

## **A Final Word on a Matter of Syncretism: Seeing the Big Picture and Calling a Spade a Spade**

TO THE PASTORS AND PEOPLE OF THE LUTHERAN CHURCH – MISSOURI SYNOD:

Whereas, it behooves the Christian pastor to rebuke those who contradict the truth of God's Word, as is clear from St Paul's instruction to Titus (1:9) that the overseer "cling to the faithful word in accordance with the teaching, in order that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to rebuke those who contradict"; and

Whereas, my three-year attempt to bring my concern through a congregational overture to the attention of the Synod ended in its censorship by the very one about whom I sought to warn the pastors and people of our beloved church; and

Whereas, I can only assume that future attempts through similar channels will end with the same result three years down the line while the sin continues to do public damage; and

Whereas, despite the public nature of the sin, I have spoken privately and in person with the public sinner with no success in bringing him to see his error; and

Whereas, many others have both spoken and written on the matter publicly; and

Whereas, the failure of synodical vice-presidents, the Council of Presidents, and the entire Synod meeting in convention to rebuke the error and require repentance on the part of the sinner does not relieve the individual pastor of his God-given responsibility to rebuke the one who contradicts sound doctrine; therefore

With great sadness and fear of God I have taken it upon myself, though unworthy yet called and ordained to do so, to offer the following public rebuke.

Humbly in the fear of God,

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16 February 2006/revised 10 February 2010

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## Bound to speak

*“You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people’s feet.” Matthew 5:13*

A person must advise and support peace while he can and keep quiet as long as possible. But when the sin is evident and becomes too widespread or does public damage, as the pope’s teaching has, then there is no longer time to be quiet but only to defend and attack, especially for me and others in public office whose task it is to teach and to warn everyone. I have the commission and charge, as a preacher and a doctor, to see to it that no one is misled, so that I may give account of it at the Last Judgment (Heb. 13:17). So St Paul (Acts 20:28) commands the preachers to watch and guard their whole flock against the wolves that were to appear among them. Thus it is my duty to chastise public sinners so that they may improve, just as a judge must publicly condemn and punish evildoers in the performance of his office. [Martin Luther, Sermon on the Mount, Matt. 5:9; AE 21:44]

Dr. Martin Luther took a strict approach to doctrinal purity, no doubt with words such as Jesus spoke in Matthew 5:13 in mind. His approach is one which some in the Missouri Synod today appear to despise. It is time to heed this warning concerning the truth:

Also it does not help that one of you would say: “I will gladly confess Christ and His Word on every detail, except that I may keep silent about one or two things which my tyrants may not tolerate, such as the form of the Sacraments and the like” [Martin Luther, “Briefwechsel,” Weimar Edition 3:81-82]

or Christ’s clear teaching throughout the Old and New Testament that His Apostles, Prophets and Pastors should not pray publicly beside or with pagan priests who are praying to other gods! What sort of insanity has struck our Missouri Synod’s vice-presidents, Council of Presidents, etc., with our Synod in Convention, as they have excused and condoned unionism and syncretism at the highest and most public level. As late as February 5, 2010 in Atlanta, when admonished to repent of his sin, President Gerald Kieschnick continues to maintain that he did not sin by authorizing President David Benke to pray alongside heathen priests at Yankee Stadium, also maintaining that the Synod (including COP and Vice-presidents) agrees with him.

*“Woe to the world because of stumbling blocks . . . woe to the one by whom the stumbling block comes!” Matthew 18:7*

There is a crucial scene in the movie Luther in which Martin Luther kneels before Cardinal Cajetan in Augsburg in 1518. When pressed on his position Luther states,

“I am interested in truth.”

“Truth,” Cajetan retorts, “The Turks are building armies on our eastern borders. We are on the brink of war. To the west lies a world of souls who have never heard the name of Christ. That is the truth! Christianity is tearing apart and just when we need unity most, you create confusion.”

“My goal,” Luther responded quietly, “is not to quarrel with the pope or the church but to defend them with more than mere opinion. The gospel cannot be denied for the word of man.”

