

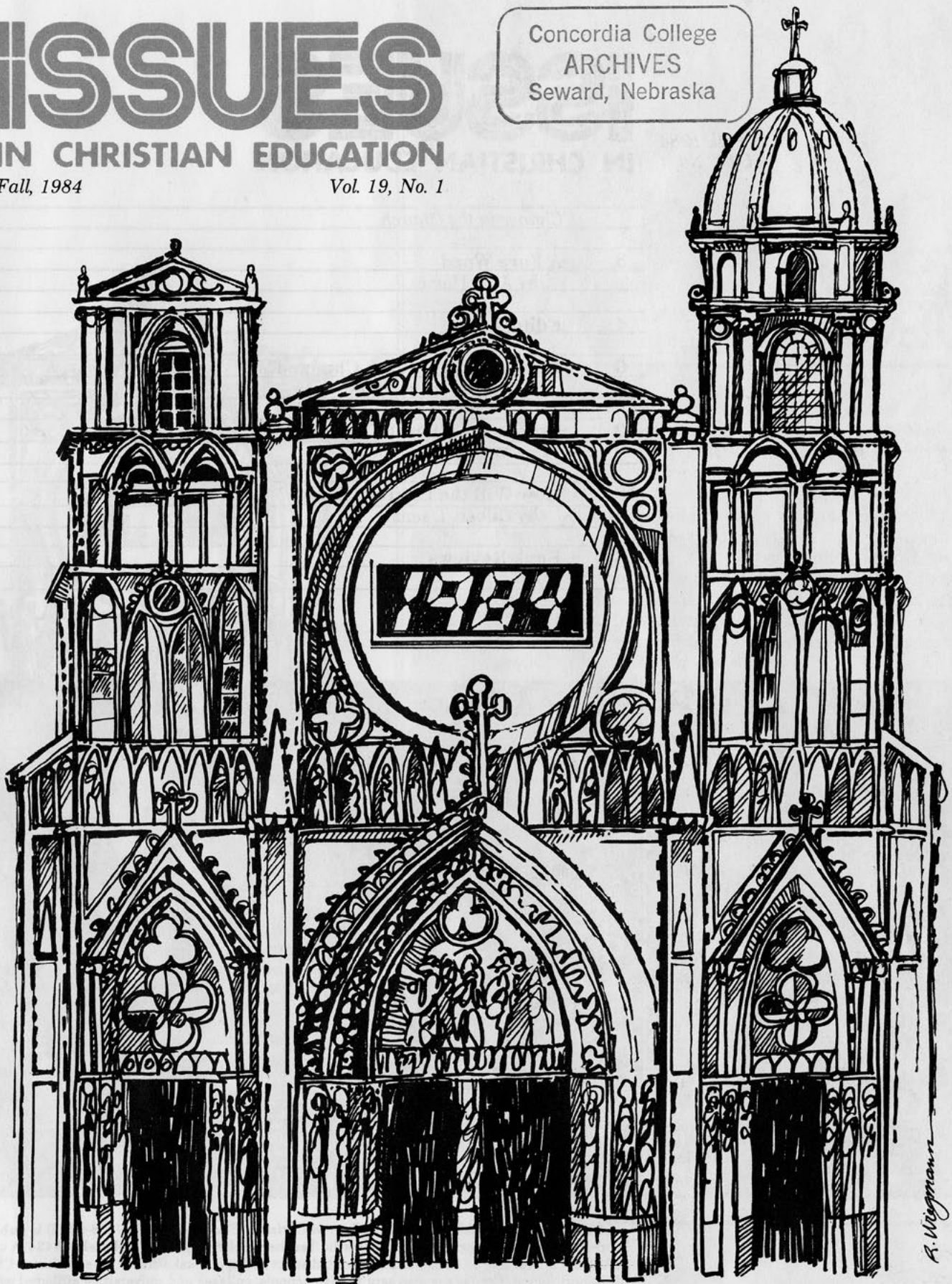
ISSUES

IN CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Fall, 1984

Vol. 19, No. 1

Concordia College
ARCHIVES
Seward, Nebraska



CHANGE IN THE CHURCH

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Change in the Church

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EDITOR'S NOTES

This number of *ISSUES* concerns itself with change and the effect change is having in our lives. One of the authors predicts computers will impinge on our lives and that, for the most part, this can be good if it saves us time, makes us more productive, etc.

One way the computer is affecting *ISSUES* readers and staff pertains to our mailing department. Addresses are being transferred to a computerized system. DO US A FAVOR BY HELPING OUR MAILING DEPARTMENT UPDATE OUR *ISSUES* LIST.

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Your cooperation will reduce the number of copies you receive and may help us reduce our printing costs as well. Please do it now.

We also use these notes to bid farewell to Dr. Alan Harre as he assumes the president's office at Concordia College, St. Paul, Minnesota. He

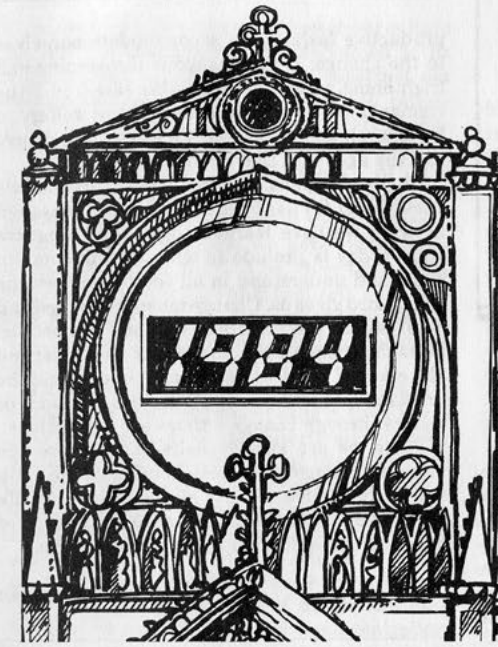
has been a valued member of the Editorial Committee. His insights have helped keep the focus of *ISSUES* on issues which concern its readers. His coordination of the editorials section has been excellent.

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All other authors of materials in this number of *ISSUES* are members of the Concordia Seward faculty.



A FORE WORD

"Change" is a word which usually evokes reactions and unleashes emotions. This six-letter word is capable of producing feelings that vary from one end of the spectrum to the other (joy, anticipation, curiosity, dread, fear and abhorrence). Such reactions are symptoms which are produced because of what people expect to gain or lose through the processes of change. Attempts to encourage change or to resist it produce conflicts between the individuals supporting and those resisting the proposed change. Anyone who has lived even a relatively short period of time knows these facts about change, yet this knowledge does not necessarily diminish the intensity of the feelings produced by change or by the lack of it.

In a church body that values an unchanging God, unchanging Scriptures and an unchanging confessional commitment to the content of the *Book of Concord* the emotions caused by change are even heightened. History has taught us that even subtle changes in formulations and practices, which seem initially to be minor and insignificant, can produce long range effects that are detrimental to our confessional witness. On the other hand, some changes have been so positive that we thank God for bringing about the changes in the life of the church. To ignore this body of knowledge and experience is irresponsible.

Therefore, in a world that seems to be changing ever more rapidly, it is important for Christians to take seriously the meaning of change in the life of the church. It is the hope of the editorial committee that this issue of *ISSUES* will be a springboard for moments of edifying reflection and for many constructive conversations about the subject of change, how change interfaces with our Christian faith and how to remain faithful to Scripture and the confessions in the context of the pervasive changes which are happening all around us.

We wish you pleasant and energizing reading.

Alan F. Harre
Acting President

CIRCULATION POLICY - *ISSUES* . . . in *Christian Education* (ISSN0278-0216) is published three times a year by the faculty of Concordia Teachers College, Seward, Nebraska 68434. A copy of *ISSUES* is sent free to each church, school, district and synodical office in The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. Copies are also sent to high schools, colleges and universities affiliated with the Synod.

Individuals wishing personal copies may obtain them as follows: Single copy @ \$1.00 each; Subscription @ \$3.00 per year; 10 or more copies mailed to the same address @ 60¢ per copy.

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TRANSCEND THE PAIN OF CHANGE

The task of the church and its agencies is to promote change. Christ commissioned His people to engage in the Spirit-led enterprise, the transformation of the world. Coming to faith is the result of God's gracious, powerful intervention in an individual's life. Sanctification is a continuing process of repentance, absolution, adoration and active love. This growth cycle is radical and therefore painful.

Learning and growth cannot occur without change. Change cannot be accomplished without cost. The cost of change is frequently experienced as shock, frustration, tension and anguish. The reward of change is insight, knowledge, joy and achievement.

Because the rewards of change are very desirable but the cost is severe, there is a tremendous temptation in schools and other agencies of the church to engage in pseudo change. Such fraudulent change is partial and incomplete. I label two expressions of this fraud the elixir prescription and the whitened sepulcher syndrome.

The elixir approach is characterized by the exclusion and avoidance of the cost of change. Some religious television approaches are an example of this approach. "He who loves father and mother or brother and sister more than me is not worthy of me" (Matt. 10:37). "Think not that I have come to bring peace but a sword" (Matt. 10:34). "No man builds a tower without first counting the cost" (Luke 12:28). These statements express the reality of the existence of pain whenever sanctifying change occurs. Teaching and preaching which ignore the reality of true change becomes promotional rather than transformational.

The whitened sepulcher syndrome denies the reality of the status quo by making cosmetic adjustments. This approach does not clearly identify the need for change. The result is that a gimmick or cute solution substitutes for substantial change. The bad solutions cover up the reality that should be addressed. These two approaches are two sides of the same counterfeit coin. One promotes exhibiting satisfaction without counting cost; the other markets artificial solutions.

I also distinguish between variety and change. Variety is the result of the application of alternative activities in worship and instruction. Variety occasionally requires preparation and debriefing but it is different from the change I have described. Variety increases stimulation, alertness and short time motivation.

Real change in our lives, schools and churches must begin with the honest and clear identification of a need to change. The change process continues when we apply the powerful presence of Christ to this need.

Eugene Oetting

"... BUT WE SHALL ALL BE CHANGED ..."

That is what St. Paul told the Christians in Corinth when he answered their questions about the resurrection of the dead (I Cor. 15:51). Change is certainly a fact of life for Christians. Furthermore, Christians look forward to change because through change death gives way to life and the uncertain present is transformed into the certain and glorious future!

Life in this world is a sequence of changes: birth—infancy—childhood—adolescence—young adulthood and mature adulthood—old age—death—resurrection. And the church throughout its history has continually experienced change. No human being and no institution with human beings in it can escape the reality of change.

To live is to change. To die is to be static and unchanging. Life is movement, and movement is change. The issue is not whether change happens. The issue is whether we will manage change or whether change will manage us. The issue, moreover, is not whether we want change to happen: to live is to change!

Given the reality of change—history is the record of change in this world—we must ask ourselves how we intend to cope with change. We can take one of four approaches. The first approach is to deny that change happens, to refuse to acknowledge the fact of change. In every age of the church, in every age of history, some have adopted this approach with greater or lesser consistency. Another approach is to adapt and accommodate oneself to the change that is occurring. This approach wants to retain the value of past heritage and tradition while moving forward to take into account new situations and developments. A third approach is to withdraw from change, to remove oneself from the uncomfortable changing situation. The fourth approach is to attack the change by destroying the change itself or by overcoming those who are urging that change take place.

Surprisingly enough, each of these four approaches to change can be appropriate, depending on the circumstances and situations under consideration. And, moreover, all of us have reacted to change in all of these four ways. If the change is moving us forward in a positive and

productive fashion, we accommodate ourselves to the change. If the change is threatening and frightening, we withdraw from the situation. If the change must be counteracted for the welfare of the church and ourselves, we attack the change and the agents of that change.

