

*The
Concordia Lutheran*



“The Scripture cannot be broken.” John 10:35
“Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.” Psalm 119:105

Vol. LXIV

May-June 2020

Nos. 5-6

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“We worship
one God in Trinity
and Trinity
in Unity.”

— Athanasian Creed

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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

To set forth in simple and plain language the pure doctrine of God's Word as taught by the true Lutheran Church in full accordance with the **Book of Concord of 1580** and the **Brief Statement of 1932**.

To show, **on the basis of Scripture**, what true Christians are to believe and how, out of love for their Savior Jesus Christ, they are to lead Godly lives.

To furnish aids for Bible study and articles for Scriptural devotion and meditation.

To demonstrate, by our Scriptural stand, that our **Concordia Lutheran Conference** is not a sect or false church body, but that the congregations which form it confess, teach, and practice the Word of God in its full truth and purity and use the Sacraments according to Christ's institution. All who do this are the true visible Church on earth.

To seek out all who truly share our Scriptural position in doctrine and practice, and to urge the mutual public acknowledgment of such God-given unity. Thus we shall be able thereafter to practice a God-pleasing fellowship with them.

To show that we do not have among us a mixture of divergent teachings but that we are "perfectly joined *together in the same mind and in the same judgment*."

To set forth pertinent historical information which has a bearing upon the Church and to expose modern philosophical thought and the so-called scientific theories which contradict the Word of God.

To expose particularly the false teaching and practice of the various so-called "Lutheran" church bodies by comparing their teachings and practices with what is plainly recorded in the Word of God, in the Lutheran Confessions, and in the old orthodox Lutheran writings.

To expose false teaching and practice wherever it makes its appearance and to keep abreast of the current happenings in the church and among the nations as signs of the times.

To be truthful and factual in our reporting and freely to correct any misinformation of which we are not aware and which has been called to our attention. Also to clarify any information or statement of doctrine or practice which may be unclear to our readers or which may create a wrong impression.

The Ascension of Christ

— So Where Is He NOW?

“Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.” — Matthew 28;20

Parting from dear friends, beloved relatives, and especially from cherished brethren in the faith is never easy—even if just for a short time. And, when such parting is to be *permanent*—when the chances are overwhelming that we will probably never again lay eyes upon a loved one here in this world—oh, then the parting is fraught with indescribable **pain** and **heartache**, which only those who have experienced it can truly appreciate. With **parting** viewed from that perspective, we can better sympathize with the disciples of the Lord Jesus whose hearts were filled with “*sorrow*” (John 16:6) when He told them of His impending departure to be with His heavenly Father. He would no longer be *visibly* present with them to teach them, to guide them, yea, even to reproach them and admonish them, and thus to restore them to the paths of righteousness, comforting them with His precious Gospel.

But the Savior did not leave them, nor did He leave **us**, in *hopelessness* and *despair*. Instead, He assured us all of His *visible return* someday and, in the meantime, left us the ironclad guarantee of His **abiding presence** with us “*even unto the end of the world*,” and of His **continual blessing** upon our work for Him, upon our lives, and particularly upon our souls, as we diligently continue in His precious Word. Those promises took the sting out of Jesus’ departure for the disciples; and they do the same for us today, as we find superb JOY in our Savior’s **omnipresence** according to both His divine and human natures, both natures together forming one undivided and indivisible person.

At the time of His ascension, Jesus had spent almost six weeks with His disciples, confirming to them the glorious fact of His mighty resurrection from the dead with “*many infallible proofs*” (Acts 1) and opening their understanding of the Scriptures (Luke 24:45ff.) to a recognition of how wonderfully God had foretold through His holy prophets all that befell their Lord Jesus during His great and horrible passion, and had even prophesied His resurrection from the grave on the third day. Things were finally beginning to “gel” for the disciples, even though they still had many questions and misconceptions about Jesus’ real mission to this world of sin (Cf. Acts 1:6-8). These gaps would soon be filled in, Jesus promised them, with the coming of “*the Comforter*,” His Holy Spirit, who would “*teach [them] all things, and bring all things to [their] remembrance, whatsoever [Jesus] had said unto [them]*” (John 14:26).

The Evangelist Luke tells us that He led them out as far as to Bethany (24:50). It was a familiar trek for Jesus and His little band; they had walked this road before—out of the city of Jerusalem, across the brook Kidron, and past the Garden of Gethsemane, where they had witnessed the beginning of Jesus’ great passion and where they all had deserted Him out of fear for their own safety. They climbed the hill called Olivet (Acts 1:12) and followed the road until it branched unto a kind of fork: One path led down to the city of Jericho, the other to the nearby village of Bethany, the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Little did the disciples know what a triumphant act was about to take place.

Suddenly Jesus paused, turned to them, and “*lifted up His hands, and blessed them*” (v. 50). In none of the Gospel accounts are the Savior’s words recorded. His hands were raised, as Christian pastors still do today when they lay the Lord’s blessing upon His people; and there in His palms were still visible the “*prints*” or scars of the nail wounds Jesus suffered when He “*gave His life a ransom for all*” (I Timothy 2:6). What a tender and loving scene as the Savior bestowed upon His disciples the **fruits of His vicarious atonement**: Peace with God, His unmerited grace and blessing, and the assurance of God’s favor through faith in His Son ...the very same blessing, in essence, laid upon **you** each and every Sunday at the close of the worship service.

“*And it came to pass*,” Luke reports by inspiration of the Holy Ghost, “*while He blessed them, He was parted from*

them and carried up into heaven.” What a simple statement to report such a triumphant act! Before their very eyes, according to His **human nature** (that is, with His true human flesh and blood), Jesus began slowly to rise into the air! This was no illusion or trick; there were no wires or mechanical assists. But this was yet a further “*infallible proof*” of Christ’s almighty power as the exalted and glorified Son of God, the Creator defying the powers of His creation, rising unpropelled higher and higher into the sky! The awestruck disciples craned their necks, “*gazing up into heaven*” (Acts 1:11), following His ascent heavenward, until finally, Luke tells us, a passing cloud “*received Him out of their sight*” (v. 9). “*And they worshiped Him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy*” — joy, first of all, over **the triumphant act itself**, by which the Lord Jesus again made good on His Word, demonstrated His divine power over the forces of nature, and did so visibly before their very eyes, thus confirming to them the truth of their earlier confession of Him: “*Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God!*” (John 6:69).

But the joy of the disciples, and **our** superb joy as well, in the ascension of the Lord Jesus is not limited merely to the **act of triumph** witnessed that day! It is also joy **in Christ’s triumphant reign** at the right hand of His heavenly Father, for which the disciples “*worshiped Him.*” Jesus didn’t ascend to heaven just to BE there! No, He ascended to **DO** there what was His divine right to do in His *state of exaltation* as the King of all kings and the Lord of all lords, namely, to **reign** forever and ever. The Father had “*put all things under His feet,*” under His control, Paul writes to the Ephesians (1:22), making even His enemies His footstool according to the prophecy of the Psalmist (110:1).

Now, after the deep humiliation to which He had subjected Himself in order to be our Savior, during which time He voluntarily refrained from the full and continual use of the divine attributes that He possessed without interruption from all eternity — now Christ sits on the right hand of God the Father, exercising, also according to His human nature, “*all power...in heaven and in earth*” (Matthew 28:18), ruling over all creatures, all peoples, all governments, even over Satan and all his hosts, in the particular interest of His Church on earth. At His Name, every knee must now bow in subjection (Philippians 2:10), even those who abused *their* temporal power to *abuse* and to *slay Him*.

