal commanded by Christ. All of this may be important but it deliberately avoids or even rejects the traditional Lutheran position on the subject, which boldly confesses the real presence of Christ’s true Body and Blood for the forgiveness of sins as the central gift given by Christ in the Sacrament. The question, “What did Christ mean when He spoke the Words of Institution?” or “What do the Words of Institution mean grammatically?” is not addressed by Reumann because it has ceased to be relevant. What is now relevant is the question “How does the church’s action show itself to be the body of Christ as it re-enacts the first Supper?”. This is not to say that the question of what the church does when it celebrates the Sacrament is unimportant, but the Lutheran Church of the Reformation era recognized that without a clear understanding of Christ’s words, “This is My Body, This is My Blood,” the significance of the Church’s action of receiving what Christ gives, namely His Body and Blood for the forgiveness of sins is lost. Luther recognized that unless the Church and the individual believers communing were in fact receiving the very Body and Blood of Christ which participated in the crucifixion, there is no other significance for the Supper other than a mere memorial meal.

The main textbook used in ELCA seminaries for teaching Lutheran Doctrine is entitled *Christian Dogmatics*. In this book one of the editors, Robert Jenson, discusses the Supper in a way that echoes Reumann’s words and makes the Words of Institution the Church’s interpretation of Christ’s original action. Jenson declares:

Much historic difficulty will be overcome if we have it always clearly in mind: So long as we are exegeting<sup>14</sup> for dogmatic<sup>15</sup> – rather than historical or perhaps homiletic<sup>16</sup> – purposes, our concern is primarily not with what these sentences might have meant as utterances of the historical Jesus, but with what they mean as interpretations, canonically authoritative<sup>17</sup>, of the church’s rite, the very rite whose origins we have sketched and which Paul and John discuss. However the institution narratives may have come into being, and whatever relation to the events of Jesus’ Last Supper they may have, it is as rubrics<sup>18</sup> and interpretation of the church’s Supper that we have them. *Within* the narrative structure of the accounts, it is decisive for the meaning of the sayings that they appear in the mouth of Jesus.<sup>19</sup>

Jenson’s interpretation goes on to interpret the words in a way which sees them fulfilled in the church’s action rather than in the gift promised: the true, substantial presence of Christ’s Body and Blood. The thanksgiving cup *is* the covenant, (noting that covenants throughout the Old Testament are established by blood) and the sharing of the cup is that which establishes the community. The body of Christ is nothing other than the person. Thus, he says:

We may summarize the sacramental situation as Paul grasps it: In that the bread and the cup are given, there is a body present that is Jesus, and there is a body present that is the community, and a person’s relation to the one is not distinguishable from that person’s relation to the other.<sup>20</sup>

This understanding not only goes beyond the dogma set forth by the Lutheran Confessions; it clearly rejects it as faulty. But it is only such an understanding that makes possible, and makes understandable, communion fellowship between Lutheran and

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Reformed. It is clearly also the understanding of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, which, in its *Statement on Sacramental Practices*, adopted by convention in 1991, eschews Body and Blood language and replaces it with the statement "In Holy Communion the crucified and risen Christ is present in word and action. This presence is a mystery."<sup>21</sup> This paves the way for the acceptance of such practices as "eucharistic hospitality," that is, communion of all baptized Christians, whether or not they have been catechized in the Lutheran understanding of the Christian faith, and gives permission to Lutherans to commune at the altars of other Christian "faith communities."<sup>22</sup> It also makes possible agreements for eucharistic sharing with churches which historically have rejected the Lutheran (that is, the biblical) understanding of the real presence. In the ELCIC such agreement has taken place with the Anglicans, and in the United States during the summer of 1997 it took place between the ELCA and the United Church of Christ, the Presbyterian Church (USA), and the Reformed Church in America. The passage of the ELCA-Reformed "Formula Agreement" caused LCMS president Alvin Barry to declare that this represented "a significant movement away from the Scriptural and Confessional position of historic Lutheranism," and that "we feel that the long-standing differences between the Lutheran and Reformed churches are not being adequately addressed, but merely allowed to exist as equally valid opinions regarding important teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>23</sup>

Those who come from the Missouri Synod tradition have reservations concerning such "eucharistic hospitality" on several grounds. First of all, the Confessions clearly and frequently state that Christians should be properly examined (clearly seen to be preceded by instruction) before they are allowed to receive the Sacrament (Augsburg Confession XXIV.1; Augsburg Confession XXV.1; Apology XXIV.1; Small Catechism Preface 11; Large Catechism Preface 5; Large Catechism V.2). They also quote the early church theologian John Chrysostom approvingly in his statement that one of the duties of the priest (that is, the pastor) is to

forbid some from receiving the Sacrament (Augsburg Confession XXIV.36).<sup>24</sup> Thus, it can clearly be seen that the two major Lutheran bodies in Canada are not in agreement on the nature of the Lord's Supper, either in doctrine or in practice.