Change happens: nothing stands still! What we knew yesterday has been improved and seasoned by what we have learned today. And what we know today is prelude to what we will come to know and understand in all the tomorrows the Good Lord gives us. Change must be weighed and managed for the welfare of God and His people. Does the change advance the cause of Christ and His church? Or does the change undermine the proclamation of the Gospel? Victims of change or victors through change—those are our options.

Since we are already heirs in Christ to the ultimate change—the resurrection of life—we fearlessly receive and use all the changes of life for the welfare of church and society to the glory of Almighty God! Such is the church's faith.

James H. Pragman

BOUNDED RATIONALITY AND "SATISFICING" AS IMPEDIMENTS TO CHANGE IN THE CHURCH

The focus of this editorial is admittedly narrow. The point to be made here represents a small collection of some social scientific wisdom from the rich traditions of both organizational and anthropological thinking. One of the most elementary learnings from these perspectives is the notion of a worldview. It represents the driving force that produces the social configurations that emerge and become institutionalized in a given culture.

One of the significant elements of our own worldview has to do with our assumptions about how we "organize" ourselves. It has been stated by others that the primary driving force in our culture is not linked to primary groupings such as the family, but to a more culturally significant value system, that of work and the occupational structure. As such, our thinking is permeated by the cultural dictums of a "corporate" ordering of the world. It is also understandable that even our religious life (nourished from the religious organizations that we occupy and maintain) reflects the power of such a pervasive mental construct. Nonetheless, it is the reliance on this element of our world view, I will argue, that impedes some significant changes in the Church.

Some years ago, theorists James March and Herbert Simon elaborated on the work of the eminent Max Weber by presenting several con-

cepts identifying how organizations in our culture operate. Since efficiency is highly valued in the world we live in, we necessarily construct our organizations as bastions of "bounded rationality," wherein we "satisfice," or tolerate a satisfactory rather than a maximum level of performance. The boundedness of the organizations we inhabit consists of a reliance on perceptions of how to go about the business of doing whatever it is that we have defined our organization's "charter" to be. Over time, these perceptions become institutionalized, and often take on a life of their own, creating the impression that they represent ultimate and unchallengeable truth—hence the term.

Bounded rationality and "satisficing" begin to be obstacles to meaningful change in the Church when we fail to look introspectively at these "social facts" in operation within the confines of our own church body. The history of mission in Missouri-Synod, for example, allows us to view one aspect of the organization's bounded rationality. The unique scholastic confessionism of our religious worldview represents an early illustration of the definition of the church's mission as one of homogenization, with the historical result of a largely mono-ethnic membership. The recent bureaucratization of the church is another illustration of how the church has bounded itself by its occupational stratification (the role of the professional church worker), and the gradual disenfranchisement of the laity in the decision-making process, creating the aura of "Zion on the Mississippi."

Similarly, "satisficing" is one consequence of the successful bureaucratization of organizations, and has led to the repeated critique of the contemporary church as being inauthentic. Gibb and Morton's caricature of a church is pertinent:

St. Exurbanite is a fine fellowship—indeed a cozy club of fellowship, moving from summer tennis to autumn barbeque, from youth dances to old folks' film shows. And yet, though all these may be worthy... social groups... a fellowship which consists only in doing such things together is quite damnable...

Thinking concerning church growth and renewal as aspects of change in the Church must confront the realities of the cultural baggage of our corporate worldview. Indeed, it is imperative to note that unless the true mission of the Church is constantly before us (which has to do with disclosing the fact of Christ's lordship over all things, being servants of men, and thereby acting out the unity of God's reconciling love), we will be all too willing victims of corporate pressure in a hostile culture that mires in the slop of institutional procedures, is controlled by bureaucratic policy-makers, and persecutes churches that are really being the Church.

W. Michael Woodburn

CHANGE IN THE CHURCH

The phenomenon of change is common to all historical times. The first parents of the human race were evicted from Paradise because of a change in their condition. Jesus was confronted with changes in His earthly environment. Martin Luther entered the pages of history as an advocate of change. The Saxon fathers settled in Missouri hoping to escape what they perceived to be undesirable change.

Most often, debates concerning change in the church have sought to determine whether such change is desirable or undesirable. Some Christians have devoutly supported perpetuation of the imagined perfections of the past. They have seen the church "threatened" by introduction of English worship services, the individual communion cup and the demise of the *klengelbeutel* for gathering offerings. A line from a favorite hymn laments, "Change and decay in all around I see." Have some Christians equated change with decay?

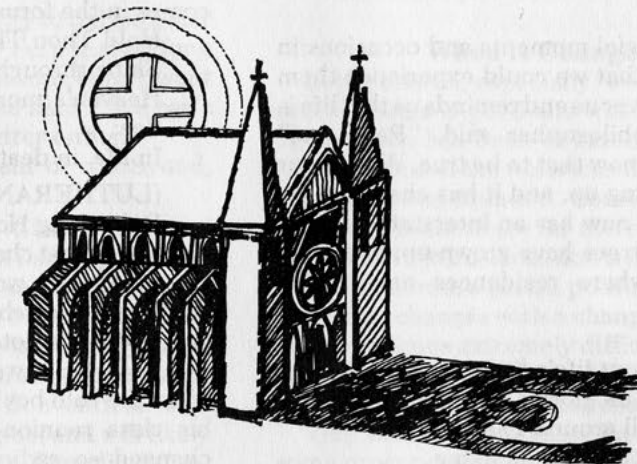
The church has also been subjected to its quota of apostles of change. Some of them seek indiscriminately to modernize the church. The church may be asked to accept the homosexual life as an acceptable alternative lifestyle. It may be asked to deny the rights of unborn children in order to defend the newly-acquired rights of liberated women. It may be asked to embrace contemporary music at the expense of the great musical heritage of the Renaissance.

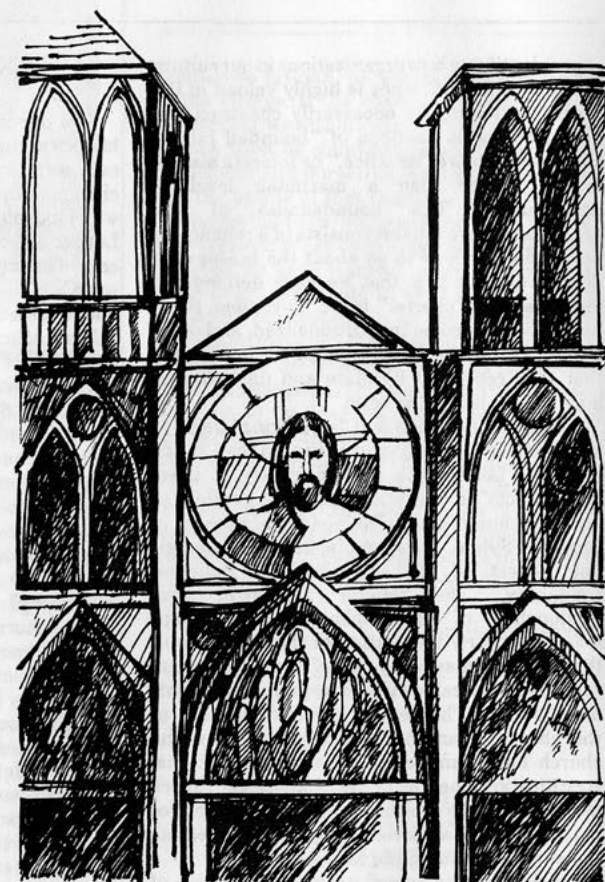
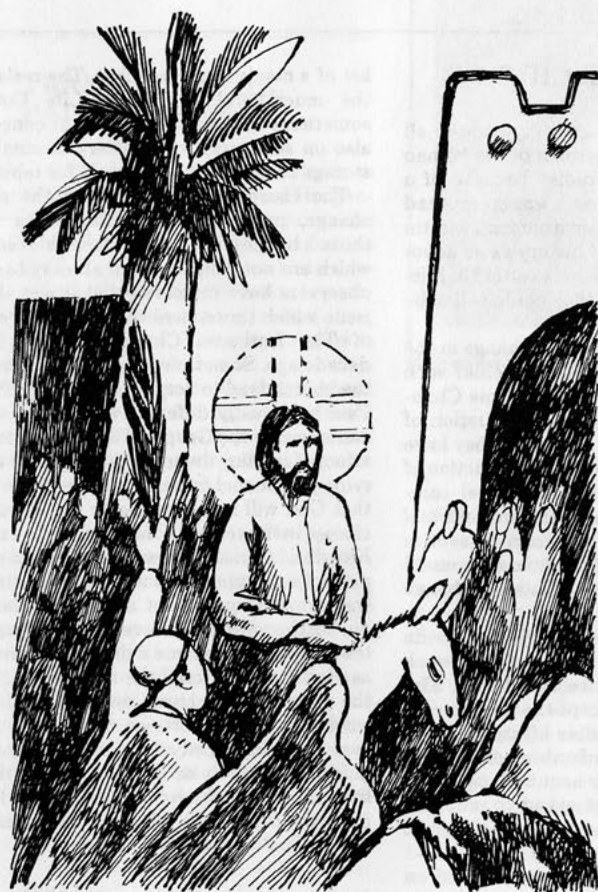
Some changes in the church are resisted on bases which are practical rather than doctrinal in nature. The larger 1941 hymnal was unpopular because it did not readily fit into the inside poc-

ket of a man's Sunday jacket. The resistance to the much-heralded Mission-Life Curriculum sometimes centered on doctrinal concerns but also on such practical matters as cumbersome storage or inadequate manuals for teachers.

The church, having accepted the reality of change, must learn to differentiate between those changes which are desirable and those which are not. This is never an easy task. Some observers have indicated that it was this basic issue which threatened the continued existence of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod a decade ago. Sometimes sharp differences within the church lead to very salutary ends. Peter and Paul held vastly different views as to the basic audience for the Gospel. The difference had the effect of sending them on their separate ways carrying the Gospel into new regions. Who is to say that God will not continue to use debates over change in the contemporary church to extend His Kingdom? Christians need once more to study the perfect example of Jesus. He conformed to the traditional requirement of visiting the temple during the week of Passover. But, having entered the temple, He became a dramatic change agent as He forcibly evicted the moneychangers from the temple. The church needs such discerning wisdom as it supports or resists change in an ever-changing society. May the Spirit continue to guide the church as it seeks to identify those limited areas in which change cannot be tolerated from the adiaphora which so often needlessly divide God's people.

Lee Roy Holtzen





by August R. Suelflow

Most of us have had special moments and occasions in our lives when we wished that we could experience them forever. But reality comes over us and reminds us that life is even as the old Greek philosopher said, "Panta rei" (everything is in flux). We know that to be true. We see our home where we were growing up, and it has changed; the community where we lived now has an interstate running through it; all the familiar trees have grown up; huge factories have been built where residences once stood before.

The poet reminds us:

Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day
Earth's joys grow dim, its glories pass away;
Change and decay in all around I see;
Oh Thou who changest not, abide in me.

This has been a beloved evening hymn for many decades and is probably a good stanza to look at as we talk about changes in the church, particularly since the final stanza comes in the form of a prayer:

Hold Thou Thy cross before my closing eyes,
Shine through the gloom and point me to the skies;
Heaven's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee;

In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me.

(LUTHERAN WORSHIP, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1982, Hymn 490)

To deny that changes have taken place in the church over the past years would be folly. Even as we look at The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and its 6,000 congregations we note that constant changes have occurred. But, sometimes we don't fully realize them, as for example when the "old boy" comes back for the 50th anniversary of his class reunion and is amazed that the others have changed so radically, never realizing that he, too, has

how has the church changed?

changed equally as much. This also underscores the fact that so many things change, and we change with them. It is impossible to hold back the clock.