We are of course compelled in the interest of the truth to comment on and to refute the rationalistic axiom of the Reformed that “**the finite is not capable of the infinite.**” Placing their human reason above and in opposition to the infallible Word of God, they dare to claim that **the true human body** of the Lord Jesus, born of the Virgin Mary, is “finite” — consisting of a certain number of cells, of a certain mass, volume and weight— that it is subject to the usual “laws of nature, and is incapable of “the infinite.” Therefore they say that Jesus couldn’t have given His disciples His **true body** to “*eat*” on Maundy Thursday because His **true body** was sitting at the table with them. And Jesus’ **true body** could not be present in the Lord’s Supper to have been eaten by millions of Christians over thousands of years and still exist as a **truly human body**. Moreover He surely did not give His disciples His **true blood** to “*drink*” on Maundy Thursday since He was still alive, not yet bleeding (not yet having “shed His blood” on the tree of the cross), and still needing His blood to flow from His pierced side. And His **true blood** could not have been consumed by millions of communicants since He instituted His Supper and still flows through the sacred veins of His true human body. What He gave them, say the Reformed, was quite “obviously” wine (a.k.a. grape juice, *they claim*) as a mere symbol of His *finite* blood. And so they deny the **real presence** of Christ’s body and blood in the Sacrament, preferring to ascribe to it only a *symbolic* presence and claiming that we receive His body and blood *not really* but *spiritually* by faith.

They use the very same rationalistic “logic” with reference to Jesus’ promise in our title-text. Jesus is “*with [us]*” only “**in spirit,**” they claim, since His **truly human finite** body cannot be in heaven and here on earth at one and the same time. “Anybody knows that from the laws of nature!” Note that the word “*I*” in our title-text is the very same “*I*” that Jesus used in Luke 24:39 when He told His disciples concerning His *finite* body: “*It is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see Me have.*” The Reformed do not deny that the resurrected Christ, with His *finite body*, appeared to the disciples on Easter evening and also a week later, permitting them to examine, to touch and feel, His *finite hands, feet and side*. And yet, at the same time, they confess that the very same *finite body* was capable of passing through — **infinitely** — the locked doors behind which the disciples were cowering!! —And from the Mount of Olives they saw the **finite body** of the Savior levitate itself against the force of gravity — without any finite force of propulsion — and ascend into the atmosphere, into the stratosphere above

the clouds, and presumably, according to the angels, into outer space and beyond “*into heaven*” (Acts 1:11), where there is no atmospheric pressure to keep His *finite* body from exploding, no water to keep His *finite* body from dehydrating, and no food to keep His *finite* body from starving!! And yet this isn’t a problem for them??!! How inconsistent they are!

“The finite is not capable of the infinite?” Really?? The Bible is literally FULL of examples to the contrary — called “*miracles*.” Note just a few: The *finite* cruse of oil and one handful of meal *infinitely* fed Elijah, the widow of Zaraphath and her son for three years! (I Kings 12:9ff.) Jesus fed 5,000 people on one occasion (Matthew 14:21) and 4,000 people on another occasion (Matthew 15:38) from the *finite* contents of a lunch box! The Reformed don’t deny those instances which illustrate the fact that “*with God all things are possible*” (Matthew 19:26 *et al.*), but they deny the power of the Lord Jesus, to whom is given “*all power in heaven and in earth*” (Matthew 28:18) whom they confess to be God, to “*do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think*”!! (Ephesians 3:20).

Indeed one of the special facets of His reign at the right hand of the Father, one which brings us particular joy, is that this glorified and exalted King does not just “*sit*” in heaven (as if He were now permanently “located” there on a physical throne, as many ignorantly suggest), but He “*ascended up far above all heavens*,” the Bible tells us, “*that He might fill all things*” (Ephesians 4:10). Now, as we well know, the **Reformed**, who ascribe to Christ only a “**local** presence” according to His human nature, who consider Him “stuck there,” as it were, with His physical body, *locally enclosed* in heaven, really sell the Lord Jesus short!! For He is not limited to any **thing** nor to any **place**, nor to any “**law of nature**”! **That’s** why He could promise us: “*Lo, I [I myself, my entire self, true God AND true man], I am with you always, even unto the end of the world!*” (Matthew 28:20b; cf. Luke 24:39). What a wonderfully comforting and reassuring promise ... provided it is not “guttred” by rationalistic nonsense! —And one more example concerning **the ascended Christ** and His ability to **be everywhere** at the very same time and **visible** to **everyone** at the same time is recorded in Revelation chapter 1, verse 7, regarding His appearance on the Last Day: “*Behold, He cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see Him* [everywhere in the world, on ths sphere, at the very same time, both “the quick and the dead”], *and they also which pierced Him* [from over two centuries ago!!]. They will see “**Him**,” not a hallucination of Him, nor an apparition of Him, nor a symbolic representation of Him, but the very one whom Jesus told Caiaphas that he would see with his own two eyes (Matthew 26:64).

That’s why He could assure us concerning the **real presence** of His true body and blood in the Holy Sacrament: “*This IS My body; this IS My blood.*” He is **not** *locally enclosed* in the heavens at all. He is **everywhere** at the same time, **omnipresent**, also according to His human nature. Oh, what **joy** that should bring to our hearts to be able to confess of Jesus’ **real presence** in the Sacrament of the Altar, for instance:

*Thy body, Lord, is everywhere at once, in many places!
How this can be, I leave to Thee; Thy Word alone sufficeth me.
I trust its truth unfailing! (TLH 306, 5)*

But we Christians have our most superb joy in **the triumphant comfort** that is ours because of Christ’s ascension, because of the blessed functions He now fulfills in His glorious reign. The exalted Lord Jesus ascended, first of all, to be our **Forerunner**, that is, to prepare in the heavens a place for us, that where our Savior is, “*there [we] may be also*” according to His sure promise (John 14:3), living and serving Him there in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness! Even now anticipating that “*crown of life*” is a **joy**, He tells us, that “*no man taketh from you*” (John 16:22).

We also have the **joy** of knowing that our exalted and ascended Lord Jesus still functions as our heavenly **Prophet** by sending forth pastors to dispense to us and to our children the precious Means of Grace, by which our souls are nourished and built up in the faith unto salvation, and by which we are equipped here in this present world to lead lives well-pleasing in His sight in proof of our faith in Him and to the glory of His grace.

We also **rejoice** that, as He sits at the right hand of His heavenly Father, our exalted Savior acts as our **Advocate** or lawyer, our “defense attorney” as it were, pleading our case with God for the sake of the price He paid for our

redemption: His holy life and His innocent suffering and death. You just can't get representation and advocacy and mediation like that from anyone but your perfect **High Priest**, "*Jesus Christ, the righteous [One],*" ... "*who...maketh intercession for us,*" the **only** intercession that avails before God, the **only** intercession made on our behalf at the Throne of Grace.

And finally, we **rejoice** in the **kind of reign** that our exalted and ascended Savior exercises there at the right hand of God: A reign in which the King of kings and Lord of all lords governs and protects His precious bride, the Church, and rules over all things—even over our enemies— in the interest of His Church. With that kind of joyful assurance in the **reign** of our heavenly **King**, we can confidently declare with the Apostle Paul: "*I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord!*" (Romans 8:38-39). Yes, "even as He **lives** and **reigns** to all eternity, **this is most certainly true!**" (Luther).