How accurate this account is to their actual conversation we do not know. What we do know is just how accurately this conversation from Luther reflects the conflict that exists today between pastors concerned with preserving and teaching the truth and LC-MS President Gerald

Kieschnick's concern in our darkest national moment for "unity" and the "world of souls who have never heard the name of Christ." It is difficult not to see a parallel. For, when the Turks (same folks surprisingly 500 years later) had invaded our borders and all out war had been declared, unity meant more to President Kieschnick than truth. Yet the fact remains (whether Luther actually said it in this particular context or not), "The gospel cannot be denied for the word of man."

**"Levels of Fellowship":  
A Heresy Coming Back at Us in Ever Bolder Fashion**

With all the talk in recent years of levels of fellowship by various church leaders, we are reminded of Jesus' words about the casting out of a demon in Luke 11. Jesus tells us,

*"When the unclean spirit goes out of a man, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and not finding any, it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when it comes, it finds it swept and put in order. Then it goes and takes along seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they go in and live there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first."*

In 1992 something happened that is nearly unheard of in the Missouri Synod: then President Dr. Ralph Bohlmann failed to be re-elected as president of the Synod. Pastor Al Barry was elected in his place. Many may not realize it today, but this election more than anything else was a hair-thin rejection of the newly proposed notion of "Levels of Fellowship."

The "Yankee Stadium Prayer Service" was not a harmless exercise in civic responsibility. It cannot be left standing as an unfortunate blemish, no matter how far behind us. It strikes at the very heart of what it means to be a confessional church. The history of the Old Testament church, led astray by various leaders, ought cause us all to fear. Our God is a jealous God. The 2002 Valpo incident involving vested clergy of Muslim, Jewish and Christian faiths (at least five Missouri Synod pastors) is a painful example. The pastors involved received better training than this from our seminaries and yet they were duped into thinking that there is no problem as public servants of Christ and His Church to "exchange the peace" publicly with those who deny their Savior (cf. 2 John 10-11). Is it not true that they sought to "*heal the brokenness of the daughter of My people superficially, Saying, 'Peace, peace,' when there is no peace*" (Jeremiah 8:11)? These pastors sorely confused the two kingdoms. God be praised, the angels rejoice and we with them, for those pastors have repented and we trust with a sincerity that will not allow a repeat of such action.

Rick Meyer in the December 2002 *Jesus First* defined the schism in Missouri with new group labels, the "uniformity-in-practice" group and the "freedom-in-practice" group. The "freedom-in-practice" group is made up of those in our Synod who are already practicing levels of fellowship and have been for years—contrary to our biblical and confessional stance as a church. They flourish in a synod where more and more "every man does what is right in his own sight," at the expense of the confessional integrity of us all. We pastors sin often enough in our duties unknowingly and with no intent to do so, for which we must repent daily, but deliberate sin against God's ways arises from a lack of the fear of God.

The proper fear of God is exactly what St. Paul admonishes young Timothy to maintain through his oversight of the pastors under his charge:

*"Do not receive an accusation against an elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses. Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also may be fearful of sinning. I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of His*

*chosen angels, to maintain these principles without bias, doing nothing in a spirit of partiality.” I Timothy 5:19-21*

As a faithful “Timothy” the sainted President Al Barry did just this when he rebuked before all a District President who joined in a prayer service with Roman Catholic priests, other Christian clergymen and even Jewish and Muslim clerics. Indiana District President Tim Sims also was faithful in the Valpo case mentioned above (cf. also his action with regard to Bretscher below).

The “freedom-in-practice” group fears that the message we Lutherans proclaim is in danger of becoming obsolete and impracticable. Therefore, the ancient principles of fellowship, for example, must be adapted to fit the changing situations of our day. Interesting in this regard is F. F. Bruce’s description of the Pharisees in his commentary, The Gospel of John, “They built up a body of oral tradition, which was designed to *adapt* the ancient principles of the written law to the *changing situations* of later days and thus *safeguard* those principles against being *dismissed* as obsolete or impracticable” (Eerdmans 1983, p. 50; emphasis added). Driven by a lack of faith in the Word and Sacrament and its institution, as also by a failure to trust in Jesus’ institution of the Office of the Holy Ministry itself—thus the lay ministry emphasis by this group as well, adaptation is necessary. Everything must be made sweet in order for the world to accept it. Somehow prayers beside pagan priests must be allowed, if only serially! So the body of oral tradition grows.