It is only a little boy who has the audacity to tell his older brother as they are watching television: "Turn that off for a few moments, so that I can go to the washroom. I don't want to miss any part of that show when I come back." We can't stop the clock nor change it for that matter either.

Dr. Oliver R. Harms, former president of the Synod, wrote about change this way:

In many respects The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod is not the same as it was in 1847 simply because the world and the people are not the same as they were more than 120 years ago. The issues before the church from time to time and place to place have changed. At the same time some of these issues are remarkably the same in every place and every time. Conventions have served a wholesome purpose in the past and will likely do so in the future." (Oliver R. Harms, Synodical Con-

ventions: A Theological Perspective," CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY, Volume XL, No. 5, May 1969, p. 268)

When is Change Good? Evil?

In the church, especially, we need to ask ourselves how much change is good and when is change evil? This is an issue which has been debated among the churches ever since any one of the American denominations which we can recognize was founded. Some changes are very easy to note, while others are far more subtle.

Perhaps a word of caution is in order. We need to be careful not to confuse social, political, economic, geographical and other changes with a change in doctrine and theology. It is sometimes extremely difficult to tell whether a change is a sociological-theological issue, a medical-theological or even a political-theological change.

Very often people enter into a debate on change with some preconceived notions, with ideas that have been for-

mulated purely on the basis of their personal lives, their individual experiences, and their place of work. At other times it may be the experience of the church two or three generations ago. Thus, it often happens that any theological aspects which may be involved and are part of the changing scene are blurred or homogenized to such a degree that they cannot be easily isolated.

For example, a visitor came and worshiped with a little congregation in a well-kept white frame building. The members were friendly enough, but about the middle of the sermon the entire congregation moved from the right side to the left side of the sanctuary. The visitor alone remained on the right side and was deeply puzzled. After the service he promptly spoke to an usher and wanted to find out the reason for such action. But nobody could tell him. All responded: "We have done that ever since I was young." Finally the visitor found aged Grandpa Schmidt. Hopping over his cane, Grandpa Schmidt was at first a bit puzzled at the question, too. But then suddenly his eyes lit up. When he first attended worship services in that same church more than 80 years ago, the congregation had a huge potbellied stove on the right side of the building. On cold Sunday mornings the fire had just been started and all "congregated" as close to the stove as they possibly could. But then, during the middle of the sermon, it started to radiate such heat that as one person, they got up and moved to the opposite side of the church. Grandpa Schmidt chuckled when he said: "That stove was replaced with hot air heat some 75 years ago, but we have continued to move from right to left ever since." Tradition can become an irrational force.

Of course, it is only too true that we are intimately involved in both our physical and our spiritual environment. The greater such intimate interrelatedness, the more difficult it is to extricate what God is saying on a given issue. It is at that time that the Christian must very seriously ask, what does God tell me to do? What does He expect of me? The church corporate may sometimes even find that more difficult to discern than an individual. Because corporate churches, too, are also being influenced by the changes that are taking place on the passing scene. At one time "situation ethics" was extremely popular and at another time voices were shouting that "God is dead."

Integrity and Integration as Forces of Change

The church - any church - is always engaged in making decisions between two poles. We can label the one INTEGRITY, whose meaning includes everything which is considered essential for the existence of the church and particularly its message in its most irreducible form. We in The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod say that our integrity is drawn from the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions and that the proclamation of the Gospel of forgiveness through Jesus Christ, our Savior, to a sin-sick world is the essence of our integrity. We call that our "formal principle" in theological language.

But as soon as we have identified the pole of integrity as an irreducible minimum, we begin to realize that it may also

include the literature of our church body, or at least some of it; public expressions of our faith and towards issues; traditional interpretations and pronouncements; and perhaps even some cultural remnants which simply will not go away. Some churches, according to this definition have a very large source for their integrity, and others an exceptionally small one. For some the "autonomy of the local congregation" may be the only significant message that they have, while for others, there is a series of documents a mile long.

In contrast to INTEGRITY, we place the word INTEGRATION at the other pole. This has no reference to race whatsoever, but rather could be summarized as the mission of the church in an unreceptive world. Even as Christ was rejected in His own society and was told that He was inspired by the devil, so the Christian church, too, will find that there is a certain amount of hostility to its message as the gospel is being proclaimed in a radically different environment. But the negatives of the process by which the mission of a church will be received may become acculturated, standardized, assimilated, or absorbed as elements of an incompatible religion which we call syncretism. On the other hand, theological erosion may be threatened. Then the church may well respond by building up higher and higher walls to protect its theological integrity. Thus isolation from society may result. When the church's message (integrity) is not met with any kind of opposition whatsoever, it may be entirely possible that either nobody is listening or that the church does not have a distinct message, but is merely going through the motions.

Perhaps we could compare these concepts to a football player who is zealously carrying the ball. He scores a touchdown only if he brings the ball through the goal posts. But he must possess the ball. The opposition on the other hand, the friction of the integration spoken of earlier, causes his purposes and objectives to be thwarted. He strives, but is tackled and in the process he loses the ball. If he would be so foolish as to get up, dust off his uniform and run victoriously through the goal posts, he will have lost his integrity and become a laughingstock. On the other hand, equally dangerous, may be the football player's insistence that if the ball is, indeed, so dramatically important and valuable, then perhaps he ought to take it and deposit it in a security safe in a bank vault. The former lost his integrity and the latter is preserving it. But in neither case is there any integration. The message of the Gospel of forgiveness also serves no useful purposes when it has either been lost or is preserved in isolation.

At all times, churches must not only operate under these twin focal forces, but must also seriously evaluate how they are transmitting their vital message (integrity) and how they are being integrated by the manner in which an individual or a community accepts their message. In the history of American Christianity, churches would have fared far better had they felt the strong pressures to preserve their integrity while at the same time proclaiming this integrity (missions; integration) instead of making

decisions based on practical issues, policy, etc.

A church must ascertain whether or not it has become encrusted with man-made traditions and practices, considers such as part of its integrity and in this way has developed a man-made Gospel. Further, churches should constantly re-evaluate their transmission, or mission, or integration process. The church should be involved simultaneously in preserving its integrity and in the process of integration without really being conscious of either one, as a person inhales and exhales without giving much thought to either. As breathing is natural, so it ought to be the most natural thing for churches to worship and proclaim. The person who is ill becomes aware of a respiratory problem. Churches, too, are ill if they are troubled by re-evaluating their integrity and integration.

Changes in Worship Services

Having said this much we need also to move one step further in this discussion of the changes which have occurred in the church. First, some changes may be extremely beneficial while others may be harmful. This may not be too apparent at the time a decision is made, either consciously or unconsciously. In fact, it appears that all too often changes are officially made after they have been unofficially practiced for some time. This all depends on how a church defines its "integrity." For example, after the immigration of the 1830s and 40s, there were people who felt that Lutheranism could be properly preserved only via the German language. Several congregations even prohibited the use of any other language but the German in an unalterable paragraph of their constitutions. For a brief period, the Chippewa Indian children in Frankenmuth, Michigan were taught German so that they might get a better grasp on Lutheran doctrine. We may smile benignly at such positions today. However, when a congregation adds a certain practice, specifies a language, etc. as an unalterable way of doing things, this becomes a part of that congregation's "integrity." There are many things which we feel are "musts" concerning our life together in the church. How many of us wouldn't be terribly upset if we were forced to worship without an organ, or if the ushers had forgotten to light the candles?

Earliest constitutions of the Synod required exclusive use of the German language at its conventions. This actually appeared as one of the conditions for joining the Synod. Only "guests" were afforded the privilege of addressing the delegates of the convention in another language if they were unable to use German. If that were still a condition of speaking at conventions today, hardly a single resolution would be adopted.

Some of the readers may still remember that many, many years ago it was the common, accepted practice, only rarely questioned, that the women and younger children sat on the right side of the church while the men occupied the left. The young people very frequently flirted on the balcony. Very often the elders occupied an especially honored pew at the front of the church.

Or, who does not remember the old black "Geneva

gown"? Usually the *Beffchen* (bands) of the German worshipers and the "ruff" for the Norwegian worshipers was considered an essential part of the pastor's apparel when conducting public worship. In fact, one of our pioneer Canadian pastors, who was serving a group of Germans from Russia, had inadvertently left his black Geneva gown at home in his haste to get to the distant church on time. When he arrived there he noticed to his great consternation that he had forgotten his gown but he had his *Beffchen*. Hastily he convened the elders and explained to them that the wearing of a gown for worship service was not of great importance and that a business suit would do. But, he emphasized that a Lutheran pastor wearing the *Beffchen*, representing the Law and Gospel, was the real mark of the authority to conduct public worship. Consider further that the surplice with or without a stole became extremely popular and more recently has already been replaced by the alb. Certainly, comparing *The Lutheran Hymnal* introduced in 1941 and *Lutheran Worship* in 1982 will demonstrate most noticeably the changes which have taken place in our worship and hymnody.

Let's look at a few other changes which have taken place. Note the church's attitude toward usury, which originally meant charging of excessive interest, even more than the law allowed. Dr. C.F.W. Walther opposed charging of interest as a matter of principle, arguing that the person who had the ability to lend money was taking undue advantage of an individual who needed to borrow. Yet, some of the entities of the Synod charged interest when they lent monies from their surplus capital.

New Views on Insurance, Dancing, Etc.

Consider the church's position on life insurance (*Lebensversicherung*) and lightning arrestors (*Blitzableiter*). Both were opposed because it was felt that people would become more dependent on such provisions than upon God's benevolent protection.

It was argued that life insurance was a gamble since the insured took a chance on the amount of time which God had granted him to live. If the person could beat the actuarial rates, the beneficiaries would receive benefits which they had not earned. The argument continued that in addition to expressing a lack of faith in God, the life insurance business all too often was a risky business because it often was managed by unbelievers. And yet, as early as 1858, upon the premature death of Professor Adolf Biewent at age 41, a special support plan was set up in the Synod to aid widows and orphans by founding a separate support society. Gradually over the years it has developed into the sophisticated and inclusive "Concordia Plans" operated by the Synod. What is more, two of the largest fraternal life insurance firms in America proudly carry the name "Lutheran" in their corporate titles.

In spite of the fact that the literature of the church advised against the use of lightning arrestors, many congregations installed them because they felt that they simply made good sense. Lightning arrestors were gadgets which were placed on the peak of the roof with a grounding

wire going down the side of the building. it was assumed that they would divert many an electrical charge during thunderstorms and preserve the church building from fire.

In the realm of the family, extensive changes have also taken place in the church with respect to attitudes on engagement, marriage, divorce and birth control. In the same vein *Schwagerehe*, or prohibited degrees of marriage of those closely related by a blood relationship or by a previous marriage, was prohibited. There is an instance of a seminary student who broke his engagement and married another. He was severely disciplined as a result. The reason for that was the fact that engagement was at one time considered tantamount to marriage. In the same vein, in previous decades, a very strict discipline was exercised when an unhappy marriage was dissolved in divorce. It seemed simple to identify the "guilty party" and to exercise church discipline on him or her, while the "innocent party" went comparatively free. Only two valid reasons were given for divorce, namely, fornication and malicious desertion. But then, society, family and ecclesiastical life were far less complex. Often times the secretary of the voters' assembly recorded in great detail the difficulties encountered by a husband and wife. This was a part of the voters' process to determine guilt or innocence. Earlier in our history other than natural forms of birth control were frowned upon.

