

# The LUTHERAN CLARION



Lutheran Concerns Association  
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## Pastoral Care & Admission to the Lord's Supper

Rev. Peter Bender delivered the following paper at the January 21, 2013, LCA Conference in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

"Pastor, I want to go to communion at your church but you won't let me. I don't believe in closed communion." "Hi! I'm Pastor Bender. Who are you?" "I'm Jack Smith from Carson City, Nevada. I'm Sally Brown's brother and I want to go to communion in your church, but you practice closed communion and I don't believe in it." "I understand, Jack."

"The Lord's Supper is open to those who are baptized, but it is closed to those who are not baptized."

"The Lord's Supper is open to those who believe in Christ alone for salvation; it is closed to those who do not believe in Christ."

"The Lord's Supper is open to repentant sinners who know and believe that they need Christ because they know and believe that they cannot save themselves by their own good works; it is closed to those who are impenitent, self-righteous and full of pride and arrogance; it is closed to those who believe they have a right to the Sacrament because of their own goodness."

"The Lord's Supper is open to those who believe that Jesus gives them His true body and blood in the Sacrament for the forgiveness of all their sins; it is closed to those who believe that the Lord's Supper is merely a symbol and that the body and blood of Christ are not actually distributed in the Sacrament."

"Well, I've got a problem with that...I believe the Lord's Supper is a symbol, I don't believe it's Jesus' body and blood and I know it doesn't give forgiveness of sins."

"I understand that, Jack, but this is one of the reasons why we practice closed communion. It's not about telling people that they aren't Christians; it's about caring for every soul that comes to the altar. God's Word says, 'Whoever eats and drinks of the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner, eats and drinks judgment to himself' (1 Corinthians 11:27-29). That's serious business. I have a responsibility as a pastor to care for the Lord's altar for the spiritual welfare of everyone who desires to come to the Sacrament. It is very important that communicants are baptized, that they are repentant sinners who believe in Christ alone for salvation. It is important that they trust that

when He says, 'This is My body and this is My blood, which is given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins' that they really believe those words. It's important that Christians are joined to an altar and a pulpit in a church that actually preaches the truth of God's Word and where their faith in Christ will be nourished and strengthened. I understand that you won't be communing this morning, but I would welcome the opportunity to speak with you further about the Christian faith. Peace be with you."

The preceding conversation actually took place in my congregation several years ago. Only the names were changed. Although Jack and I never had a follow-up conversation, and he hasn't been back for a visit, there are a number of important things I'd like to comment on regarding the conversation. Never once did I utter the words "Missouri Synod." It is not because my status and that of my congregation as members of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod is unimportant or means nothing; it is rather because I don't want anyone to say that the ticket to the communion rail is the "Missouri Synod" membership card. I have asked many LCMS members, my own and those of other LCMS congregations not to commune. I say that not to boast, but to underscore that admission to the Lord's Table is a matter of serious concern for the pastor who wants to be faithful to the Lord and responsibly care for the souls of members and non-members alike.

I don't blame anyone for passing judgment on us if our communion practice amounts to this: "Are you a Missouri Synod Lutheran? Okay, you can commune." "You're not a Missouri Synod Lutheran? Sorry. You can't commune." When this is the extent of our conversations, then we are rightly accused of arrogance and lovelessness.

In our communion practice there is a hierarchy of concern that I have as a pastor: Has a person been baptized? Do they know their sin? Do they know their Savior? Do they believe that Christ gives them His actual body and blood in the Sacrament for their forgiveness? Are they under church discipline from the congregation to which they belong? Are they visiting our congregation because they are filled with resentment and bitterness toward the pastor or members of their own congregation? Finally, where do they go to church? Is the confession and public doctrine of the church body to which they belong

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preaching the truth of God's Word, or do they belong to a church body whose confession and public preaching undermines saving faith in Christ?

Since faith in Christ is dependent upon the pure Word of God, that's why we are concerned with church membership. Faith in Christ depends upon the truth. False doctrine undermines and wars against faith in Christ. That's why the questions of Church fellowship matter. And it is not just agreement in the Gospel "in the narrow sense"—it involves the whole counsel of God's Word. Christians are not free-wheeling independent agents. We are dependent upon the external Word and Sacraments for the creation and preservation of our faith. To put it another way, Christians need to be attached to an altar and pulpit whose confession and public preaching will support and strengthen their faith. To put it another way, Christians need pastors because faith in Christ is dependent upon a Word from outside ourselves.

This is what our communion practice is all about: pastoral care. It is not easy. It is hard work for the pastor to catechize his own members, to catechize his elders and communion assistants, and to dare to have the kinds of conversations that I had with "Jack." A bulletin announcement that says, "Show me your Missouri Synod Card" is easy. Responsible pastoral care requires that we know what we believe and that we listen with a discerning ear with those who desire to receive the Sacrament.

My catechesis on "Closed Communion" has been born of over 25 years of experience as a parish pastor and of realizing that the average layman in the Synod doesn't understand the practice. "Closed Communion" is a pastoral practice that rests upon the doctrine of the Lord's Supper, but "Closed Communion" itself is not a doctrine. In what follows I will rely heavily upon the material on the Examination of Communicants and Closed Communion from Lutheran Catechesis. There are several places in the Small Catechism upon which pastoral practice relative to the Sacrament rests. The Third Article of the Creed: "I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ...but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel" and under the Sacrament of the Altar: "that person is worthy and well prepared [to receive the Sacraments] who has faith in these words: 'Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. But anyone who does not believe these words or doubts them is unworthy and unprepared, for the words 'for you' require all hearts to believe.'"

