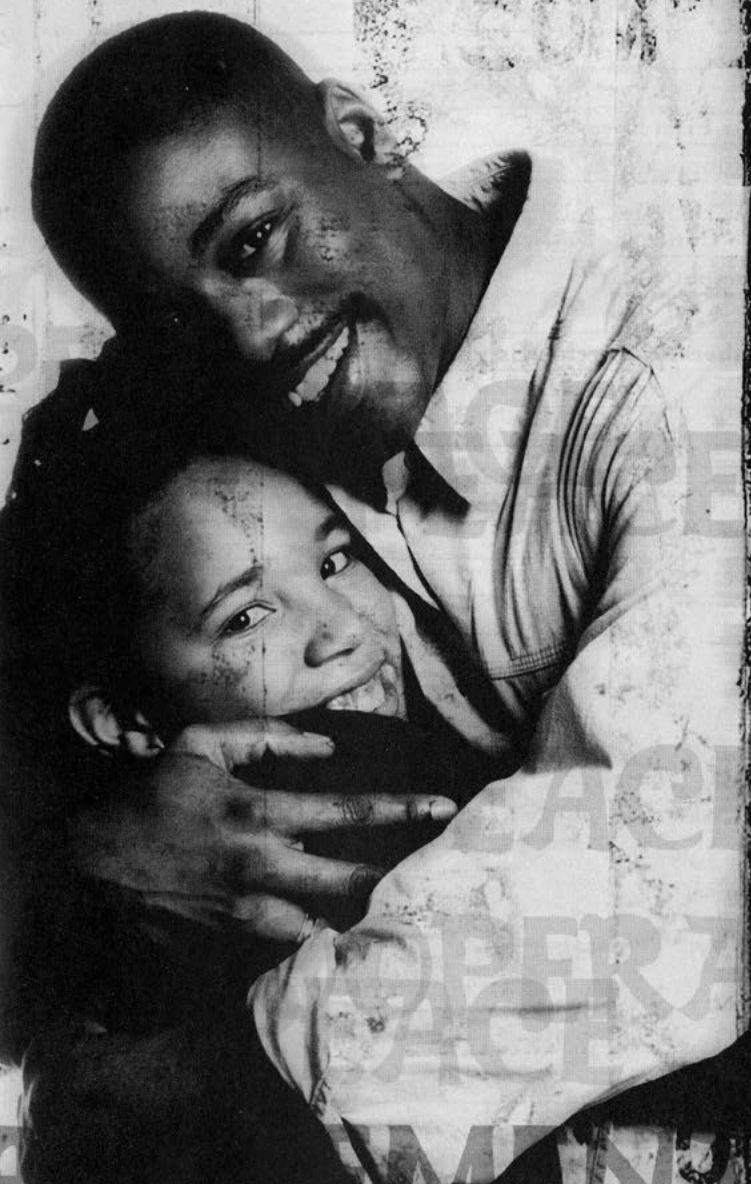


ISSUES

IN CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

WINTER, 1998

VOLUME 32, NO. 3



THE CHURCH IN CONCORD OR CONFLICT

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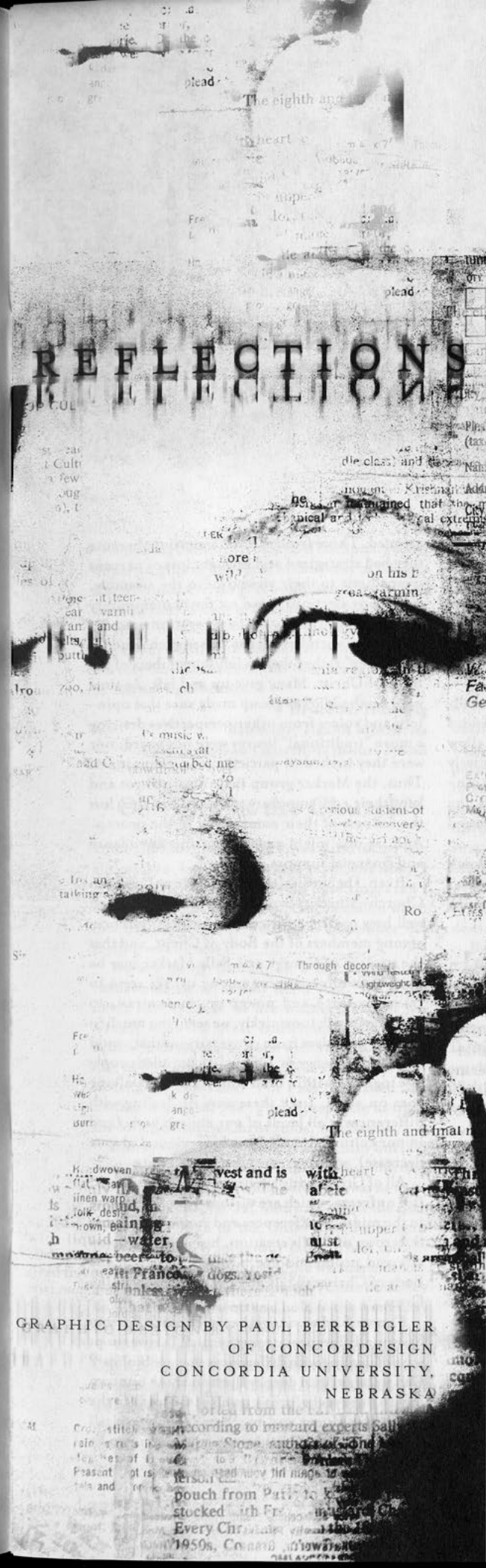
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REFLECTIONS



Questions I am frequently asked while traveling, especially by individuals who come from non-Lutheran backgrounds, are: "What does the name *Concordia* mean?" "From where did the name come?" My response begins with the dictionary definition of harmony, agreement or concord, including what happened centuries ago when the *Book of Concord* was written. I explain that all of the Concordias in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod are walking together in carrying out the Great Commission. When living in Canada, I also mentioned Concordia University in Montreal, created several decades ago when three struggling institutions of higher learning, often at odds with each other, joined together to become one, choosing the name *Concordia* to indicate their new harmonious relationship.

But is there concord in our beloved Synod today? Are we walking together in harmony and agreement? Is The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod today a church of concord, or is it a church in conflict? Robert Benne in his study, *The Paradoxical Vision*, has observed that the LCMS is not likely to develop significant social policy statements as long as it remains enmeshed in internal conflict. Indeed, church consultants estimate that approximately 40 percent of congregations are involved in conflict.

Examples of conflict in our church are numerous. How well I remember the response of a fellow Missourian whom I invited to our campus to listen to a speaker before judging his message. He said, "I wouldn't walk across the street to listen to him, let alone drive three hours." The list of conflict topics is long: inter-church relations, communion practices, the role of women (girl acolytes, female ushers and readers), the degree of diversity permitted in conducting worship services, hymnals (*TLH*, *LW*, *Hymnal Supplement 98* and others), and the meaning of proper pastoral care. What is worse than fellow Christians in the LCMS being at war with each other? What can we do to learn how to deal constructively in our beloved Synod with fellow members walking together as members of the Body of Christ? How can we as a church be a witness to the world that Jesus Christ is our Savior, if we cannot speak the truth in love with one another?

Richard Thompson, in one of the major articles in this edition, asks these questions: "Love for one another was a hallmark of the early Christians. Can the same be said of us today in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod? . . . I hear pastors and laymen speak in harsh ways to one another and about one another. I see people of different opinions either boycotting or walking out of meetings where those speaking may be saying things they don't agree with. I hear labeling, name calling, and misrepresentations among the brethren, and I wonder, 'How are we going to contend for the faith and encourage one another when we can't seem to even listen to one another?'"

The purpose of this edition of *Issues in Christian Education* is to explore ways in which the church can respond constructively to internal conflict and move to a higher level of concord. It is my prayer that this *Issues* will be a helpful step in that direction for you.

Orville C. Walz, President

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Conflict and Peace within the Church

There are those who would claim that the church is like a piece of old cotton cloth, crumpled and stained from exposure to the ravages of mankind's lack of faithfulness and made fragile by repeated exposure to uncaring hands. It is certainly true that like everything and everyone else in this world, Christians often find themselves involved in relationships and situations which clearly show the imperfections and shortcomings characteristic of our fallen state. History offers ample evidence of the power of human conflict to destroy communities, demolish families and divide the church. Sadly, history also bears witness to the power of conflict to damage the effectiveness of the church as it carries out its mission.

Despite the ravages of human failings, St. Paul develops an image of the church that is characterized by forgiveness and love. Paul asserts that while conflict may be inevitable, the painful results often associated with it need not be. In the Christian Church we are called by God to love each other with the vigor, the tenderness and the depth of Jesus Christ who so "loved the church" that He "gave Himself up for her, that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that the church might be presented before Him in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish."

But the stain of sin must be recognized before it can be cleansed and washed by God's forgiving love. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the Law leads us to recognize and confess our sins even as Christ's sacrifice for us on the cross washes our sins away.

As our sins are forgiven through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, so too can we forgive the sins of those who have sinned against us even as we seek their forgiveness for the wrongs that we have done and as we ask God to help us change attitudes and habits that lead to conflict.

We are enabled by the presence of Christ to iron out the wrinkles that are caused by conflict.

Sometimes that means that we will choose to overlook offenses. At other times we might talk directly and graciously with those whose offenses seem too serious to overlook. And still at other times, when conflict cannot be resolved in private, the Christian will ask others in the body of Christ to help settle the matter in a biblical manner.

The Lord cared enough to give Himself totally for the church, so she might be spotless, splendid and deserving of His love. As we refuse to allow relationships to be destroyed, and as we actively pursue peace and reconciliation, forgiving others as God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven us, the fabric of the church is cleansed and ironed smooth. In this way God is glorified.

David Dolak

Vice President for Academic Services
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Can We Find Ways of Dealing with Differences?

What more is conflict in the church than differences among people? Dealing with these differences becomes then a question of how diversity among members of the Body of Christ is acknowledged, received and utilized for the sake of the Gospel. We have clear choices about how we deal with differences.

George and Sally Marker had strong opinions about Sunday morning worship based on familiar services of the hymnal, while they preferred more contemporary kinds of worship. They became quietly vocal about their concerns, gathered persons around them that shared the same view and began to strategize how to move the congregation's worship style toward the way they wanted it to be. Their strategy: recruit like-minded people for offices in the hope that they could seize control of congregational governance. In so doing, they could then bring about the required changes.

