

# ISSUES...

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**SIN**

SIN	
Articles	
5	What Should the Church Do About Personal Sin? Leonard W. Heidemann
9	What Will the Church Do About the Church's Sin? Marvin Bergman
16	The Responsibility of the Church for the Sins of the State Larry Grothaus
3 Editorials	
23 Book Reviews	
27 Last Words W. Theo. Janzow	

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### Editor's Notes

Today there is a renewed interest in the study of sin. For a time man tried to forget sin's existence and, especially, his affliction with it. The havoc which has resulted from this denial is so apparent one may well wonder how anyone can fail to recognize our plight. It is time to face the plague of sin and the festering wounds it has produced in our government, church, and personal lives. This *ISSUES* presents some of the current consequences of sin and suggests ways to deal with some of the problems it is causing today. The views expressed are the authors and do not represent the position of the Concordia faculty.

THE EDITOR

### About the Authors

Dr. Leonard W. Heidemann is assistant pastor at St. John Lutheran Church, Seward. Rev. Marcus Zill is the administrative pastor. Both men have extensive records of district and synodical service as well as service as parish pastors to their credit. All other materials were contributed by the Concordia faculty.

## POLITICAL CRIMES AND SIN

When God created the universe, He completed His work with the creation of a special pair of beings, ones created in His image, who were to subdue the earth and to exercise dominion over God's other living creatures. When God's image-bearers rebelled against Him, that action was quite properly termed "the Fall."

Sin occurs when humans act beneath their dignity as those created in God's image. Eve, created to be the helper suited to Adam, created to exercise dominion over all non-human creatures, fell when she believed Satan's lie that she could become like God when she already was in God's image. She fell when she permitted the serpent to exercise dominion over her. Adam fell when he permitted his fallen wife to exercise dominion over him.

Sin, in its fullest dimension, consists of those actions in which humans act beneath their dignity as the epitome of God's visible creatures. For this reason the political crimes of President Nixon and Vice-President Agnew are sins against human dignity, for in each instance a human acted beneath his dignity as God's special creature.

In similar fashion the abortion decision of the U. S. Supreme Court that denied to the fetus the protection of law, treating the unborn child as if he or she is a nonperson exactly as a court over a century earlier had declared Black slaves to be nonpersons, is an action beneath the dignity of humans. It is a sin to treat that which God has created as if it is "common" or "unclean."

Or again, the U. S. Government treatment of its Indian citizens as if they are the property of the state and its failure to care for them as adequately as Nebraska ranchers care for their cattle should be beneath the dignity of government officials. It is sin to degrade fellow humans in this fashion.

Yet there are some Christians in America who act as if it is wrong for the Christian churches of America to speak out against such sins. They claim that because such actions are "political," the church as church is to remain silent on such matters.

The strange thing is that some Lutherans, ignoring their heritage, say the same things. They forget that Luther, in his commentary on Psalm 82, called on the pastor to *publicly* repudiate the sins of both princes and peasants *from the pulpit* as demanded by his office. The prince, Luther indicated, was to be publicly repudiated for such sins as failing to protect widows and orphans, or for serving himself rather than his poor citizens. (*Luther's Works*, vol. 13, pp. 49ff).

In a lengthy series of articles at the start of 1936 in the *Lutheran Witness*, Theodore

Graebner used Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions to prove that the separation of church and state means only a difference in the power of each. The state can only use the power of the sword. The church cannot use the sword, but is privileged to use the far greater power of the Word of God. Hence the state can only deal with crimes, while the church deals with sins.

It is for this reason that the church as church must be involved in those political issues in which humans degrade themselves and others. The state deals with crimes and can only punish them with the power of the sword. This means, as for example in the case of Mr. Nixon, the state can only punish or pardon. Frequently either option leaves the one so treated a broken person.

But the church deals with sins. As a result it must unsparingly use the Law of God to expose every sin for the ugly, dehumanizing thing it is. It must use the Law of God to expose every situation where humans act to degrade themselves and others. It must label clearly as sin all governmental actions that deny that all humans have been created in the image of God.