Oh, no wonder the disciples "*returned to Jerusalem with GREAT JOY, and were continually in the Temple, praising and blessing God!*" Can **WE** do **otherwise**, who "*know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,*" who have **seen Him** in spirit through His Word **ascend** into the heavens **for US** to be our **Forerunner**, our **Prophet**, our **Priest**, and our everlasting, gracious **King**? Should not **we also** be "*continually in the Temple,*" making the most of every opportunity we have to "*grow in grace and in the knowledge of our [exalted and ascended] Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*" (II Peter 3:18)? Should not **we also** be "*praising and thanking*" our gracious God and Lord for His undeserved mercy toward us poor sinners, and then backing up our words with **lives** dedicated to the service of our glorious King? After all, we have a lot to be thankful **for**; we have a lot to be joyful **about**; and, by His grace, we have a lot to look forward to, if we but hold fast to what we have—His precious Word of truth in its purity with all its promises and assurances— "*that no man take [our] crown!*" (Revelation 3:11). Therefore, with grateful hearts, we raise our voices to our ascended and *omnipresent* Lord Jesus, who is truly *with us* always, even unto the end of the world, and earnestly beseech Him:

*Oh, grant the consummation of this OUR song above
in endless adoration and everlasting love!
Then shall WE praise and bless Thee where perfect praises ring
and evermore confess Thee, OUR Savior and our King!*

(TLH 352, 4)

— D. T. M.



How Does God “Grow” the Church? OR Is that up to US??

“I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase.” — I Corinthians 3:6

In the parable that Jesus sets before us in Mark 4:26-29, He presents in picture form a common everyday scenario in the life of a farmer—or even a gardener or landscaper. And He draws from the so-called “natural order of things”—the way plants here in this world germinate, and grow, and mature—a *likeness* of His **Kingdom of Grace** and how IT grows here in this world.

For us Christians, this is always a timely subject as we **look** for, **work** for, **pray** for, and desperately **yearn** for **growth** in the Savior’s Church—growth not only in the “invisible church,” as we often refer to the Communion of Saints, the whole number of *true believers* throughout the world, but also and especially growth in the **local congregation**, both as *men* see it and hopefully also as *God Himself* sees it, because we want “*believers [to be] added to the Lord*” (Acts 5:14), as they were to the early church in Jerusalem on and immediately following the first Christian *Pentecost*.

There is an active “Church Growth *Movement*” that is very popular today, which centers people’s attention chiefly upon **numbers**—upon statistical growth, growth in church attendance figures, growth in fiscal revenue, and growth in the outward enthusiasm that people show about their church. And the real “key” to growth, say the self-proclaimed “experts” in this movement, is found in their “buzz-words”: The church needs effective **advertising**, “creative” **preaching**, organized **outreach programs**, social **inclusion**, and positive **imaging**. In other words, the key to “church growth” as they envision it is the application of successful business techniques to the “marketing” of Jesus Christ to potential “consumers.” Put another way, it’s basically up to US as to whether the Church grows.

Well, the Lord Jesus, the **real Expert** on Church Growth, has **plenty to say** on the subject in his parable—plenty to say in just a few words. In a world of business gimmickry and “get rich quick” schemes, Jesus turns our eyes **away** from the hokey programs of spiritual *snake oil salesmen* to the **only sure-fire growth-builder**, namely, the “*incorruptible Seed*” of **His Word**. It is **the Seed itself**, not what WE do with it, that creates spiritual life, produces spiritual growth, and yields a spiritual harvest.

“And He said, ‘So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground.’” The picture is **simple** really, **so** simple that the spiritual “*technocrats*” of this world “don’t get it” at all! A farmer “*casts seed into the ground,*” by hand, into ordinary, generic soil, without making any “pH” analysis first and without enriching it with chemicals and growth stimulants. The man just lays down the seed, and **that’s all!** And it’s as if he “*should sleep and rise, night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how.*” The farmer simply **plants** his seed and then goes about his other business on the farm and lets “nature” take its course. He passes his time doing his other chores, and he even gets regular sleep, Jesus says, obviously not at all worried about the condition or future yield of his crop. After all, what will **worry** accomplish? **Good seed** always “comes up”—initially at least; and even then the tender sprouts are best left alone to grow on their own, nurtured by the perfect food that **the seed itself** supplies! The farmer “[*doesn’t know exactly how it works*],” but it **does!**

In the more well-known parable at the beginning of Mark chapter 4, the *Parable of the Sower*, Jesus says: “*The sower soweth the Word.*” The **Word of God**, particularly the **Gospel** or “Good News” of salvation in Jesus Christ, the **great** news that God, in view of Christ’s perfect satisfaction of divine justice, forgave the sins of all mankind and has declared all men righteous in His sight, is a uniquely viable seed with a perfect germination-rate; and it contains

the powerful **nutrients** in its cotyledons which make spiritual plants **thrive!** Paul says that “*the Gospel of Christ...is the power of God unto salvation!*” (Romans 1:16). “*Faith* [which clings to God’s mercy for Christ’s sake] — *faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.*” (Romans 10:17). And Peter pointedly identifies the **SEED of the Gospel** as the **one crucial ingredient** in man’s regeneration or new birth, when he writes: “*Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the WORD OF GOD, which liveth and abideth forever.*” (I Peter 1:23). —No wonder the spiritual farmer doesn’t have to worry about his crop once the **SEED** is in the ground! He simply **relies** upon the **Seed**, guaranteed by its Maker, to “*accomplish that which [He pleases] and to prosper in the thing whereto [He] sends it.*” (Isaiah 55:11).

“*For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself,*” Jesus says in His parable, “**automatically**” according to the original Greek. The germination and growth of plants is not something that you “**program**,” it’s not something that you **cause to happen**; it’s not something that **YOU control!** It **happens** “*automatically*” when a man “*casts seed into the ground.*” Notice that the ground itself doesn’t bring about either *germination* OR *growth*. It’s just the growing **medium**. It could even be a completely **sterile** medium (like *Vermiculite* or washed sand or *Styrofoam* beads). And so, this statement of the Lord Jesus in no way indicates that some hearts are more fruitful than others (in and of themselves); that some hearts are more receptive than other hearts; or that some hearts are more “cooperative” with the Holy Spirit’s germination efforts in and through the Seed of the Gospel! For **synergism** (that is, the idea that **man**, to some extent at least, is to be credited with his own conversion when he helps the Holy Ghost along, resists Him less, or cooperates more) — **synergism is out-of-the-question!** **ANY** soil, even **sterile** soil, properly prepared, will act as a good rooting medium, provided the **SEED** is healthy. Thus, in the application of His parable, Jesus shows that **ANY heart** which has been plowed, disced, and dragged by **God’s Law** to prepare it for planting — convicted of sin, terrorized by the threats of God’s justice, brought to humble brokenheartedness, and stripped of any personal merit or worthiness toward salvation — **such** a heart is a *suitable medium* in which the Seed of the **Gospel** will germinate and grow. For it is the **Seed** that both **has** life and **gives** life.

“Growth gimmicks” of man’s creation, chemical fertilizers applied to the soil as the seed is ready to sprout, can actually “burn” the tender shoot and kill the life that otherwise would have taken hold in the soil all by itself! **AND** they can actually **deduct from** and **destroy** the seed’s own *natural* plant-food as the seedling begins to grow — the arrogance of work-righteousness, the cunning deceit of synergism, the warped self-image or conceit which denies one’s total depravity in the sight of God by nature. Thus, only the **WORD**, the **Gospel** of God’s free gift of forgiveness to the **undeserving**, nurtures the tiny faith-plant as it begins to grow in the heart — “*first the blade* [that is, the **leaf**], *then the ear* [the developing **fruit**], *after that the full corn* [the **mature grain**] *in the ear.*” The regular and consistent application of the **nutritious WORD** is also likened by the Lord, through Isaiah the Prophet, to “*rain and snow from heaven,*” supplied to growing plants to make them “*bring forth and bud.*” (Isaiah 55:10).

