

Battling Unionism: President Kieschnick on the Administration of the Sacrament

Unionist clergyman and President of the LCMS Gerald Kieschnick wrote of the division among Missouri Synod pastors over who may commune at the altars we serve, as he also spoke of that division at the Southeastern District Convention this summer where I heard him speak firsthand. In neither case did Unionist President Kieschnick carry out his God-given responsibility and preach the Gospel, namely, tell us what Jesus says about the theology and practice of communion fellowship. Rather he allows the unionism at the altar of our Lord's most precious Blood to go on unchecked in our dear synod. At the same time might he be attempting to remove the practice and teaching of open communion from the realm of false doctrine among us? Excerpts from Kieschnick's letter to pastors:

Our confessional unity

Speaking of our unity in confession, this is one of the matters I have been discussing in the introduction to my video report that is being presented at each convention, whether I have been present in person or not. I am deeply moved by the response to my discussion of our oneness in confession.

Included in my introductory comments are these words: "Doctrinal unity in the LCMS remains a very important matter for the future of our Synod. As repeatedly written, resolved, and reaffirmed in our constitution, bylaws, doctrinal resolutions, and doctrinal statements, *the LCMS is exceptionally united in what we believe, teach, and confess.*" After listing 25 major doctrines on which our Synod is in agreement, I add, "This is what we believe, teach, and confess. This is what I believe, teach, and confess. While this list is not intended to include every doctrine of the Christian faith, it serves to illustrate that *we simply are not arguing or even debating the major doctrines of the Christian faith that are in contention in many parts of the Body of Christ. We are undeniably blessed with God given unity and harmony and have so much more that unites us than those things that would divide us!*"

Such unity is not to be taken lightly. Few, if any, other Christian church bodies enjoy the doctrinal unity that we share. Dear brothers in Christ, we are so blessed in what unites us!

Where we do differ

Having said the above in my convention report about our doctrinal unity, I do take note of areas in which we in the LCMS are *not* in agreement, citing four of them:

- "The administration of the Sacrament of Holy Communion, mainly the question of who should be invited or allowed to commune at the altar of our Lord in LCMS congregations.
- "The service of women . . .
- "Questions about proper forms of worship . . .
- "Inter-Christian relationships . . .

Finally, I note, "In the years ahead our Synod will need to continue to work under Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions to achieve similar solidarity in these matters. Where Scripture speaks plainly and clearly to the question at hand, the matter is resolved. Where Scripture does not speak plainly, clearly, or at all to the question at hand, it behooves us as a group of rational, reasonable, Christian people to come to a godly and common-sense conclusion regarding how to proceed with mutual respect and non-offensive conduct."

From President Gerald Kieschnick's "June 2009 Letter to Pastors"

Note what President Kieschnick does in these paragraphs:

"Where Scripture speaks plainly and clearly to the question at hand, the matter is resolved."

Does the administration of the Sacrament of the Altar fall into this category for President Kieschnick? If so, why does the trumpeter not sound a clear message? Why does the president of our beloved Synod bring up the division again and again without giving direction based on God's Word, if nothing else at least to defend our stated position?

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Or is this where President Kieschnick would place discussion of administering the Lord's Supper? If he did not place it here, he would undoubtedly act to enforce the Missouri Synod position of closed communion. He would ask every Circuit Counselor to get the public statement written or oral used at every congregation in his circuit and require that each be a statement of closed communion. In the very least, he would defend the synodical position. Yet, he does not. Rather he sets the matter out there as though it were undecided, as though it could go either way. To give up this ground to President Kieschnick, that is, to allow him without correction to speak in this way about the differing practices of administering the Lord's Supper in our Synod, is to give up the whole field.

President Kieschnick is a unionist theologian. He is unable or unwilling to distinguish the subtleties of various doctrinal aspects of Christian fellowship, so that he fails to teach and to lead as an Evangelical Lutheran faithful to the Lutheran Confessions and the God-breathed Holy Scriptures. President Kieschnick, with his followers in the vice-presidents of our church body and many district presidents, has left the Missouri Synod and he is trying to entice the pastors and congregations of the LCMS to follow. The uncertain sound of his trumpet is wreaking havoc on the Missouri Synod. For not many months go by before one hears of another congregation dismissing its pastor or trying to drive him out, often because he would be faithful to the Lord at His table and will not commune the ELCA son, Methodist grandmother or Presbyterian mother-in-law of this member or that.

President Gerald Kieschnick is a unionist, that is, he counts unity more important than doctrine. He is willing to sacrifice some doctrinal teaching(s) of Christ Jesus our Lord for the sake of outward unity in the church. He thereby allows the name of Jesus Christ to be profaned among us. Indeed, he is willing to compromise the highest and most holy teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ by allowing to commune at Missouri Synod Lutheran altars those who fail to publicly confess the truth of Christ's New Testament in His blood.

On the one hand, President Kieschnick argues that to be a Missouri Synod Lutheran means to publicly confess in total unity with one's fellow Missourians 25 or more central teachings of Jesus Christ. He celebrates this and invites all of us to do the same even when we disagree on one or two or three or four other teachings. On the other hand, when the member of the ELCA or the Baptist church or Presbyterian or Methodist or Roman Catholic approaches one of the altars at which a Missouri Synod pastor officiates and from which he distributes the most holy Blood of Jesus by which we were redeemed from Satan and death, all of a sudden all the teachings of their church bodies **CONTRARY TO CHRIST'S TEACHING AND OUR CONFSSION**, which they carry with them to the altar, are forgotten by President Kieschnick as he celebrates their **SUPPOSED** agreement with a few Lutheran Confessional teachings. I say "supposed" because that is all it can be when there has not been thorough discussion and instruction on the chief doctrines of Holy Scripture. For consider that even the phrase "Real Presence" is not a uniquely Lutheran one as it was used by John Calvin, though to speak of Christ spiritually, as pointed out in Professor David Scaer's article in [Understanding Four Views of the Lord's Supper](#).