However the church does not deal with sins for the purpose of choosing between pardon or punishment. The church deals with sins so that, once contrition is produced in the sinner by the Holy Spirit through the Law, it may apply the healing power of the Gospel. And its act of healing through the Gospel is at the same time an act that energizes forgiven sinners to live in accord with their regained status as God's image-bearers. But this healing and this energizing will take place only when the church deals directly and forcefully with those political issues that clearly are sins against God's holy and unchanging Law.

We in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod have not always dealt with political sins as openly and as directly as we should have. One of C. F. W. Walther's unfulfilled dreams was the creation of a purely political journal, sponsored and edited by the Synod, to apply Law and Gospel to social and political sins. Without such a vehicle, Synod has only sporadically dealt with social evils—although its record when viewed objectively seems no worse and in many instances far better than that of mainstream American Protestantism.

Yet the Synod, in the words of its Mission Affirmations, has never recognized any "area of life that may be termed 'secular' in the sense that it is removed from the lordship of Jesus Christ." Hence officially—and on occasion in actual practice—it has affirmed that the church as church must use the sword of God's holy and invincible Word to expose social and political sins so it can then apply the healing power of the Gospel. When it does, the church is about its Father's business.

ARNOLD KRUGLER

## editorials

### THE CHURCH'S CLASSROOMS AND SIN

With its large system of Christian day schools and its many facilities for higher education, the Lutheran Church must face the question of sin in the classroom. Both its teachers and pupils would quickly agree that sin does exist there, and both would cite examples of pupil misbehavior as evidence. If pupils were asked how to deal with such misbehavior, it is likely that they would readily, perhaps even enthusiastically, find some punishment worth the crime. If teachers were asked the same question, they would be more hesitant, desiring to do that which would best help the pupil grow into a mature Christian individual yet not always knowing what steps in each particular instance would indeed be most beneficial to the individual. The rule of thumb, Law for the unrepentant, Gospel for the penitent, is much easier quoted than applied. Is a pupil's emotionless expression a sign of sullen unrepentance or is it hiding a deep-aching soul?

The teacher's own sinfulness—including his or her sinful nature and in some cases a particular sin which is related to the pupil's misbehavior—further complicates efforts to deal lovingly with the pupil. Robert Sylwester in his book *The Elementary Teacher and Pupil Behavior* identifies four categories of teacher misbehavior: lack of preparation, special relationships with pupils, verbal abuse, and unfair punishment (p. 164).

In each of these instances of teacher misbehavior, Sylwester notes, it is the pupils who suffer. If the teacher is unprepared, the lesson is frequently long and vague. The pupils become bored and restless. This in turn leads to a reprimand from the teacher for their inattention and fooling around—for their sinfulness. Just as frequently, however, it is the pupil's misbehavior which drives the teacher to frustration and anger, to sarcastic remarks and unfair treatment—to sin. However, simply placing blame does not help us get to the heart of the problem. What must happen if the teacher is to deal realistically with sin is to first deal with the sin within oneself—and that one cannot do alone.

The teacher hears the Law being proclaimed from all sides. She is told she does not love God or neighbor as she ought. Or



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## editorials

he is told he does not make good use of his time and talents, that he is destroying his body through too much work, too little rest, too little proper food, too much improper food. And it is true—as least it is true enough that it forces the teacher to see himself as a sinner.

One teacher responds to this Law confrontation by trying harder and harder to meet all the demands of the Law. She works more and more hours, she sincerely tries to deal justly and honestly and openly with all, she tries to find more time for worship and for family but finally despairs.

A second teacher decides that there is just enough untruth in all these accusations that the expectations of others are not the same as the expectations of God. He eventually convinces himself that God is not speaking a Law word to him. Both teachers have gotten caught in partial truths, the first because it is indeed true that God does expect us to continually grow in sanctification, serving Him faithfully, and the second because it is also true that the expectations of God are frequently not the same as the expectations of the church and the world.

The Law is being spoken every day, in numerous ways, and not infrequently directly to the teacher, but where is the Gospel? It is preached from the pulpit on Sunday morning, but too frequently it is not spoken among colleagues during the week. We spend so much time doing the Lord's work that we have no time left for hearing His Good News together with colleagues, for worshipping together in response to it, for applying it to our particular situation. A college coed was in a bad mood one evening and making sure that everyone knew it. Finally in a pang of conscience she said to her roommate, "I'm sorry I'm bugging you but I'm in this miserable mood." She reported later that the roommate's reply astounded her and changed her behavior immediately. The roommate didn't say, "That's o.k. We all get in those moods"; she said, "I forgive you."