Thus a Christian pastor, for example, is indeed doing his job when he regularly and consistently proclaims the Word of God in its truth and purity, that is, when he “*plants and waters*” the Seed (I Corinthians 3:6) according to the Lord’s instructions. St. Paul tells Timothy and all Christian pastors: “*Preach the Word!*” A pastor is not to worry about the plant’s development, so long as he regularly and consistently feeds it with the Word (Acts 20:28). He is not to fret about “slow growth” and “retarded fruit,” as if he will have to give account for plants that deny themselves the nourishment by which growth is maintained and fruit is produced. And he is not to blame himself for plants that wither and die, if he has been faithful as a sower of the Seed! The Seed was **GOOD Seed**. It was “*cast into the ground*” according to the instructions of the **Chief Sower!** And **both of them** will wait patiently for “*the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear.*” “*I have planted,*” Paul writes to the Corinthians, “*Apollo watered; but God gave the increase.*” (I Corinthians 3:6).

The same applies to the efforts of Christian laymen in their **mission work**. **People** don’t “grow” the Church. People just sow the seed and water it in; they don’t make it germinate; they don’t make it thrive; they don’t make it fruitful. Those facets in the growth of the Church are God’s business. And, unlike the duties of their pastors, Christian laymen do not have the ongoing “*care*” and *feeding* of the churches as their responsibility (Acts 20:28; II Corinthians 11:28).

Sadly, as Jesus points out in the Parable of the Sower, **some plants** “bring *no fruit to perfection*” because they let **spiritual malnutrition** stunt their growth and permit **worldly cares and lusts** to choke out their life, due to no fault of the sower. That’s the way **THEY want it!** And no amount of worry and sleepless anxiety on the sower’s part will change that. Only the **Word** — “*the one thing needful*” (Luke 10:42) for spiritual life and growth — only the **Word** in its truth and purity “*is able to make [us] wise unto salvation,*” (II Timothy 3:15), to **keep us** “*steadfast in the faith,*” (I Peter 5:9), to **make us** “*able to withstand in the evil day*” (Ephesians 6:13), and to **preserve us** in the faith “*that no man take [our] crown!*” (Revelation 3:11).

Jesus says: “*When the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come.*” When the precious **Seed of the Gospel** has brought forth the desired fruit of humble, childlike and steadfast confidence in God’s merciful forgiveness for Christ’s sake, when the only **Church growth** that counts has occurred and “*the harvest is come,*” — when for a particular “*plant,*” an individual Christian, the **time of death** draws near; yea, when for the entire “*Church militant*” here on earth the **Last Day** comes and the time of grace is past — **then** the “*man,*” the heavenly Farmer, the “*Lord of the harvest,*” will gather all **true believers**, who have “*grow[n] up into Him*” (Ephesians 4:15) as “*living branches*” on His Vine (John 15:5), nurtured by His precious Word, — He will gather them as precious fruit into His garner, to the praise of the glory of His grace!

A common misconception regarding so-called “church growth” among heterodox mega-churches in particular is that the growth is to be expected in terms of **numbers**. The Apostle Peter points us rather to **spiritual** growth in those who have already been converted as the hedge against falling away from steadfastness of faith and of losing their everlasting citizenship in heaven. He writes in his second epistle chapter three, after discussing the last times and the end of the world, and the apostasy that will precede it on the part of those who are “*unlearned and unstable,*” wresting the very Scriptures to their own destruction (v. 16): “*Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before [having been forewarned], beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness! But grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be glory both now and forever! Amen.*” (vv. 17-18).

Indeed, as to sheer **numbers**, it is far more likely that, instead of the number of true believers *increasing*, the net **numerical** size of the Church will actually *decrease*. For, although the end of all things will not occur until the Gospel has been preached in all the world (Matthew 24:14) and all the elect have been gathered in (Matthew 24:22; 24:31; Mark 13:20, 27; etc.), “*that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first*” (II Thessalonians 2:3), “*and because iniquity shall abound, the love of many [who were once on fire for the Savior and His truth] shall wax cold*” (Matthew 24:12; cf. Revelation 3:15-16); “*for there shall arise false Christs and false prophets and shall show great signs and wonders, insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect*” (Matthew 24:24). Moreover, because of carnal security, indifference and inattentiveness on the part of erstwhile believers, many will not be ready for the Savior’s appearing and will be caught spiritually asleep with their lamps of faith having gone out for lack of spiritual re-fueling (Matthew 25:1-13). And in many cases this will not be due to the lack of faithful preaching and teaching or the lack of personal missionwork, but the fact that, as the Apostle Paul prophesied: “*The time will come when they [to whom the Word is preached, taught and applied] will not endure (that is, tolerate) sound doctrine, but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears [wanting to have their ears tickled by the “good words and fair speeches” of false prophets; cf. Romans 16:18]; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth and shall be turned unto fables [myths]*” (II Timothy 4:3-4). Indeed, in one of the Savior’s most striking warnings concerning the Last Day, He said: “*When the Son of Man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?*” (Luke 18:8). Nevertheless we also have His precious comfort: “*Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom*” (Luke 12:32).

In these last days of sore distress, it is truly ironic that so many professing Christians are consumed with the need for “church growth” — at any cost — and, at the very same time, are unconcerned about orthodox preaching, teaching and practice. For “church growth” manipulated by the marketing, salesmanship, gimmickry, whitewash and attractive liberalism and rationalism of men, growth expected from *corrupt* and *corruptible* seed, is no real church growth at all. It is a deception and fraud perpetrated upon the unwary and ignorant to lead them **away** from the **true**

church that is “*built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone*” (Ephesians 2:20).

It is THAT Church which we Christians desire to see growing and flourishing, not merely in numbers like a prosperous, financially viable worldly corporation, but growing in grace, in faith, in steadfastness, in sanctification, and in perseverance even unto the end, “*being born again not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, with liveth and abideth forever*” (I Peter 1:23). To **that** blessed end we preach, teach and apply faithfully the doctrines of Holy Scripture and continue by our personal missionwork to bring others to the knowledge of its blessed truth for the sake of their ultimate salvation (I Timothy 2:4), leaving to our gracious God “*the increase*” (I Corinthians 3:6) to His glory.

In these last days of sore distress,
grant us, dear Lord, true steadfastness,
that pure we keep til life is spent
Thy holy Word and Sacrament.

And since the cause and glory, Lord,
are Thine not ours, to us afford
Thy help and strength and constancy.
With all our heart we trust in Thee.

(*TLH 292, 2 and 7*)

— D. T. M.



“We All Believe in One True God”

— or Do We??

The Folly of “P.C.” Ecumenism!

*“Thou believest that there is one God. Thou doest well.
The devils also believe and tremble.” — James 2:19*

On Sunday, June 7th, we celebrated *The Feast of the Holy Trinity* in joint recognition and confession of our common faith that “**the only true God** is the **Triune God**, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, three distinct persons in one divine being or essence” (*Catechism* Q/A 26, C.P.H., 1943 Ed.). In these latter days of sore distress and strife in this world, not only “*distress [among the] nations with perplexity*” (Luke 21:25) in terms of political unrest, “*wars and rumors of wars*” (Matthew 24:6), but also distress in **society** fomented by “*false Christs and false prophets,*” in the guise of religion trying to deceive “*if it were possible... the very elect*” (Matthew 24:24) by their false doctrine and practice (Cf. Romans 16:18), the basic concept of “**God**” is under attack and very particularly the idea that there is **only ONE true God**.