## Examination of Communicants & Closed Communion

### *The Words "for You" Require All Hearts to Believe*

The Word of God clearly teaches that the Lord's Supper is to be received only by baptized Christians who confess their sins in repentant faith and believe in Christ and the words of His testament: "This is My body, which is given for you ... this cup is the new testament in My blood which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins." The words "for you" in the Sacrament require this faith of all communicants. Communicants who do not have this faith eat and drink the body and blood of Christ to their judgment (1 Corinthians 11:27-29).

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Help!

With the March 2013 issue, *The Lutheran Clarion* began monthly publication leading up to the 2013 LCMS Synodical convention. In order to address the wide range of issues and concerns facing the upcoming convention, it is necessary to increase the publication frequency from bi-monthly to monthly.

Whereas in a non-convention year we would have published four issues in the January to July time frame, in this convention year we will publish six issues. This means, of course, our costs of publication and mailing will increase proportionately. Accordingly, we would ask, you our readers, to increase your donations in support of this convention-year effort.

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Communicants who receive the Sacrament in faith eat and drink Christ's body and blood to their abundant blessing. The Church has always taken seriously the spiritual oversight of the Lord's Table. Pastors are called "servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God" (1 Corinthians 4: 1). They are called to "keep watch over" their members, their congregations, and their catechumens in the administration of Christ's Word and sacraments, "as men who must give an account" before the Lord ("What the Hearers Owe Their Pastors"—Hebrews 13:17).

### *Closed Communion*

Faithfulness to the Lord and love for those who might receive the Sacrament "unworthily" is the motivation for the Church's historic practice of closed Communion. Christians do not become Christians "by their own reason or strength," nor do they remain Christians apart from the Holy Spirit who works faith through Word and sacrament. Christians are converted by the preaching of the Gospel and Baptism. Their faith continues to be sustained by the external Word of Christ or it dies. This is why catechesis is to be taken seriously by the Church and her ministers. In his preface to the Small Catechism, Luther lamented the lack of faith and understanding among the people and pastors in the congregations of his day. If they did not know, at the very least, the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord's Prayer, and understand how they were to be used in the Christian's life, they should not be admitted to the Sacrament. This "pattern of sound words" (2 Timothy 1: 13), laid down in the ancient catechism, is the Christian's tutor in the Word of God that keeps his faith firmly grounded in Christ. "Those who refuse to learn," wrote Luther, "are to be told that they are denying Christ and do not belong to Him. They are not to be admitted to the Sacrament, accepted as sponsors in Baptism, or allowed to exercise Christian liberty in any way" (Preface to the Small Catechism).

The spiritual welfare of souls was Luther's motivation for what might appear harsh language. He understood that Christians need faithful catechesis and preaching in order for true faith in Christ to be sustained, and that without true faith there would be no worthy reception of the Lord's Supper.

The practice of closed Communion is concerned with two fundamental questions for all communicants:

*Do they confess faith in Christ alone and in the words of His testament for their salvation?*

*Do they belong to a church whose preaching and teaching will nurture and sustain them in that faith?*

These questions are related and dependent upon each other. Without faith in Christ and the words of His testament, there can be no worthy reception of the Sacrament. But the question of one's church membership is also important. For unless a Christian's faith is being fed by faithful preaching of the Gospel, his faith in Christ cannot long endure.

### **Who Is to Be Admitted to the Sacrament?**

The Lord's Supper is open only to:

- those who have been baptized with water in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit;
- those who confess faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who died for them and shed His blood for them upon the cross for the forgiveness of their sins;
- those who confess faith in the words instituting the Sacrament, namely, that Christ gives them His true body and blood in the Sacrament for the forgiveness of their sins, eternal life, and salvation;
- those who are penitent sinners, that is, not under church discipline, and not harboring grudges or refusing to forgive a brother who has sinned against them; and
- those who confess the faith of the church at whose altar they are communing.

It is important to note that bearing grudges and refusing forgiveness to a brother is a denial of the very words of the Sacrament. One cannot claim faith in the body and blood of Christ given and shed for *his* forgiveness, and *deny* that same forgiveness to his brother. Such impenitence is a rejection of the very nature of the Holy Communion as the gift of salvation by grace alone. This must be taken seriously by the pastor in the administration of pastoral care to his own members, catechumens, and visitors.

### **The Examination before Admission to the Lord's Table**

It has always been the responsibility of the local pastor to examine the confession of faith of those who desire to commune. He does this for his own members and catechumens after instruction in the faith and before admission to the Lord's Table, and he does it for visitors and guests in the congregation who desire the Sacrament. Until recent times, admission to the Lord's Table was never left to the feelings of the individual. It is irresponsible and unloving toward potential communicants for pastors not to take this responsibility seriously. It would be like a doctor who allows patients to prescribe their own medications and administer their own medical care without his examination and diagnosis of their condition.