### The question of women's ordination

The differences between the two streams of Lutheranism in North America also can be seen in relationship to the question of the ordination of women. Those churches which stand in the catholic tradition (Rome, Eastern Orthodoxy, Anglicanism, Lutheranism) have traditionally not ordained women. This has not been a mindless tradition, but is a practice that finds its roots in the Scriptures themselves. The fact that Jesus never appointed women as apostles and that Paul and his associates never appointed women to the position of elder and presbyter, though they all clearly had high views of women and their place in the Church, has been taken as normative for the Church down through the ages. This is further demonstrated by two clear passages from the writings of St. Paul: 1 Cor. 14:33-35 and 1 Tim. 2:12-15. Both passages reject the idea of women speaking in the public assembly, and 1 Timothy ties this to God's order of creation.

Now, it is true that the Lutheran Confessions do not speak about this issue. However, this was not an issue of controversy at the time of the Reformation, and the churches of the Augsburg Confession continued the ancient practice of reserving the office of public ministry to men. Any change in the practice should come on the basis of the clear declaration of the text of Scripture itself, and confessional Lutherans have always declared that the text says what it says.

Since the early 1970s, however, the ELCA and ELCIC practised women's ordination. In doing so, they have rejected the traditional understanding and interpretation of the relevant Scripture passages. Some, but not all of the supporters of women's ordination hold to this position because they follow radical historical critical conclusions which state that 1 Timothy was not even written by St. Paul and that 1 Corinthians 14 was something that someone else later

added to the text (in spite of the fact that there is no manuscript evidence that the passage was ever *not* there). Regardless, the supporters of women's ordination do not base their conclusions solely on the words of Scripture taken in context. They appeal rather to such things as; the style of Christ's ministry, the cultural restrictions of the time, and the primacy of the Gospel which, as they maintain, removes any restrictions against women holding the pastoral office.<sup>25</sup> It is certainly true that there are passages in which women speak the Gospel to men: the women coming from the tomb to the apostles, Priscilla and her husband Aquila speaking to Apollos, and others as well. However, these testimonies clearly come from the announcement of the Gospel which Christians are always called upon to give to each other. They do not refer to the public proclamation to the gathered assembly which is the central act of the office of public ministry.<sup>26</sup>

### Issues regarding worship

The Church has always recognized that there is an intimate relationship between its theology and its worship. Its theology shapes its worship, and in turn its worship both reflects and teaches its theology. When one finds changes in worship forms those changes must be tested against the theology of the Church to see that God's revealed truth is still being reflected. It is instructive, therefore, to compare the content of some of the more recent published forms of worship to illustrate how theological change has taken place among Lutherans. A look, for example, at the confession of sins is instructive. In the orders of service published throughout Lutheranism in the earlier part of the century, sins were confessed both in terms of sinful nature and the resulting sinful acts. The confession that we are by nature "sinful and unclean" and that we have sinned against God by "thought, word and deed" was present in the liturgy of the Missouri Synod in *The Lutheran Hymnal* and in the *Service Book and Hymnal* of the American Lutheran Church and the Lutheran Church in America (which later merged into the ELCA). In fact, the wording of the confession of sins in the "page 5" service of *TLH* and that in "The Service" of

*SBH* is identical. The same confession, with some minor updating of language, appears in *Lutheran Worship* as one of the forms. The confession of sins as it is set forth in the service of Holy Communion in *TLH*, identifies the "sinner" who was guilty of "sinning." A look at the confession of sins in the *Lutheran Book of Worship*, however, shows a change. The confession there begins with the words, "We confess that we are in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves."<sup>27</sup> While sins committed are acknowledged in the next sentence, this first sentence creates an erroneous impression. A confession that "we are in bondage to sin" is not really a confession at all. Rather than causing us to admit that we are by nature in rebellion against God, it creates the impression that we are pleading for mercy on the basis of our inability to avoid sin rather than simply acknowledging our sinfulness without trying to excuse it.