As Americans we enjoy, as essential to our civil liberty, an unfettered *pluralism* in our society, according to which we are *free* openly to disagree with one another, *free* to engage in spirited controversy with our neighbors about issues of concern, *free* to hold divergent opinions in matters of politics, sports, philosophy and religion, *free* openly to disagree with our government and its policies, provided that we do not engage in treason and rebellion but limit ourselves to lawful opposition and redress of grievances. And we are *free* to be **critical** of one another’s viewpoints and sincerely-held positions, provided that we respect their “right” to have and to express their opinions as citizens of a *free* society. This does **not** mean, however, that we must *agree* with them, that we must *validate* them, that we must *compromise* our own positions in order to accommodate theirs; nor are we obligated to **respect** their position if we find it to be untenable, unreasonable (even in our own estimation), or immoral (according to our own standards based on **Scripture**). We are even “*free*” (thanks be to God!) to “*come out from among them and be...separate*” from those who would entangle us in “*unequal yokes*” of compromise and accommodation with wickedness, false doctrine and false practice in matters of faith and life (II Corinthians 6:14ff.).

Nowadays, however, our **exercise of freedom** is judged to be “**politically incorrect**” by self-professed “political liberals” who have, on the one hand, **re-defined** their “liberty” as “license-to-do-as-they please” (even contrary to law and order), and, at the very same time, have **restricted** the “liberty” of others so that they must think, speak, and act only as they do. And they **condemn** and **excoriate** what they identify as “**politically incorrect**” ideas, thoughts, words and deeds and call them “hateful.” What does this have to do with the topic of our article??

One of the most common deceptions perpetrated upon the so-called “intellectually enlightened” and “politically correct” world of this century concerns itself with the concept of “**God**.” Many (and perhaps even *most*) people like to regard themselves as “Godly” and “Godfearing” individuals — roughly equivalent to “moral” and “upstanding” members of society. **Political correctness** in the matter of “God” is actually a gross **self-deception** — the idea that **we all** (all of us Americans at any rate) believe in the **SAME** God, the “God” on our coinage, the “God” in the *Pledge of Allegiance*, the “God” in the oaths taken in courts of law, the “God” to whom the chaplains of Congress address opening prayers at the beginning of each session, etc. The Apostle James in our title-text writes: “*Thou believest that **there is one God**. Thou doest well;*” and that is, of course, **the plain fact**, a fact which even Satan recognizes. And the Bible in *many* passages declares the same, as for example St. Paul in I Corinthians 8:4, “*There is none other God but **one**.*” The problem arises in people’s **identification** of that “*one God*.”

Among the “politically correct” *ecumenists* of our day and time, who would like to pretend religious unity under the name of “God,” very few are clear in their own minds **who** (or **what**) that “God” is. Some regard God as an impersonal “goodness” in people; some as “the Force” for good in the world; some (like the Masons, for example) call God the “Grand Architect of the Universe” (even though most now *deny* the divine creation of all things — especially in six twenty-four hour days — preferring *atheistic* evolution over billions of years). Some think of God simply as “the Man Upstairs,” an uninvolved patriarchal being who is “up there” somewhere, merely observing what is happening in the world as it coasts along on its own without any “divine” preservation or intervention, while some actually conceive of Him as controlling to some extent what is going on — hopefully “for the good of mankind.” They *point* “up there” after hitting a grand slam home run in a baseball game; they *look* “up there” when hoping for “good luck” in some endeavor; and they sheepishly *glance* “up there” when they’ve done something that they consider to be “wrong” and are looking for “a pass” when it comes to a feeling of guilt. But fewer and fewer regard God anymore as a real *personal being*, unless, of course, they want someone to blame for violence, warfare, poverty and “bad things that happen to good people.” To their way of thinking God is ultimately responsible, and they blasphemously “*reply against God*” (Romans 9:19-20) for permitting evil in the world and for not intervening to stop it.

But *very few* anymore, even among professing *Christians*, confess, as we do **on the basis of Scripture**, “that we worship **one God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity**, neither confounding the Persons nor dividing the Substance,” and that “we believe and confess...our Lord Jesus Christ...perfect God and perfect man,” our Redeemer and Savior, “who suffered for our salvation, descended into hell, rose again the third day; He ascended into heaven; He sitteth on the right hand of the Father, God Almighty; from whence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.” This is **NOT** the deistic so-called “faith of our fathers,” expressed on our coinage and on our currency as “In **God** we trust,” but “this **IS** the *catholic* [i.e. *universal Christian*] faith, which, except a man believe faithfully and firmly, he cannot be saved” (*Athanasian Creed*).

To be sure, we are laboring under false illusions if we think that our Scriptural position concerning God will continue to be tolerated in “the land of the free,” especially if we confess, as we do in our *Catechism* (St. Louis, C.P.H., 1943), in Question and Answer 26: “The **only TRUE** God is the **Triune God**, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, three distinct Persons in one divine Being or Essence,” especially if we declare with St. Paul the simple statement, “*given by inspiration of God*” (II Timothy 3:16), that “**There is none other God but one**” (I Corinthians 8:4). Indeed, if we “*confess before men*” (Matthew 10:32), openly, unashamedly, unequivocally and boldly: “*All the gods of the nations are idols, but the Lord made the heavens*” (Psalm 96:5), and “*An idol is nothing in the world*” (I Corinthians 8:4), then certainly we can expect to be castigated as “hateful,” “bigoted,” and “intolerant” even by many who profess themselves to be Christians.

So-called “political correctness” today *insists* that we accept one of two (or perhaps even BOTH) false principles: **1)** The “universalistic” idea that **all gods** have **equal validity** and are to be respected as **legitimate deities** — when the passages cited above (in addition to many others) declare **the very opposite**, or **2)** The preposterous opinion that, despite their different origins, different essences, different identities, different principles, and different scriptures, in addition to the fact that most of them regard the others as false and pernicious, all “gods” are essentially ONE and the SAME god with **different NAMES** — when the Bible clearly **names** the **only true and living God** *very specifically* and *exclusively*: “*And Moses said unto God, ‘Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel and shall say unto them, ‘The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you;’ and they shall say to me, ‘What is His name?’ what shall I say unto them?’ And God said unto Moses, ‘I AM THAT I AM.’ And He said, ‘Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, ‘I AM hath sent me unto you’’*” (Exodus 3:13-14). The name “**I AM**” God uses of Himself; in the third person (in grammar), when **we** speak of Him, the Name is “**HE IS**” — “*Jaweh*” or “*Jehovah*” in Hebrew, translated into the Indo-European languages as “**The Lord**,” not just any old “lord,” not merely “**a** Lord,” but the only “**Lord**” that truly IS. Thus God says of Himself in Isaiah 42:8, “**I am THE LORD; that is My name; and My glory will I not give to another, neither My praise to graven images.**” “**THE LORD, our God, is ONE Lord**” (Deuteronomy 6:4), “*Thou shalt not take the name of THE LORD, thy God, in vain*” (Exodus 20:7).

The **one true God** never identifies Himself by *other* names, such as Allah, Buddha, Krishna, Vishnu and other

avatars in Hinduism; nor does He identify Himself as a *non-trinitarian* deity. Compare, for example, the “Jehovah” of modern *Judaism* which excludes Jesus Christ, “*the Son*” of God, and the “Jehovah” of the *Russellites*, who hold that Jesus Christ was merely Jehovah’s first creation (“*He that honoreth not the Son, honoreth not the Father, which hath sent Him,*” John 5:23); as well as the “God” of *Mormonism*, Adam; the “Grand Architect of the universe” of *Freemasonry*; and the incorporeal “divine Principle” ruling over all as “eternal Spirit and infinite mind” of the so-called *Christian Scientists*. Then, of course, there is the “God” of *deists* in general, who represent him on our coinage and currency as the “God” in whom all Americans nominally “trust”— but NOT *necessarily* the **Triune God** whom we confess according to Holy Scripture.