The *Christian Questions with their Answers* from the Small Catechism provide a basic outline for the pastor's examination of those who desire to receive the Lord's Supper:

*"Do you believe that you are a sinner? Yes, I believe it. I am a sinner. How do you know this? From the Ten Commandments, which I have not kept. Are you sorry for your sins? Yes, I am sorry that I have sinned against God. What have you deserved from God because of your sins? His wrath and displeasure, temporal death, and eternal damnation. Do you hope to be saved? Yes, that is my hope. In whom then do you trust? In my dear Lord Jesus Christ. Who is Christ? The Son of God, true God and man .... What has Christ done for you that you trust in Him? He died for me and shed His blood for me on the cross for the forgiveness of sins ... How do you know this? From the holy Gospel, from the words instituting the Sacrament, and by His body and blood given me as a pledge in the Sacrament. ... Do you believe, then, that the true body and blood of Christ are in the Sacrament? Yes, I believe it. What convinces you to believe this? The word of Christ: Take, eat, this is My body; drink of it, all of you, this is My blood .... Why do you wish to go to the Sacrament? That I may learn to believe that Christ, out of great love, died for my sin, and also learn from Him to love God and my neighbor."*

These are not all the questions from the *Christian Questions with their Answers*, nor will all of them necessarily be asked by the pastor in every case. They provide a basic outline for the kinds of questions the pastor needs to ask in his examination of catechumens and potential communicants. The catechism itself indicates that these questions were "prepared by Dr. Martin Luther for those who intend to go to the Sacrament."

In addition to these questions, the pastor will want to ask the visitor about his church membership. He does this because he recognizes the importance of Christians belonging to churches that will support and nurture them in their faith. It is quite possible for a visitor to confess the faith of a "worthy communicant," as outlined above, but be asked by the pastor not to commune. The pastor would do this, not because the person "is unworthy and un-prepared" and would thereby eat and drink to his judgment, but to give witness to that Christian that the church to which he belongs does not support the confession of faith that he has just made! We rejoice with him in his confession, but we ask him not to commune. We do this in order to make the clear statement that a church's confession matters, both for the honor of Christ and for the Christian's continued spiritual welfare. We take seriously the need for him, and all Christians, to be joined to a pulpit and altar where "the Gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the Gospel" (*Augsburg Confession*, Tappert, VII, 31: 1).

### **The Responsibility of Members of the Congregation**

To commune at a church's altar is to say "AMEN" to the faith that is taught and confessed in that church. Members of a Lutheran congregation should not commune in other churches who do not share their confession of faith. It is not the faith of the communicant that makes the Sacrament a sacrament, but the Word of Christ that is faithfully preached and administered in that place. It is false for a Christian to conclude, "I know what the Sacrament is in my heart, so even if this church teaches something different, I'm going to commune there anyway." This dishonors Christ and does



## Thank You

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**The Clarion** is most appreciative of such continued support from Balance-Concord, Inc., as well as the wonderful support of our readers. These contributions make it possible to bring you substantive articles by respected and qualified authors on issues affecting YOUR Synod. Please continue your support. It is both appreciated and needed.

not give witness to the fact that it is His Word alone that makes the Sacrament what it is. When Christians do this they are relying upon the thoughts and feelings of their own hearts, rather than upon the Word of Christ. The only ground of certainty for faith is in Christ's objective Word. When Christians commune "willy-nilly" in congregations of church bodies which do not confess their faith, they are saying that the teachings of Christ do not matter. The Word of God gives a strict warning in this regard: "Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds" (2 John 1:9-11). This is why church fellowship is important. We are united with churches who faithfully confess the Gospel of Christ, for it is the Gospel alone that sustains faith.

When Christians visit sister congregations within their synod, it is proper to announce to the pastor the desire to commune at the Lord's Table in that congregation before approaching the altar. Members of the congregation should also assist visitors who come with them to the Divine Service. They should know and understand why closed Communion is practiced. They should make arrangements for their visitor to speak with the pastor before the Divine Service. Members should take the initiative to contact their pastor in advance of the Divine Service, so that an adequate time for consultation can be arranged. This is very important, particularly if there is a question on the mind of the member concerning the "worthy reception" of that visitor at the Lord's Table. If the visitor is a repeat visitor and known to the pastor, individual discussions may not be necessary each time. Circumstances and knowledge of the visitor will determine the extent of the pastor's examination. The pastor will take great care in training the elders and ushers in the congregation, so that they can assist him in the faithful administration of the Sacrament. Closed Communion is the ancient practice of the Church. Though often misunderstood, it is born out of love for Christ and every potential communicant. It is the practice of responsible spiritual care that ensures health to the whole body and each individual member of Christ.

See also Lutheran Service Book Pastoral Care Companion, "Guidelines for Pastoral Examination of Catechumens Before

the Rite of First Communion or Before the Rite of Confirmation" p. 664 ff.

### Rev. Peter Bender

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## Unionism & Syncretism: What are they?

Rev. Dr. Wallace Schulz in his presentation *Come, Let Us Return to the Lord* given to the Pacific Southwest District Theological Conference Feb. 16-19, 2004, asks the question, "Does anyone know what Syncretism means?" He states, "There are also those who try to argue that no one can be charged with syncretism because no one knows what syncretism means." Schulz then gives the working definition used by Rev. Dr. Benke who states "Syncretism means the amalgamation (mixture, blend, combination) of different religions, cultures, or schools of thought. The definition of syncretism for our benefit means the mixing, blending, or combining together of Christian and non-Christian religions."