This is not to say that we are not in bondage to sin by nature. But the nature of our bondage is our rebellion against God—that is, that we are in bondage according to our wills, not against them. While as Christians we certainly recognize and lament this bondage, the change in focus to bondage from the simple reality of our sinfulness which needs forgiving, and the word of forgiveness which in turn actually releases the sinner from bondage, is disconcerting.

The diverging views among Lutherans concerning the Lord's Supper can be seen in the liturgy as well. In fact, the differing understandings among Lutherans which manifest themselves in the abandonment of Real Presence language and which open the door to "communion of the baptized" are reflected also in divergent understandings of the nature of worship and liturgy itself. In the title of one of his papers on the subject, Norman Nagel asks the question, "Whose Liturgy Is It?"<sup>28</sup> In other words, who is doing the work? Is it God, or is it the people of God?

Philip Pfatteicher and Carlos Messerli set up a false dichotomy at the beginning of the ELCA's *Manual on the Liturgy* which serves as a companion volume to the *Lutheran Book of Worship*, when they declare "Liturgy means 'work of the people,' but too

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often in the past the liturgy gave the impression that it was the work of the pastor.<sup>29</sup> This fails to take into account the fact that the primary service of the New Testament was Christ's service on behalf of the people, not us to Him. Thus, the church does not do the work, but receives the benefits of the work that has been done on its behalf by the Great High Priest. That is why Norman Nagel, in the introduction to *Lutheran Worship*, states:

Our Lord speaks and we listen. His Word bestows what it says. Faith that is born from what is heard acknowledges the gifts received with eager thankfulness and praise, enlarging and elevating the adoration of our gracious giver God. . . .

The rhythm of our worship is from him to us, and then from us back to him. He gives his gifts, and together we receive and extol them. We build one another up as we speak to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Our Lord gives us his body to eat and his blood to drink. Finally his blessing moves us out into our calling, where his gifts have their fruition.<sup>30</sup>

This theme is borne out in the essays in the book *Lutheran Worship: History and Practice*, the companion volume to the hymnal *Lutheran Worship*. In his essay on the nature of corporate worship, Roger Pittelko quotes the above words, and adds:

Worship is God speaking. It is our listening. Worship begins with God's Word. He is the content. Evangelical Lutheran worship begins with God giving us his Word. It comes to us and we respond in faith and devotion. It is God's action, not ours. He is the mover, the doer. Faith comes as the gift from God, not from our own doing or action.<sup>31</sup>

Charles Evanson continues this motif in his discussion of the place of the Sacrament in Divine Service, saying, "In the Service of Holy Communion God joins his act and deed to his Word; he gives us the body offered and the blood shed for the forgiveness of our sins and strength for Christian

living."<sup>32</sup> The real action is performed by God. The people receive and respond.

When the celebration of the Lord's Supper is understood in such a way as the Church's doing rather than God's, then the ritual, the doing by the people, is what matters, for the blessings come by the doing of the action rather than by the receiving of a specific gift. While there is no question but that such acts by the people of God are acts performed in faith, the understanding comes uncomfortably close to the Calvinistic understanding of the Supper, which also focusses on the act rather than the specific gift<sup>33</sup>. It leads one to the uncomfortable conclusion, then, that what we have in the statements of agreement and concord is not so much a consensus based upon the resolving of the differences, but, as Alvin Barry put it, an abandonment of the historic Lutheran position and the adoption of a position that Article VII of the Formula of Concord of the Lutheran Confessions was written to reprove.

### Some concluding thoughts

The two major strands of Lutheranism in Canada have a lot in common. Attendance at the worship services of the two bodies (at least at those services where the hymnals of the church are used as the primary resource) would undoubtedly convince the visitor that the churches share a common confession. Sadly, the two church bodies seem to be going in different directions. One maintains its ties with principles of Scripture interpretation used by the church of the past and continues to see its confession as normative for its teaching. The other has embraced at least some of the tools of historical criticism, and the end result has been a change in theology which will become more and more apparent as time goes on. We pray the Lord of the Church that by the power of His Spirit working through the Word the truth of the Gospel be confessed everywhere, false teaching be rooted out, and people prepared through the gift of the forgiveness of sins for eternal life.