Bonhoeffer distinguishes between apologizing for sin and confessing it. An apology brings understanding and acceptance of the apology. Confession brings the Word of forgiveness. The teacher who knows both sin and forgiveness knows Jesus Christ, and through Him knows the 30 or more brothers and sisters in Christ in the classroom. The teacher who has experienced the love of Christ is compelled by love to share the Good News with his or her pupils. She can speak boldly of sin for she has faced her own sin.

He can face a pupil as an equal—a forgiven child of God—and say in a very personal way, "You have sinned," and "Rejoice, the Lord forgives, and I forgive."

Experiencing forgiveness will not end sin in the classroom. Forgiveness will not prevent pupils and teachers from frequently suffering the consequences of sin. It will not eliminate the need for some painful experiences in growing toward Christian maturity. It is after all an earthly classroom. But it is a unique and exciting place. It is a place where brothers and sisters in Christ stand before God worshipping Him together, led by a teacher who is rejoicing in His mercy, admonishing each other when needed, but much more often encouraging and edifying one another. Experiencing forgiveness, the pupils will learn to forgive. How great it is that God can move into the Christian classroom through the Christian teacher and pupils so that where sin abounded so much more does grace abound.

PRISCILLA LAWIN

### SEE WHERE YOUR BROTHER IS

The existence of tensions in the Missouri Synod is well known. That has been our history these 128 years. Tensions are the result of sin.

So what is our task as we *view, regret, and deplore* SIN in others? It is not merely to hide our heads in the sand, nor to put on sack cloth, nor to say: "We have sinned." Each of these options lets man off too easily. Each lets man do something for himself and nothing for his fellow man.

In Matthew 18 Christ shares with us guidance on the treatment of sin. The first step is to check with your brother about sin. It may turn out that

- (a) he has sinned, or
- (b) not he, but you, have sinned, or
- (c) you both have sinned.

Thus, the first step is DIAGNOSIS. This requires that we understand people "where they are" in their faith, knowledge, or life. That is not to be confused with where we think they are or where we would like them to be. That is what Matthew 18 is all about. It is a much-maligned chapter. Reread it. It talks of *children*, humble, unlearned, simple in their faith. It speaks to all including "Missouri—1975."

v. 6 "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to stumble, it would be better for him to . . ." (You can finish that sentence.)

v. 7 "Temptations will come . . . but woe to that man by whom the temptation comes."

v. 10 "See that you do not despise one of these little ones."

v. 12 "Leave the 99 and go after the one."  
vv. 15–20 Specific, loving guidelines for "gaining your brother."

v. 21 How often forgive? Not merely seven times, but 70 times seven.

v. 22ff The parable of the squaring of accounts. The king forgives a debt of \$10,000,000. Then the forgiven servant turns and insists on payment of a \$20 debt. You can almost see the story on TV with Maude saying: "God will get you for this."

The starting point must be an attempt to understand the other person's position, not merely insist that he understand your position. Let me illustrate how this might be leading to differing points of view in Synod today.

Many of our "younger" members and leaders have not experienced the joys of the 1950s and '60s . . . the great expansion throughout Synod, the mission planting in North America and overseas, the postwar building boom with the excitement of new forms of building to house God's people for both worship and equipment for ministry . . . the evangelism thrusts of the PTRs . . . the utilization of TV's potential through "This Is the Life."

Many of our "older" members and leaders have not experienced the study of Scripture through newer methods. Many have not had the opportunity to learn through extensive travel and openness to new ideas and new people that our younger members have had.

Thus, different groups see the church's mission from varying starting points. The "older" group recognizes the great strides of the last decades. The "younger" group only sees that movement is still necessary. Where are you at? Each of us is at a different point. But all can say: "We've come a long way." Each must say: "We still have a long way to go."

That is where it is at. If we feel that we have moved to new truths, new insights, and others have not caught up with us, then it is only loving for those who are moving ahead of the rest to look back and seek where the rest are . . . lest they be lost.