In the CTCR document *Guidelines for Participation in Civic Events* another attempt is given, "The American cultural context with its freedom of religion and its corresponding emphasis on tolerance raises the spectrum of syncretism becoming an increasingly attractive option. Syncretism is "the reconciliation or union of conflicting (as religious) beliefs or an effort intending such" ( *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*). This attempt references Syncretism (from Gk. for "union; federation" and perhaps assoc. with Gk. for "mix, mingle"). Union, or effort to unite; in religious context practically a synonym for *unionism*. The term is used mainly in reference to three controversies:

- (1) That which began after the 1645 Colloquy of *Thorn*\* (see Poland, 4; Reformed Confessions, D 3 c), involved G. Calixtus,\* and ended with the latter's death 1656; Calixtus tried to unite Protestants with each other and with Roman Catholics. See also Dorsche, Johann Georg.
- (2) That which extended from the 1661 *Colloquy of Cassel*\* to 1669, when an order (probably originating from Frederick\* William of Brandenburg) to refrain from literary polemics was heeded. An interim of quiet followed till 1675. See also Gerhardt, Paul(us).
- (3) That which began in 1675, when A. Calov(ius)\* renewed the conflict, and ended with his death in 1686.

Syncretistic notions of the 17th century led to union movements in the 20th c. See "Union Movements," 8-16; "Union and Unity Movements," "Lutheran, in the United States," a paper written by Rev. Dr. Samuel Nafzger who states, "In the first LCMS Constitution the word "syncretism" was used in reference to a combination of Lutheran and Reformed worship practices and later to Freemasonry, which combined Christianity with other religions." (See Samuel H. Nafzger, "Syncretism and Unionism," *Concordia Journal* 29 (July 2003), 240-64.)

Nafzger states, "The term syncretism was apparently first used by Plutarch, a Greek biographer who wrote at the end of the first and beginning of the second Christian century, as both the Roman Catholic and Lutheran encyclopedias point out. Plutarch used the term to describe the Cretans, who 'often quarreled among themselves but always made common front against an enemy who threatened them from outside.'" This means that the earliest use of the term is referenced to civil authorities' uniting to save the state from outside invaders.

The CTCR document, *Guidelines for Participation in Civic Events* continues to attempt to explain Syncretism, stating, "Syncretistic mixtures are not all of one kind. In some cases Christian churches have taken on pagan characteristics—for example, Roman Catholicism's absorption of Voodoo (Vodun) in Haiti, and Santería in South America. This was happening already in the Old Testament among the Samaritans (2 Ki 17:24–33). An especially clear example of intentional syncretism today appears in Bahai, which believes in and advocates the unity of all religions. Many more subtle forms of syncretism exist in contemporary religion and culture (whether intentional or unintentional), as people pick and choose perceived "truths" from a veritable smorgasbord of religious sources in an effort to find or create a blend of "religious truth" that meets their own personal desires, tastes, or needs. Our pluralistic and syncretistic cultural context makes it all the more urgent that Christians be prepared to bear bold witness to the Gospel without any compromise of its radical and exclusive claims."

This last sentence is a wonderfully clear statement when lifted out of the context of the document as a whole that suggests that this bold witness can be put on hold as long as it's a once in a lifetime event, which renders this CTCR document less useful when trying to deal with the issues of unionism and syncretism in our Synod.

The word Syncretism comes from the Latin *syncretismus* and Greek *synkrētismós*; it simply means mixture or union. Syncretism, as defined by the *Lutheran Cyclopedia* is a synonym for Unionism, which is joining in worship with other Christians with whom we are not in agreement in doctrine. While this seems harmless to the modern ear, the Christian must hear St. Paul's warnings in **Romans 16:17** "I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause division and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them". And in **1 Timothy 6:3-4, 11** "If anyone teaches false doctrines and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, he is conceited and understands nothing...you, man of God, flee from all this and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness." Also see **2 Timothy 3:1-17**. John also warns in **2 John 9-11** "Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him. Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work." The problem I have with the broader view of syncretism, meaning joining in worship with those of non-Christian religions, is that this form of worship already has a name **idolatry** and is forbidden by God in the First Commandment, "You shall have

*no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3).*

I believe that when Article VI is speaking of syncretism it is likely referring to the syncretistic controversy that occurred among Lutherans in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, which was the theological debate, provoked by the efforts of Georg Calixtus and his supporters to secure a basis on which the Lutherans could make overtures to the Roman Catholic and the Reformed Churches. This controversy lasted from 1640 to 1686. Calixtus, a professor at Helmstedt, traveled throughout England, the Netherlands, Italy, and France, making acquaintance with the different churches and their representatives, and through his study Calixtus developed a more "liberal" attitude toward the different religious bodies than had the majority of his contemporary Lutheran theologians. While Calixtus' contemporary Lutheran brothers firmly adhered to the principle that "pure doctrine" is the only grounds for true fellowship, Calixtus tended not to regard agreement on "pure doctrine" as the one thing necessary for Christian unity, nor did he regard all doctrine as equally certain and important. Consequently, he advocated unity between those who agreed on the "fundamental minimum," with liberty as to all less fundamental points of doctrine. Calixtus viewed agreement with the Apostle's Creed as enough for all Christians to unite, note this is not agreement in what the Apostle's Creed teaches, but rather the use of the creed itself. So, while the term syncretism has been used in many ways I believe that the founders of the LCMS had this syncretistic controversy in mind when they listed the "Renunciation of unionism and syncretism of every description." The way this term is being used today is really describing idolatry, which I believe the founders of our Synod would have considered unthinkable for a Christian to participate in.