As the battle for confessional integrity continues within our Synod seemingly against all odds, we have the encouragement of Mary who is called Magdalene, for the Lord our Savior cast seven demons out of her (Luke 8).

### **The Kieschnick (~~Benke~~) Case – In Proper Historical Perspective**

In the book of Judges, God reminded the children of Israel of His command to tear down the altars of the heathen in the land of promise (Judges 2:2; Exodus 34:13). The people were not faithful, which brought suffering and ultimately destruction to them. How does God’s command to tear down the altars of the heathen gods translate for us today and how have we responded?

Synod’s reply at the 2004 convention was: Serial prayers! Line up with them and take a number. They move their altar in, have their prayer, and move it out. The next and the next likewise. Then our turn. We move our altar in, pray to the true God who tells us to tear down the heathen altars (translate in NT terms, “stay clear of them, mark and avoid them”), and then roll on out to make room for the next pagan priest. My friends, God is not mocked. “*Thou shalt have no other gods before Me.*”

In the 1980’s Theodore Ludwig, a professor at Valparaiso University and a member of the Missouri Synod clergy, wrote an article entitled, “The Many Faces of God.” In it he compromised the clear teachings of the Holy Scriptures: that Jesus of Nazareth is the only-begotten Son of the living God and, therefore, the only way to know the Father is through knowledge of Jesus Christ, His Son; and that this one Lord Jesus Christ is true God from true God and the only way to heaven, for no other name is given among men whereby we must be saved. The content of this article was condemned as false by the Northeast Pastoral Conference of the Texas District in the mid 80’s in a resolution which called upon Ludwig to retract his false teaching and which encouraged his district and synodical presidents to act should Ludwig fail to repent and confess the truth. Not long after, Ludwig departed the Missouri Synod and joined what is now the ELCA.

During this same time, a colleague of Ludwig at Valparaiso named Paul Bretscher, Jr., also a Missouri Synod clergyman, was espousing the very same thing quietly but even more specifically. Bretscher's long-held beliefs were finally published in his book, Christianity's Unknown Gospel, in which he claims to proclaim the gospel "of" Jesus rather than the gospel "about" Jesus. Bretscher sent a letter touting his new book to Indiana District pastors on May 20, 2001. In his book Bretscher denies the deity of Jesus as the incarnate Son of God. He views the current wars among Arabs, Jews and Christians as a fight among brothers who give more attention to Ishmael, Isaac and Jesus, respectively, than they do to the one (not triune) god. In an opinion piece in the local Valparaiso newspaper, The Times, Bretscher wrote on September 14, 2001 in an article entitled "Unity through God, not Abraham's sons":

The only hope in a religious war is religious—to throw ourselves on the mercy of the one God from whom all of us came, even before Abraham. The God without partiality is the dignity of Arab, Jew and Christian alike.

By resting in him despite our limited and conflicting understandings, we can go back to the beginning together, search to know what went wrong, and start over clean without fear of loss.

Do not think that Bretscher forgot that in the first book of the New Testament, the Gospel according to St. Matthew, Jesus is specifically called the Son of Abraham. Bretscher's title would exclude Jesus as well, "Unity through God, not Ishmael, Isaac or Jesus" would be a way to make the matter plain to Christians.

Thankfully, Indiana District President Timothy Sims saw the error of Bretscher's false teaching and suspended him. While we mourn the shipwreck of a prophet, we praise God for Sims's defense of the truth: the God to Whom Christians pray is not the god of Muslim or Jew, for Jesus, to Whom and through Whom we pray, is one with the Father and therefore very God of very God; Jesus alone (with the Father and the Holy Spirit) is of the Godhead.

The Kieschnick (~~Benke~~) Case has revisited far more publicly the issue raised by Ludwig in the mid 80's and, throughout the 90's and into 2001, by Bretscher. For not only is Gerald Kieschnick a member of the LCMS clergy, he was (and still is) synodical president (!) when he authorized David Benke's active participation in the Yankee Stadium Prayer for America. Furthermore, Kieschnick (through Benke) did not simply write what he had to say in a school or local newspaper like Ludwig and Bretscher or in a book that few will read as Bretscher has, Kieschnick has announced his message from the mountaintop—and has done so from the office of the LCMS presidency itself.