“*All the gods of the nations are idols, but the Lord made the heavens*” (Psalm 96:5), and “*an idol is nothing in the world*” (I Corinthians 8:4). “*They have mouths, but they speak not; eyes have they, but they see not; they have ears, but they hear not; noses have they, but they smell not; they have hands, but they handle not; feet have they, but they walk not; neither speak they through their throat*” (Psalm 115:5-7). This description of the Psalmist “*in the words which the Holy Ghost teacheth*” (I Corinthians 2:13) speaks not only of idols of “*silver and gold, the work of men’s hands*” according to the near context, but in the wider context also of ALL false gods, “*the gods of the nations,*” which are **nothings** in the world (I Corinthians 8:4). As non-existent entities, they are not worthy of anyone’s adoration; they are unable to hear and to answer anyone’s prayers; they are incapable of coming to anyone’s aid; and their “*way...leadeth to destruction*” (Matthew 7:13). “*They that make them,*” those who **craft** them of “*silver and gold*” (Psalm 115:4), of wood and stone, as well as those who **invent** them and their religions as figments of their own imaginations, “*are like unto them*” — **nothings** — “*so is everyone that trusteth in them*” (v. 8).

Their **false teachers** — from pagans to anti-trinitarian cultists and sectarians — lead precious souls to **hell**, teaching “**damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction**” (II Peter 2:1). They deny **the ONLY TRUE GOD, the Triune God**. —They deny **the Father**, who in eternity decreed His only-begotten Son to be the ransom for sinful mankind and foreordained Him to render the *vicarious atonement* that would purchase man’s redemption (I Peter 1:20; Isaiah 53; Acts 2:23a; etc.). —They deny **the Son**, who in time took upon Himself a true human nature and, as man’s Substitute (Galatians 4:4-5; II Corinthians 5:21), kept God’s Law perfectly (Romans 5:18-19) and suffered the penalty of man’s guilt (I Peter 3:18), thus fulfilling in time that which God accepted in eternity (Revelation 13:8) as the “*propitiation*” of His justice (I John 2:2), so that, without compromising His perfect justice, He could unilaterally reconcile the world of the ungodly unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them (II Corinthians 5:19). —And they deny **the Holy Ghost**, who earnestly desires to bring all men to saving faith in God’s mercy and grace in Christ Jesus (I Timothy 2:4; John 14:6) through the means of the Gospel (Romans 10:17; I Peter 1:23), so that they might appropriate and receive for themselves God’s gracious forgiveness (Acts 2:38; I Timothy 6:12; Romans 5:11; Acts 10:43) and be eternally saved (Ezekiel 33:11; John 3:16; Mark 16:16a; Ephesians 2:8). —All those who **deny** the **Trinity** deny God’s **whole plan of salvation** from beginning to end and, by their own fault, forfeit God’s gift of eternal life in heaven. “*Many there be which go in thereat [that is, to destruction],*” Jesus says in Matthew 7:13, “*many,*” writes St. Paul, “[*who*] *are the enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things*” (Philippians 3:18-19).

Thus, faith in the **Triune God**, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, is **necessary to salvation**, as we confess in the *Athanasian Creed*: “Whoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the catholic [*i.e.* the universal, Christian] faith, which faith except everyone do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly. And the catholic faith is this, that we worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in unity, neither confounding the Persons nor dividing the Substance. ...He, therefore, that will be saved must thus think of the Trinity.” For “*this is life eternal,*” says our dear Lord Jesus, “*that they might know Thee, the ONLY TRUE GOD, and [that is, including] Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent*” (John 17:3). “*I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No man cometh unto the Father, but by Me*” (14:6).

Then, of course, there is the important distinction between **profession** and **faith**. In our Scriptural definition of **faith** in our *Catechism* (Q/A 103). we hold that “**belief**” in God, in the **only true God**, includes three components:

Knowledge, assent and confidence. When we say “we *believe* in God,” we mean that “we know and accept as true what the Bible says of God and trust in Him and rely on Him with firm confidence.” Therefore *not* everyone who *professes* faith in the Triune God is a true *believer*! Note that **we** do not **judge** the **hearts** of men. “*There is One that seeketh and judgeth,*” Jesus said (John 8:50). But **He** says in His holy Word: “*NOT everyone that saith unto Me, ‘Lord, Lord!’ shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven*” (Matthew 7:21). “*I never knew you. Depart from Me, ye that work iniquity!*” (v. 23). “*Why call ye Me ‘Lord! Lord!’ and do not the things which I say?*” (Luke 6:46). “*This people draweth nigh unto Me with their mouth and honoreth Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me!*” (Matthew 15:8; cf, Isaiah 29:13). “*In vain do they worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men*” (v. 9). And the Apostle Paul to Timothy: “*Take heed unto thyself and unto the doctrine; continue in them, for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee*” (I Timothy 4:16). It is clearly a departure from Scripture and a violation of the Savior’s own words to claim that “where there is **profession** there is **faith!**” Talk is indeed cheap!

Thank God, therefore, that by His grace, that is, by the gracious operation of His Holy Spirit through the Gospel, we **reject** the “political correctness” of *ecumenism* and the preposterous notion that all gods (who distinguish themselves as different from all others) are really one and the same, and that we boldly confess with Luther on the basis of Scripture, from hearts truly accepting and treasuring what the Bible says of God and “*the doctrine which is according to Godliness*” (I Timothy 6:3):

We all believe in **one true God**,
who created earth and heaven,
the **Father**, who to us in love
hath the right of children given.
He both soul and body feedeth,
all we need He doth provide us;
He through snares and perils leadeth,
watching that no harm betide us.
He careth for us day and night;
all things are governed by His might.

We all believe in **Jesus Christ**,
His own Son, our Lord, possessing
an equal Godhead, throne, and might,
source of every grace and blessing.
Born of Mary, virgin mother,
by the power of the Spirit,
made true man, our elder Brother,
that the lost might life inherit;
was crucified for sinful men
and raised by God to life again.

We all confess the **Holy Ghost**,
who sweet grace and comfort giveth
and **with the Father and the Son**
in eternal glory liveth;
who the Church, His own creation,
keeps in unity of spirit.
Here forgiveness and salvation
daily come through Jesus' merit.
All flesh shall rise, and we shall be
in bliss with God eternally. Amen.

(Martin Luther, 1525 – TLH 251)

—D. T. M.

(Adapted from an article that appeared in May-June 2018)

Treasuring Our Blessed Fellowship

*“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is
for brethren to dwell together in **unity!**”*

— Psalm 133:1

In these latter days of sore distress, wherein the world round about us is sorely plagued with widespread unrest, palpable anxiety, manifest hatred, mob violence, and frightening anarchy, it *should* be of great comfort to us Christians that the lawless attitude and behavior of the children of this world are *not* (and *ought* not be) characteristic of the children of God (John 12:35; Ephesians 5:8–11)! And yet, merely *nominal* Christianity is no guarantee that those who *profess* themselves to be “Christians” actually *practice* the “*Godliness [that is] profitable unto all things*” (I Timothy 4:8) and redounds to the glory of God (Matthew 5:16). Hence, the common definition of the “*visible Christian Church,*” as consisting of all those who “use the Word of God” (at least outwardly) and “profess the Christian faith” (at least with words and/or Christian symbols) — among whom, besides *true* Christians, there are also *hypocrites* (Matthew 15:8) — is not sufficient to identify the *fellowship* that is evident among those who comprise the *true visible Church* — comprised of those who have, teach, confess and practice the *entire* Word of God in its truth and purity and administer the Sacraments according to *Christ’s* institution — the church which we call truly “*orthodox*” in doctrine and practice.