Another area where changes in the church's position have taken place is in the entertainment world, including card playing, going to the theater and dancing. One only needs to read Theodore Graebner's *THE BORDER LAND OF RIGHT AND WRONG* (St. Louis: CPH, Eighth Edition, 1951) to become aware of some of these changes.

Pastoral theology books which have been used during the earlier period of the Synod in the training of future pastors went into considerable details warning young people against the evils of the dance, attending kissing parties, going to theaters and movies with their sex appeal, reading salacious literature, and immodest attire. Christian youth were to ask before engaging in such recreations whether they could "take Jesus with them." Consequently, in many instances, they did not engage in such practices. Today it appears that the church has adjusted to movies, certain types of dancing, etc. The contemporary literature of the church treats such subjects with silence.

The Changing Role of Women

Times, circumstances, and even society provide for modifications and changing attitudes and applications of Scriptural principles. This can also be seen in the role of women in the church. There is no doubt about the fact that at one time they provided the role of *Kinder, Kirche and Kuche*. Often times this was an extremely fulfilling role. During the demanding pioneer days women prepared all foods in the kitchen to feed the hungry mouths of large families, baked and also canned for winter's needs. It was also their responsibility to grow the vegetables, pick the berries that went into the jams and jellies, spin the wool, knit it into socks and

mitten, buy the bolts of cloth and sew the family clothing. "Man works from sun to sun, but women's work is never done" was the adage.

But economics, inventions, traditions, cultural changes, etc. have modified that role. Entering the teaching profession in the church's schools marked an early breakthrough. An early report on parish schools of the Synod indicates that in 1884 there were a total of 13 women teachers. The number increased to 115 in 1897. Discussions ensued whether women, according to Scriptural principles, would be permitted to teach in the classrooms of the Synod's elementary schools. Most maintained that she could teach children and thus also serve as a public servant of the Word. It is interesting that by 1922, 343 women teachers were reported as serving in the various schools in the parish. (August C. Stellhorn, *SCHOOLS OF THE LUTHERAN CHURCH-MISSOURI SYNOD*, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1963, p. 344)

By 1941 the Synod clarified its position on women teachers; it stated that the woman teacher, though having a limited public ministry, nevertheless, as a teacher of children formed a part of public ministry. In 1947 women teachers and women graduates of the teacher training institutions also received a "Solemn Agreement" which probably had been partially in use, patterned after those which male teachers had been receiving for years. From that point on, the Synod, when discussing the role of the parish school teacher, included both men and women. The last major change occurred in 1983 when the Synod adopted resolution 5-09A "To Classify Ministers of Religion" and thereby included female Lutheran elementary, secondary and college teachers, with certain qualifications, as "Ministers of Religion, Commissioned." (*PROCEEDINGS*, 1983, pp. 178-179)

The role of women in the local parish has also changed immeasurably. This synodical change occurred in 1969 when the Synod adopted Resolution 2-17 "To Grant Women Suffrage and Board Membership." The resolution gave women the franchise in congregational and synodical assemblies by the adoption of that resolution which states:

"Those statements of Scripture which direct women to keep silent in the church and which prohibit them to teach and to exercise authority over men, we understand to mean that women ought not to hold the pastoral office or serve in any other capacity involving the distinctive functions of this office." (*PROCEEDINGS*, 1969, p. 88)

In spite of the resolution, questions concerning "full membership of women on synodical boards, commissions, and committees" as well as "exercising the franchise in congregational or synodical assemblies" has been severely criticized. Nevertheless, the action in 1969 does, indeed, document a significant change in the manner in which the Synod arranges its affairs.

Alterations in Prayer Fellowship

Prayer fellowship is a practice which has been altered

twice in the history of the Synod. When the Synod was originally organized in 1847, its practice of "prayer fellowship" especially at public meetings was materially different than the practice which was initiated in the midst of the hotly debated Predestinarian Controversy of the 1880s. Perhaps some of the strongest documentary evidence which one can submit are the records of the "Free Conferences" held between 1856-1859. These sessions all were opened with a hymn, prayer, and the Apostles' Creed, similarly closed, even though the individuals participating in these conferences were not members of church bodies with which the Missouri Synod was officially affiliated.

The same is also true with respect to several of the "Colloquies" which were conducted by representatives of the Missouri Synod with representatives of other synods between which the "declared fellowship" did not exist. This was true with respect to the Buffalo Synod with whom Missouri's representatives met in late 1866. Although the controversy between the two synods raged for more than a decade, the colloquy between the two synods was opened with a hymn, a reading of Scripture, a prayer, and the Lord's Prayer. The colloquy with the Iowa Synod, another synod with which Missouri had engaged in violent controversy, invited Missouri to a colloquy in 1867. Although the relationships were intensely antagonistic, the colloquy was opened with a brief service, nevertheless, conducted by a Missouri Synod pastor. Individual sessions of that colloquy lasting approximately a week, were also opened with a reading from the Scriptures. One can cite quite a number of additional examples, including the sessions in 1866 consisting of a preliminary meeting leading to the formation of a General Council. Devotions, indeed, were conducted. The Missouri representative opened the first session of that meeting with a prayer. (*PROCEEDINGS*, 1864 & 1866, p. 14)

But a very important change occurred in 1881, after the intense, acrid and disruptive controversy on election was at its intensist. The controversy had not only brought internal strife to the Missouri Synod but also alienated several of the Synod's friends within the recently organized Synodical Conference (1872). At its convention in 1881 the Missouri Synod included in its instructions to its delegates to the next Synodical Conference the following: "You are not to recognize any synod as a member of the Synodical Conference, which, as such, makes the accusation of Calvinism against us." (*PROCEEDINGS*, 1881, p. 45)

It was also at the same convention that the Synod adopted the so-called "Thirteen Theses" or propositions on predestination. This clarified the issue for the Missouri Synod, but its position had been termed Calvinistic by the opponents. After various attempts at reconciliation, during the colloquy engaged in by the Synodical Conference faculties held in Milwaukee in January 1881, an anti-Missourian periodical reported that all of the ten sessions had been opened with a joint worship and had also been concluded with the Lord's Prayer. Then F.A. Schmidt, the editor, added almost in parenthetical afterthought that upon the motion of a member of the Missouri Synod, the last

session on Monday afternoon was concluded with "silent prayer." (*ALTES UND NEUES*, Volume 2, January 1881, pp. 26-27) This became a pronounced turning point in Missouri's fellowship practices. Prior to this time Missouri engaged in prayer fellowship with other Lutherans when discussing theological differences. At this point in its history, when Missouri was accused of Reformed or Calvinistic heresy, its position changed. The question for Missouri was whether the other Lutherans with whom it was in controversy could pray with her, the Calvinistic Synod? To this the answer was no. This later became practice for virtually all meetings conducted to overcome the differences existing among the various synods. The practice which was then applied to fellow Lutherans continued until the Fort Wayne and Saginaw conventions, in 1941 and 1944 when the Synod, in a resolution, adopted the following:

"We affirm the position taken at the Fort Wayne Convention, page 303, paragraph 11, 'that in the meantime it be understood that no pulpit, altar, or prayer fellowship has been established between us and the American Lutheran Church; and until such fellowship has been officially declared by the synods concerned, no action is to be taken by any of our pastors or congregations which ignores the fact that we are not yet united.'

"However, joint prayer at intersynodical conferences, asking God for His guidance and blessing upon the deliberations and discussions of His Word, does not militate against the resolution of the Fort Wayne Convention, provided such prayer does not imply denial of truth or support of error. Local conditions will determine the advisability of such prayer. Above all, the conscience of a brother must not be violated nor offense be given." (*PROCEEDINGS*, 1944, pp. 251-252)

Considerable discussions about this position, at variance with that held by a sister synod of the Synodical Conference, did not modify it, but this together with several other differences ultimately disrupted the Synodical Conference totally.

Does Doctrine Change?

What about doctrinal or theological changes in the Missouri Synod? Perhaps a comparison will be helpful. Let us define the doctrinal position of the Synod as the faith which compels to action. Then faith or the theological position and the manner in which such action is taken corporately can be compared to a kind of a sprocket wheel.

1. The core of the hub of that wheel is the faith, the doctrine, the theological content (integrity) of what we believe, teach and confess, (cf. Article II, the Synod's Constitution)

2. Spokes radiate out from that hub, from faith, which produces faith in action such as helping the Samaritan who is beaten and robbed; proclaiming the Gospel of our Lord

Jesus Christ, defending against schism and sectarianism, training professional church workers; engaging in teaching; supervising and protecting pastors and teachers, protecting congregations; printing church literature and other resources; choosing media in preaching the Gospel, preserving the unity of the faith, etc., etc. A good place to check on these functions is in the synodical Constitution, Article III "Objectives."

3. At the end of each spoke appear several specific things that we do as a result of our faith which compels functions, and the function in turn seeks forms to carry them out as effectively as possible. These forms are largely detailed in the Bylaws of the Synod and can change very frequently.

All forms may change at every convention of the Synod, and even functions may change, because the different needs and circumstances to which our faith responds may be changing. But faith never dare change!

A good test of the faith, the confessing, believing and teaching content of a church is as the first president of the LC-MS suggested in his convention essay to the Western District of 1873. He began his presentation with the bold statement that the "doctrine of the Lutheran church alone gives all glory to God, an irrefutable proof that its doctrine alone is true!" That is the severe litmus test. To whom does our doctrine, with all of its ramifications and its explications as revealed in the divine Word and expressed in the ecumenical creeds and the historic Lutheran Symbols give glory? (CFR Theo. Tappert, THE BOOK OF CONCORD, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959) As Dr. Francis Pieper emphasized several years ago:

"It will certainly not do to define as 'dogma' any doctrine which merely 'asks for, or claims to have, the sanction of the church.' The correct definition is: That dogma is a church dogma which is taken from the 'manual' of the Christian Church, from Holy Scripture, and every dogma which does not have its origin in Scripture is unchurchly. As matters stand, it cannot be otherwise. The Christian Church has no doctrine of its own; it possesses, teaches, and confesses only Christ's doctrine." (Francis Pieper, CHRISTIAN DOGMATICS, St. Louis: CPH, 1950 English translation, Volume 1, p. 99)

Dr. Repp wrote in 1967 an article on change:

"If doctrine is used in that sense it must be stoutly maintained that there has been no change in the Missouri Synod. Every pastor and professor in his ordination vow, and again when he is installed into a teaching office or into another parish, accepts without reservation the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament as the written Word of God and the only rule and norm of faith and practice; and all the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church contained in the Book of Concord as a true and unaltered statement, an exposition of the Word of God." (Article II Sections 1 and 2 of the Synodical Constitution)

"In the Missouri Synod, Scripture is still the sole governing norm of faith, the *norma normans*. No thesis

is more heartily and sincerely affirmed than 'Verbum Dei Manet In Aeternum.'" (The Word of God endures into eternity.) (Repp, "Changes in the Missouri Synod" in CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY, Volume XXXVIII, No. 7, July-August 1967, p. 458)

The Lutheran Confessions are considered the *norma normata*. Not only are they subscribed to at the time of ordination and installation, but they establish what the "public doctrine" of the congregations, pastors and teachers of the Synod is in fact.