Kieschnick's act was a concurrent event with the Bretscher case. In the troubling days following 9/11/2001 Kieschnick our president trumpeted a message more clearly and boldly than either Ludwig had or Bretscher was in his 9/14/2001 article. In doing so Kieschnick acted as though the false teaching of the former two were true. He authorized the Atlantic District President of our Synod to pray in a context which declared unequivocally that the gods of the Muslim and modern day Jew were the same (another "face") or at least on the same level as the only true God. The true God conquered the Egyptian army in the Red Sea. The true God sent His only Son into the world to suffer humiliation and death for the world. The true God raised up His only Son from death for us. The true God, in an even greater show of wrath and power than against the Egyptians, then destroyed His own people Israel at the hands of the Romans in AD 70 when they rejected the world's Savior, Jesus Christ the Righteous. We who have been grafted into the tree in Israel's place can expect only a greater judgment should we set Jesus beside the gods of the heathen.

By standing and praying amidst Muslim and Jewish clerics, along with others praying to other gods, Kieschnick (through Benke), by his action, put Jesus on a par with false gods. By his

action in that setting and at that time, Kieschnick actually has spoken before the world more loudly than Ludwig or Bretscher ever could. And in weakness the Missouri Synod in convention has allowed his action to stand. President Kieschnick only did it once, but once is too often. Our God is a jealous God.

David Benke has repented publicly of failing to pray rightly and President Kieschnick has publicly absolved him. The greater sin, however, of being involved at all in a syncretistic service rests squarely on President Kieschnick's head, who gave ecclesiastical permission for the involvement, who refuses to admit any error, and who refuses steadfastly to repent and remove the stumbling block he has created. This defilement of the holy Office of the Ministry by President Kieschnick is an abomination to the Lord for (before the whole world) he tread under foot the Gospel of Christ by presenting Jesus as but one among many of a whole smorgasbord of gods.

Let us recall that the holy Apostle Saint Peter, who without uttering a false word, by his action of merely associating with the Jews amidst a controversy over circumcision, was opposed publicly and to his face by Paul (Galatians 2). For Judaizers had sneaked in among the Christians formerly and, though identified and removed, they introduced a leaven that must *always* be *continually* opposed. When Peter gave the impression that he agreed with the false teaching Judaizers by separating himself from the Gentiles and sitting with the Jews, without saying a word he became one of those false teachers so that God raised up Paul to oppose him.

We do well to heed the warning one has given about such matters, who would be a grandfather to most of us. J. T. Mueller writes,

By the grace of God we are as a Church still horrified at blasphemous doctrines such as we find in Modernism. So, too, we are still shocked at the crying ungodliness of life as manifested in the godless world today; but what is so hard to perceive and to detest and to fight is the *little leaven*, the initial appearance of the ruin which threatens us no less than it has threatened the Church at all times. Let us by the grace of Christ see the *beginning* of evil in life and doctrine and wipe out the first and "little" leaven before it will leaven the whole lump.

We must apply the warning in particular to every form of *syncretism*. Today churches are uniting by the wholesale, and this under the slogan "God wills it." But God does not will that we sacrifice even the least of His commandments and the least of His Gospel revelations. Look at Paul's attitude. His contention was that every one who was circumcised under the conditions as they prevailed in Galatia "was fallen from grace." As Paul resisted and rejected circumcision, so we must resist and reject the twin evils of the Christian churches in America—synergism\* and unionism. Little leaven indeed!—or so it seemed at the beginning. But oh, how they have leavened the whole lump!

[J. T. Mueller, "Facing Our Worst Enemy—the Little Leaven," Concordia Theological Monthly, Vol. I, No. 1, January, 1930, p. 38; emphasis in original. \*See what follows.]