According to the principles of *fellowship* set forth in Holy Scripture, a *spiritual “brother”* is one whom we can *identify* as being **one in faith** — fully in agreement with the *fides quae creditur* or **body of doctrine** “*once delivered to the saints*” (Jude 3) and fully consistent in **practice**, the application of doctrine (Luke 6:46; James 1:23; etc.) — and **profession** (confessing it by word and deed, cf. Matthew 10:32; I Peter 3:15; etc.) with all those others who “*endeavor to keep the **unity** of the Spirit in the bond of peace*” (Ephesians 4:3). The “*unity of the Spirit*” is not merely an *external* association or *nominal* union (denomination) that has nothing to do with **objectivity** in doctrine and practice, but it IS *outward* and *external* (“*visble*”) to this extent, namely, that we can see, observe, measure, judge, and thus *identify consistency* in doctrine and practice on the basis of **ONE source and standard** of divine truth, namely, the **Holy Scriptures** (Ephesians 2:20). “*Can two walk together, except they be agreed?*” (Amos 3:3). This rhetorical question expresses a truth that no reasonable person will deny, namely, that, if two people truly want to walk *together*, they will have to *agree* on the path they will take, the direction they will follow, the pace they will maintain, when, where and even if they will pause for a rest along the way, and ultimately their goal or destination. And, although we cannot look into one another’s **heart** to see whether in fact he truly **believes** what he **professes**, whether in fact he truly **believes** what he **practices** (that is, what he consistently *applies* of the doctrine he professes), if we are to “*walk together*” in common purpose, according to common principles, and toward a common goal, we will have to be “*agreed*” in all of those things as we proceed along the way. And that agreement is **outward** and **external**; it is identified on the basis of **word** and **deed**. Thus the Apostle Paul describes the **unity** of the basis of which we recognize and maintain **Christian fellowship** as follows: “*Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment*” (I Corinthians 1:10).

“*Behold, how **good** and how **pleasant** it is for brethren to dwell together in **unity!**”* — all of them responding mutually to the Apostle’s exhortation in Christ’s name to *perfect agreement* in doctrine and practice! All those who find themselves in true Christian fellowship with others do so because “[*they*] **all speak the same thing,**” and they recognize that sameness of speech in their preaching, in their teaching, in their exhortation and admonition, in their polemics, and in their personal confession of what they believe (I Peter 3:15). They recognize “*that there [are] **no divisions** among [them]*” — no disagreements, no controversies, no schisms, no breaches, such as are caused by errorists who “*serve not our Lord Jesus Christ but their own belly, and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple*” (Romans 16:18). Those who thus disrupt and destroy true Christian unity we are to “*mark*”

[identify] and “avoid” [stay away from] (v. 17). Those who find themselves in the “good” and “pleasant” relationship of true Christian fellowship rejoice in the fact that they are “*perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.*” They think about things the same way, and they judge righteously (John 7:24) between truth and error (Hebrews 5:14). “Behold, how **good** and how **pleasant** [that] is!!” Behold, how **rare** and how **unusual** that is in outward Christendom **today**, when in these latter days the time has already come, as described by the Apostle Paul, “*when they will not endure [that is, tolerate] sound doctrine, but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears [itching to be told what they want to hear rather than what they need to hear!]; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth and shall be turned unto fables [that is, myths]*” (II Timothy 4:2-3).

“Sound doctrine” is barely to be found anymore today. And church bodies (synods, etc.) once regarded as truly **orthodox** (such as the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod at the time of its *Brief Statement of 1932*) have largely forsaken “*the doctrine which is according to Godliness*” (I Timothy 6:3) in spite of longsuffering admonition and correction on the basis of Scripture alone over many years—long after we marked and avoided it in 1951, and have been so polluted by accommodationism, ecumenism, liberalism, unionism and rationalism, in BOTH doctrine and in practice, that they can only be described anymore as **heterodox** and lacking the true unity that once characterized them. **NOT** “good;” and certainly **NOT** “pleasant.” Their pastors, professors, parochial school teachers and laymen do **NOT** “*all speak the same thing.*” By their willingness to accommodate differences of opinion among themselves in matters of doctrine and practice, they cannot say “*that there [are] no divisions among [them].*” And they cannot claim the “good” and “pleasant” condition in their midst that results from being “*perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment*” (I Corinthians 1:10).

Solely by the grace of God and only with His never-failing help has our **Concordia Lutheran Conference** endeavored over the past sixty-nine years “*to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*” (Ephesians 4:3). “*The good fight of faith*” (I Timothy 6:12) has not been an easy one to wage, to be sure, just as the Savior forewarned us in His Word. Our numbers in terms of congregations, pastors, communicant members, theological students and candidates have ebbed and flowed over the years; and our little fellowship of congregations today is statistically insignificant on the landscape of outward Lutheranism. To those concerned only with growth in numbers, this is often used against us as so-called “evidence” that God’s blessing does not rest upon us and our efforts. But it would no doubt come as a shock to those same nay-sayers to hear the Lord Jesus Himself say of conditions in these latter days: “*When the Son of Man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?*” (Luke 18:8).

Many pastors and laymen **left our fellowship** over the years to seek easier religion elsewhere. They would no longer “*endure sound doctrine;*” and, by the grace of God, they found no “*teachers*” among **us** willing to tickle their “*itching ears.*” And so “*they went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us; but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us*” (I John 2:19). [Sinful separatism].

Others endeavored to **disrupt our fellowship** from within. “*Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them*” (Acts 20:30), “*caus[ing] divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which [they had] learned*” (Romans 16:17), “*and by good words and fair speeches deceiv[ing] the hearts of the simple*” (v. 18). These had to be dealt with by means of **doctrinal discipline** (not to be confused with “church discipline,” Matthew 18). Their manifest errors were judged as such by “*the apostles and prophets*” (Ephesians 2:20), enabling “*those who by reason of [Scripture’s] use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil*” (Hebrews 5:14) to “*judge righteous judgment*” (John 7:24) regarding them. And they had to be **expelled** from our fellowship in order for us to “*keep the unity of the Spirit*” among us.