Walther has an interesting observation in his 1873 essay at the Western District convention on the position of Scripture. He stressed that the Lutheran Church must engage in self-examination by checking whether its doctrinal position was indeed giving all glory to God alone. He emphasized that:

"Here our Church confesses (in the Apology) that every word, every sentence structure, every repetition of any word, every abbreviation, the entire manner and method of speaking has its origin in the Holy Spirit, who has inspired everything, not only the truths, not only the meanings, not only the 'what' but also the 'how,' who has selected the words necessary so that the mind of God could be correctly revealed to us. That this is the teaching of Holy Scripture itself is clear to every Christian." (Aug. R. Suelflow, translator, series editor, CONVENTION ESSAYS: SELECTED WRITINGS OF C.F.W. WALTHER, St. Louis: CPH, 1981, p. 27)

A little later he ties that statement together with subscription to the Lutheran Confessions:

"That our Lutheran church believed and confessed this already in the 16th century is proved by the reference, among others, quoted from the Apology. Anyone who pledges himself to the symbolical books and permits himself to be installed into the ministry and does not believe this teaching is a miserable scoundrel."

Consequently, one of the bench marks of doctrine in the church is whether it gives all glory to God alone. Hence the church must repeatedly review and re-evaluate its doctrinal position, not only as to what it believes, but also as to what it proclaims, teaches and confesses. It must ask itself whether it, in fact, really gives all glory to God alone or whether a tiny jot or tittle is done to the glory of man. Thank God that there has been no doctrinal change in The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod in its long history of 137 years! Changes in function and in form? Yes, indeed! The church is in the world to serve God (*Gottesdienst*) and to proclaim the precious Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, to work and to confess.

(Continued on page 24)

how is the church changing?

by M.J. Stelmachowicz

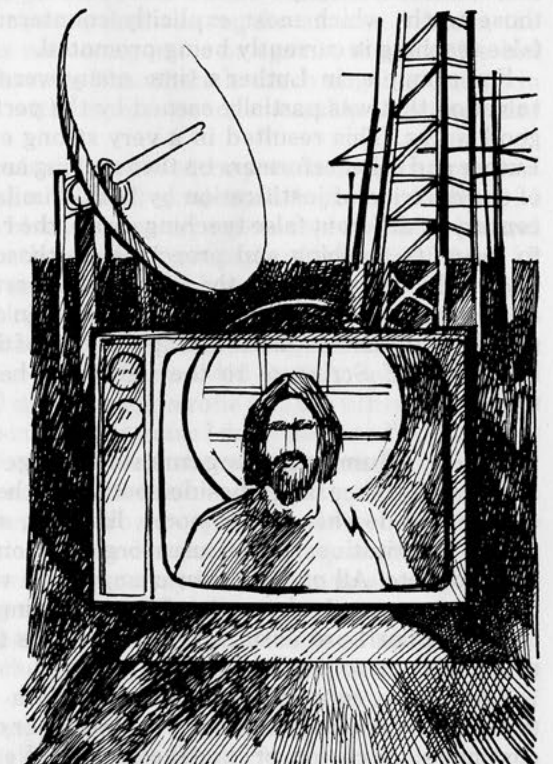
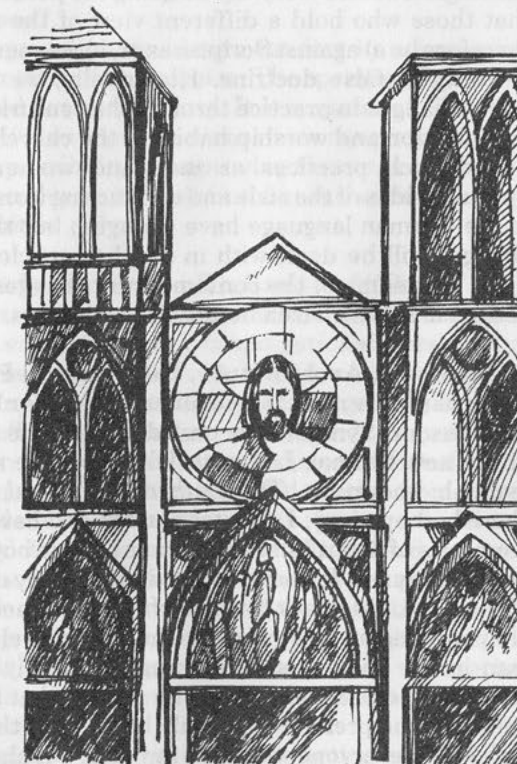
It is in the very nature of man to resist change, especially if the change is not initiated by him. There is a feeling of security when conditions of stability exist. But stability and sameness without any variation can also result in boredom. If our routines and activities do not vary year after year, we often begin to feel that we are in a rut and we yearn for new experience.

It is not surprising, therefore, to note that many individuals like to be innovative and creative. We like to try new things and have new adventures. That is perhaps why vacation periods are usually so popular. They give us the opportunity to break the monotony of our regular routines of working and living.

Most people tend to want to do something different on their vacations than they do during the rest of the year. For example, the professional golfer is not likely to want to play golf on his vacation. He may prefer taking time to rest or read books. But the editor or author who daily reads and works with manuscripts probably yearns to spend time during his vacation on the golf links. The professional driver of trucks or busses is not likely to look forward to a vacation involving a long automobile trip, but the business man who does not spend much time on the highways is likely to look forward with joy and anticipation to a long motor trip.

True Doctrine Does Not Change

It is the purpose of this article to examine the phenomenon of change as it relates to the church. What about change and the church? Is it true that some things should never change? Ought there to be change in the



church? Is all change progress? Is change in the church dangerous? In this article when change in the church is mentioned, it must be made clear at the outset that I am not referring to a change in doctrine. Lutherans who believe and confess that all true doctrine is based solely on the Holy Scriptures neither expect nor appreciate changes in doctrine. This is so because the revealed Scriptures do not change.

God's plan of salvation through Christ Jesus, His only begotten Son, is not a variable. It is a constant and an absolute truth. Of Christ Himself the Scriptures say, "Jesus Christ the same, yesterday, today and forever" (Heb. 13:8). Christ's voluntary suffering and death for the sins of all human beings was a once-and-for-all action. That atonement accomplished our redemption. Christ, Himself, testified from the cross regarding the completeness of His mission, when He declared, "It is finished." The heavenly Father then placed His ultimate seal of approval on Christ's completed mission in the glorious resurrection of Our Lord on Easter morning.

St. Paul assures us that there is only one Gospel and that it will not and cannot be changed. Therefore, he declares with boldness under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit when he writes, "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other Gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed." (Gal.1:8)

Does true doctrine ever change? Not really, but in different eras of the history of the church we do note that different facets of some doctrinal truths are emphasized more than others. Christian preachers, teachers, and writers naturally react to the circumstances in the world which surrounds them. They turn to God's Word to cite and apply those truths which most explicitly counteract whatever false teaching is currently being promoted.

For example, in Luther's time many were teaching a salvation that was partially earned by the performance of good works. This resulted in a very strong emphasis by Luther and other reformers on the teaching and preaching of the doctrine of justification by faith. Similarly, in each century as different false teachings arise, the church tends to focus its teaching and preaching on those Scriptural truths which best combat the error of that particular time. Such practice does not constitute a change in doctrine but merely a prudent emphasis and application of the unchanging truths of Scripture to the particular heresy of the time.

Human Arrangements Change

But many other things beside doctrine in the church can change and do change - customs, liturgies, architecture, music, constitutions, procedures, organizational patterns, methods, etc. All of these can change from time to time without necessarily detracting from or adding to the true Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ which it is the church's prime mission to proclaim.

Sometimes congregations are torn with bitter controversy and strife as they argue over whether or not to discontinue some custom or cherished ritual. "We have always

done it this way," or "We have never done it that way before," becomes the battle cry of those who desire to preserve some well-established and comfortable tradition.

Reinhold Niebuhr is credited with being the originator of the so-called prayer for serenity which says, "God, give us the grace to accept with serenity the things which should be changed, and the wisdom to distinguish the one from the other." Rather than being automatically opposed to all change which is proposed in the life of our congregations or being automatically in favor of every new proposal, we ought to examine and evaluate each idea separately on its own merits.

For many Christians, however, any change in the church is viewed negatively and looked upon with suspicion. Some members want all things to remain as they are or even as they remember them to have been in their childhood. The hymn books, the artwork, the organ, and the communion procedures represent pleasant memories, fond spiritual associations, and strong emotional ties that were experienced in their corporate worship life. There may even be some very good reasons not to change certain customs and worship procedures which are functioning well and serving a good purpose even though the particular practice is not specifically commanded by God. But here is where all of us must be careful as we discuss and debate the question on instituting some change in our congregational life. Inevitably one side or the other will attempt to enlist the Holy Scriptures in support of its position and in so doing imply that anyone who disagrees with its point of view is thereby opposing God's Word and God's will. Or, stating it another way, one side attempts to make of the debate a theological controversy. By so doing the person is implying that those who hold a different view of the matter must therefore be a) against Scriptures or, b) an enemy of God or, c) guilty of false doctrine. Historically, we can observe many changes in practice through the centuries in the life, organization and worship habits of the church. In our own Synod such practices as men and women sitting on opposite sides of the aisle and conducting worship services in the German language have changed, but these historic changes will be dealt with in another article. This essay deals with some of the contemporary changes which have occurred in the church in more recent times.

Hymnals, Architecture, Communion Practices

Certainly the most talked about change for Lutherans of the Missouri Synod in the past decade is the introduction of the new hymnal, *Lutheran Worship*. The so-called old hymnal, known as *The Lutheran Hymnal*, is lovingly cherished by many. I, too, treasure it and have many fond memories of it, but I also can remember as a boy when it was first introduced. It was resisted vigorously by many in favor of the good, old, black hymnal which contained only words of hymns and no music. I can remember one elderly gentleman in our congregation arguing eloquently in a special meeting after a Sunday morning service that the old hymnal was to be preferred not only because of the old hymns with which everyone was more familiar, but also because 1)

the congregation didn't need the notes, only the organist needs notes and 2) the old hymnal was much smaller and fit conveniently into a man's pocket or a lady's purse.

Church architectural styles have also changed drastically in recent years. Have you noticed how pulpits have gotten lower and lower? Chancels have gotten wider and wider to accommodate longer communion rails. Altars have moved further away from the front walls. Communion rails today often surround altars.

Speaking of communion, which is certainly one of the most sacred rites in the church, one notices that there has been much change in practice. For example, few congregations any longer require advance announcements in person at the church with a preparational confessional service conducted apart from the confession in the communion service itself. Those of us over 50 years of age remember the confessional service as a regular practice in most congregations.

Since I am not a pastor of a parish I frequently serve as guest preacher, often substitute for an absent pastor and frequently conduct a communion service where pastoral vacancies exist. I am always amazed how many questions I must ask of the elders in order to determine precisely what local communion practices are. For example: Common or individual cup? If individual cup, does the communicant serve himself, or does the pastor lift the glass to the lips? What about the wafer? Does the pastor place it in the hand of the communicant or in the mouth? Do the communicants kneel or stand? Are all at the communion rail dismissed at the same time or just part of them? Are the used cups placed back in the tray which is held by the pastor, left on the communion rail, or deposited in a basket on the way back to the pew?

How a congregation decides to conduct its communion services is a matter of local choice. The specific procedures are not spelled out in Scripture. It is a matter of Christian liberty. Yet, if a new pastor comes to a congregation and suggests the possibility of improving the communion distribution procedures, he may find himself embroiled in a serious and bitter debate.

Children's Sermons - Exchange of "Peace"

What are some other changes which have occurred in relatively recent times in our congregational worship customs? One new custom which has been introduced in many congregations and which still seems to be gaining momentum is the fellowship ritual or exchange of a greeting of peace by worshipers during the service, individually and personally, to other worshipers seated nearby. Sometimes this is also done in connection with signing attendance cards or booklets which are located in the pews. Some congregations also have visitors introduced at this point in the service. Such a break in the regular order of the liturgical service, which is becoming common place today in many congregations, was extremely rare if not altogether unheard of in most of our congregations less than two decades ago.