Matters came to a head for the first time at a congregational voters' assembly. A huge battle

erupted. Those from the Marker group, because they had strategized and brought lots of persons sympathetic to their viewpoint to the assembly, won many elections based on the contemporary worship platform. But the congregation was split. Long-time members began to see each other as the "other" rather than as fellow members of the Body of Christ. Many gave up and left. As time went on the Marker group made sure that opinions and voices from other perspectives desiring a more "traditional" liturgy were not heard, nor were they invited to participate on committees. Thus, the Marker group that remained got and kept their contemporary worship, but they lost the fullness of their community in the process. And, as one might expect, worship attendance and financial support decreased.

It can, I believe, safely be said that our Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod culture has not learned well how to deal constructively with differences among members of the Body of Christ, and that the strategy of George and Sally Marker may be altogether too common among us. We seem to resort to force and power or, in contrast, to withdraw much too quickly; we seem too much to insulate ourselves from conversations that would seriously challenge us. Often, like-minded people talk together within their own clusters, if talking goes on at all. I see these ways of dealing with differences at all levels of our church body (and in our culture also as places for serious dialogue decrease), with increasingly tragic results.

All of God's living creatures can fight, submit, flee or freeze, which are various ways of behaving in the midst of differences and conflict. But only the crown of God's creation, human beings, can talk and problem-solve. Only members of the Body of Christ can talk and pray at the foot of the Cross.

Can we find ways together in Christ's Body to have our differences strengthen us? Can we adopt ways of dealing with differences that are biblical? Can we begin with deep reflection about our own logs in our eyes before we go after the speck in the eye of our sisters and brothers? These are tall orders, too much for a human alone. But God's Spirit empowers!

Speaking of the Holy Spirit: if the Spirit grants different gifts to members of the Body of Christ, suppression of those gifts would actually be a sin, would it not? Which is, of course, why we all stand in need of a Savior. Thus, the sensitive and respectful dealing with differences in our midst is a very crucial concern, for this can be a matter of eternal significance.

Bruce M. Hartung

Director, Health Ministries
The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

Conflict in the Church

I don't like being tricked. I don't mind losing fair and square, but to be tricked, especially when I end up harming myself, is really upsetting. I can't remember right now any specific occasion when this has happened to me, but I remember the feeling very clearly.

We are being tricked. In a fair and square confrontation we would never lose. We could never lose because we are winners. Christ has already won the great confrontation fair and square, and we who are one with Him in baptism can never be defeated. St. Paul's words in Romans 8 are a favorite, "For I am persuaded that neither death nor life . . . shall separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Savior."

But we are being tricked, tricked into hurting ourselves and others and, in the process, hurting our Lord also. How vividly John forewarns us in Revelation, chapter 12, where he offers the picture of the birth of the Child with the dragon poised and ready to devour Him. When unsuccessful, the dragon pursues the woman and angrily makes war on her offspring, "those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus" (v. 17).

The woman in John's writing represents the Church, and all who have come to faith in Jesus are her children. The dragon, the old evil foe, is still loose and in a desperate rage. He is intent upon dragging people from life and light into darkness and death. To do so he often uses direct confrontation with the Scriptures, plunging many

church groups into false doctrine. At other times he causes hardship or even bloodshed, all too evident in our world today. To his further rage, however, these don't always work. They can instead be the very stuff to cause faithful Christians to cling all the more to Christ, thereby becoming even stronger of faith.

I remember a conversation several years ago with the students at the Ingrian Seminary just outside of St. Petersburg, Russia. These were Christians still reeling from 75 years of Marxist persecution. But their faith was strong. I asked them what they were most concerned about as they faced a very uncertain future. I anticipated a different answer than the one received. Knowing first hand that hardship is often a blessing in disguise, their greater concern was that things would become too easy now. They knew from experience that persecution need not, and often does not, destroy faith.

But the devil has a trick up his bloody sleeve. Should all else fail, he can still resort to turning Christians against one another. He creates ill-will and conflict among and between believers to distract them from their faith and mission, something he does remarkably well, as we who live and work in the church know all too well. C. F. W. Walther knew this, too, as evidenced in his essay to the 1879 Iowa District Convention:

You see, the devil's great craftiness is that if he cannot plunge a church group into false doctrine, nor destroy their unity in confession, he then tries [to destroy it] through their lives. He creates divisions among the members. One person offends another, perhaps without wishing to do so. The second person then becomes angry and imputes malice to him. And if the offense was great enough, perhaps even intentional, then true brotherly fellowship has been destroyed, and the result is that there is no longer any real joy of standing in confessional fellowship with the offender. And that is what the devil wants.

Temptations leading to conflicts in the church are inevitable. What matters is how we in the

church address them. How important it is that we first recognize their instigator and their evil purpose, so that we are not tricked into harming ourselves and one another.

I know this temptation. I have struggled with it. I recall such a time when I found myself in a team ministry with another pastor who rubbed me the wrong way. I know I did the same for him. But we were not tricked. We worked through and sometimes around our tensions, both of us knowing who was behind our struggles which both of us were intent to overcome. Not only did we not ever forget the devil's purposes, but we always took care to keep Christ in our company, even to the extent of picturing Him with His arm around the other, one of His children.

We will do well to try to do the same throughout the church. God give us the wisdom always to recognize the one with whom we are contending, lest we be tricked into doing harm ourselves and to one another. No one likes to be tricked.

Raymond L. Hartwig,

Secretary

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

Returning to Our First Love

BY RICHARD L. THOMPSON

I suppose one could study the history of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod strictly on the basis of its various conflicts or controversies. The Synod was born in the midst of a struggle about *church* and *ministry*. In 1992, Dr. John C. Wohlrabe, Jr., published a condensed form of his 1987 doctoral dissertation entitled *Ministry in Missouri until 1962*. In this study, the author demonstrates how, between the Synod's first convention in 1847 and its 1962 convention, the Synod's understanding of the doctrine of the ministry changed at least twice. This work of Dr. Wohlrabe is well worth reading in order to begin to understand the Synod's struggle over *church* and *ministry*.

This struggle still exists in our church today as evidenced by a recent mailing to all congregations of the Synod consisting of a collection of papers from the 150th Anniversary Theological Convocation which took place earlier this year in St. Louis.

No doubt, this will be one of the controversies or conflicts that will occupy our church body for the next several years. As Dr. Roger Pittelko, former English District President, said in his address to the Iowa District East Convention in 1997:

There are those who want to emphasize the Office of the Ministry to the detriment of the priesthood of all believers. The view of some *seems to be* that the lay people should pay and pray and especially obey. Others seem to want to reduce the Office of the Ministry to paid functionaries. We hire the pastor, says this group, and we can certainly fire him, too. The pastor is seen as the Chief Executive Officer of the congregation, and if the annual report does not show a profit both in dollars and number of members gained, then 'out with the CEO and we'll hire another one.'

The teaching of the Scriptures is all but forgotten. Those called to the office of shepherd are under-shepherds, not hired functionaries. As under-shepherds they need to be reminded that they did not die for the sheep. They, as pastors, are standing in place of the *Good Shepherd* who will come again in glory. The *Good Shepherd* will ask his under-Shepherds to give an account of their stewardship *of the mysteries of God, namely, the Gospel*. The lay people of our congregations need to remember that they are the Lord's sheep and that the Lord, through Word and Sacraments exercised on his behalf through called pastors, is feeding them and leading them. When the pastor, as a called servant of the Word, deals with them on the basis of that Word, it is as if Christ Himself were doing it.

An Underlying Issue

There are other struggles and conflicts. For example, how are we to relate to other Christians, even with other Lutheran Christians? Or, what is the role of women in our church, identifying not simply what they cannot do, but what they can and should do in ministry? How are we to conduct our worship services, and what degree of diversity in practice can we allow within the bounds of our theological understandings? What does "proper pastoral care" really mean? How are we going to address our culture which seems to be at best *amoral* and at worst *immoral*?

Meanwhile, we consume the time of floor committees and national conventions debating "close" vs. "closed" communion, the use of non-alcoholic wine, the singing of songs or hymns that are not in our hymnal, and involving girl acolytes and women ushers in worship. In the meantime, our young people struggle in a culture teaching them that divorce is okay and that living outside of marriage with your boyfriend or girlfriend is a good way to test whether or not a relationship

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will last; our young people struggle in a culture that says abortion is an acceptable way of controlling the births of unwanted, inconvenient, or less than perfect children; our young people struggle in a culture that says that suicide is a constitutional right; our young people struggle with a culture that tells them that homosexual relations are a perfectly acceptable life style.

Certainly communion practices are important, worship practices are important, the orders of creation are important, as we walk together in our Synod. However, as we seek to preserve our doctrines and practices, let's not devour one another or become so consumed with the process that we ignore what's happening all around us. People are being overcome by the evil one and eternally lost. Is it possible to be biblically and confessionally grounded, biblically and confessionally correct in the essential beliefs of Christianity, but totally, culturally irrelevant and unable to communicate the greatest message in the world to a culture that is dying to hear it? How do we retain our confessional basis and invite new ethnic groups into our midst? Indeed, how will we address the culture(s) of our times?

While these and many other issues will engage us well into the 21st century, I want to address an underlying issue which threatens to stop us in our tracks and render us ineffective in our attempts to reach out with the Gospel. That issue is, "*How are we going to address one another when engaged in various conflicts that arise?*" There seems to be a lack of love for one another and an unwillingness to "*bear one another's burdens*" as we address differences of opinion.

In Revelation 2:1-6 we find a letter to the angel of the church in Ephesus. I wonder if this letter helps us to focus our attention on a danger which confronts us as individual believers and as a church body in general. The one whom John hears directing him to write is identified as "the First and the Last . . . the Living One . . . who was dead and is now alive."

To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lamp stands. I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know you cannot tolerate wicked men that you have tested, those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name and have not grown weary. Yet I hold this against you: you have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first . . .