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## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> For a full discussion of the history of the relationships within Lutheranism in Canada during this century, see Norman J. Threinen, *Fifty Years of Lutheran Convergence: The Canadian Case Study*, Lutheran Historical Conference Publication No. 3 (Dubuque, IA: Wm. C. Brown Co., 1983). For a detailed look at the history of the doctrinal discussions, see pages 143-205.
- <sup>2</sup> Formula of Concord, Epitome, Rule and Norm 1, in *The Book of Concord*, trans. and ed. Theodore Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 464.
- <sup>3</sup> The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *A Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod* (St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, n.d.).
- <sup>4</sup> "The Function of Doctrine and Theology in Light of the Unity of the Church" (New York: Division of Theological Studies, Lutheran Council in the USA, 1978).
- <sup>5</sup> John Reumann, ed., in collaboration with Samuel H. Nafzger and Harold H. Ditmanson, *Studies in Lutheran Hermeneutics* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979).
- <sup>6</sup> The Missouri Synod's continual affirmation of its traditional understanding of Scripture and its rejection of so-called "Gospel reductionism", the process of reducing the important parts of the Bible to only those bits which directly talk about the Gospel, are reflected in two papers submitted to the Church by the Missouri Synod's Commission on Theology and Church Relations: *The Inspiration of Scripture*, published in March 1975, and *Gospel and Scripture*, published in November 1972. Both documents, along with the *Brief Statement*, can be found on the Project Wittenberg page of the Internet, <http://www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/wittenberg-home.html>
- <sup>7</sup> Formula of Concord, Epitome, Rule and Norm 8, in Tappert, 465.
- <sup>8</sup> The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *Brief Statement*.
- <sup>9</sup> Charles P. Arand, who teaches systematic theology at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO, has recently published a study documenting the various views of confessional subscription which have existed among Lutherans in North America. See Charles P. Arand, *Testing the Boundaries: Windows to Lutheran Identity* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1995).
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 239, quoting Carl E. Braaten, "The Lutheran Confessional Heritage and Key Issues in Theology Today," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 8 (1981): 261.
- <sup>11</sup> It must be noted that, while the Confessions here clearly identify with Rome in teaching the true, substantial presence of Christ's Body and Blood, they elsewhere (Smalcald Articles III.VI.5) reject transubstantiation, Rome's attempt to explain the Real Presence philosophically.
- <sup>12</sup> John Reumann, *The Supper of the Lord: The New Testament, Ecumenical Dialogues, and Faith and Order on Eucharist* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 1.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.
- <sup>14</sup> "Interpreting"
- <sup>15</sup> "Doctrinal"
- <sup>16</sup> "For purposes of preaching"
- <sup>17</sup> "If the words truly are part of Scripture"
- <sup>18</sup> "Direction on how to do something"
- <sup>19</sup> Braaten, Carl E. and Robert W. Jenson, eds., *Christian Dogmatics* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 2: 347.
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 346-347.
- <sup>21</sup> Division for Parish Life, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, *Statement on Sacramental Practices* (1991), par. 5.2.
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, par. 6.13, 6.14.
- <sup>23</sup> "Barry: ELCA actions move church away from historic Lutheranism," *Reporter*, September 1997, 1.
- <sup>24</sup> For a fuller discussion of this issue, see the Lutheran Church—Canada Commission on Theology and Church Relations document, *The Sacrament of Unity in a Divided Christendom: Closed Communion in Contemporary Context* (Winnipeg: Lutheran Church—Canada, 1996).
- <sup>25</sup> A detailed examination of the Scriptural data on the ordination of women from the perspective of those favouring it may be found in John Reumann, *Ministries Examined* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1987), 78-139.
- <sup>26</sup> For a further explanation of the Scriptural position on the ordination of women see "Ordination of Women?" by Hermann Sasse. *Word & Deed* pages 13-18, Vol. 2 Issue 1
- <sup>27</sup> *Lutheran Book of Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House; Philadelphia: Board of Publication, Lutheran Church in America, 1978), 56, 77, 98.
- <sup>28</sup> Norman E. Nagel, "Whose Liturgy Is It?" *Logia* 2, no.2 (April 1993):4-8.
- <sup>29</sup> Philip H. Pfatteicher and Carlos R. Messerli, *Manual on the Liturgy: Lutheran Book of Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1979), 9.
- <sup>30</sup> *Lutheran Worship* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1982), 6.
- <sup>31</sup> Fred L. Precht, ed., *Lutheran Worship: History and Practice* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1993), 45.
- <sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 419.
- <sup>33</sup> "Calvinism" refers to the teaching of John Calvin and his doctrinal system adopted by the Reformed Churches. Calvin held to the spiritual presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper but not the doctrine of the real presence of Christ's body and blood.