Yet, since the tragic events of 9/11/2001 our country has an ever increasing taste for an artificial unity and on 9/23/2001, we saw to what length some are willing to go with the inter-faith "Prayer for America" at Yankee Stadium (which is an example of idolatry not Unionism or, as I believe, syncretism as known by our Synod's founders). Since this event it seems whenever there is a tragic event in our country, there are communities and political leaders calling for all faith groups to unite and pray for peace and healing together. This is not entirely a bad thing; in fact in one sense it's a good thing, it shows that the natural knowledge of God is not lost. So, when tragedies occur, people seem to know to turn to a god in their time of need. However, to our culture whom that god is doesn't need to be the True Triune God Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, any god will do in a storm. Yet only the True Triune God can command the storms to stop, as even death is swallowed up in Christ Jesus' victory.

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Yet, this desire for perceived unity continues to grow and has led to such spectacles as a Roman Catholic Nun praying publicly at a Sikh temple, after the shooting at the Azana Salon and Spa, and the Salvation Army (a Methodist split off group) bringing in a Sikh priest to speak to the families affected by the Azana shooting. While this may sound or feel caring and loving, seeing that the Sikh had just survived a shooting at their own temple months earlier, nothing could be further from the truth, for whereas Sikhism is monotheistic their monotheistic god is not the True Triune God, and they believe, teach, and confess belief in reincarnationism among other idolatrous doctrines, lest we forget Jesus has already instructed us that a little leaven leavens the whole lump.

Just as it seemed our country was climbing back under the comforter of our self-centeredness, we were shaken from our peaceful slumber by the tragic shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary in Newtown, Connecticut, which once again led to a call for an interfaith prayer service. Again the LCMS finds itself in the center of controversy, as Pastor Rob Morris participated in an idolatrous worship service despite the sound advice from fellow clergy. Synod President Harrison rightly states,

"The event was variously called an "ecumenical service" or "vigil." There were prayers, Scripture readings done by various clergy, including representatives from the Baha'i and Muslim faiths. Pastor Rob Morris was asked to provide the closing benediction to the event, and he did so as he describes in his letter of apology. Pastor Morris took specific and commendable steps to mitigate the impression that this was joint worship. He asked for an announcement before the event to make it clear that those participating did not endorse each other's views. He read from Scripture when he spoke."

While Rev. Morris' apology may seem fitting, it is yet again an example of an apology in a way of "if you were offended, I apologize" and it has been publically stated that Morris does not believe he participated in a unionistic/syncretistic service or an idolatrous service as I would assert. I encourage us all to pray for Rev. Morris, the people of Newtown, and our Synod that true repentance occur. I am not seeking to file charges against Rev. Morris nor am I calling for anyone else to do so, I believe Rev. Harrison is doing all he can to pastorally serve Rev. Morris along with the help of Rev. Morris' District President.

That being said, could someone please tell me where in God's Word does God ask for an apology? I thought God sought repentance for sin. I thought the penalty for sin is death, and we both die in Jesus death and rise in His resurrection or we die for eternity. Nowhere in Morris' or Harrison's initial statements is there an admission of sinning against the Office of the Ministry, God, or His Word. When Nathan confronts David in his sin, David cries out, "Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight...." I am sorry if this seems judgmental. See just how hollow my apology is. I wrote this out, and yet I am sorry if you find me judgmental. This is not the attitude of repentance, if you believe I have sinned love me enough to call me to repentance and forgive me. If you think I made a mistake an apology seems correct. Yet, when Harrison says "sin boldly" quoting Luther, I say forgive boldly, announce absolution for sin boldly, not acceptance of what is at best an apolo-

gy with no acceptance of guilt.

I hope you noticed the one common theological thread among all the examples I have listed above, they are all examples of idolatry. I pray all Lutherans would understand idolatry to be sin and not a mistake. Dear brothers in Christ we don't pray with people of other religions, who serve other gods. We pray for people of other religions to come to saving faith in the True Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost and to repent of their sins. The renunciation of idolatry is dealt with in Article II of Synod's Constitution.

"The Synod, and every member of the Synod, accepts without reservation:

1. The Scriptures of the Old and the New Testament as the written Word of God and the only rule and norm of faith and of practice;
2. All the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as a true and unadulterated statement and exposition of the Word of God, to wit: the three Ecumenical Creeds (the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Athanasian Creed), the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the Smalcald Articles, the Large Catechism of Luther, the Small Catechism of Luther, and the Formula of Concord."

This is why I believe the only examples given in Article VI (Conditions of Membership) in Synod's Constitution are examples of Unionism and Syncretism not Idolatry (see Article VI below).