That is what Matthew 18 is all about. Reread it once again. Love does not say to the weak, young, new in faith, the "little ones": "You have to grant me liberties. I have moved so far beyond you and your position in my scholarship, understanding, and faith." No, God is saying: When you are in the forefront in scholarship, mission understanding, or any other area, you turn around and see where your brothers are. If they are stumbling, if they are in danger of being lost, you slow down, back up. You even leave the 99 and go back and help them as you would a lost sheep.

That is where it is at! God has freed us up . . . not to say: "I'm free to do my own thing." He has freed us up with the Gospel and His Spirit so that by His grace we can say: "I'm free to do God's thing."

MARCUS ZILL

## WHAT SHOULD THE CHURCH DO ABOUT PERSONAL SIN?

by Leonard W. Heidemann

UNLESS AND UNTIL THE CHURCH DOES SOMETHING about personal sin it will not be able to do much about community, state, or church sins. The reform of society begins with the reform of the individual. If things are right on the personal level, there is a genuine possibility of things becoming right on other levels. In a surprising but frank way a modern writer philosophizes, "I think that if we are going to reform the world, and make it a better place to live in, the way to do it is not with talk about relationships of a political nature, which are inevitably dualistic, full of subjects and objects and their relationship to one another; or with programs full of things for other people to do. I think that kind of approach starts it at the end and presumes the end is the beginning. Programs of a political nature are important end products of social quality that can be effective only if the underlying structure of social values is right. *The social values are right only if the individual values are right.* The place to improve the world is first in one's own heart and head and hands, and then work outward from there"<sup>1</sup> (emphasis mine). The church's responsibility is not to create a new society, but to create the creators of a new society.

What should the church do about personal sin? It must come to grips with it! This may sound simplistic, but the answer is full of profound implications. In a Lutheran Hour sermon, Dr. Oswald Hoffmann developed a message on the title of Dr. Karl Menninger's book, *Whatever Became of Sin?* As a spokesman of the Gospel he made clear that both sin and forgiveness are real. These are the overriding Biblical themes. In her ministry the church dare not forget or neglect them.

James G. Emerson summarized it well when he wrote, "The first task of education is to teach a man his sin; then show him God's forgiveness."<sup>2</sup> The pastoral task is primarily that of communicating the realities of sin and grace. Man needs to know many things, but above all, he needs to know that he is a sinner and that Jesus Christ is his Savior.

### Sin Is Real

Luther said, "If you want to engage profitably in the study of theology and Holy Scripture and do not want to run head-on into a Scripture closed and sealed, then learn above all things to understand sin aright."<sup>3</sup> Sin is real. It is mankind's fundamental problem. It separates man from God and man from man. It provokes God's wrath and deserves His punishment. Sin is "in truth as great as He who is offended by sin."<sup>4</sup> "The wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6, 23), and there is no way to minimize the seriousness of this Biblical declaration. When we view man and his condition from the perspective of God's righteousness, we see that the distance between man and God is infinite. The heinousness of sin becomes even more terrible when we view it from the perspective of Christ's cross. His sacrifice on the cross reflects the indescribably huge size of man's guilt and the high cost of man's redemption.<sup>5</sup>

Every sin is serious. What many do not understand is that in the sight of God there really isn't any difference between sins. All sins are heinous and an affront to God. The self-righteous Pharisees in Jesus' day thought that the woman taken in adultery was a gross sinner. It is interesting to note the difference between what Jesus said to the woman and what He said to the Pharisees. Jesus did not take adultery lightly, but He made clear that other sins are just as bad. Too often our assessment of behavior is the assessment of society instead of God. Someone has said that if sin were punished by society according to Christ's assessment of its wickedness, we should all be in jail.<sup>6</sup>

Man does not like to admit his sin. All kinds of things stand in the way of his confession. His pride, for instance. Man has come to think that to admit wrongdoing is a sign of weakness, an act beneath his dignity. Even the word "sin" has a bad connotation, and one should keep it out of polite conversation. While other three- and four-letter words are quite acceptable, this one is taboo. Some call wrongdoing a sickness, anti-social behavior, negative living, or just a mistake. The Bible calls it sin. A false statement, for example, is not just "inoperative"; it is a lie.