Resistance to immorality, evil and false doctrine is a valid and necessary concern for any congregation and for any church body. Many of those who are wrapped up in modern ecumenism have almost a complete indifference toward false doctrine in the name of Christian "love" and "patience." Such "love" and "patience" are not pleasing to our Savior. The "wicked" mentioned in the verses above were teachers who had been tested according to Scripture and found to be false. It is good to be concerned about and even zealous for the truth of God's Word and the Confessional understanding and application of that Word. However, in the process of contending for the faith, one must guard against lovelessness. The same one who commended the congregation in Ephesus also warned of a problem. He who sees all, sees what was missing in the heart. The members had "*lost (abandoned or left) their first love.*"

Our First Love

Various commentators, such as Tasker, Becker, Lenski and others, note that this "first love" may refer to love for the Lord and His Word, love for mankind in general, and love for one another. The apostle Paul had written of the Ephesians' love for all the saints (Ephesians 1:15), and he prayed that they would be rooted and established in love (Ephesians 3:17). Love for one another was a hallmark of the early Christians. Can the same be said of us today in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod? It seems to me that love for the Lord and His Word shows itself in love toward one another, and yet I hear pastors and laymen speak in harsh ways to one another and about one another. I see people of different opinions either boycotting or walking out of meetings where those speaking may be saying things that they do not agree with. I hear labeling, name calling and misrepresentations among the brethren, and I wonder, "How are we going to contend for the faith and encourage one another when we cannot seem to even *listen* to one another?"

The Lord called the Ephesian congregation to remember their first love and, by way of repentance, to return to it. We who have been baptized into Christ's name most holy, and we who have subscribed to the same Lutheran Confessions must daily remember the Lord's love for us and bear with one another.

Labeling

In 1969 I began studying for the pastoral ministry at Concordia Theological Seminary, Springfield, Illinois. At the seminary I found groups of students who wanted to talk about the problems in the church almost all the time and those who wanted to pretend that there were no real problems. The interesting thing to me was that these two groups did not seem interested in talking to or listening to one another.

In the same year that I enrolled at the seminary, I almost left at the urging of some who said that the Synod was too liberal in its theology and practice. One of my professors, using the book of Jude, persuaded me to stay and "contend for the faith that was once entrusted to the saints." He pointed me to verses 17-23:

But dear friends, remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold. They said, in the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires. These are the men who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the spirit. But you, dear friends, build yourself up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit. Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life. *Be merciful to those who doubt; snatch others from the fire and save them; to others show mercy mixed with fear, hating even clothing stained by corrupted flesh.*

I remain grateful for the wise counsel of that professor, and I have certainly never regretted continuing my studies and, by the grace of God, entering the ministerium of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

While at the seminary I became familiar with labels like "conservative," "liberal," and "moderate" as applied to certain people and groups of people within the church. These labels followed me into my first year of pastoral ministry and got in the way of much love and understanding. The labels were often applied on the basis of the district to which one belonged, the college or seminary from which one graduated, or the position one held in district or Synod. Many times those who applied the labels had never met or heard those to whom the labels were applied.

It was not long after my ordination that the "walkout" took place at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. The conflict was referred to as the "Battle for the Bible," and revolved around the use of the so-called "historical-critical method" of interpreting the Bible. The flaw in this method of interpretation was that it insisted that the Bible be approached, studied and interpreted without any pre-conceived theological notions. It was like any other book or piece of literature and was to be read in that way. Such an approach to Scripture was quite impossible for those of us who began with the pre-supposition that the Bible is *the Word of God*. Those early years of ministry were difficult as families were divided from each other, dollars were withheld from the Synod, called teachers and pastors walked off the "job," people were many times unfairly labeled as "liberal" or "conservative," and a lack of trust was rampant throughout the church along with an unwillingness to talk about the issues or listen to one another. I sat in meetings on both sides which would have to be classified as loveless, all in the name of "contending for the faith once delivered to the saints." By the grace of God, our beloved Synod emerged from those "Battle for the Bible" years with an even stronger commitment to the Scriptures as the inspired, inerrant Word of God. Yet at times it seems to me that we lost something; could it be *trust*? Especially *trust* in the Lord and the power of His Word as the "only source and norm of doctrine and life." We talk about the Word in that way, but do we *trust* this Word?

As I now reflect over 25 years of congregational ministry and 12 years as an officer of the Synod, I am struck by how little things have changed in terms of how various groups within the church label one another and refuse to really listen to one another. Today we have those on the "Right"

(conservatives), those on the "Left" (liberals), and those in the "Middle" (moderates). Today we have "Confessional" Lutherans and, by implication, "non-Confessional" Lutherans, even though both groups subscribe to the same Lutheran Confessions. Today many react negatively to people who use certain words like "contemporary worship" or "church growth" or "felt needs." Today if a pastor reads authors like Barna, Mead, Easum, Drucker, Schaller and a host of others, or if he attends a "growing church" conference, his confessional subscription is questioned by some of his brothers. Today we still look at the district, the college, the seminary, or the position one holds and on that basis make rather arbitrary decisions that they must be on the "right" or the "left." If we feel strongly enough, we add the word "far" in front of the designation. It seems to me that any one of these groups or individuals may well find themselves to be warned and described by Holy Scriptures as "*those who cause division within the church.*"

Concerns

I find myself in agreement with Dr. George Wollenburg, President of the Montana District, who wrote in a paper titled *To Keep the Unity of the Spirit in the Bond of Peace*:

Disagreement among Christians is nothing new. The New Testament bears witness to the conflict which even the apostolic church faced. We have disagreements also within our Synod. Such disagreements with the doctrinal resolutions of the Synod as well as those resolutions in which we set forth our practice are not in and of themselves evil. Concerns about biblical truth are legitimate. However, the manner in which partisan groups are being organized within the Synod is a matter of grave concern.

While conflict in the church is inevitable, and we are commanded to ". . . *contend for the faith once delivered to the saints* (Jude 3)," nevertheless, there are dangers inherent in such conflict. The danger is peril to our own souls. We need always to be aware of the deceitfulness of Satan, who seeks to stir up conflict, animosities, enmities and dissension in the church. The danger to our own souls is that we become contentious individuals and fault-finding persons. The Word of God clearly forbids us to be contentious. St. Paul lists among the sins of the flesh which exclude from the kingdom of God not only gross sins such as idolatry and immorality, but also "*hate, bickering, jealousy, anger, selfishness, quarreling, divisions. . .*" (Galatians 5:20). He leaves us with no illusion about the seriousness of such sins: "*I warn you as I did before, that those who continue to do such things will have no share in the kingdom of God*" (Galatians 5:21). What is to be feared most is not that somehow I and those with me may not prevail, but that in the conflict, "*having preached to others, I myself might be a castaway*" (2 Corinthians 9:7).

Dr. Wollenburg also stated: "We are becoming a Synod of partisan groups, and such groups threaten to destroy the unity and love which God has given us." Recognizing the sincerity and zeal of the various groups and the laudatory intentions they may have does not take away the fact that the very organizing of such groups produces a partisan attitude that may well be used by Satan to create schism and sectarianism. The same danger exists on the national level of the Synod with the appointing of special "Blue Ribbon Committees" and "Task Forces" to do the work that could be done by elected boards and commissions of the Synod which, according to the bylaws, have the responsibility for carrying out their tasks. Some examples include the President's Committee on Finances (an LCMS Board of Directors responsibility), the Blue Ribbon Committee on Structure (a study which had been begun by the Board of Directors), the Sanctity of Life Task Force and the Task Force on Homosexuality (responsibilities of the Board for Human Care).

What Needs to Happen

One of the primary purposes for which the Synod was organized is stated in Article III of the Constitution:

The Synod, under Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions shall, . . . conserve and promote the unity of the true faith (Eph. 4:3-6, 1 Cor. 1:10), work through its official structures toward fellowship with other Christian church bodies, and provide a united defense against schism, sectarianism (Ro. 16:17) and heresy.

This synodical organization exists at least partly to prevent people from dividing into factions and partisan groups, each with its own concerns, practices and theological opinions. Isn't that what "providing a united defense" implies? In any conflict it is easy to be deceived into thinking that since our cause is just, any means may be used to achieve victory. Lies, deception, betrayal, hostility, abuse, manipulation, intimidation, strident accusations, all become weapons of warfare and are justified in our own mind and heart by the rightness of the cause. By such acts we may well destroy ourselves.

I agree that some action is needed to prevent us from dividing into factions, and I think that Dr. Wollenburg is correct in suggesting that "any action taken should have at least two purposes." The first is: *Not to silence theological and doctrinal discussions within the Synod, but to provide a safe place for such discussions and to provide procedures for conducting such discussions.*

At the most recent synodical convention there were attempts to silence discussion about certain issues. Usually such attempts are made through parliamentary proceduring such as calling the question immediately before anyone can begin a debate. However, I observed a more subtle attempt which went almost unnoticed. A suggestion was made from the floor to dispense with the electronic voting on a particular resolution and to make the vote unanimous by a show of hands. While I totally agreed with the resolution and wished that it could have been passed unanimously, nevertheless, I thought this action itself stifled debate and attempted to control the vote by intimidation. We would surely all know who voted against the resolution. Any time this sort of action or any sort of action that seeks to control debate on issues takes place, then we are in danger of encouraging division and may well violate the principle of love for the Lord and for our brother or sister in the Lord who may differ with us. This leads to the second purpose for any action taken, namely: *To prevent the creation of partisan groups within the Synod.*

Such actions as those described above do not produce brotherly discussion but anger, shouting, or even worse, silence. During such times, opposing thoughts are hardened to the point of no return. Dr. Martin Luther wrote in commenting on John 15:9 (*Luther's Works*, Vol. 24):

A trivial cause can dispel love and separate those who should really be bound with the firmest of ties . . . this is what happened in the days of the apostles when the devil raised up his schismatic spirits and heretics, so that the bishops and pastors became inflamed with hatred against one another and then also divided people into many kinds of sects and schisms from which Christendom suffered terrible harm. For in the absence of love doctrine cannot remain pure; nor can hearts be held together in unity.

We are confronted with situations in our Synod where some insist that they must work to eradicate certain practices which Synod has adopted, and they trouble and divide congregations over such issues, such as women's suffrage. They justify their actions on the grounds that they are in conscience bound to the Bible, as they understand it, and therefore they must follow their conscience and ignore or defy the resolutions of the Synod. Others, using the same argument, defiantly violate the Synod's often repeated position on close communion, in spite of repeated appeals to abide by the recognized and accepted practice of the Synod determined by convention. Persons such as these continue to argue their public right of dissent as the basis for creating dissension and division. St. Paul warns, "Watch out for those who create dissension and offenses contrary to the doctrine which you have learned and avoid them" (Romans 16:17).

One of my concerns is that our beloved Synod is going to self-destruct if we cannot bring ourselves to find constructive ways to discuss and work through our differences. David Mills, an Episcopalian, in an article published in *Touchstone* (Summer, 1995) reflected on the collapse of churches and hope for the future. Mills distinguished Christian hope and worldly hope when he wrote: "Worldly hope is the desire that things get better, or at least not worse, with a minimum of fuss and bother and as little pain as possible. Christian hope is hope in Christ. . . hope that is found only through the cross. . ."