So at the same time we have an ever growing public outcry for the acceptance of public idolatry in our midst, even amongst our fellow clergy, we can't forget we continue to have a never ending struggle with the issues of Syncretism and Unionism that continue to raise their ugly head. Whether it's the new pastor at the mission church trying to get publicity

### Thank you **Clarion** Readers for Financial Support for Rev. Jeffrey Horn: \$1,460!

We have been encouraging **Clarion** readers to provide financial support for Rev. Jeffrey Horn, a CTS graduate who served Zion Lutheran Church in Garrett, Indiana, from 2003-2012. Rev. Horn and his wife, Lora, will serve the Lord in Papua, New Guinea, as missionaries. He will teach at Timothy Lutheran Seminary and will look for ways to strengthen the education there. So far, we have received \$1,460 from **Clarion** readers; others may have sent contributions directly to Synod for Rev. Horn.



While the LCMS is willing to "send" him and his family, it is up to Rev. Horn himself to raise the \$164,000 that is needed. Pilgrim Evangelical Lutheran Church, West Bend, Wisconsin, through its Horizon Fund, has matched the first \$500 received.

**Clarion** readers, please send checks payable to:

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Mark the memo line of your check "New Guinea Mission Project."



for the mission start participating in a community worship service or the pastor whose son is getting married at a Roman Catholic congregation participating as a "father and not a pastor," or the new church start that hires an Armenian parachuting team to come to town and give their testimonies, to attract a crowd to their mission start, or even the fact that various churches in our district and Synod pay annual dues to be members of the Willow Creek Association. It is clear that many brother pastors do not understand these terms or the reasons the founders requested the renunciation of unionism and syncretism of every description for being a condition for membership in the Synod.

**"...we have to wake up and see clearly that the professed peace within our Synod does not exist. Maybe now we will be honest with each other and finally have the heart to heart talk our Synod deserves and God desires."**

#### From the LCMS Constitution:

##### Article VI Conditions of Membership

Conditions for acquiring and holding membership in the Synod are the following:

1. Acceptance of the confessional basis of Article II.
2. Renunciation of unionism and syncretism of every description, such as:
  - a. Serving congregations of mixed confession, as such, by ministers of the church;
  - b. Taking part in the services and sacramental rites of heterodox congregations or of congregations of mixed confession;
  - c. Participating in heterodox tract and missionary activities.
5. A congregation shall be received into membership only after the Synod has convinced itself that the constitution of the congregation, which must be submitted for examination, contains nothing contrary to the Scriptures or the Confessions.
6. Pastors...certified lay ministers, or candidates for these offices not coming from recognized orthodox church bodies must submit to a colloquium before being received.

Therefore LCMS pastors and congregations by their very membership in Synod say that they agree with the condition of membership in the Synod. This includes, but is not limited to, refusing to participate in the services and sacramental rites of heterodox congregations or those of mixed confession.

Now, to make a bad situation worse, District President Benke, former Synod President Kieschnick, and even missionary at large to the Indiana District Matthew Becker have chimed in on the Newtown incident, in what appears to be an attempt to try to hurt not only Harrison's reelection in the upcoming Synod vote (don't forget that the election for President of Synod takes place prior to the Synod Convention), but the clear proclamation of the Gospel. The *New York Times* reports,

*"Mr. Benke had broken the First Commandment — 'I am the*

*Lord thy God'— by worshiping with 'pagans,' including Muslim, Sikh and Hindu clergy members," the Rev. Wallace Schulz, a senior official of the church, said then. Mr. Benke refused to apologize, and was cleared by a church panel in 2003 and permitted to return to ministry.*

*Asked for comment on the Newtown situation on Thursday, Mr. Benke said he did not agree with the denomination's decision to ask Mr. Morris to apologize. "I am on the side of giving Christian witness in the public square and not vacating it," he said. "If we don't show up, who can receive our witness?"*

From the *Saint Louis Post-Dispatch*

*"But some pastors and academics — most of whom did not want to speak publicly — reacted angrily to Harrison's letter. "I would hope that this latest action by Harrison would be sufficient to lead LCMS electors to remove him from the office of president and to replace him with someone who is wiser and more evangelical," said the Rev. Matthew Becker, interim pastor at Immanuel Lutheran Church in Michigan City, Indiana."*

The Rev. Scott Seidler, pastor of Concordia Lutheran Church in Kirkwood, sent a message to his congregation saying that *"with thousands of other pastors and church leaders from across our denomination, I find President Harrison's actions to be both outside the bounds of his denominational authority and inconsistent with the example of Jesus Christ himself."*

In an email to the *Post-Dispatch*, Seidler said that Lutherans *"will not soon forget the heavy-handed reproof of a young pastor who interceded for the little children. It is quite possible Matt Harrison is a one-term president."*

Former President Kieschnick's blog stated:

*"I say now what I said over 11 years ago. If a Lutheran pastor is invited to pray in a public gathering and declines that invitation, he yields the platform, the microphone and the message to those whose witness to Christ and his redeeming love may, in some cases very possibly and in other cases undoubtedly, not be nearly as clear as our pastor's would have been.*

*"Elijah prayed in the presence of hundreds of prophets of false gods. Paul preached in synagogues and taught in temples in the presence of people who rejected Jesus as the promised Messiah. So did Jesus himself.*

*"Our witness to the truth needs to be given to people who know not the truth. For that to happen, we must speak that witness in places where people who need to hear the truth are present. That may very well include other speakers who are present in those places.*

*"To the question whether it is OK for a Lutheran pastor to pray publicly in circumstances such as just described, my perspective is: Absolutely! Anytime! Anywhere! In the presence of anyone! Like Peter and John in Acts 4, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard, even if it means persecution or imprisonment!"*

So, amongst some calling for the removal of President Harrison, and others calling for the head of Pastor Morris, we have to wake up and see clearly that the professed peace within our Synod does not exist. Maybe now we will be honest with each other and finally have the heart to heart talk our Synod deserves and God desires. Which is why defin-

ing and calling idolatry what it is might help us see this as public sin, which I hope has been repented of, and appears to have been publicly absolved, in what clearly appeared to be an attempt to avoid other pastors from filing charges against this young pastor. I give thanks to God for the leadership of Rev. Harrison and the Godly example he set by publicly repenting (even though some have wrongly criticized him). May we all forgive him, as confession deserves absolution, even as we must all repent of our sins, turning to the Lord and then receive Christ's absolution.