Everyone needs to repent of his sin. The choice one has about this is not really viable. Either one repents or he dies. It is not a sign of the lack of compassion or understanding, but a proof of it when someone points out sin, exposes it, and challenges the sinner to come to terms with it. The church is kept alive, not by organizational or charitable endeavors, but by the spirit of repentance. God's prophets through the years have always called for repentance. The first step in one's approach to God is repentance. It is also a significant step in man's reconciliation with man. In the last chapter of his book *Whatever Became of Sin?* Karl Menninger says this to clergymen: "Preach. Tell it like it is. Say it from the pulpit. Cry it from the housetops. What shall we cry? Cry comfort, cry repentance, cry hope. Because recognition of our part in the world transgression is the only remaining hope."<sup>7</sup>

Dr. Hoffmann in his sermon on that same subject says, "The first step to recovery is an honest confession of sin, our sin. We must not excuse ourselves. We must not try to justify our wrongs or explain them away. We cannot sweep them under the rug. It's no answer to say, 'I can't help it. It's somebody else's fault. They

are responsible.' No, here everyone must confess for himself: I am personally responsible. There is no way out except David's way. O God, against thee, and thee only have I sinned. I have done this great evil in thy sight. I have hurt a family, hurt my parents, my children, my neighbors, my friends, my church, and my country."<sup>8</sup>

It is said that "confession is good for the soul." It is also good for the body. Confession is necessary for mental health. "The rise of psychoanalysis represents a rediscovery of the law that private secrets are destructive to those who fail to confess them. Catharsis, or the cleansing out of secret emotions, was the name used by the Greeks for the initiation rites of the ancient mystery religions to bring forth hidden emotions into the esoteric fellowship."<sup>9</sup> A good confession serves many wholesome purposes. It cleanses the mind, relieves the conscience, ends the loneliness of pretense, and opens the door to the restoration of fellowship. These benefits should not be minimized. What Shakespeare says about sorrow is true about sin: "Give sorrow words; the grief that does not speak whispers the o'er-fraught heart and bids it break."<sup>10</sup> Familiar Biblical examples illustrate the same truth: David, the prodigal son, the woman taken in adultery, Peter, and others.

The church therefore must call attention to personal sin and challenge people to come to grips with it. It must do this with a sense of compassion and a sympathetic understanding of the human dilemma. No one has a right to despise his brothers. Before God each of us is a beggar. Luther once said, "One of the virtues of counterfeit sanctity is that it cannot have pity or mercy for the frail and weak, but insists on the strictest enforcement. . . . True holiness is merciful and sympathetic, but all that false holiness can do is to rage and fume."<sup>11</sup>

There must be an evangelical insistence upon repentance. Without repentance we cannot come to grips with sin and know the joy and freedom of forgiveness. He who does not feel a burden isn't particularly interested in someone who can carry it. He who has no sense of need will hardly care about a message which tells about how his need can be met. That Christ died, the just for the unjust, is good news only to one who knows he is a sinner and needs a Savior. It is when we realize that we are all "beggars" before God that the call to repentance will be made with compassion and humility and not in the spirit of haughtiness.

#### Forgiveness Is Real

"The way to deal with sin is to confess it, that God may heal with His forgiveness."<sup>12</sup> We don't confess because we need to inform God or anybody else about what we have done. God knows everything about us, and those we sin against know the harm we have done to them. We don't need to make explanations, much less excuses. We confess for our sake that we may become open to the

benediction of pardon, heaven's highest blessing. "The forgiveness of God is, in my opinion, the most powerful therapeutic idea in the world," says Leslie Weatherhead in *Prescription for Anxiety*.<sup>13</sup> Paul E. Johnson in his book *Psychology and Pastoral Care* says, "Guilt is more than a burden; it is a disease that burns like a fever and ravages like the deathly struggle of bacteria in the bloodstream. And like any mounting infection it must be removed to permit the forces of health to reorganize."<sup>14</sup> What this psychologist affirms, one of our own theologians asserts in true evangelical fashion when he says:

A generation that is plagued by guilt complexes perhaps more than any other needs to be directed ever and anew to Him whose blood alone can purge away all guilt, Jesus Christ, the divine Savior. Because death is and always will remain the wages of sin, a dying world must be told the words of life."<sup>15</sup>

Forgiveness lies at the heart of the Christian Gospel. It is the summary of God's promises. It may be true that in Luther's day the big question was "How can I find a gracious God?" and that today the big question is, "How can I know that God exists?" but when life draws to a close and the chips are down, when all the pretenses vanish and every earthly prop is taken away, the ultimate question still revolves around forgiveness, and the Christian pastor's ministry to the dying centers on this gift of God in Christ.