With our orthodox fathers in the *Formula of Concord* (Thorough Declaration XI), we **treasure** our “good” and “pleasant” fellowship of “unity” and realize full well that **true Christian unity** is never served nor preserved by departure from the Word of God in its purity, nor by any accommodation or compromise with errorists. That is indeed *the way of this world* in the avoidance of controversy and the “healing” of discord and division, but it is **NOT** the Word and will of **God** to forsake the truth for the sake of temporal peace, the appearance of tranquility, and a

pretense of unity. Therefore,

we have no intention of yielding aught of the eternal, immutable truth of God for the sake of temporal peace, tranquility, and unity (which, moreover, is not in our power to do). Nor would such peace and unity, since it is devised against the truth and for its suppression, have any permanency. Still less are we inclined to adorn and conceal a corruption of the pure doctrine and manifest, condemned errors. But we entertain heartfelt pleasure and love for, and are on our part sincerely inclined and anxious to advance, that unity according to our utmost power, by which His glory remains to God uninjured, nothing of the divine truth of the Holy Gospel is surrendered, no room is given to the least error, poor sinners are brought to true, genuine repentance, raised up by faith, confirmed in new obedience, and thus justified and eternally saved alone through the sole merit of Christ. (*Triglotta, Formula of Concord, Thorough Declaration XI, p. 1095.*)

We have on occasion been criticized (and even excoriated) for expressing “**love**” for our **Concordia Lutheran Conference** and its fellowship of unity. We do not apologize for that sentiment in the least; for “*behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren,*” for us, in our **Conference**, as a fellowship of Christian *brethren*, “*to dwell together in unity!*” “*Love the brotherhood*” [τὴν ἀδελφότητα] writes the Apostle Peter in his first epistle (2:17) — not merely individual brethren (as we find that exhortation especially in John’s first epistle), but **the body** of brethren as identifiable by their mutual profession and by their consistency in orthodox doctrine and in orthodox practice (Amos 3:3; I Corinthians 1:10; Romans 16:17-18; etc.). It is truly “*good*” to be able to look back over almost seventy years of our existence as a church body to observe **not one change** in our doctrinal position! It is truly “*good*” in surveying our practice over those seventy years that **not one change** and **not one accommodation** has made its appearance and gone unchallenged without long and dangerous delay! It is truly “*pleasant*” for those of our fellowship to be able to assemble at conventions, to attend pastoral conferences, and to do our work together in the spirit of meekness, “*in honor preferring one another*” (Romans 12:10) “*unto unfeigned love of the brethren*” (I Peter 1:22), out of love to Him who first loved us (I John 4:19). May this mind ever be in us as the fruit of the Spirit, that we, by God’s grace and with His help, continue to enjoy the “*good*” and “*pleasant*” blessed fellowship of our **beloved Concordia Lutheran Conference** to His glory and to our own spiritual welfare!

— D. T. M.

Official Announcement

After months of dealing with the debilitating effects of bipolar disorder, the Rev. Edward J. Worley resigned from the pastoral office at St. Luke’s where he had faithfully served the Lord and a flock of believers in Seattle, Washington for almost twenty years. Different medications have been tried in order to help him manage his condition, but improvements thus far have been slow and minimal. He submitted his resignation on June 14, 2020, because he cannot in good conscience continue to be the pastor of St. Luke’s in his current condition, being unable to give account to God for the souls put under his care.

Pastor (emeritus) Worley continues to be a beloved Christian brother who desires to serve His Redeemer in the public ministry of His Word and Sacrament. We pray that God will restore him to good health and allow him to be a pastor in our Conference once again in the future (if it be in accordance with the Lord’s good and gracious will).

“Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous but grievous; nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby” (Hebrews 12:6, 11).

— The Rev. Paul E. Bloedel, President
Concordia Lutheran Conference

Churches in Fellowship

ORTHODOX LUTHERAN CHURCH OF EKATERINBURG

Ekaterinburg, Russia

The Rev. Roman G. Schurganoff, Pastor

P. O. Box 27

620039 Ekaterinburg, RUSSIA

E-mail: Schurganoff@mail.ru

CHRIST LUTHERAN CHURCH

Olu-Ama (Kula), Nigeria

(Pastoral Vacancy at present)

ST. PAUL'S LUTHERAN CHURCH

Abule Egba, Lagos, Nigeria

(Pastoral Vacancy at present)

HOLY TRINITY LUTHERAN CHURCH

Idama, Nigeria

The Rev. Innocent Karibo, Pastor

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church

Idama, Rivers State, NIGERIA

E-Mail: kanboinnocent@yahoo.com

SALEM LUTHERAN CHURCH

Abalama, Nigeria

The Rev. Bateinm Bestman, Pastor

Thompson Compound Abalama Abalama,

Rivers State, NIGERIA

ST. CLEMENT'S LUTHERAN CHURCH

Elem-Sangama, Nigeria

The Rev. Timothy Biobele Aaron, Pastor

St. Clement Lutheran Church,

Elem-Sangama Arch-Deaconry

Elem-Sangama, Rivers State, NIGERIA

E-Mail: tbaaron2@gmail.com

ST. MATTHEW'S LUTHERAN CHURCH

Port Harcourt, Nigeria

(Pastoral Vacancy at present)

76 Abba Street, Mile 1 Diobu

Port Harcourt, Rivers State, NIGERIA

ST. PAUL'S LUTHERAN CHURCH

Kula, Nigeria

(Pastoral Vacancy at present)

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Kula, Rivers State, NIGERIA

ST. PAUL'S NYEMONI LUTHERAN CATHEDRAL

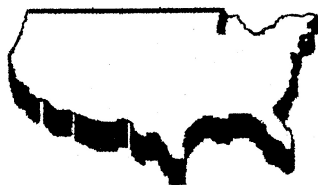
Abonnema, Nigeria

The Rev. Nimi B. Fyeface, Pastor

P. O. Box 123

Abonnema, Akulga, Rivers State, NIGERIA

E-Mail: njohnfyeface@yahoo.co.uk



Directory of Member Congregations

www.concordialutheranconf.com

PEACE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

Central Avenue at 171st Place, Oak Forest IL 60452-4913

Sunday School & Bible Class 8:30 a.m.

Worship Service 10:00 a.m.

The Rev. DAVID T. MENSING, Pastor

17151 South Central Avenue, Oak Forest, IL 60452-4913

E-mail: pastormensing@yahoo.com

On the Web at

PeaceEvLutheran.com

Office Telephone: (708) 532-4288

Pastor: (708) 532-9035

Pastor's Cell: (708) 601-3943

ST. JOHN'S LUTHERAN CHURCH

Sixth and Tangent Streets, Lebanon, OR 97355

Sunday School & Bible Class 10:00 a.m.

Worship Service 11:00 a.m.

The Rev. PAUL E. BLOEDEL, Pastor

483 Tangent Street, Lebanon, OR 97355

E-mail: revbloedel@gmail.com

Telephone: (541) 258-2941

Pastor: (541) 258-2941

ST. LUKE'S LUTHERAN CHURCH

5350 South Fountain Street, Seattle, WA 98178

Sunday School & Bible Class 9:00 a.m.

Worship Service 10:30 a.m.

On the Web at

StLukes-CLC.com

Telephone: (206) 723-1078

(Pastoral Vacancy at present)

NOTE: Services are also held in **Victoria, British Columbia, on** the 1st and 3rd Sundays. Please call for current location.

Worship Service 7:00 p.m.

Adult Bible Class 4:30 p.m.

Adult Catechism Class 8:30 p.m.

ST. MARK'S EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

22012 Torrence Avenue, Sauk Village, IL 60411

Sunday School & Bible Class 10:00 a.m.

Worship Service 11:00 a.m.

The Rev. DAVID J. MENSING, Pastor

22012 Torrence Avenue, Sauk Village, IL 60411

E-mail: d_rnensing@hotmail.com

On the Web at

StMarksEvLutheran.com

Telephone: (708) 757-6859

Pastor: (708) 655-7549

TRINITY EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

300 North Ridgeland Avenue, Oak Park, IL 60302

Sunday School & Bible Class 9:00 a.m.

Worship Service 10:15 a.m.

The Rev. ROBERT J. LIETZ, Pastor

233 North Cuyler Avenue, Oak Park, IL 60302

E-mail: robertjlietz@gmail.com

On the Web at

TrinityEvLutheran.com

Telephone: (708) 386-6773

Pastor: (708) 386-4145

(During the current pandemic, please call the respective pastors regarding **assembled** or alternative **"virtual"** services.)

Pentecost



The Feast of the Holy Spirit