Consider this carefully. In light of what I have pointed out here, is not President Kieschnick's admitted allowance of varying communion practices as explained in his letter and the ongoing division among us troubling? His words are "fast talk." They are "smooth talk" and deception.

Why not state plainly what the Holy Scriptures clearly teach regarding Christian unity and the Lord's Supper? First, one must be baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, the One True God. Secondly, one must say the same thing, be of the same mind, bring with one the same teaching, that is, the Apostles' doctrine (Matthew 28:20; Acts 2:42; Romans 15:6; Titus 1:9; 1 John 2:3-6). And thirdly, one must live an outwardly godly life.

It is no new teaching to assert this threefold obligation. Justin Martyr said the same thing in "First Apology" (c. 150):

(66) And this food is called among us *Eucharistia* [the Eucharist], of which no one is allowed to partake but the man who believes that the things which we teach are true, and who has been washed with the washing that is for the remission of sins, and unto regeneration, and who is so living as Christ has enjoined.

Of course, the second point above is the crux of the matter (the first mentioned by Justin), namely, must say the same thing, or as Justin puts it, "believes that the things which we teach are true." Therefore, so what if someone comes with **SUPPOSEDLY** the same teaching on

the Lord's Supper—at least they checked the Real Presence box, but confesses double predestination as a Presbyterian that God created some people for hell and thus Jesus did not die for all or intend for all to be saved; or confesses works righteousness and the sinlessness of Mary while denying complete forgiveness through Baptism as a Roman Catholic; or denies the total depravity of man and rejects the cleansing and saving power of Baptism as a Baptist; or does not actually discern the holy Body and Blood of Christ Jesus to be present and received under bread and wine at all—as becomes evident after the slightest inquiry as to the person's understanding of the Supper. Is a pastor or district president or synodical president being responsible of his guardianship of the Lord's Supper when he knowingly admits those outside our fellowship to the Lord's table, who always come with their public confession on their lips?

Perhaps President Kieschnick does not know this teaching of Jesus, or perhaps he does not like what Jesus teaches, or perhaps he knows and kind of likes what Jesus teaches but perhaps President Kieschnick likes unity more than he likes Jesus, His teaching or His name (remember Yankee Stadium). In any case, let us all be warned: "Evil men and imposters will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived; but as for you, continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them; and that from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:13-15).

Putting the best construction on everything, I believe that President Kieschnick has been deceived, from which deception he now (with genuine intentions) deceives others. Lord, have mercy on The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod.

We read of a similar situation in the Old Testament to what we face today. It was a divided church then when Abijah said to rebellious Jeroboam who sought to take Judah by force (Task Force on Structure),

"But as for us, the LORD is our God, and we have not forsaken Him; and the sons of Aaron are ministering to the LORD as priests, and the Levites attend to their work. And every morning and evening they burn to the LORD burnt offerings and fragrant incense, and the showbread is set on the clean table, and the golden lampstand with its lamps is ready to light every evening; **for we keep the charge [literally, "guard the things to be guarded"] of the LORD our God, but you have forsaken Him.**"
2 Chronicles 13:10-11

These words hearken back to an earlier scene during the days of Aaron, when Korah and his sons and then the 250 had brought great trouble on young Israel. The Lord said to Aaron,

"So you shall attend to the obligations of the sanctuary and the obligations of the altar [literally, "you shall guard the things to be guarded of the sanctuary and the things to be guarded of the altar"], that there may no longer be wrath on the sons of Israel."
Numbers 18:5

The most important charge Jesus Christ gave to His disciples was on the night of His betrayal and concerned the administration of the Lord's Supper, "Do this to bring Me to

remembrance.” In fact, to this certainly (but not exclusively) Jesus refers when in Matthew 28 He commissions the Apostles and says, “Teaching them to observe [that word regularly means ‘guard, watch over, preserve, keep’] all that I have commanded you . . .” What is more at the center of Jesus’ teaching and command than the New Covenant that has replaced the Old Covenant. If the Old Covenant was to be handled with the utmost care and was to be guarded always to be administered according to the Lord’s institution, how much more the New Covenant in His blood.

Thanks be to God for those faithful pastors who are guarding that which has been entrusted to them, the Mystery of the Blessed Sacrament, but woe to those who trifle with the Holy Things and profane the name of Christ by practicing open communion (which includes communing those whose confession is only “close” to our own). They treat as common the holy Blood by which they were redeemed. Perhaps it is time to reassert the need to guard against the “i” of the “like/same” (homoios instead of homoousios) debate at the time of Arius. “LIKE” TEACHING and “LIKE” CONFESSION is not enough, but let him who believes and says the SAME thing come forward and commune. SDG

Before anyone gets too excited about my publicly calling President Kieschnick a unionist, realize that I have already carefully and in proper order confronted President Kieschnick privately on the matter of his being a unionist, as Indiana District President Dan May can attest, and he has refused to repent and amend his ways, rejecting my admonition. I have also tried to communicate this through the proper channels of our Synod, namely, synodical resolution, which President Kieschnick himself blocked from being printed. You can read all about it in my article entitled “A Final Word on a Matter of Syncretism: Seeing the Big Picture and Calling a Spade a Spade,” which is available on the website of Trinity Lutheran Church, Tryon, North Carolina. President Kieschnick’s position revealed in his “June 2009 Letter to Pastors” is but further evidence of his unionistic thinking and ways.