Because this new practice is something that was not done

during the childhood or young adult years of many of the older members of a congregation, some of them feel quite uncomfortable with this development and confess to a mild uneasiness with this informality and social exchange within the confines of the service itself. Some feel that, while personal and individual expressions of Christian greetings among worshipers is a good practice, it is more appropriately done before or after the formal order of worship. The point here is not to take sides over the issue, but simply to illustrate that there is change occurring in the church and that this change is in the area of Christian liberty, being neither commanded nor forbidden by the Scriptures.

Another popular new addition to the Sunday morning order of worship is the so called "children's sermon." At some point in the service the small children who are present are invited to come forward to the chancel area. They often gather at or on the steps in the front of the church and perhaps sit on the floor while the worship leader presents a brief (usually five minutes or less) sermonette, or object lesson to the children. The lesson is usually a simple one geared to the small child's understanding and vocabulary. Often a visual aid is used by the speaker to illustrate and focus the attention to the main point of the children's sermon.

This practice was not in vogue while our children were growing up so they did not experience this relatively new custom. I have heard many mixed reactions from worshipers regarding the children's sermon, ranging from those who feel it is inappropriate and that such instruction should more properly be carried on during the Sunday school hour, to those who like the practice very much. One man said, "I get more out of the children's sermon and remember it better than the regular sermon." Again, the point here is not to argue for or against the practice but merely to illustrate that there is much ongoing change in the church with regard to our worship customs and practices.

Then there is the matter of the preacher's garb worn during the service. When I graduated from the seminary, I purchased a black geneva-type gown replete with folds and pleats. It was the predominate style of that time. About 15 years later I was still wearing it and assisting at a congregation where the senior pastor wore the cassock and white stole which had become the more popular style. One day a representative of the Ladies Aid Society approached me asking why I did not wear a robe like the other pastor. My answer was simple, "Because I don't own one." She wanted to know, "Would you wear the cassock type if we gave you one?" I obviously did not refuse that kind generosity. But a few years later my garb was again out of step with the ever changing styles. I served at a college campus where the "in" style was now the alb. At my installation as a college president, I believe I was the only one wearing a cassock and white surplice! There is constant change going on in many areas of our church life and we should not view it with alarm or as a sign of deterioration, but rather as a reflection of societal change that is all around us and which we experience in every facet of our life.

Change – Good or Bad?

Why is it that so many Lutherans feel that almost any type of change in the church is bad and therefore is to be resisted? Perhaps this feeling of antagonism toward change may be associated with our feelings about God. We know that God does not change and God is good. Perhaps we subconsciously associate goodness with "no change."

The popular hymn by Henry Lyte, "Abide with Me," has these well-known lines, "Change and decay in all around I see; Oh Thou who changest not, abide with me." Again the idea of change is associated with the negative concept of decaying.

God does not change because He is absolutely perfect, altogether holy, and totally complete. Growth and improvement are therefore inappropriate concepts to apply to God. Human beings, however, do grow physically, intellectually, and spiritually and growth involves change. Human beings also consciously strive for improvement in their skills, their procedures, and in their systems of social organization and communication. All of this results in continual change, both inside and outside the church.

Human beings are also finite creatures with limited life spans. Their body mechanisms grow old, wear out, and their physical strength wanes. These automatic physical changes result in changing habits and life styles as we advance from one decade of our life to another. All of this merely serves to remind us that change is inevitable in our lives. We change whether we want to or not, and the changes that occur in our own life cause us in turn to bring about changes in our relationships with others, in the organizational structure of which we are a part and in every facet of our societal experience.

Change is therefore not in itself an evil to be despised. God, Himself, has built much change into the physical world which He created. He does not, for example, provide a world with constant temperatures. The seasons change. The weather changes daily. The cloud formations give us endless changing patterns of beauty. Each of us has enjoyed thousands of sunsets, but who has ever seen two sunsets exactly the same in every detail?

While change in itself is not necessarily evil, it would be an overstatement to suggest that all change is good. Some changes represent progress, but other changes may be examples of regression, or even deterioration. These basic principles should be kept in mind when dealing with any contemplated changes in the church. To automatically rule out all proposals for change in the church would be to eliminate any possibility of improvement and progress in organizational efficiency, in administrative procedures, in worship techniques, in mission outreach or in any of the *bona fide* activities of a congregation.

On the other hand, to accept all proposals for change in the church without first critically examining and carefully evaluating them would likely result in chaos. Even though it is axiomatic that variety is the spice of life, change merely for change's sake is seldom to be recommended. Proposed changes in the church should be purposeful, reasoned and well planned. People have a right to know why a change is

being proposed and what the anticipated results of the change will be. The burden of proof for showing the advantages of the proposed changes rests upon those who are recommending the changes. Moreover, even after the majority of the congregation and/or the proper boards or committees have voted for a change, it is usually desirable to plan carefully for the step by step and gradual implementation of them. Many congregations did a beautiful job in this regard by preparing carefully for the gradual introduction of *Lutheran Worship* through the step by step learning of new music and words of the liturgies, one part at a time over a period of many weeks, before trying to utilize any one of them in its entirety in one Sunday service.

Change in our methods of carrying out our Lord's work, or changes in our ways of worshiping, or changes in our organizational structures should not be feared, but neither should they be adopted and accepted without being subjected to careful scrutiny, study and analysis. Change should not be viewed as something that simply happens to us, but it should be viewed as a tool which we may or may not choose to use to accomplish our purposes as a church and to carry out our mission. Robert C. Worley in his book entitled, *Change in the Church: A Source of Hope*, says it all quite well in one paragraph:

The task of ministers and laymen is to reflect critically as Christians about truth or truths, the expression of Christian faith, embodied in the institutional church, and then together, mutually and cooperatively, to change the institutional church until it approximates more closely a common understanding of Christian faith. Ministers and laity, as churchmen, should be agents of institutional change to the end that Christian faith is interpreted and expressed in every facet of the institutional church.

Change is not a concept that is foreign to the Church. It should be noted that the Christian Church itself is an agency of change. By the preaching of the Gospel and the power of the Holy Spirit which works through the Word, the lives of people are changed drastically. People are born again. They become new creations in Christ. Old things pass away; all things become new.

The early Christians were described as those "who have turned the world upside down" (Acts 17:6). St. Paul himself is a most vivid example of the kind of change that happens in the life of a person who becomes a member of the body of Christ, the church. So we, who are members of the church today, ought not to be frightened by the idea of changes in our life or of change in the institutional church so long as the proposed changes do not conflict with God's will as He has revealed it to us.

Change in the Voting Franchise

Another contemporary change in the organizational and administrative structure of the congregations of our Synod has been the change in the voting franchise. For many years only those who were over the age of 21 were eligible to vote in most congregations. When our nation changed the voting eligibility age for national elections by lowering it to 18

years, the church began to reassess its regulations regarding the acceptable age for voting eligibility. Since the Scriptures do not deal with the subject of voting and certainly do not prescribe any voting age, it is clear that this is not a theological matter at all but an administrative question to be answered, not by the Word of God, but by logic, common sense, and reasoned judgment. Obviously there is no one right or correct age at which people should be allowed to begin to vote in a democratically organized institution. If a congregation wishes to keep the voting age at 21 years or lower it to 20 or 19 years, it is not guilty of wrong doing. It may also in Christian liberty choose to set the voting age at 22 or 23 for its members. Since these matters are decided by a congregational vote, it is the members themselves who finally determine at what age a person may participate in the deliberations and in the balloting. Congregations, however, should not act capriciously. They should base their decisions on logic and sound reasons for whatever they decide to do.

Less than two decades ago a ruling by the Commission on Constitutional Matters and a subsequent opinion rendered a few years later by the Commission on Theology and Church Relations indicated that participation and voting by women in the voters assemblies of congregations did not constitute a usurpation of authority by women over men and that those Scripture passages which exhort women "to keep silence in the church" and not to exercise authority over men are understood to mean that they should not rule ecclesiastically or serve as pastors or spiritual supervisors of the congregations. A synodical convention in 1969 also passed a resolution indicating the position of Synod was that participation by women in balloting was to be regarded as an open question. Congregations of the Synod were therefore free either to adopt the practice or to reject it since there is no clear Scriptural teaching that specifically mentions the practice of voting.

While a majority of congregations of the Missouri Synod have adopted this change and have decided to allow both men and women to vote, this particular change in practice has disturbed some congregations largely, it appears, because of confusion about and/or disagreement over the meaning of St. Paul's exhortation regarding the role of women in public worship. Some oppose woman suffrage in the church because they fear that it might be the first step toward permitting women to serve as pastors. It should be made explicitly clear that the Missouri Synod has not changed its historic position regarding this matter. In commenting on those Scripture passages which were the subject of dispute regarding woman suffrage, the Commission on Theology and Church Relations said in its reports to the 1973 synodical convention, "The CTCR finds no fault with the exegesis and the use made of passages treated in its document entitled, *Woman Suffrage in the Church*. It holds that Denver Resolution (1969) Res. 2-17 is not contrary to the Scriptures or the Lutheran Confessions."

The Lutheran Confessions themselves have much to say about rites, ceremonies, adiaphora, and Christian liberty.

The Confessions consistently support the principle of individual freedom of choice on those matters where the Scriptures do not expressly speak. Article VII of the Augsburg Confession states, "Nor is it necessary that human traditions, that is, rites and ceremonies, instituted by men, should be everywhere alike."

Indeed those who would bind the consciences of people, by insisting on some procedure, custom, or arrangement as divinely mandated, which is not in fact commanded by God, are sinning. God, Himself, says, "Behold I am against the prophets who use their tongue and say, 'He saith'" (Jer. 23:31). And again, "In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." (Matt. 15:9)

Conclusion

Change is inevitable in our lives. We change as individuals and the world around us changes. An ancient philosopher once observed that you cannot stand in the same river twice. A purist on the subject of change would even challenge that and say, "You cannot stand in the same river once; while you are standing there it is in the process of changing as it flows around you."

Most of us accept change not only as inevitable, but also as desirable. Change ordinarily represents growth, progress, and improvement. While we are willing to accept change in styles, architecture, government, our jobs and in society in general, some of us would like to make of the church an isolated cultural island where no change may occur. This is not only unrealistic but it may even be disadvantageous to the church's mission if it does not keep pace with the developing and changing modes of communication, transportation, organization, administration, methodology and technology.

Having said this, however, we must repeat our opening disclaimer: to accept change in the church does not imply approval of changing the church's doctrine, its message or its mission. Not one jot or tittle should be added or subtracted from the inspired, sacred revelation that God has given us in His Holy Word. The true Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ does not change and cannot be changed.

It is that very same Gospel, however, that frees us up to be a free people of God, not slaves of tradition, not bound by human customs, but bound only and joyfully by the Word of God. With that stance we can look to the future with excitement, with anticipation and with joy, wondering what new opportunities and what new challenges and new blessings await us as members of the Christian church living in God's ever changing world.