Worth Considering

Several statements by Mills are worth our careful and prayerful consideration. "The danger of mere conservatism is to assume that any change in externals inevitably changes the substance. The danger of liberalism is to assume that a change in externals does not affect the substance." One must guard against a merely conservative opposition to change as well as an attitude that is cavalier about changing externals which asserts that style and substance are somehow independent. This observation also applies to the polity and structure of an institution.

Mills identified three different visions of reality which may be held by members of a church and, I would submit, also by members of a Synod. He speaks of: 1) "cloudy liberalism," 2) "the timid and incomplete orthodoxy of self-proclaimed moderates," 3) "the historic orthodoxy of traditional believers." These persons do not disagree simply on what the Bible says about a particular question, but they disagree on the more basic question of "What the world is like and how it is to be understood." Mills also asserted that:

When churches or institutions lose their shared beliefs, they respond in at least five ways: 1) *Denial*—pretending that nothing has really changed; 2) *Centralization*—moving everyone toward the center, trying to gain more control over those who rebel or lose interest; 3) *Homogenization*—blending things together so as not to polarize; 4) *Frantic activity*—invention of programs, projects, mission statements, decades of evangelism, trying to create unity; 5) *Cleansing*—expelling the most 'divisive' members.

Our Synod exhibits many of these symptoms described by Mills. New structures will not bring about peace and unity. Grand sounding mission statements or vision statements will not bring about peace and unity. Giving more authority to the president or to the board of directors of the Synod will not bring about peace and unity. Removing from our midst those who disagree with us will not bring about peace and unity. Ignoring our differences or trying to adopt a "blended theology" will not bring about peace and unity. Our only hope is to humble ourselves before God and know that it is not we who defend God and His Word, but that He defends us and that Christ alone makes us one. Let us return to our "first love," the Lord Jesus Christ, and stand in awe as He restores our peace and unity.

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From Conflict to Concord: Biblical Perspectives

BY WILLIAM B. KNIPPA

What can we learn from Scripture about the nature of conflict and ways in which the early church dealt with it?

Church Issues

We see several different settings in which conflict occurs in Scripture. One involves an entire group of people dealing with an issue that faced the church. This is represented by the dispute that arose concerning circumcision and other Jewish ritual practices that were very problematic in the Gentile church of Antioch. This conflict was addressed at the Council at Jerusalem, recorded in Acts 15. The approach in dealing with this crucial issue was similar in some ways to subsequent councils such as Nicea, Constantinople, Ephesus and Chalcedon as well as those that shaped the Reformation. An assembly was called, delegates were sent, discussions were held, the issue debated, a position adopted and a document prepared. The position that was adopted appeared to have brought some peace and sense of unity within the early church, but we are not sure for how long. The issues of meat sacrificed to idols and circumcision came up again.

Conflicts in the Epistles

A second setting involving conflict is seen in some of the epistles. Here one man, Paul, addressed specific uses and points of conflict in given churches. There were no assemblies or delegates. Rather, one man spoke to and attempted to influence a group. It will be instructive to explore how Paul addressed the concerns he faced with the churches, specifically those in Corinth, Galatia and Colossae. There is a pattern in Paul's interactions with each of these churches. He connected, confronted, established credibility and presented Christ. We can learn from Paul.

Paul "connected" with those gathered in each of the churches. He addressed issues of conflict within the context of the community, the Body of Christ. He communicated clearly his love for his readers, encouraged them in their faith and expressed his desire to be with them. He was not simply trying to "straighten them out." Rather, he was wanting to bring healing, strength and the clear Gospel to fellow saints. The Corinthian Christians were addressed as "those sanctified in Christ Jesus" (1 Corinthians 1:2) for whom he "gives thanks" (1 Corinthians 1:4). He wanted them to be involved in his ministry and desired to spend an extended period of time with them (1 Corinthians 16:6). They were his "dear friends" (2 Corinthians 7:1) in whom he had "great confidence," "takes great pride" and is "greatly encouraged" (2 Corinthians 7:1).

Paul was well aware that there were substantive issues of concern that created conflict in each of these groups. He addressed these issues. But he was also deeply committed that the truth must be spoken in love. He expressed that love directly and thus reinforced the connection that was theirs in Christ.

Having reinforced the bond of love and the fellowship in Christ that unites them, Paul confronted the problems that necessitated the letters. To confront is to face directly and squarely the issue or issues at hand. Paul did this. In Corinth, factions seeded by jealousy were tearing at the fabric of the church just as the soldiers at the cross sectioned Jesus' garment. Spiritual arrogance and elitism had displaced love as the driving force in the community. This resulted in a distortion of the beauty of the Body that had been fashioned by God and blessed with various parts that were to be in symphony with one another (1 Corinthians 12-13). In addition, some asserted that there was no resurrection of the dead, which meant that the Body, in effect, was dying or dead.

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In Galatia, the Gospel of Jesus Christ was "being perverted" by some, thus throwing the churches into "confusion" (1:7). Some Jewish Christians had great difficulty separating aspects of their religion and culture from the core-truth, the Gospel. They attempted to force the fresh and refreshing wine of the grace of God poured out in Jesus Christ into the old wineskins of the law's restrictions and demands. In light of this core conflict, Paul stated, "I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!" (2:21), and "if you let yourself be circumcised Christ will be of no value to you" (5:21). The sufficiency of Christ was at stake, so Paul could not but speak, even if it created conflict.

In Colossae, the Body was being threatened by a "hollow and deceptive philosophy which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of the world rather than on Christ" (2:8). Strict rules about what was permissible to eat and drink, an insistence on the continuing validity and efficacy of Jewish ceremonial law, and the intrusion of the Gnostic world-view and practice were a direct assault on the supremacy and sufficiency of Jesus Christ. Again, the conflict of belief and practice these influences created had to be faced and addressed.

Having connected with the saints and confronted the issues, Paul "takes a position" and "presents himself." There are two dimensions to this. One, he told people who he was. Personal experiences abounded: "I did not come with eloquence . . . I came in weakness and fear" (1 Corinthians 2:1,3); "I planted the seed" (3:6); "my conscience is clear" (4:4).

Additional information about his life before and after his conversion is contained in 2 Corinthians 11. But, of course, he did not just tell people who he was. He told them who Jesus is. He appealed to them in the name of Jesus (1 Corinthians 1:10). He pointed them to Jesus. In response to the issues of factions and quarreling, he queried, "Is Christ divided?" (1 Corinthians 1:13), saying in essence that "if Christ is divided, then it is fine for us to be divided as well." But, if Christ is not divided, then . . . Christ is the measure, the rule, the norm. He is the Truth. Concerning the dispute about resurrection, Paul again focused on Christ alone: "If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is in vain and our faith is useless" (1 Corinthians 15:14). If there is no resurrected Christ, there is no focus of our faith or reason for it. No resurrected Christ, no hope.

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul also personalized the truth of his faith saying, "I no longer live, but Christ lives in me" (2:20). Paul presented the objective, absolute truth of who Jesus Christ is and gave witness to his life-changing encounter with that Truth. In order to establish his apostolic authority among these churches, Paul described a portion of his physical and faith journey and experiences (1:13-2:21). He even asserted this authority over against fellow apostle Peter: "I opposed him to his face because he was wrong" (2:11). Peter was wrong because his position was undermining the sufficiency of Christ. Paul spoke both of himself and of Jesus. His desire for the "dear children" he addressed was that "Christ is formed in you" (4:19b). His passion for the truth and pastoral concern for those in Galatia went hand-in-hand.

Relational Conflicts

Scripture describes a third setting in which conflict arises. This type of conflict involves differences that exist between people that are not based on issues concerning the supremacy or sufficiency of Christ. Rather, they are relational in nature and derive from personal differences existing between people. We see evidences of this in Paul's relationship with John Mark as well as with Euodia and Syntheche. Regarding the latter, Paul "pleads with them to agree in the Lord" (Philippians 4:2). Their dispute has been a part of the public record of the church for almost two thousand years. While we do not know the exact nature of their conflict, we do know that it was impairing the spirit and community in Philippi in some way. Two points are obvious as Paul addressed this problem. One, they are not to agree between themselves, but "in the Lord." If there is to be reconciliation, it will happen because each of the women will see past her anger, frustration and hurt and look into the face of Christ. There, both will see the One who has given her grace, forgiveness and eternal life. Their disagreement pales into insignificance in light of the eternity they will share. The second point is that Paul exhorted the "loyal yoke fellows" to "help these women" (4:3). The community is to be involved in bringing about a resolution to the prob-

lem and reconciliation in the relationship. Here we see the importance of the community of faith in encouraging and facilitating healing.

We know more about the nature of Paul's conflict with John Mark recorded in Acts 15:36 ff.

Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us go back and visit the brothers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing." Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, but Paul did not think it wise to take him because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. They had such a sharp disagreement they parted company.

We also know that these two were reconciled, as Paul later described John Mark as "one who has been helpful in my ministry" (2 Timothy 4:11) and one whom the Colossians should "welcome" (Colossians 4:10). Based on the Scriptural record, there is no evidence to suggest that either attempted to undermine the other's ministry. Rather, they simply "went their own way" and continued in their respective ministries. We see that these two men and fellow workers in the Lord were able, by God's grace, to experience and demonstrate the fruits of the spirit in their relationship with one another. God be praised!

What We Can Learn

What can we learn from the conflicts recorded in Scripture?

It is vital that we understand that some issues must be faced, even if it does produce conflict. We should not avoid or shun conflict when to do so would be to undermine or deny the truth of who God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—is. To fail to present and contend for the truth when it is being attacked directly or indirectly is to betray the trust given the church by God Himself. The greatest threats to the church in Paul's time were those teachings coming from both the Jewish and Greek world that in some way undermined the person and work of Jesus. In light of these assaults Paul boldly declared Jesus' supremacy and divinity. Jesus is the God-man whose work on the cross has made us righteous. The great councils of the church have focused on just such issues.

It is also important to remember that sound, clear doctrine is essential in order for the church to be what God has called her to be. She is the means through which the Word is spoken and the sacraments administered. She is the Body of Christ, His presence in our world. Even those who grow a little weary of talk about the importance of doctrine usually react strongly to an individual or group that he or she believes in some way distorts what that person believes to be true and important. The importance of doctrine is driven home when one faces the reality of the influence of cults, both home grown and Eastern, legalistic theologies and secular belief systems on one's congregation, school or family members. Our doctrine directly affects the way in which we confess Christ, define our mission as the church, give witness to the faith, and live our lives.