So, now you may be asking, how do you define what is a public worship service? The CTCR has defined it this way "According to the historic LCMS understanding, a worship service is any occasion in which the Word of God is preached and prayer is made to Him by a fully authorized church worship leader" (A study of Fellowship principles). Nowhere in this accepted definition is mentioned whether the clergy are vested or not as a grounds for it to be considered worship.

Finally our Synod's constitution and by-laws are specifically concerned with members of Synod, the pastors and congregations, as official representatives of Synod, giving a false impression of the true confession of the Lutheran faith, in public situations (services) where participation would imply rightly or wrongly unity or joint worship with those who either worship false gods (article II) or with those who hold false teaching about the One True Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost (article VI).

Or as our Confessions state and I will close.

<sup>1</sup> Our churches teach with common consent that the decree of the Council of Nicaea about the unity of the divine essence and the three persons is true. <sup>2</sup> It is to be believed without any doubt. God is one divine essence who is eternal, without a body, without parts, of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness. He is the maker and preserver of all things, visible and invisible [Nehemiah 9:6]. <sup>3</sup> Yet there are three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit [Matthew 28:19]. These three persons are of the same essence and power. <sup>4</sup> Our churches use the term person as the Fathers have used it. We use it to signify, not a part or quality in another, but that which subsists of itself.

<sup>5</sup> Our churches condemn all heresies [Titus 3:10-11] that arose against this article, such as the Manichaeans, who assumed that there are two "principles," one Good and the other Evil. They also condemn the Valentinians, Arians, Eunomians, Muslims, and all heresies such as these. <sup>6</sup> Our churches also condemn the Samosatenes, old and new,

who contend that God is but one person. Through sophistry they impiously argue that the Word and the Holy Spirit are not distinct persons. They say that Word signifies a spoken word, and Spirit signifies motion created in things. <sup>1</sup>

In Christ,

**Rev. Joseph Fisher**

Pastor, Pilgrim Lutheran Church, West Bend, Wisconsin

<sup>1</sup> Concordia : The Lutheran Confessions. Edited by Paul Timothy McCain. St. Louis, MO : Concordia Publishing House, 2005, S. 31

## The LCMS Position on Unionism & Syncretism

Rev. Fisher's above paper included several quotes, covering a broad spectrum of time, that show the Synod position on Unionism & Syncretism. Those quotes are included below.

From *Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod*:

"28. On Church Fellowship. Since God ordained that His Word only, without the admixture of human doctrine, be taught and believed in the Christian Church, 1 Pet. 4:11; John 8:31, 32; 1 Tim. 6:3, 4, all Christians are required by God to discriminate between orthodox and heterodox church bodies, Matt. 7:15, to have church fellowship only with orthodox church bodies, and, in case they have strayed into heterodox church bodies, to leave them, Rom. 16:17. We repudiate unionism, that is, church fellowship with the adherents of false doctrine, as disobedience to God's command, as causing divisions in the Church, Rom. 16:17; 2 John 9, 10, and involving the constant danger of losing the Word of God entirely, 2 Ti. 2:17-21."

From *Christian Cyclopedia* on the LCMS web site:

"Religious unionism consists in joint worship and work of those not united in doctrine. Its essence is an agreement to disagree. In effect, it denies the doctrine of the clearness of Scripture." (Quoted from *The Concordia Cyclopedia*, St. Louis, 1927)

From the 1974 CTCR document *A Lutheran Stance Toward Ecumenism*:

### "C. On the Congregational Level

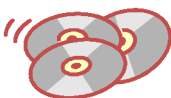
"When congregations become members of the Synod they voluntarily accept certain limitations of their autonomy. For the sake of good order and the benefit of all, congregations consent to regulate the exercise of their rights according to a compact freely entered into and mutually accepted. Congregations, for instance, agree to be served only by such pastors as have been certified for placement by the Synod's seminary faculties and who are members of the Synod. Similarly, congregations agree that they will practice fellowship only with those congregations which belong to a church body with which the Synod is in fellowship. Once such an agreement has been made, confusion and disorder result when congregations act independently by practicing selective fellowship. The Synod has, therefore, on several occasions stated its position on selective fellowship. Key sentences from a resolution adopted in 1969 give the Synod's position:

"WHEREAS, The members of The Lutheran Church—

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Missouri Synod have voluntarily united in a fraternal agreement to determine fellowship relations with other church bodies or congregations, not individually but through convention action (*Handbook 1.21*)...