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HOW WILL the church change?

by Gilbert Daenzer

This is a transition time between ages—the industrial age of the recent past and the information age of the immediate future. This may well be a transition time for religion, or at least churches, as well. As Andrew Greeley, the noted Roman Catholic writer sees it,

Organized religion dangles on a dilemma. The commodities it offers—meaning and community—seem to be immensely popular; but the churches, particularly the mainline denominations, don't seem to be able to generate much enthusiasm. While fundamentalist denominations seem to be flourishing and the charismatic movement attracts thousands... membership in tradition... denominations are declining... 3 (p. 9)

This same shift in church membership to the strictest and most demanding (in the earthly sense) denominations is viewed by John Naisbitt, the well known trend reporter, in this way,

(That mainline churches) are declining should not be surprising. During turbulent times many people need structure—not ambiguity—in their lives... The demand for structure will increase, supplied not by the old, established denominations—Catholics, Episcopalians, Methodists, Presbyterians, and Lutherans—but by the Southern Baptists, the Mormons, the Seventh-Day Adventists, and by a great array of the new, native grown fundamentalist faiths, by the charismatic Christian movement and the youthful Jesus movement. There are thousands of independent Christian churches and communities in the United States today... many with fewer than 100 members. 10 (p. 240)

Martin E. Marty, a prominent church writer, sees it not as a time of transition, but “bad times”:

Mainline churches always have the advantage that in years in which the official culture is secure and expansive, they are well off... (They) suffer in times of cultural crisis and disintegration... So they looked as good in the 1950s as they looked bad by the 1970s. 7 (p. 71)

Dean Kelley suggests that the trend away from the mainline churches and toward the conservative groups has its roots in the psyche of man, this deep craving we all have for ultimate meaning in life; a craving he believes to be as fundamental as hunger, sex and aggression. The growing religious groups better satisfy this craving. In addition they evidence the six characteristics of social strength and strictness: commitment, discipline, missionary zeal, absolutism, conformity and fanaticism. 5 (p. 84)

How will the church change during these times of great change? Will the changes be such as to take advantage of the opportunity to bring more people to Christ or will the church change in ways that continue or accelerate the disaffection of the young, the marginal and the unchurched?

This article is about trends and their implications for the church of the future. It will focus on societal indicators and projections from within the church. It will assess not only what probably will happen, but also includes what might happen with appropriate intervention by the church, its leaders and its people.

Societal Trends

Naisbitt lists these ten major societal trends, the unalterables of the future,¹⁰

- 1) From industrial society to information society; 2) From forced technology to high tech/high touch; 3) From national economy to world economy; 4) From short term planning to long term planning; 5) From centralization to decentralization; 6) From institutional help to self-help; 7) From representative democracy to participatory democracy; 8) From hierarchies to networking; 9) From North to South (and West); 10) From either/or to multiple option.

They epitomize the principle that everything connects to everything. They also guide the church in the sense that, “Trends, like horses, are easier to ride in the direction they are already going.”¹⁰ (p. 9)

Toward High Technology

If there are four things that document the reality of the information age, they must be: the computer, a time orientation to the future, over 50% of the work force in information and the whole world connected electronically. What does this mean for the church?

The church of the future will use this information potential both in data analysis and in media presentation. The future will include an even larger number of electronic parachurches than today. Both electronic churches and PACs have demonstrated what can be done with computer lists. Independents like Jimmy Swaggart, Oral Roberts, Robert Schuller and a host of evangelicals, fundamentalists and charismatics are already riding this trend. The mainline churches have a lot of catching up to do. The more than 1300 religious radio stations of today mean big money, big audiences, “big time” religion, and there will be more. This will continue the erosion of members and support from the mainline denominations.

On the positive side the denominations and congregations will integrate the computer into their ministries. Contrary to the common belief that the computer dehumanizes ministry, it finally provides the potential for true individualization and personalization of ministry. The data based, service model of the college recruiter may well become the prototype for service ministry. Whether the emphasis will be on the two discipling functions of the church—sharing Christ and nurturing faith and life—remains to be seen.

A High Touch Trend

The simultaneous rise of high technology and the human potential movement symbolized the high tech/high touch trend. Just as the video revolution promoted movie theatres, high touch promotes human contact. High touch represents the need to be together, well documented with the rise and success of the many small religious groups in the

country – from home Bible classes and churches to cults and cult-type leaders who offer acceptance, structure and answers, not questions; providing certainty, as well as community.

The maxim, "Trends bottoms-up, fads top-down" 10 (p. 3) is a helpful guide. In a high touch, self-help, decentralized, global, multiple option, information world, one bottoms-up trend that will probably continue unabated is the emergence and success of all shades of religions into the American pattern. There is not a smorgasbord of home grown and imported choices to fill the needs of meaning and community. This proliferation of these supplementary small, religious groups, infrachurches and parachurches, often made up of members simultaneously part of the mainline churches, will continue even while local congregations attempt to provide better high touch and community experiences.

Toward Decentralization in the Church

The internationalizing of religions is another aspect of these trends that will continue as well as "reverse" missionary effort. It is no accident of time that the largest Christian churches are now in foreign countries, and in some cases in the very countries where our missionaries made little progress, and that religions like Hare Krishna are among the fastest growing in this country. Christianity may well see its largest congregations in China. This may also be the time of the big, independent churches, especially in foreign countries and the urban areas. Judging from some currently successful models – Paul Cho, Seoul, Korea 350,000 members; Schuller, Crystal Cathedral; Falwell, Thomas Road Baptist; and Chile's Superchurch¹⁴ – programs of these large churches of the future will be characterized by most or all of the following: they will be decentralized, most independent, service oriented, with good sermonizing, have a small homogeneous group or cell structure, be community and meaning oriented, have a strong education arm (either schools or Bible classes or both), have one main pastor and many assisting ministers (including women), offer specialized ministry to many groups (handicapped, youth, the elderly), be goal oriented, have a common clergy-lay vision, train and use lay leaders, exhibit a genuine outreach thrust and a genuine inreach growth goal. While the view is still pessimistic for mainline denominations in the United States, it is optimistic for independents and fundamentalist groups, but the latter are nearing their peak and have exhausted their prime appeal audience.

Another bottom-up movement to watch will be interesting interplay between the decentralization trend with its splintering of the larger church denominations as disaffected small groups go their own way and the global trend, which as a counter movement, will support the ecumenical components of the denominations. The global trend will tend to coalesce the larger groups, the mainline Protestants, most Roman Catholics and some evangelicals that Marty calls the public church. However, the view to the turn of the century is quite bleak if one is looking for grace, hope,

civility and similar Christian virtues. Consider these words,

... One cannot point to many signs that promise survival of religions that are not belligerent ... against them, however, we can compile some assets. Countless congregations in the public church *do* work effectively. The growth of Christianity in South America ... a renewed sense that Christians must think; and not merely experience ... Women, aged and people in minority groups have gained voices of a sort ... Christian people have not chosen to jump ship. 8 (p. 169, 170)

What these societal trends suggest and church writers observe coming might be characterized as the day of the congregation, characterized by a weaker alliance and identification with the denomination. It will be harder to do what denominations do, missions and religious education. Two evidences of these trends in our own church (LCMS) are 1) the 4% increase in dollars at the Synodical level during a period when congregation dollars more than doubled and 2) the congregational solution to the hiring of teachers from their geographical area for our Christian schools. The number of Synodically trained teachers has dropped sharply from 90% to 70% in just a few years and assignment to a school by "Synodical placement" is all but non-existent for increasing numbers of the graduates of Synod's schools. It is doubtful that the schools will maintain a distinctively Christian and Lutheran impact as fewer of the teachers have a common philosophy of Christian education and a denominational commitment. We are experiencing a deregulation in religion, a free market approach, that does not do much for the one Christian church on earth nor for denominational strength.

No trend will have more impact on larger denominations than the decentralization trend, especially as it is supported by and coupled to self-help and participatory democracy trends and networks rather than hierarchies. Recall Kelley: Whereas strictness, conformity, commitment, and discipline are required for growth and group strength, diversity, dialogue and individualism are promoted by societal trends – just the characteristics of weak groups.⁵ The church will have to find some way to balance the desire by the central office and denominational leaders for the strictness and strength behaviors and the reality of the grass roots calling the shots. The constituency has an infinite capacity to ignore the leadership as is done in Roman Catholic circles relative to birth control. This is the time when leaders find, "He who pays the piper calls the tune," and when "Out of sight out of mind," prevails.

It seems for now that large size and strong commitment are mutually exclusive. The only hope for size to survive is for churches to organize along the lines of smaller homogeneous sub-groups.

Other results of decentralization will be that general church meetings will do less and less and vote more and more for local option programs. Although special interest groups will more easily "capture" the efforts of the "front office," the constituents will care less.

One reaction of denominations to the pressure of these trends has been to restructure in the hope that they can recapture the allegiance of the constituency. This has begun in all major denominations, and there is no reason to believe that the tinkering will not continue. One general effect has been to create fewer but larger areas of responsibility. For a rather detailed treatment of the process and results of restructuring consult Mickey and Wilson.⁹ Even though restructuring is basically a crises of faith and not of managerial and bureaucratic style, it does make it easier to reduce the bureaucracy. "It is easier to reduce the number of members on a board than the number of boards."⁹ Some decentralization results of our own (LCMS) restructuring are: the circuit meeting, the directives for regionalizing the college system, and the congregational "adoption" of foreign missionaries.

Let me bring the discussion of the decentralization trends to a close for this article by listing some aspects of their pervasiveness and breadth and a special treatment of their impact in congregations. Consider these aspects of decentralization: the courts consistently holding for congregation over denominations; the church growth movement; the home and neighborhood Bible study groups; the home grown religions; the weakness of commitment to evangelism by larger denominations; the ministry of women; the places the young choose to worship; – in a word – all the things on the current scene that ignore denominational labels or guidelines. They indicate that churches will need to change to benefit from these new directions.

Toward New Relationships Between Clergy and Laity

Lyle Schaller identifies the special impact on congregations of these trends as they reveal themselves in the mismatch of clergy and laity on several vital levels: 13 (p. 45-47)

ITEM	CLERGY	LAITY
Church "success"	spiritual life items	statistics and buildings
Time orientation	future	past
Leadership	shared leadership	strong leader
Stewardship	broad sense	money and pledging
Social issues	taking stands	stick with "religion"

Trends indicate that this mismatch will decrease, that "the new leader will be a facilitator, not an order giver,"¹⁰ and that more churches will follow the fundamentalist groups in overt political action. It does not imply significant impact of large groups on big societal issues: disarmament, peace, poverty, or prejudice.

Let me now turn to another critical trend for churches – long range planning. The first rule of long range planning is, "Strategic planning is worthless unless there is first strategic vision."¹⁰ The first question faced in finding a common vision is, "What business are we in?" Sears prospered when it reconceptualized itself as being in the retailing business (all types) and not just a department store. Penn Central learned too late it should have been in the transportation business, not the railroad business. Churches hoping to prosper in the future will need to recon-

ceptualize their missions in light of societal trends. Is the church in the Christ dispensing business, the church growth business, the comfort business, the family support business, the counselling business, the disciple-making enterprise, the organizational game or what? The church growth movement seems to have learned its planning, group dynamics and psychology lessons well and is riding the trends – a well identified, shared strategic vision; activities consistent with building strong groups; meeting meaning and community needs.

Church leaders willing to embrace decentralization trends and nurture them with the trends of long range planning, participatory democracy and networking (nurturing – not climbing over each other as in hierarchies)¹⁰ can grow in grace, wisdom and numbers and in favor with God and man. When variety is the norm – the multiple option trend, all 31 flavors – variety in religion is to be expected. However, the need for order and security presents the opportunity for the churches to be bastions of firm ground in a rapidly changing world. Although the trend to variety is strong and will continue, churches that can provide a clear, captivating vision and reasonable structure will prosper. That is, of course, why the most demanding and narrowest get such loyalty. In this respect our own denomination is an enigma. It has been variously characterized as mainline,^{14, 10} borderline mainline,^{5, 7} "evangelical" conservative,¹ and fundamentalist.² I personally like the reflective characterization of Quebedeaux, "truly orthodox and strongly confessional."¹² I can live with that and think it *can* be a base for proceeding with strategic vision and planning. It seems to carry the right balance of being solidly Scriptural in content and also able to change the methods with the times to do God's work. Our church can prosper, but *not until* leaders and constituency really share a common vision.