We also see from Scripture that some conflict is purely the result of the flesh having its day in our life. It has nothing to do with lifting high the name of Jesus or stewarding the truth God has revealed and given us. Rather, it results from desires for control, attempts at self-righteousness, jealousy and a myriad of other evidences of the flesh most of us are all too aware of. This type of conflict has impeded the mission of many churches.

Paul's Strategy

What can we learn from Paul's way of approaching and dealing with conflict?

First, let us look at ourselves when in conflict with one or many in the church. We pray, "Create in me a clean heart and renew a right spirit within me." Be bold to ask, "Am I taking this position because the heart of the Gospel is at stake? Or, am I taking this position because of my dislike of my 'adversary,' desire for control or power, fear of losing status or position, thirst for revenge for a past experience, or other less than pure reasons?" If so, we cry, "Lord, have mercy on me," and, assured that He does, seek the Spirit's power and others' counsel to move us past this destructive point.

Second, let there be love in our hearts for the fellow saints, even those with whom we disagree and believe to be wrong in their belief, teaching or practice. Let us give thanks for them, for they, too, have received the grace of God in Christ. Let us pray for them, that God's will be done in them and their lives be full and rich in the Lord. Let us not seek to undermine or sabotage their ministries. Let us "put the best construction on everything," including their motives. We may often question the motives of those with whom we are in conflict, judging them to be less desirous than we of serving the Lord and less committed to the truth. Until there is good reason to take that position, assume that your fellow saint is just that: a fellow saint.

Third, get personal. That is, talk not only about the issue, but about your faith and your Lord. That personal ingredient, though obviously not the ultimate measure of truth, is important even when discussing theological and related points. Paul talked about his experiences and his journey. When people or groups are in conflict over any issue, it can be very illuminating to talk about what has shaped your faith, humbled you, lifted you, inspired you, discouraged you, challenged you and given you hope (1 Peter 3:15). Take time to try to understand the person or persons with whom you are in conflict. You may discover you have more in common than initially thought.

Fourth, and most important, ask, "Where is Jesus Christ in this conflict?" As noted above, Paul faced conflict because the very core of the Gospel was at stake. We need to ask ourselves, "Can I trace and show the relationship between my position and the person and work of Christ? Can I see an unbroken line linking my thoughts, beliefs and conclusions to the cross? How does my position on issues in the church regarding polity, communion practice, worship style, etc., touch and meet the cross of Christ?" See where this takes you. For example, how does your position on an issue such as worship style exalt the person and work of Jesus Christ? If the connection is clear, describe it and show that cross connection to those with whom you are in conflict. If an issue needs clarifying, take time to clarify it. Invite others to join in the task, as the apostles did at the Council of Jerusalem, to discern if your perceptions are valid. Then ask yourself how you believe your "opponents'" position undermines the person and work of Jesus Christ. Listen to the "adversary." Let that person describe his or her position and how he or she connects it to the cross. This would be particularly helpful in matters related to the theology and practice in our congregations, schools and church body. If you cannot make the connection between your position and the cross, you may not be taking the Biblical position, or the issue simply may not be worthy of conflict.

It is vitally important to deal with conflict in constructive and edifying ways in the Church and in our churches. The members of the early church impacted the surrounding environment by their love for one another. Hostile conflict indicates little love and drains energy that could be used to "make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20).

As stated previously, there are times when conflict is inevitable and necessary in order to give a clear and full witness to the Gospel. We desire that the Gospel be kept "pure" so that its life-giving power can save and nourish in the faith all who hear it. When approached with a spirit of love and desire to exalt Jesus Christ, blessing and a renewed focus on the mission of the church can result. But let us also be aware that the way we handle conflict is very important. We handle conflict within the Body in a way that reflects the love God has for us and keeps our eyes focused on Christ and the mission he has given us. We know that when we are united in our mission to take Jesus to the ends of the earth, lives will be changed forever, angels will rejoice, and the fellowship of the saints in this world will strengthen and encourage us as we carry out our mission to "make disciples of all the nations."



Leading The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in Peacemaking

BY TED KOBER

A Bride Like No Other

The wedding guests have gathered in great anticipation; the ceremony to be performed today has been long awaited The bridegroom and his attendants gather in front of the chancel

One by one, the bridesmaids, heralds of the nuptials, begin to stride in measured patterns. Several flower girls sow rose petals upon the white, unmarked aisle cloth. The sound of the organ rises, a joyous announcement that the bride is coming. Everyone stands and strains to get a proper glimpse of the beauty—then a horrible gasp explodes from the congregation. This is a bride like no other.

In she stumbles—something terrible has happened! One leg is twisted; she limps pronouncedly. The wedding garment is tattered and muddy; great rents in the dress leave her scarcely modest. Black bruises can be seen welting her bare arms; the bride's nose is bloody. An eye is swollen, yellow and purple in its discoloration. Patches of hair look as if they had actually been pulled from her scalp.

Fumbling over the keys, the organist begins again after his shocked pause. The attendants cast their eyes down. The congregation mourns silently. Surely the Bridegroom deserved better than this! That handsome Prince who has kept himself faithful to his love should find consummation with the most beautiful of women—not this. His bride, the church, has been fighting again. (Mains, 1979, p. 143)

Can We Avoid Conflict?

In a fallen world, conflict is inevitable, even in the church. The Scriptures provide countless examples of God's people in conflict. Jealous of Abel's relationship with God, Cain murdered his brother. The Israelites were bickering constantly with each other and grumbling against Moses and the Lord. King David lusted after a married woman, committed adultery and arranged to have her husband killed. Jesus' disciples argued among themselves as to which one of them was the greatest. Paul instructed the saints about conflicts in the churches of Corinth, Galatia and Philippi. And like the saints of old, we in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod continue to struggle with disputes in our congregations and Synod. Hard as we try, we cannot avoid conflict.

And yet, Jesus commands us to live at peace with one another. He preaches, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God" (Matthew 5:9). He teaches, "First go and be reconciled to your brother" before offering gifts at the altar (Matthew 5:23). He directs, "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:39b). Jesus reminds us that the world will recognize us as his disciples if we love one another (John 13:35).

Remember Who We All Are

Living at peace with each other begins by remembering who we are—baptized children of God. Our broken relationship with God was reconciled on the cross. In conflict with each other, we threaten our mutual peace when we forget that our conflict with God has been settled. But our concord and personal relationships can grow stronger through conflict when we act like we are forgiven by Him.

Ken Sande (1997) speaks of three dimensions of peace: peace with God, peace with others and peace within ourselves. All three dimensions of peace flow from our relationship to God. If we

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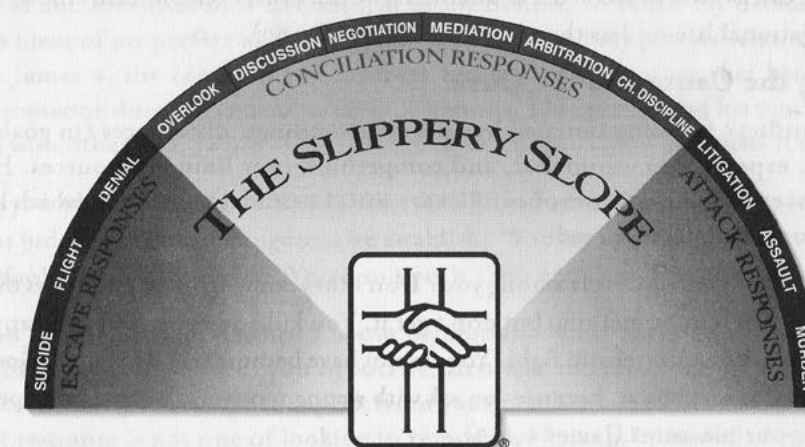
are not at peace with God, we cannot be at peace with others or within ourselves. Without the reconciling work of Christ, there is no peace.

Our mutual peace is not simply dependent upon what we *do* but who we *are*—forgiven children of God. In Paul's words, we are new creations, not because of what we have done, but because God reconciled us to himself through Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17-18).

For peace among believers, it is not enough to view ourselves as God's children. We need also to see others as God sees them. James Qualben (1994) points out that as church members, "a change of heart between you and me follows how we see each other" (p. 13). When we view one another as righteous people cleansed by the blood of the Lamb, we have a new relationship between us that overrides and surrounds our differences. Thus, Qualben continues, "we no longer strive over being Right, but rather over becoming Right with each other" (p. 13).

In God's family, relationships matter. Therefore, the means we employ in response to our disputes are important.

Sande (1997) categorizes three classifications of responses to conflict in "The Slippery Slope" (see diagram below). The left side of the slope includes *escape responses* of denial, flight and suicide. Christians often use escape responses to achieve the appearance of peace, thereby "faking peace." The right side contains the *attack responses*, consisting of litigation, assault and murder.



STAYING ON TOP OF CONFLICT

These responses are used often by people to force others to comply with their demands, often resulting in sacrificing relationships and "breaking peace." In contrast to these slippery slopes, the *conciliation responses* involve three personal responses (overlooking minor offenses; discussion of personal issues through repentance, confession and forgiveness; and negotiating substantive issues) and three assisted responses (mediation with Christian counsel, arbitration by believers and church discipline). These six peacemaking responses help us stay on top of the slippery slope, because we focus on reconciling our relationships to each other. Otherwise, in the escape and attack responses, we may fall into the KYRG zones: **Kiss Your Relationship Goodbye!**

Embrace the Opportunities of Conflict

When I came home from work one evening, I opened a widely distributed form letter from a fellow church member whom I will call Judy. I became angry as I read her letter, which I felt included some false and misleading information on a controversial issue in our congregation. I attempted to avoid confronting Judy myself; instead, I decided to direct my pastor or chairman of the congregation to deal with the matter. When I was unable to reach them, I reconsidered whether or not I was the one who needed to contact Judy. After some prayer and internal wrestling, I called Judy myself, prepared to both listen and talk.

Other people already had confronted Judy (well, actually they blasted her), and she was already in shock. Realizing that she was hurting, I asked her how I could help, and she started to cry. "Of all the people who called me, Ted, not one person offered to help. Can you really help me?"

Because I changed my attitude and looked for the opportunities in that conflict, I was able to help diffuse an explosive controversy in my congregation. I found myself in a situation where I could minister to someone who was hurting and in need of Christ's love and forgiveness. I was able to guide Judy in preparing and distributing a confession which quickly settled the matter. Through a conflict I originally wanted to avoid, Judy and I grew closer together as brother and sister in Christ, and the prompt resolution to a sticky situation became a positive influence for others.