I believe from the context that "synergism" should read "syncretism." The author goes on in the very next sentence, a new paragraph, to say, "And there is another form of syncretism which is much more subtle even than unionism as commonly conceived—the syncretism of *lodgery*" (emphasis in the original). It is in the context of lodgery that we see an example of how President Kieschnick's act can affect every local pastor. How can a pastor discipline the lodge member, seeking his repentance, when the lodge member at times ignorantly and generally quite secretly participates in syncretistic activities with his fellow lodge members, when at the same time we have a synodical president who refuses to repent for willfully and knowingly entering

a public arena to worship (invocations, scriptures, prayers, benedictions) with pagans where he knew beforehand prayers to specific false gods would most definitely be offered. Can we not see the hypocrisy of the course we have taken? Or might there be a new level of fellowship for lodge membership, too?

Mueller defines “little leaven” for us in his article (p. 36): the proverbial saying means, “A little toleration of such unholiness and a little toleration of such unchristian doctrine will pervert and ruin the entire church.” Thus, Mueller concludes, “What we need today is *a faith which fights, obedience to God*, which looks not upon men or earthly advantages, but solely upon the banner of our Lord leading us into battle, and *loyalty* unto death” (p. 39, emphasis in original).

In the last two decades of the twentieth century, Satan the deceiver—through Ludwig and Bretscher—tried to introduce a leaven into the Missouri Synod which by God’s grace was identified and removed. That little leaven, like that of the Judaizers of Paul’s day, is so dangerous that it must *always* be *continually* opposed. Albeit unintentionally or ignorantly, President Kieschnick in the Yankee Stadium Prayer for America has given the impression to the world that Jesus’ name is but one way to address God among many and that the triune God is but one god among many gods. We must say it more strongly. This participation was “not merely a toleration of and encouragement toward spiritual adultery, but a vile act that brings its profanity before the face of God Himself.” A little leaven has sneaked in among us and the very name of Jesus is the “little point which the world and the devil are at the moment attacking” (Luther).

Of course, the excuse is that it was done for the sake of missions. But real missions can never be done in a setting that necessarily reduces Jesus to “a” god. We must ask who is harmed by what President Kieschnick has done? Was Peter harmed by his action? Was not Paul’s concern for the poor Gentiles who were being misled? So likewise, not President Kieschnick but those poor unbelievers who trust in Allah, Elohim (without Jesus) and numerous other false gods suffer. And how about just one of those little ones who believe in Jesus being confused or misled? While President Kieschnick has assured us in the Missouri Synod that he holds faithfully that Jesus alone is Savior and Lord, there remains his unfortunate public testimony to the contrary. Such an inconsistent witness lacks the clarity Jesus requires of His church if it is to bring light to the unbelieving world. “. . . *if the salt has lost its saltiness . . .*”

How could this happen here in the Missouri Synod? Martin Franzmann draws a clear picture for us some 50 years ago in an article, “An Approach to the Fellowship Problem,”

. . . It is *God’s* calling that brings men into fellowship with His Son and with one another; and every expression or acknowledgement of fellowship in our life ecclesiastical must be an actualization of *God’s* intention for *His* Church, according to His will as revealed in His Word. His will and His Word will suffer no abridgment to suit our ends. . . .

There is, of course, a double temptation here—the Church’s path is always on a narrow ridge between abysses. The one is to confuse the glory of God with our glory and to make of doctrinal discipline a heavy-handed and loveless insistence on *our* way of doing things or expressing things. The other temptation is to a ‘charity’ that settles for less than the absolute obedience to the Lord of the Church to which God lays claim for Him: ‘Hear ye Him!’—to avoid the duty of correcting the erring brother; to throw truth and error together in the pious hope or the comforting conviction that truth will always ultimately win out. This type of ecclesiastical fatalism is hardly doxological.

[Martin H Franzmann, “Three Aspects of the Way of Christ and the Church: An Approach to the Fellowship Problem,” *CTM* October 1952 Vol XXIII No. 10 p. 711-712.]