Shifting Populations with New Needs to Serve

One societal trend stands alone. It is primarily demographic. This is the shift of population, high tech industries and action to the South, the West and Florida. These are also the areas with the most unchurched (23%). The church of the North must change its focus toward these areas, and must learn a new evangelism. However, don't tackle this group without checking the data gathered by Greeley.³ It seems universally valid. This shift is also related to another group curiously absent from the literature and church, the baby boom, those roughly age 25-35. They dominate society at every age they represent. They are an untapped resource. So far they have not chosen to get enthusiastic in the churches, but they are in the mainstream of the non-denominational Christian school movement, home education, mid-wifery, and other decentralized functions. Unless the church acts now to reach this group, the decline of traditional churches will plummet rather than continue its slow decline.

There remain now but a few loose ends in this brief discussion of changes in the church. For a more comprehensive treatment of the near future in religion from the

perspective of recent history read Carrol, Johnson and Marty, especially Chapter 10.¹

What of the four groups that have been singled out as those most in need of finding their true place within the church – the young, the old, women and laypersons?¹⁵ The young: if they are to be enlisted in the church they will be reached only by speaking directly to the main issue, the ultimate meaning of life. Failure to do this is what is drawing them away from mainline Christian churches. Providing ultimate meaning can gather them, not social activities that are better provided outside the church.

The old: a group ripe for major genuine effort. They too are interested in the ultimate meaning of life and have the time to share it with others. There is little evidence yet that the churches will change in significant ways to enlist them for Christ and His work.

Women: while many church bodies hope they will steal quietly away or “back” someplace, they won’t, but churches will find a place for them in genuine ministry or they will find their own – the self-help trend. Perhaps, the model of Pastor Cho using women as assisting ministers will prevail as an interim solution. The future seems to say, however, that women will become full fledged handmaidens for the Lord (Acts 2:18) being neither male nor female. (Gal. 3:28)

Laity: Societal trends here support what most pastors have been wanting for a long time. The clergy want the laity to take a larger share of the congregational ministry (not of the denominational control though), thanks to the diminishing of the clergy/lay gap.

And, what of all the current issues not examined:
 – science issues: genetic manipulation, creation/evolution, etc.
 – social issues: abortion, economy, nuclear menace, etc.
 – religious issues: evangelism, liberation theology, unisex, etc.
 – school issues: prayer, tuition tax credits, etc.
 – family issues: single parent, divorce, sexuality, etc. and on and on? They represent the selection and incompleteness of this treatment. They are subject to the same parameters of societal trends and the needs of humanity for meaning, community, and group building. They represent a challenge at the application level that grows out of discipleship reconceptualized for our age. They represent more changes in the church.

Conclusion

“Times of parenthesis are times of opportunity.”¹⁰ This is that time. The surviving church (congregation and denomination) of the next 25 years will have incorporated the latest technology into its operation. It will have found its high touch role in the life of its members, have long term goals clearly stated, a well defined shared vision, a network approach among its members, and strong groups. Denominations of strength will balance decentralization and centralization, will exhibit participatory democracy, a program for the South and the West and will provide multiple options for ministry for all its members. The problems of

youth, elderly, women and laity will be solved. It will not yet have solved the great social and political problems, but it will be active in these areas. It will have addressed the issues of ultimate meaning and community as well as marriage, family and sexuality issues. On the other hand it may not have done any of these and still be alive and well as the communion of saints in Christ.

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THE INTEGRITY OF MISSION: THE INNER LIFE AND OUTREACH OF THE CHURCH, by Orlando E. Costas. Foreword by Ronald J. Sider. New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1979.

“The church of Jesus Christ has been inflicted in our day by a diabolic polarization in its missional program. Christians . . . have been spending endless energies arguing among themselves about whether their missional programs should include teaching and preaching the gospel or engaging in the sociopolitical liberation of the weak and oppressed, or both . . . The true test of mission is not whether we proclaim, make disciples or engage in social, economic and political liberation, but whether we are capable of integrating all three in a comprehensive, dynamic and consistent witness. We need to pray that the Lord will liberate us not only from this stagnant situation, but that he may liberate us for wholeness and integrity in mission” (p. 75). Orlando Costas, a Latin American evangelical theologian, seeks to move the Church out of an inward-looking syndrome and into a “Biblical vision of a holistic mission.”

Costas’ conception of holistic mission involves several facets. Mission must include proclamation. It is never Biblically sound to eschew the verbalization of Jesus and His work. But more emphasis must be given in proclamation, he contends, to the Kingdom of God, “God’s transforming presence in history.” Many evangelicals have tragically isolated the Gospel from the Kingdom of God. Mission also is disciple-making, through which Christians surrender their ambitions, needs and loyalties totally to Christ, unconditionally following His lifestyle. Making disciples is not merely a quantitative process. To be concerned about numbers can reduce the Gospel to “a conscience-soothing Jesus, with an unscandalous cross, an other-worldly kingdom; a private, inwardly, individualistically limited Holy Spirit, a pocket God.” Third, mission must mobilize disciples who will penetrate every aspect of life with the Gospel. Effective mobilization demands of the Christian mental transformation, sacrificial action and comprehensive faith. It also means the clericalization of evangelism. Mission, fourthly, produces the integral growth of the Body of Christ—growth in breadth (numerically), in depth (as a nurturing, reflective and worshiping community), and in height (as a clear sign to the world of the new order of life which Jesus introduces). A mission of integrity also leads to liberation. God’s people will be in solidarity with the weak and down-trodden of the world. The Church must be a sign of God’s commitment to the struggle of the wretched of the earth; it will bear direct witness against the scandal of poverty; it will participate in the struggle against the structures and forces which oppress people. Christians will work to free people in the here and now, as well as in the future. Finally, mission is celebration in worship, rejoicing that God has made us participants in His work, transforming our limited talents into instruments of His grace.

This brief book is a masterpiece. Costas is a solidly Biblical scholar and presents clearly and effectively God’s vision for the Church. He deeply respects the tradition of evangelical theology for the need of a proclaimed Word, but also challenges Christians to a life of total commitment and to the struggle for justice in the world.

As his book relates to the theme of change in the church, we of the Missouri Synod tradition must take seriously Costas’ call that mission involves liberation. We have done little with that concept. To the extent that we ignore it, our concept of mission is less than Biblical, less than what God expects of His people. This book deserves serious study in our congregations, colleges and seminaries. It can take us farther along the path of faithful discipleship.

Jerrald K. Pfabe

CHURCH GROWTH AND THE WHOLE GOSPEL: A BIBLICAL MANDATE, by C. Peter Wagner. New York: Harper and Row, 1981.

Church growth, described by some as the most important influential development of the 1970s, has been criticized for giving little attention to social ministry. Reacting to this criticism, the writer affirms that matters related to the poor and oppressed, justice and peace, wealth and lifestyle, liberation and community are important items on the agendas of Christian churches. Acknowledging that his own mind on the role of the church’s social ministry has changed, the author develops a Biblical base for this facet of ministry.

In dealing with the tension between advocates of social ministry and evangelism, two Biblical mandates are identified, the cultural and the evangelistic. The cultural mandate recognizes that people living under the Lordship of Christ are to engage in keeping peace, feeding the hungry and liberating the oppressed, while the evangelistic mandate centers in going and making disciples of all nations, baptizing and teaching. While most church growth proponents are seen as doing what they can to participate in the cultural mandate, most of their time, energy and money are dedicated to the evangelization of the world. Their decision to direct the bulk of their resources and energies to where the greatest numbers are likely to become disciples is described as being Biblical. Recognizing the priority of the evangelistic mandate also is seen as the best starting point for the maximum fulfillment of both mandates. The author, however, desiring to be understood clearly, emphasizes that while the evangelistic mandate is to receive priority, fulfilling the cultural mandate, which includes both social service (meeting the needs of individuals and groups) and social action (changing social structures), is not optional for Christians.

In discussing how both mandates can be implemented, Wagner clearly reflects a commitment to bringing the Gospel to the world’s billions, and he succeeds in stating his position in a lucid and coherent discussion. At the same time, a number of questions and concerns arise.

1. Is it possible that church growth principles can be kept as atheological as possible in order to be adapted into virtually any systematic theological tradition as claimed by the author? Since a set of principles is based on assumptions, values, commitments and a hermeneutic, the claim of a value-free methodology is not accurate.

2. Does church growth, defined as the intent to direct the major portion of one’s resources to the

areas where the greatest numbers are the most likely to become disciples of Christ, reflect a clear Biblical perspective? Not really. Such an aim statement more directly reflects the starting point of the Westminster Confession, that the glory of God is the chief end of mankind, and the view of John Calvin that the sovereignty of God is the sun around which all theology revolves.

3. Will following the principles of church growth identified in this book assure one of developing a ministry that is Biblically based? Not necessarily. Giving priority to the evangelistic mandate over the cultural may cause one to ignore a key determinant of strategy, that of context. In the Book of Acts, for example, engagement in preaching, teaching, evangelizing or social ministry was shaped by the context in which Christians found themselves rather than by a set of priorities.

4. Does the church growth model described by Wagner deserve to be adopted by Lutherans? Only if one is willing to make a significant compromise. The absence of a clear Law-Gospel dynamic in the book points to the presence of another dynamic, that of a theology of glory which surfaces in a number of jarring statements made in the author’s discussion of stewardship and the homogeneous unit principle.

5. Will developing a set of principles based on Scripture and the insights of the social sciences likely result in significant change which will rouse the church today? In the opinion of this reviewer, the momentum being generated by church growth is very significant. Many of the church growth principles identified in Wagner’s model are quite helpful and illuminating. However, attempting to implement the evangelistic and cultural mandates through the articulation of principles may be expecting too much. Because of a huge gap between the identification of key principles and their implementation, the teaching and learning of principles is not an effective educational strategy in the development of evangelists, social workers, preachers, teachers or counselors.

As Wagner admits, a number of church growth principles are controversial. For this reviewer, the issues center on two questions: 1) What are the roles of evangelism and social ministry in the church’s mission? and 2) What is the relationship between Scripture and the findings of the social sciences? Both questions warrant a return to the “drawing board,” especially to the Book of Acts which provides needed guidance and correctives for all of us.

Marvin Bergman

(Continued from page 12)

We may well summarize with Dr. Martin H. Franzmann, beloved author, exegete and hymn writer who put it this way:

"Change is not only inevitable; it is desirable. One cannot avoid it; one can and must analyze and control it. Our church has taken an astonishing number and variety of changes in its life. Linguistic, cultural, liturgical, architectural, administrative, homiletical, evangelistic, journalistic changes have been accepted and approved with a virile aplomb, remarkable in so traditional-conservative a body as ours. It is specifically *theological* change that is causing anxiety and with good reason." (Martin H. Franzmann "On Change in Theology" CTM Volume XXXVIII, No. 1, January 1967, p. 5)

We end this article with an affirmation and prayer, as did Walther when he concluded the longest series of essays ever presented at any convention of the Synod in 1886:

Our life's model must be: *Soli Deo gloria!* (To God alone the glory!) That's what the angels sang

immediately after the Savior was born. That is the first and also the most important matter. God received back His honor through Jesus. We have incurred nothing but shame, but as God has reacquired His honor, we have received eternal life. Blessings to all who believe this from the heart! They will then see all the holy angels at the right hand of God and will sing God's glory, praise and honor from eternity to eternity.

God help us dear brothers, that someday we too may be found among the host and then from our entire heart, really give all glory to God. Here we cannot do this, since our evil flesh clings to us. But there, after God has removed the old flesh from us, our doctrine will not be mere theory, but then we will also practice it. O Lord Jesus, help us all to that end. Amen!"

SOLI DEO GLORIA



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