Sande (1997) challenges our negative attitudes toward conflict by observing that conflict presents three opportunities: to glorify God, to serve others and to grow to be like Christ (see 1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1). Through conflict, we can give witness to our faith in God by the way we view conflict and respond to it. Consciously recognizing these opportunities in conflicts has changed my perspective and my overall focus in personal conflicts and in others' conflicts where I am called to assist. Instead of focusing on what *I* want, I focus on what *God* has done and wants for me in each opportunity that comes in the form of a conflict. In my conflict with Judy, this new focus was instrumental in helping me to overcome my fears and my desire to escape from the conflict.

Qualben (1994) reinforces the redemptive opportunities that conflict provides:

Since every major doctrine in Scripture soars from conflict, God's redemptive action and revelation usually happen in conflict contexts. In the midst of conflict between God and me, *in Christ* I am redeemed. As Christians we can expect redemption among conflicts in congregational life no less than in personal life! (p. 50)

Recognizing the Cause and the Cure

What causes conflict? It can be initiated by misunderstandings, differences (in goals, priorities, missions, gifts, expectations, opinions), and competition over limited resources. However, the most significant causes or escalators of conflict are sinful attitudes and desires which lead to sinful words and actions. In James we read:

What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures (James 4:1-3).

Sin breaks our peace. Unresolved sin puts us in direct conflict with God and others, and we forfeit our inner peace. Thankfully, God prescribed the remedy for this relationship disrupter—Jesus Christ. When we confess our sins, we acknowledge our need for Christ and his taking our place on the cross. When we deny any wrongdoing, we deceive ourselves and claim to have no need for Christ. In effect, we declare ourselves righteous based on our own works, discarding the redemptive work of Jesus.

So, what does all of this have to do with peace and resolving conflict in our Synod? We need to ask ourselves the following question: Are we truly a "church body marked by peace and unity," one of the fivefold vision statements articulated by our synodical president?

Synod's Source of Peace

Peace within our Synod will not flow from St. Louis. We cannot resolve it in convention. We cannot create a new bylaw that will bring it about. We cannot budget for it. Such peace is not from synods or man-made organizations.

It is not what we *do* but who we *are* that makes us a synod of peace. If we are the children of God, new creatures by His work, then collectively we are part of the Church of the Prince of Peace, together with other Christians around the world, and we are to live in His peace. But if we forget who we are and live like unbelievers who do not know Christ, then we will fail to be known as a synod marked by peace. Peter says it this way:

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness For this very reason,



make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins (2 Peter 1:3, 5-9).

As God's redeemed, we have everything we need to live like His children. For it is the power of the Gospel that empowers us for peacemaking. If we want to walk together (i.e., be a Synod) in peace, then we must remember that our sins are forgiven. But, as Peter notes, if we fail to possess these qualities in increasing measure, we will be ineffective and unproductive because we have forgotten who we are—forgiven children of God.

It sounds so simple, but it is so hard to implement. Why do we struggle sometimes to treat each other with love as Christ treats us? Is it not because our struggles with each other really reflect our own personal struggles in our relationships to God?

Our conflicts arise because we desire to be God. This is characterized by an attitude in which I want the world and everyone in it to conform to *my* desires, to fulfill *my* demands, and to be subject to *my* ideas of *my* perfect world, *my* perfect church, and *my* perfect relationships. As it is described in James 4, the causes of my conflicts begin with the desires that battle within *me*! Then, when someone does not live up to *my* expectations, I judge him and his motives, "sharing" my concerns with others (cf. James 4:11-12). David Powlison (1997) describes it this way:

Who are you when you judge? None other than a God wannabe We play the self-righteous judge in the mini-kingdoms we establish: "You are so stupid, cruel, insensitive, selfish. You've gotten in my way. You don't get it. You are a hindrance to my agenda."


As I reflect on Jesus' words in Matthew 7 about my responsibility in a conflict, I am disturbed by the graphic analogy he uses. "Ted, you hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye." Whenever I am in a conflict, my first response is not one of looking to remove my "plank." After all, I convince myself, my fault in the matter is minor, if it exists at all. The real problem, from my perspective, is my opponent's sin. But Jesus tells me I am a hypocrite who is blinded by this huge object in my eye!

Thus, when a conflict arises, we seek to self-justify and deceive ourselves into thinking that we are not in a conflict that involves sinful words and deeds (especially my sin). We blame others and describe our contribution to the conflict in neutral-sounding terms. Our attempts to avoid focusing on our own sins prevent us from reconciling with one another.

Confessing Leaders Break the Barriers

The key to reconciling disputing parties is focusing on confession and forgiveness. But as I work with conflicted parties, I encounter creative variations of blame-shifting that easily can lead parties away from the sin issues that undergird a conflict. Such was the case in a congregation that was embroiled in a conflict that began with the pastor and the director of Christian education (DCE).

At the district's recommendation, the congregation invited me to serve as a conciliator to guide them through their conflict. Without exception, the pastor, the DCE, the parish council, the elders and the education board all pointed the blame at anything or anyone other than themselves. Clashes in personalities and styles, confusion over roles and diversity in gifts were perceived as the problems. As the conflict escalated, factions formed and particular people were identified as the enemy. The solution from various leaders' perspectives was for someone else (conciliator or district) to remove the prime offender(s) so that the remaining people would be free to "get on with the task of ministry." Ironically, in their zeal to solve their problems, they lost sight of the opportunities in this conflict for the vital ministry of reconciliation.



While it was true that this church had some systems issues and legitimate differences in gifts and opinions, the major cause of their conflict was unrepented sin. The parties failed to recognize their individual sins. Corporately, elected boards and informally aligned groups refused to acknowledge their sinful attitudes and actions. They deceived themselves by characterizing the situation only in terms of non-sinful issues and proposing solutions that ignored mutual confession and forgiveness and the power of the Gospel.

In reality, the leaders and members were involved in all sorts of sinful behavior. From the pastor and DCE to the secretary and the chairman of the elders, gossip was rampant. Their accusations were based on second, third and fourth-hand information. Although no one boldly declared himself to be God, several people acted like God (the "God wannabes") by claiming to know the motivations and hearts of the people they identified as "the problem." Instead of going directly to the parties with whom they were in conflict, individuals sought out group supporters for pity parties and prayer meetings. In these "Christian" group settings, they stirred up each others' bitter and angry hearts, and they made plans to undermine others. In Jesus' words, they were simply murdering each other (Matthew 5:21-22).

After some teaching and gentle admonishment, three key leaders in that church came to recognize that a major source of the conflict in their church and school was their individual, unrepented sin. Once they finally admitted this, they understood the solution—confess their sins. Each person found that confessing his and her sins openly to each other was awkward and new. Nevertheless, they obeyed God's Word in response to the love shown to them by Jesus. The forgiveness they offered each other and received from God gave them new life in their relationships to each other.

The next challenge these leaders faced was to confess their sins to other people in their church. Christ's forgiveness moved them to act on their faith and courageously face other leaders with a public confession of their sins.

Frequently, we church leaders have a great struggle with this point. The fear is that if I confess my sins to the church (the district, the Synod, etc.), the people won't respect me as their pastor (or DCE, principal, teacher, elder, etc.). We seek strength from our own righteousness, wanting to demonstrate to our followers what good Christians we are. Instead of fearing God and trusting in him, we fear that public confession will result in making us look like failures in front of the people we lead. We trust in our own good works and self-proclaimed reputation. This false premise could not be farther from the truth, but it is what so many of us sinners hang onto in order to protect our self-image (see Proverbs 3:34).

Christian leaders who model confession of their own sins break the barriers of self-righteous attitudes that permeate conflicted groups. In the situation described previously, strong leadership grew out of individual confession and forgiveness. Originally, church members and district officials doubted that God could bring healing without one or more called workers leaving. Confession and forgiveness among the church leaders opened the doors for a new working relationship with each other that gave witness to mature faith in Christ. It is radically different from the world's way! It is life-changing! It is the power of the Gospel in action!

Strategies for Peacemaking throughout our Synod

What happened in that church is a lesson for every church in our Synod. Reconciliation miracles are happening in those places where God's people are living their faith in their everyday life: confessing sin, forgiving sin and living in daily repentance and the drowning of the old Adam. As God's people gather together in Jesus' name, they teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, letting the peace of Christ rule in their hearts, since as members of one body they are called to peace (Colossians 3:12-17).

But in too many of our churches, and in numerous disputes in our districts and Synod, confession and forgiveness have become rites reserved for the Divine Service. Our Lutheran confessions and doctrine are solidly biblical, but our walk with each other reveals our other "practicing confessions" of self-proclaimed piety and self-assured righteousness.

When we as leaders and members of congregations look to the Synod for making us a church body marked by peace, our eyes are focused on the wrong place. "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:3).

In helping us focus on Jesus, our local congregation has the privilege and responsibility to love us, encourage us and exhort us. The church exercises corrective love for the purposes of restoration, to protect other members from falling into sin and to bring honor to our Lord. Today many congregations have forgotten this crucial role, and they often look to outside sources such as district or Synod to take over this responsibility, or they simply neglect their duty altogether.

In my contacts with Lutheran leaders, I am urging them to actively assist their church members to respond to conflict biblically in a process called Christian conciliation. Conciliation is distinctively Christian when founded on three convictions. First, conciliation must be Christ-focused, for genuine peace may be found only in the redemptive work of Jesus. Second, conciliation should be supported and offered through the local church, where the body of believers build each other up and hold each other accountable in love. Finally, conciliation is Christian when counsel is provided from God's Word, rightly dividing Law and Gospel.

In *Guiding People through Conflict* (1998), Ken Sande and I recount actual cases in which church leaders applied biblical mediation principles and skills to resolve an employment dispute, a Sunday school curriculum fight, an education controversy, a contract disagreement and an estate battle. Our everyday conflicts, in and out of the church, provide opportunities for the Christian to live the life of a forgiven and forgiving child of God. In Christian conciliation, people are guided by Scripture to respond to every kind of dispute from playground arguments to divorces, civil lawsuits and church conflicts. Just as Paul urged the members of the church at Philippi to assist two women in conflict (Philippians 4:2-9), we too need to take advantage of these opportunities to disciple one another in love.