Today in the LC-MS we have an erring brother over us. Even though synodical convention, COP, and vice-presidents of Synod have failed to correct him, this does not release the parish pastor from his obligation to defend the truth against the error of syncretism and unionism. The fatalism that Franzmann describes is an exact portrayal of our current circumstance and therefore serves as a piercing indictment upon our Synod. How utterly sad that the warning was not heeded and our Synod has been dragged into an “abyss” where truth (an LC-MS District President praying in the name of Jesus) and error (Muslim, Jewish, Sikh and other anti-Christian clerics praying to their gods) were commingled in the “comforting conviction” that truth will always ultimately win out. The truth will indeed win out—ultimately, but if careless we very well may not be in that winners’ circle! *Lord, have mercy.*

Later Franzmann makes another critical point about American Lutheranism:

We are therefore peculiarly liable to the temptation of the ‘common front,’ whether it be a common front against Communism, or secularism, or Roman Catholicism [or terrorism?]. The need of a common front, like any other crisis in the life of the Church, may well serve as a serious call to repentance for past remissness in zeal for preserving the unity wrought by the Spirit, but it cannot serve as an excuse for an ecclesiastical huddling together under something less than the unity of the Spirit.

Though the “unity of the Spirit” was clearly absent, the tragedy of 9/11 was used by President Kieschnick “as an excuse for an ecclesiastical huddling together.” How directly Franzmann speaks to us who are faced with the dangers of the twenty-first century! Again: *Lord, have mercy.*

Franzmann calls upon us within the Missouri Synod to a conscience-bound “antagonism” to error

after the pattern of the life and teaching of our Lord and His Apostles: that with meekness (2 Timothy 2:25) and in fear (Galatians 6:1), with intent to win (1 Timothy 1:19-20), and with the high and joyous hope that the God of peace will bruise Satan under our feet shortly, we stand to do battle against Satan and all his works, including his works in ourselves and in our erring brethren. It means that we can never ignore error or treat it lightly, nor consent to it or partake in it, even by our silence. It means the end of any easy and secure optimism as to the amount of error we, or our Church, can stand, an optimism which the Apostles do not share—‘a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump’ (Galatians 5:9). [Franzmann, 716-717]

### **President Gerald Kieschnick: He (still 2/5/2010) stands condemned.**

Dr. Martin Luther, writing in the Large Catechism, teaches us what is necessary once a sinful matter becomes so public that all the world knows about it. (Lutheran Church-Canada’s ongoing concern is publicly documented as late as summer 2005.) Such a public case exposes the church to such great danger, should the sin go unaddressed, that it is no longer right or safe to try to deal with the matter privately and quietly. Instead,

where the sin is so public that the judge and everyone else are aware of it . . . when something is exposed to the light of day, there can be no question of slander or injustice or false witness. For example, we now censure the pope and his teaching, which is publicly set forth in books and shouted throughout the world. Where the sin is public, appropriate public punishment should follow so that everyone may know how to guard against it. [LC I.284]



It is in this vein and with sincere concern for our entire Synod as well as our sister synods around the world that it is necessary to offer a detailed public rebuke of President Kieschnick at this time.

The Synodical Convention of 2004 was three years in coming when this matter might have been easily settled by President Kieschnick's simple admission of guilt for the sin of unionism and syncretism. Now that convention is behind us. Irrespective of the statements the president made to explain/defend his action [President's Report in Proceedings of 2004 Convention] and his appeal to J. A. O. Preus's statements regarding fellowship, and irrespective of the Synod's willingness to re-elect Kieschnick as president thereby indirectly endorsing his action, the Reverend President Gerald Kieschnick nevertheless has sinned publicly as a minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in his response to the 9/11 terror attacks and must repent. All Christians are called to heed the Holy Spirit's clear admonition to come out from among the heathen and be separate (II Corinthians 6:14-18), how much more an overseer of the mysteries of God.

It is understood that President Kieschnick had good intentions in his authorizing David Benke's participation in the prayer service, but that does not change the reality that such action violated the doctrine of Holy Scripture with its concern for love and was therefore sin. This is a matter of doctrinal integrity for the sake of the Gospel. It is a matter of love for all.