Forgiveness is real, and the church needs to proclaim it with joyous vigor. Forgiveness is heaven's answer to man's deepest dilemma. In Bunyan's *Pilgrims Progress* we read these lines: "So I saw in my dream that just as Christian came up with the Cross, his burden loosed from off his shoulders, and fell from off his back and began to tumble, and so continued to do, till it came to the mouth of the sepulchre, where it fell in, and I saw it no more. Then was Christian glad and lightsome, and said, with a merry heart, 'He has given me rest by His sorrow and life by His death.'<sup>16</sup> You see, forgiveness changes one's perspective and destiny.

In *The Parables of Peanuts* Robert Short quotes Karl Barth as saying, "Christianity is a proclamation of joy. It is not a mixed message of joy and terror, salvation and damnation. . . . It does not proclaim in the same breath both good and evil, both help and destruction, both life and death. It does, of course, throw a shadow. We must not overlook or ignore this aspect of the matter. In itself, however, it is light and not darkness. . . . The Yes cannot be heard unless the No is also heard. But the No is said for the sake of the Yes and not for its own sake. In substance, therefore, the first and last word is Yes and not No."<sup>17</sup>

In a recent issue of the *CPH Commentator* Rudolph Norden writes about forgiveness and refers to a recently reprinted Concordia book, *The Hidden Discipline*, by Martin Marty, whom he quotes as follows: "Forgiveness of sins is the generating power of the hidden discipline.

It does not mean that God slops over, winks at, overlooks, does not care about, relaxes in the face of, becomes casual about sin and the sinner. . . . God steps in by way of the cross of Jesus Christ and completes the act of man's justification."<sup>18</sup> That is a beautiful statement. It is the Gospel in a nutshell. It echoes what Luther said when he declared, "Christianity is nothing but the constant practicing of this passage, namely, being convinced that you have no sin although you have sinned, that your sins rest on Christ, who is the eternal Savior from sin, death, and hell."<sup>19</sup>

Forgiveness makes a difference. Martin Marty wrote *The Hidden Discipline* to demonstrate what the Christian life looks like when we believe in the forgiveness of sins. Not only is the Bible unintelligible and irrelevant without forgiveness, but without it man cannot live and without it he cannot grow. Forgiveness gives freedom; it makes possible the freedom to forgive, and to live in openness and trust with one's fellowmen. This is because forgiveness is a work of God by virtue of which sin, in all its seriousness and with all its consequences, is cancelled out in Jesus Christ. Forgiven, we don't have to fear anymore. Accepted by God we are no longer left to manage for ourselves. Through forgiveness a new day dawns for us and a new dynamic becomes operative in our lives. Thurneysen says, "Assurance of pardon is ultimately to be understood as exorcism."<sup>20</sup> Norden in *Concordia Comments* lists a number of new books which illustrate how this is so. With God's forgiveness we can reach out in forgiveness towards others and oneself. He refers to Leslie F. Brandt's new book *Living through Loving* and quotes him as saying, "We have been accepted by God through Jesus Christ. Now we can accept ourselves as forgiven, guilt-free persons. Now a new life can begin."<sup>21</sup>

The church needs to proclaim the forgiveness of God unconditionally. It is one thing to say, as we do in our creeds, "I believe in the forgiveness of sins," and another thing to demonstrate that God's forgiveness of our sins and our forgiveness of the neighbor's sins has no limitations or reservations. But it is only when forgiveness is unconditional that it becomes a force for freedom and joy. The church is weak and helpless in the degree that it fails to communicate God's full and free forgiveness of our sins.