*“Resolved, That the Synod urge all its members to honor their fraternal agreement with all members of the Synod by refraining from practicing altar and pulpit fellowship with congregations of church bodies with whom the Synod has not yet declared fellowship.*

#### **“D. On the Individual Level**

“1. In the exercise of their office pastors will follow Synodical policy. Except in emergency situations and in such cases where their action cannot rightfully be construed as disregard for pure doctrine, for the responsibilities of their office, or for the concerns of their brethren in the ministry, pastors will ordinarily commune only those individuals who are members of the Synod or of a Lutheran church body with which the Synod is in fellowship. Pastors will not participate in joint worship services with pastors of denominations with which the Synod has not established fellowship relations. When pastors affiliate with ministerial alliances or associations, they will participate in such activities and service opportunities as do not imply ecclesiastical fellowship where it does not yet exist.”

From the 2001 CTCR document *The Lutheran Understanding of Church Fellowship*:

“The promise not to participate in worship services with those not in church fellowship with the LCMS applies particularly to pastors, who are the official representatives of both their congregations and the LCMS. Their solemn commitment to the scriptural and confessional position of the LCMS must be their guide and will supersede personal feelings or preferences. Trust among LCMS pastors, congregations, and leaders allows everyone to carry out their commitment to fellowship practices to which they have mutually agreed. This trust is undermined when these commitments, as they are set forth in the official documents of the LCMS, are openly violated. Public knowledge of such violations strains relationships and makes reasoned discourse of real issues difficult. This in turn hinders pastors from exercising discretion in unclear situations.”

From Hermann Sasse, *Concerning the Unity of the Lutheran Church*, Letters to Pastors, No. 25, translated by Matthew C. Harrison:

“True ecumeny, which sees the one church of Christ wherever the means of grace are yet preserved—through which the Lord calls to His church—even beyond the boundaries of one’s own ecclesiology, stands opposed to false ecumeny, which treats Christians of all denominations as brothers in faith. This false ecumeny tries to make visible and tangible that which we humans cannot see and touch, the church as the people of God, as the Body of Christ, as the temple of the Holy Spirit. This false ecumeny changes the ‘article of faith’ about the church into an ‘article of sight.’ It understands the unity of the church, which only the Holy Spirit can create and maintain, as something which we humans can produce. And it tries to produce this unity, in that it works to realize the one faith, the one baptism, the one sacrament of the altar as a compromise of various forms of faith, various interpretations of baptism, and various understandings of holy communion. In

so far as it does that, this false ecumeny overlooks [the fact] that the various understandings of the means of grace are not only different possibilities of understanding the truth, but rather that soul-murdering errors and church-destroying heresy also hide among them. True ecumeny sees this. Therefore, it is able to recognize the true unity of the church only there, where it recognizes the one correct faith, the one correct baptism, the one communion of the Lord Christ. True ecumeny asks, therefore, not first about unity, but rather about truth. It knows that where the true church is, there, and there alone, is also the one church. In this sense it understands the high priestly prayer of the Lord, too, in which the ‘that they may all be one’ is linked inseparably with ‘sanctify them in Your truth; Your Word is the truth’ (John 17:17, 21).”

From Dr. Theodore Graebner, from his essay *The Leprosy of Unionism*:

“It is a bad sign when hearers become angry at their pastor for ‘preaching against other churches.’ It is a worse sign when pastors, bowing to such disapproval, begin to withhold instructions concerning the errors of the sects. It is a most alarming symptom when pastors and parishioners fraternize...with those who represent a different conception of Lutheranism. It becomes denial of the Truth when they associate with such for the purpose of ‘making church-work more effective’ or ‘keeping the Lutheran Church on the map.’

“As we love our church, let us so teach our people so that they will fear the contagion of error as they would fear to breathe the air of a small-pox hospital. Let us exhibit to them the damnable nature of false doctrine. Let us preach Luther on this point, who saw only the work of Satan in every deviation from the truth of Scripture. If our people learn to recognize every false doctrine as a snare of the devil, spread to catch victims for hell, they will not need to be held with a rein lest they stampede into unionism. ...

“Let it be understood that any undertaking or activity which is, in effect, the doing of religious work jointly with those from whom we ought, according to Scripture to separate, is unionism. Here, if ever, the old sayings must apply: ‘Nip the evil in the bud.’ Our first duty is that of watchfulness. There is no higher duty now because there is no greater danger.”

From Dr. Martin Luther, quoted in F. Bente’s *Historical Introductions to the Lutheran Confessions*:

**“Whoever really regards his doctrine, faith, and confession as true, right, and certain cannot remain in the same stall with such as teach or adhere to false doctrine.”**

**The Heavens Declare: What Astronomy  
Can Tell Us about Biblical Creation**  
with Dr. Danny Faulkner and Dr. Don DeYoung



**When: July 8-10, 2013**

**Where: Concordia University, Mequon, Wisconsin**

**Info: [www.societyofcreations.org/conferences.php](http://www.societyofcreations.org/conferences.php)**

The conference is being convened and cosponsored with Concordia University Wisconsin by the co-founders of the Society of Creation, a 52-member creation organization in the Concordia University System, a system of ten universities operated by the LCMS.

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Faithful Lutheran individuals who are members of LCMS congregations are invited to submit articles of approximately 500 words for consideration. Inquiries are welcome. Manuscripts will be edited. Please send to: Mr. Walter Dissen

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