The challenge that faces the pastors and people of our Synod today is best summed up in the words of our Lord (Deut. 13:5), "So you shall purge the evil from among you." This challenge, which many today would reject on the basis of their boast of zeal for "love and harmony," is consistent with St. Paul's words in Galatians 5, "A little leaven leavens the whole lump." That this word is applied to doctrine is apparent. Paul has asked, "Who hindered you from obeying the truth?" Luther understands by Paul's words that we cannot yield even a hairbreadth where doctrine is concerned.

For doctrine is like a mathematical point. Therefore it cannot be divided; that is, it cannot stand either subtraction or addition . . . doctrine, must be completely pure, clear, and sincere, having no part dark and no dark spots . . . It belongs to love to bear everything and to yield to everyone. On the other hand, it belongs to faith to bear nothing whatever and to yield to no one . . . Therefore let us not be moved when they make such a boast of their zeal for love and harmony; for he who does not love God and His Word does not count for anything, regardless of what or how much else he may love. . . . "One dot" of doctrine is worth more than "heaven and earth" (Matt. 5:18); therefore we do not permit the slightest offense against it. [AE 27, pp. 37-41]

"One dot," Luther writes, not "the slightest offense." The leaven of unionism and syncretism must be driven from among us with unfailing persistence.

*"The first to plead his case seems just, until another comes and examines him"* (Proverbs 18:17). Perhaps President Kieschnick can justify his actions with human thoughts and words based on synodical documents and bylaws, but not from the Word of God. Former Vice-President of Synod Pastor Wallace Schulz demonstrated this with complete thoroughness (though deemed inapplicable to Benke as one under ecclesiastical authority). Perhaps President Kieschnick can point to other important church leaders who support what he has done, but he will not find Christ and His Apostles among them. Therefore, until he repents of this sin and amends his way, based on the Scriptures, as much as Peter did, President Kieschnick stands condemned.

## **“There is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared” Psalm 130:4**

Our sins cannot be undone by us, but only can be put to death by repentance. My prayer is for the death of this act, possible only through President Kieschnick’s public repentance. Nothing less will suffice to reestablish our Synod’s clear witness to the world. As we sing in verse four of “O Word of God Incarnate”: *“Oh, make Thy Church, dear Savior, A lamp of burnished gold To bear before the nations Thy true light as of old!”*

What life, what blessed undoing of all that we have done, we have through faith in Jesus’ forgiving work, in His righteousness, in His holy innocent suffering and death, and in His resurrection from the dead! We are the baptized. Our dear Father awaits us. We “sold our brother to the Ishmaelites” for what—a few minutes at the world’s high altar of prayer [a borrowed analogy]. Let us all avail ourselves of His mercy and forgiveness, for our Jesus awaits us as Lord of heaven to hug and kiss our neck at the holy altar of His true body and blood.

As (now in 2010) a former pastor of a charter member congregation of The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod I fervently pray for the life of the Synod and for our president’s spiritual well-being at this sad time. He has stated more than once, publicly and privately, that he has not sinned in authorizing Benke to participate, therefore he will not repent (2/5/2010). We must see for him the danger caused by the stumbling block he has placed before Christ’s church. We must help him see the serious snare Satan has set for his own soul. We must consider for him the Lutherans of other lands, particularly the many Lutheran churches scattered throughout Africa, who face great peril and steady pressure to unite as one under the influence of the Lutheran World Federation. How does Kieschnick’s action appear to them? Is any position or action of the LWF churches any worse than Missouri’s own praying with the heathen? Is not that the ultimate act of unbelief in the Old Testament, to approach their place of prayer? Missouri, this is not the message we want to be sending. Help me convince President Kieschnick to repent.

*“. . . if salt has lost its saltiness . . .”* Be filled with what J. T. Mueller called “*a faith which fights*” for the truth, even Jesus Christ. For most in our Synod, Yankee Stadium is far behind them; it is over; we go on from here, without admitting error or repenting of sin. But already the leaven spreads, for we have our corrected view of how we can pray alongside the heathen when their priests are praying. It is called Serial Prayers. And yet, if those words mean anything, not even that new *doctrine of men* would allow President Kieschnick to do what he did at Yankee Stadium. Something is terribly wrong. Like Adam and Eve, the Synod is trying to cover itself with leaves rather than walk in the light in the presence of God, confessing its sin and being forgiven.

† soli deo gloria †