Strategies for becoming known as a Synod of peace begin with each of us in our own congregations. First, we must remember that our sins are forgiven and view one another as forgiven children of God. Next, we need to hold ourselves accountable to our own churches. We need to encourage our churches to preach the Good News patiently, lovingly, continuously, and repeatedly and call us and others to repentance. The church teaches God's Word and administers the Sacraments to strengthen and encourage us, and God calls us to put our faith into practice. Finally, each of us is responsible for setting an example and for teaching and admonishing one another where God has placed us. Let us not grow weary in leading our congregations to action!

May God grant us grace to see each other as He sees us—forgiven children of God. To God alone be the glory!

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Doctrine Works! Theological Aspects of Conflict Redemption

BY JAMES QUALBEN

Beloved in Christ, God knows all about us but loves us nonetheless. But how can that be? There are so many things unsettled between my Lord and me. So much . . . *conflict!*

We confessional Lutherans hold to the doctrine of Grace epitomized by the phrase *simul iustus et peccator*—at once right with God while yet a sinner. Because of Jesus Christ and through our Baptism, that's how it is for us. Life in Christ struggles in so much conflict with God, between my sinful nature and what I have done/left undone and, on the other hand, God's unrelenting gracious love for the likes of me.

A major difference between human ways and God's way of coping with conflict lies in the desired outcome: Law (humanism—judgment via secular mediation and arbitration methods), or Gospel (new life, redemption and vitality via doctrines such as grace at work). Because of Christ, our conflict with God can be redemptive through his blessings.

Our doctrine informs us of how God deals with us. But here's the key question for confessional Lutherans: "We know how God treats us. Is that how we treat each other?"

Or could some of us be guilty of false doctrine—in practice? I am thankful that Synod has spared me from its convention experiences and kept "Peace in the Parish" out of Synod politics. Some of you have heard me tell of my conversation with an Associated Press reporter who sat in the next seat on a *long* plane trip. He confronted me: "Don't you try to tell me what you Lutherans believe. I saw what you *really* believe by how you treated each other at the convention I just covered for the AP!"

The good news is that so many around Synod—conservatives and moderates alike—recognize the underlying doctrinal crisis in how we deal with conflict. That's why, a dozen years or so ago, Synod's Board of Directors contracted with me to develop a new process for helping LCMS congregations—including those with schools—cope with conflict.

Throughout the four years of Synod's "Peace in the Parish" project, we developed a *conflict redemption* process based on confessional Lutheran doctrine, adapting my experience in multi-interests negotiation and leading to biblically purpose-led (e.g. Paul's "so thats" emphasis noted a bit later) recommendations. The clearly Lutheran doctrinal center of the process may be why most congregations where I have consulted have been LCMS. ("Audicators" I have trained in several districts have used this process in well over a hundred more LCMS settings.) Perhaps it should be noted here that I have *not* been involved in the essentially secular mediation/arbitration "Reconciler" process that appeared in the LCMS after the Pittsburgh Convention.

Some of you have heard me present at LCMS events on the doctrinal bases for coping with conflict; others have read our books, such as *Peace in the Parish*, on this subject. (All of these publications have gone through Synod's doctrinal review process at the highest level, by the way.) So, what shall I say now in this short space on this topic?

JAMES QUALBEN WORKED FULL TIME FOR SYNOD FOR FOUR YEARS TO ORIGINATE AND DEVELOP "PEACE IN THE PARISH." HE HAS CONTINUED PRESENTING AND TRAINING THROUGH THIS PROCESS FOR SYNOD, DISTRICTS AND LCMS CONGREGATIONS FOR MORE THAN 12 YEARS. WITH HIS WIFE LOIS HE LIVES IN SAN ANTONIO WHERE HE ALSO SERVES AS SENIOR EDITOR FOR LANGMARC PUBLISHING (800-864-1648) AND AS A PART-TIME PARISH PASTOR.

Catechesis

Luther's catechisms focused on how Lutheran doctrine *works*. How does this Article, this Petition, this Commandment (etc.) connect with my neighbor, family, vocation, spouse, and other realities in daily Christian life? If you doubt this point, just look at Luther's Explanations—"What Does This Mean?" which amount to "How Does This Work . . . in Real Life?"

Unfortunately, the generation after Luther decided it was more important to connect doctrines with other doctrines—rather than with everyday life, violating the essence of our Small and Large Catechisms. The first Lutheran heretic, Andreas Osiander, did precisely that. Martin Chemnitz (and other highly political "theologians" in the 1560s to 80s) more thoroughly perverted Luther's vision of the Gospel as connecting with daily life. And, I believe, we've suffered from their perversion of Luther's catechetical approach to vocation, church, and ministry ever since.

When we forsake Luther's *catechetical* approach to Christian living, we Lutherans easily succumb to intellectual constipation—especially in how we approach conflict. We keep it all in our heads. Often we don't let our doctrine connect with our hearts, wills, behaviors and with how we treat each other. We preach pure doctrine; teach it; write about it. But too many Lutherans seem to assume that they must not *do* doctrine with each other! (Have any of you teachers and principals ever seen this acted out at Voters' Meetings, for example, where there's almost a yellow line down the middle, dividing pro-school from anti-school voters?)

Mission and Doctrine

Until recent decades, the Missouri Synod was characterized by a vital tension between concern for pure doctrine and an obsession with mission. This tension goes back to "Loeche's Men" and "Walther's Men," as partially typified by differences between the 801 DeMun and Springfield seminaries. My dad's generation (an ELC pastor-scholar) was so impressed by how Missouri could take such mission risks while knowing where the limits were—how far Missouri could go without surrendering its doctrinal/identity birthright. Walter Maier radio broadcasts were required listening in my childhood household; there was no going out to play stickball while *The Lutheran Hour* was on. The Lutheran Reformation was the first mass media movement in history (via the printing press). *The Lutheran Hour*, and later, on TV, *This Is Your Life*, became the first mass media religious efforts of our century. Yes, this risky pioneering happened because of the Missouri Synod.

With the exception of several districts' recent bold mission initiatives and the Lutheran Laymen's League's (LLL) radio venture into Red China, can you imagine such synodical mission risks happening today? Since the late 60s the Charismatics have taken over mass media religious broadcasting, and the surging vitality of Missouri's world-wide mission came under political pressure.

My doctoral dissertation research was about change organizations, investigating why most fail and very few succeed. A key factor in the success of extremely rare successful movements is the integrity of their values system. Inevitably, when an organization's identity level of values (e.g. pure doctrine, C.F.W. Walther, *The Divine Call*, etc.) does not exist for the sake of mission, doctrinal concerns collapse down to the next lowest level—politics, control games and such. This disintegration of the dynamic tension between Identity-for-Mission is typical of cults and gangs, for example. In such organizations, one of the chronic features is what historians term loyalty-looping and loyalty-transactions, in which appeals to loyalty override competence and commitment to mission.

Doctrinal integrity is crucial for congregation, school, district and synodical levels of organization. Without sound doctrine, not only do identity values blur the parameters beyond which risks must not be taken lest they sacrifice our birthright, but fuzzy identity values become incapable of providing the staying power for effective mission. So it should not be surprising that those denominations that are fuzziest on doctrine are also the least effective in mission. On the other hand, this relationship amounts to almost a law: doctrine often becomes an instrument for conflict whenever it gets disconnected from mission.

Purposeful Doctrine

"So that" (and its variations) could be one of the most important phrases in God's Word. Throughout Scripture, God doesn't merely act, even when sending his Son, but specifies even greater purposes beyond the act itself ("so that whoever believes in him shall not perish . . ."). God acts purposefully. Too many of our churches do not.

Absence of conflict has never been essential to getting on with mission. If it were, Christianity would have died out long ago. Re-read Acts and Galatians, for example. Compared to those first-generation Christians, the recent synodical controversy looks like a Sunday school picnic. So what makes the difference?

The early church's conflicts were kept in "purposeful perspective." Our earliest predecessors knew, and were unified by, what their job was. And they got the job done! They shared a decisive vision that served not only as their guidance system and big picture for keeping all else in perspective but also led them in the same direction.

An LCMS huntsman I interviewed recently likened this to experience with his hounds. "Until they spot the rabbit, they nip and snarl at each other. But once they see it, they're off and running in the same direction, pursuing that rabbit. But if the varmint finds a hole and disappears, those hounds go after each other again." He likened the analogy to his congregation: "We've lost sight of the rabbit."

The way many churches (and conventions) invoke "mission" reminds me of cheerleaders whose team hasn't actually won a game in years. Then, too, there are others who spend so much energy on who is—or isn't—on the team that they never get into the mission "game" (or even know what sport or league or ballpark their team belongs in).

From another perspective we should note that an "imploded" (turned in on itself) personality becomes inherently self-destructive. The same is true of churches. When a church implodes, it is no longer a question of whether it is going to face self-destructive conflict but rather how soon and how badly!

Law and Gospel

Conflict has a way of filtering out the Gospel heard and experienced. I have seen it too often: conflicted pastors turn pulpits into soapboxes. Or conflicted laity complain: "All we hear around here anymore is Law" (even when tapes I have heard of their pastor's recent sermons manifest a pretty good distinction between Law and Gospel).

God's Word reveals a quite different attitude toward conflict. Almost all of God's major acts of redemption and revelation have happened in conflict contexts. Contrast that with our usual expectations of conflict!

Over and over, I have witnessed the *healing* power of our doctrine. For old (including childhood) hurts. For vocational distress which, despite Luther's emphasis and insights, remains (I think) our most neglected focus for interpretative ministry across America. For congregational wounds over the years. And for so many more everyday, practical troubles in our personal lives, biographies and households.

But the way we usually approach conflict in our churches almost amounts to a *Fourth Use* of the Law—the litigious use. Just before I started working for the LCMS, Synod was facing well over \$200 million in lawsuits filed by its own members against congregations/schools, districts and Synod. For example, I was scheduled to come to a congregation for a "Peace in the Parish" consultation several years ago. This site is the only cancellation I have had, which happened just a week or so before my trip. As usual, it was a complex (but doable) situation. But Law took over until, before long, Synod itself was thrown into a constitutional crisis over this matter—and big bucks paid out.

By contrast, my cousins in Norway are active in the confessional Lutheran mission movements (we slur their American counterparts as "Haugeans" while the lively Norwegian original was never corrupted by American Puritanism). One, a dairy farmer, probably has forgot more of our Lutheran confessions than many of our pastors ever knew. Per and his wife belong to a local multi-purpose "small group" that has been in continuous existence for 204 years! One of the keys to success is their Bible study focus on the *healing* power of the whole of God's Word upon real, everyday hurts and needs.