The importance of the local parish comes from the Lord's charge to deliver to sinful men this gift from heaven: the forgiveness of sins. Whether in the pulpit, at the Communion Table, in the voters meeting, or on the city street, the church is not important because of the good influence it has on the community. Nor is it important because it contributes to charity, or takes the lead in resolving a social problem. The local parish is important because through it the forgiveness of God is made real to sinners. As the parish ministers to its members and to the people who come under its influence it needs to remember that the major gift it has to share is the good news of life in Jesus Christ who died that we might be forgiven.

In his "Let God Be God" P. Watson quotes Einer Billing, the Scandinavian theologian, as saying, "Anyone who is but a little familiar with Luther knows that his different thoughts are not strung together like pearls in a necklace, united only by the bond of a common authority or perhaps by a chain of logical argument, but that all lie close as the petals of a rose about a common centre; they shine out like the rays of the sun from one glowing source: the forgiveness of sins."<sup>22</sup>

In *If God Be for Us* Robert E. Luccock tells the story of a group of visitors who were being shown through the

Carlsbad Caverns in New Mexico. In the group were a little man of 11 years of age and his seven-year-old sister. When they came to the deepest point in the caves the lights were turned out. So great was the darkness in the depths of the earth that the little girl began to cry. Bravely the boy put his arm around the shoulders of his young sister and reassured her saying: "Don't you cry. There's a man here who knows how to turn the lights on." Here is Luccock's comment: "The good news of God for the deepest dimension of our lives is that in Jesus Christ we have One who has turned on the light which no darkness can put out."<sup>23</sup> The darkness is there, but there is a Light greater than our darkness, and that Light dispels the shadows of fear and hate and death itself. Sin is real. We need to say that. But forgiveness is real too. We need to proclaim it. St. Paul said it this way: "Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more" (Rom. 5:20). When we have understood and acted upon the profound implications of this gracious announcement, we shall have learned what the church should do about personal sin.

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by Marvin Bergman

## WHAT WILL THE CHURCH DO ABOUT THE CHURCH'S SINS?

IN 1920 FRANCIS PIEPER OBSERVED THAT "WE SO-called Missourians have perhaps, as far as peace and order is concerned, experienced the most peaceful time, comparatively speaking, which the church has ever enjoyed."<sup>1</sup> Fifty-four years later, a former president of the Synod, in a Christmas devotion for pastors, pointed to a number of crises confronting citizens of the United States. Among these is "the condition in the church everywhere and especially in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, once a tightly united group of people, but now seriously polarized; distrust is evident everywhere."<sup>2</sup> During the same month, the Religion News-writers Association named as the number two news-maker of the year "the widening split among the 2.9 million members of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod between so-called conservatives and moderates in a dispute over Biblical interpretation."<sup>3</sup> After each of the two previous annual polls, the same news-story had been ranked number one.

Why has a body of Christians who call Jesus Christ the Prince of Peace become embroiled in a conflict that may lead to schism? How did it happen that an image of an embattled church has become etched on the consciousness of the American public? As a people with a history, our situation has been illuminated by historical perspectives. As a people with personalities shaped by a variety of needs, beliefs, motivations, values, attitudes, and opinions, social-psychological studies have made important contributions to an understanding of the current impasse.<sup>4</sup> Another perspective that deserves attention is the theological, which uncovers other realities, such as sin and its role in the struggles of the church.

While sin is often referred to in discussions of the Synod's turmoil in broad and general ways, a content analysis of articles and speeches reveals that sin as a key reality in the life of the church today usually is not explored in detail. This is not unusual. As one theologian has pointed out, most of the articles exploring sin in the church have been written only within the past 10 years.<sup>5</sup> That our church today needs to ask seriously, "What will the church do about the church's sins?" is suggested by four factors. (1) *The Book of Concord* alerts one to a paradox, that while the church is named God's holy people, sin remains an active power in the lives of those who are justified.<sup>6</sup> (2) John, in his gospel and epistles, tells us that sin, which originates in unbelief and opposition to God, is expressed in acts against the neighbor which break God's Law and contradict what is right. (3) Hate, strife, in-fighting, and other ugly acts underscore the reality of sin in the church today. (4) When we in the church commit sin, especially vulnerable to the effects of sin are those with whom we have very close contact, brothers and sisters in the faith. In responding to the question, "What will the church do about the church's sins?" this article intends to explore three facets of the question: (1) How are we treating one another? (2) Will the church repent? (3) Will the church hear Christ's command, "Be reconciled"?