In times of conflict, the basic test usually comes down to this: how much confidence do we really have in the Gospel?

Reliance on Matthew 18:15-20

Upon its Law and Gospel! Ever since the Martin Stephan episode so long ago, there is precious little evidence that LCMS crises have honored this crucial text—even though Synod's original constitution cited the "bond of peace" as Synod's first objective. How can we salute the authority of Scripture, only to scorn it in how we cope with our conflicts?

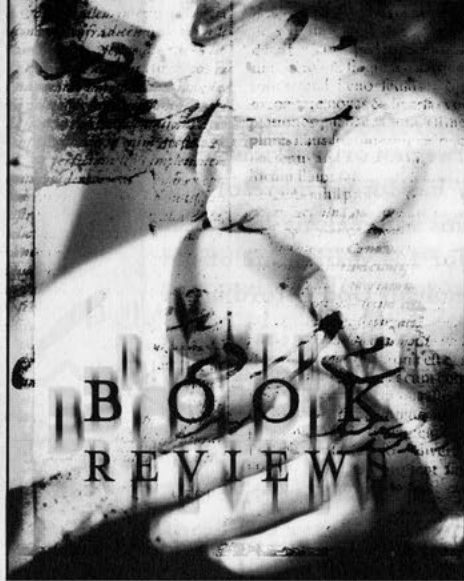
There is much more to this text than meets the naive eye. Indeed, few passages in God's Word have been more grievously misinterpreted by more scholars (and denominations) for longer than these six verses. That's one reason why three chapters in one of my books (*Peace in the Parish*) are devoted exclusively to the scholarly and practical aspects of this text.

For example, compare all-too-common "self-exclusion" practices (those "letters" that often excuse elders' malfeasance, for instance) with this passage's context in Matthew 18; it follows right after the parable of the Lost Sheep. Here is how to get them *back* (!), the following six verses tell us. Not how to get *rid* of lost sheep.

But pay attention to Peter's follow-up question in verse 21 which amounts to: "How often do we have to use these practical forgiveness process steps?" Our Lord's reply emphasizes our need to exhaust each of the earlier steps *in good faith* before "telling it to the church" or going to court . . . or invoking the usually grotesque (confessionally) claim of "it's a 'public matter'." One try at either Step One or (the usually misunderstood) Step Two simply doesn't hack it—not for people of the Word!

A plea permeates the motives for writing this brief article: Let's move beyond trying to be mere "technicians" and become better "theologians" of conflict! I believe that conflict is much too important an opportunity for us to experience how our doctrine actually works than to squander conflict on secular "med/arb" (mediation/arbitration) approaches or litigators.





Managing Church Conflict

by Hugh Halverstadt. Louisville:

Westminster John Knox Press, 1994.

The author begins with two assumptions. First, conflict is not inherently destructive or dangerous. Rather, conflict is a normal and natural part of human social existence and is necessary for growth and positive change. There is potential for harm in conflict, but that potential arises from our brokenness. The second assumption is that the conflict management role is one of ministry. "The exercise of our ministry in a meantime world involves constraining human brokenness as well as realizing human wholeness" (p. 90).

The model presented is based on the fundamental biblical concept of the covenant community, a community based on a shared ethic of respect and responsibility. It is a community which recognizes and embraces the reality of Law-Gospel living. The Law reminds the community in conflict that destructive behaviors can and must be restrained and also that people accept the responsibility for those behaviors so that all may be "[accessible] to God's grace" (p. 176). The goal of any intervention is shalom, a restoration of community which is marked by "wholeness rather than harmony. . . . personal respectfulness rather than emotional closeness. . . . usable communal solidarity in ministry rather than simple general assent" (pp. 186 ff.). The church cannot be a witness to the world if we cannot speak the truth in love with one another.

Flowing from this community model is the author's creative and practical description of "bystanders." Bystanders are not disinterested spectators who stand by idly as a conflict engulfs the church. They are the "reasonable persons" who speak for the interests of the larger community. Their interest is in *how* conflict is resolved, and their communal power is used to enhance the process. Their role is so important in Halverstadt's model that mobilizing their power is one of the first tasks which the conflict manager must accomplish, with resolution perhaps not being possible without these committed community members. It is not the role of the manager or the bystanders to resolve issues or solve problems; their task is to secure constructive behavior or constructive disengagement between the principal players.

Within this context the author then presents his model for managing church conflict. What this writer found refreshing was Halverstadt's willingness to lay out a detailed and comprehensive model and say: "Try it; it works for me." At first glance, the plan seems overwhelming and complicated, complete with flowcharts and step-by-step instructions. We naturally long for something simple, but the author addresses this concern by reminding us that church conflicts are part of a complex system of personal and institutional factors which resist the quick fix.

Briefly, the model itself begins with a self-examination by the conflict manager in order to clarify assumptions, attitudes and roles. The second step is to appraise the conflict including contextual factors and the power and ethical orientation of the principal players. Step three can go in several directions depending upon the results of the first two. It is hoped that relationships can be mediated or issues negotiated. If not, constraining strategies are employed to provide time and space to secure commitment to fair fighting and problem solution.

In his introduction, Halverstadt reminds us that shalom in the church is God's gift which, combined with our response, leads the church to an approach which is respectful, honest and courageous. "The fundamental axiom of this book is that the key to making church conflicts Christian may be found in fashioning a faith-based process. . . ." (p. 4). That emphasis alone recommends this book to the church.

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The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict

by Ken Sande. Grand Rapids:
Baker Books, 1997.

When I was asked to do this book review, I jumped at the chance. The whole area of resolving conflict, of making and maintaining peace, is intriguing for me. Perhaps it's because I am a middle child, the father of four rowdy boys, married to an attorney, and a pastor serving as a circuit counselor, that I am always on the lookout for resources that will help me to understand and resolve conflict.

I first learned of Ken Sande, an attorney involved with the Christian Legal Society (CLS), four years ago when my wife was in law school and involved with CLS. Ken Sande serves as the executive director of Peacemaker Ministries and since 1982 has worked as a full-time Christian conciliator. He has used biblical peacemaking principles to help resolve hundreds of conflicts, including business, employment and family disputes; church divisions; and complex lawsuits. He has worked with his wife Corlette, an elemen-

tary school teacher and counselor, to successfully develop resources for children. I believe his process is a very helpful resource for the church to resolve conflict.

This book is written in a popular style ideally suited for both professionals and lay persons. The paradigm for the book is the Peacemaker Pledge which serves also as the "mission statement" for Peacemaker Ministries. Few Lutherans will struggle with this language: "As people reconciled to God by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we believe that we are called to respond to conflict in a way that is remarkably different from the way the world deals with conflict. We also believe that conflict provides opportunities to glorify God, serve other people and grow to be like Christ. Therefore, in response to God's love and in reliance on His grace, we commit ourselves to respond to conflict according to the following principles" (pages 235-36).

The principles of the pledge serve as the four main sections of the book, all beginning with the letter "G." Because this reviewer loves alliteration for preaching and teaching, I found the paradigm particularly pedagogical: Glorify God, Get the log out of your own eye, Go and show your brother his fault, and Go and be reconciled.

For one familiar with other methods of conflict resolution available to our church, "Peace in the Parish" by James Qualben and "Bridge-Builders" by Peter Steinke, the beauty of this book is its biblical simplicity and objectivity. Basically, four questions are being asked of the one experiencing conflict: "How can I please and honor the Lord in this situation? How have I contributed to this conflict, and what do I need to do? How can I help others to understand how they have contributed to this conflict? How can I demonstrate forgiveness and encourage a reasonable solution to this conflict?"

The reader will find this volume is packed with powerful stories and instruction (detailed checklists and summary application questions are provided) for navigating through conflict in a Godly manner. This book is a must read for any believer experiencing conflict in life; and who isn't? Is there a weakness in the book? Yes. There are statements concerning the sovereignty of God that will raise the eyebrows of Lutheran readers (p. 52), and there is no place for the Sacraments as key connections to God in the process of resolving conflict.

Despite these limitations, this is a very fine practical and educational book. Every Christian will find this book to be a practical and powerful resource for fostering peace in parish and school. A pastor would be wise to examine this volume and all of the other materials from Peacemaker Ministries (they have a web site) for educating the entire parish in biblical conflict resolution.

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Helping People Forgive

by David W. Augsburger. Louisville:
Westminster John Knox Press, 1996.

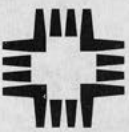
Forgiveness has received a great deal of attention lately in the national conversation. The events surrounding President Clinton have provided the impetus. Television commentators as well as newspaper and magazine articles have contributed a variety of perspectives. The seldom-mentioned idea of sin has once again become part of the popular vocabulary. Unfortunately, much of the discussion has occurred in an ethical vacuum.

It was in this environment that I encountered *Helping People Forgive*. This is the third book David Augsburger has written on forgiveness. What is forgiveness? When is forgiveness required and how is it accomplished? Is forgiveness possible without repentance? What role does reconciliation play in forgiveness? These are some of the questions the book addresses.

A background in counseling is necessary to appreciate fully all that is available to the reader. The objective of the book is to provide a new paradigm for forgiveness. This is accomplished developmentally throughout the course of the book. Each chapter begins with a story or two. These set the stage for the following discussion. Each chapter focuses on a particular model or concept from the counseling profession. The chapters conclude with two or three propositions drawn from the preceding material. A collection of these 27 propositions, in the epilogue, form a basis for the new paradigm of forgiveness.

Because I do not have training in counseling, sections of the book proved challenging. The lay person will be unfamiliar with some of the terminology and concepts. While the author communicates a good deal of information in a fairly short work, the epilogue does not provide a tidy answer to the questions related to forgiveness. It does, however, provide an excellent starting point for developing a cohesive paradigm of forgiveness.

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The Peacemaker's Guide to Resolving Personal Conflicts

by Ken Kende, General Counsel
Baker Book & Book

The whole secret of making peace is in making for me. Perhaps not because I am a child, but because I am a man.

Journal of Ken Kende, an attorney with the Christian Legal Society (CLS), when an wife made late wife and... Ken Kende serves on the Board of Peacemakers Ministry and... worked as a full-time Christian... has used biblical peacemaking... to resolve his conflicts of conflict, business, employment and family, etc... doctorate, and teaches biblical... and with his wife Corinne, an eleven...

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In this book the author... There are... the sovereignty of God... that will raise the... of Luther's... in 1521 and there is... for the... as the... in God in the... of...
Does this... this is a... for... and... will find... powerful... and... and all of the... from... the... in...

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