#### How Are We Treating One Another?

Though we live in a world of turmoil, the church especially has a hard time with conflict, for conflict often becomes a force which separates people and causes great upheaval.<sup>7</sup> Conflict and polarization also may result in the development of "blindness" which restrict one's vision, create a "win-lose" attitude, cause one to attach primary allegiance to particular personalities, and produce "groupthink." "Groupthink" can be described as an intense commitment to the goals and programs of a particular group which displaces the primary goals of an institution. Characteristics which identify "groupthink" include: (1) loyalty to group norms even when policies are working badly; (2) a strong need to maintain group consensus by suppressing criti-

cism and dissent; (3) a stereotyped view of opposition members who are seen as "enemies"; (4) a belief in the inherent goodness of one's own course of action and a failure to consider ethical issues and consequences of one's decisions; (5) an illusion of agreement among the larger membership whose silence is interpreted as an indicator of agreement; (6) rationalization that discounts warnings and negative feedback, with little or no attempt to look at a situation through another person's eyes.<sup>8</sup>

Because "groupthink" can occur in the life of any group or individual, especially in time of conflict and controversy, we need to explore in greater depth the question of how we are treating one another. How one answers such a question will, of course, depend on the lens through which one views a particular act or decision. What is seen as a just action by one may be interpreted as unjust by another. What is described as "the will of God" by one person may be seen as demonic by a second person. The kind of lens that is used becomes especially crucial when there is conflict involving two competing claims, such as "Teacher A deserves to be removed from his office" or "Teacher A is functioning as a called minister of God and has done nothing to be removed from his office." In such instances the church engages in the making of moral decisions. Ordinarily, moral decisions stimulate a variety of responses by individuals. That such diversity in making moral judgments exists is not surprising when one remembers that one's lens, outlook, or perspective is shaped by experiences and input which vary from person to person. Needed is a lens through which to view one's own perspectives relating to decisions, especially decisions involving moral judgments during a time of conflict in the church. The following discussion describes eight lenses which not only can help identify the kinds of moral judgments being made, but also provide data for the question, "How are we treating one another?"

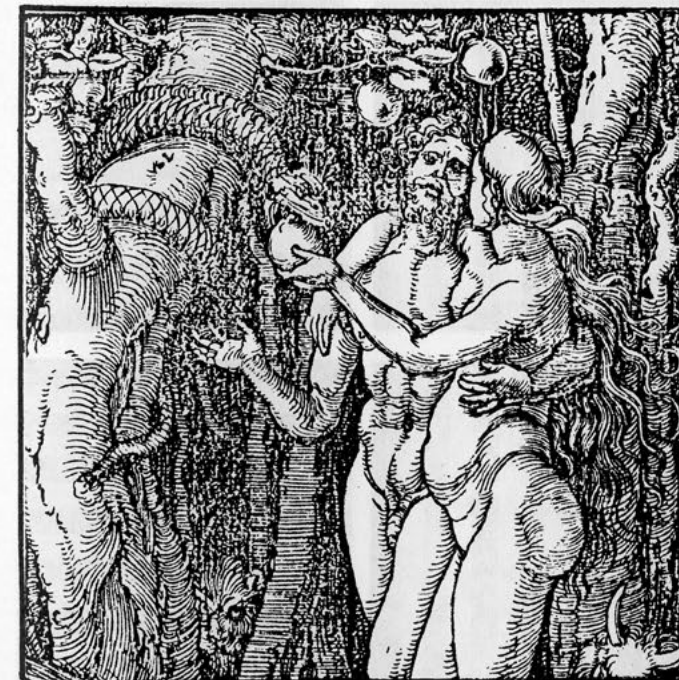
*Lens No. 0: Egocentric Judgment.* Here, one's judgment of what is good is *restricted* to personal likes and wants, and to what helps an individual achieve his/her own purposes. There is no sense of responsibility to norms or concern for the welfare of another person. Rather, what one wishes for the good of the self becomes the key motivating factor in responding to another. An example in the Scriptures of an egocentric perspective is seen in David's letter to Joab, "Station Uriah in the thick of the fight and then fall back behind him so that he may be struck down and die."<sup>9</sup>

*Lens No. 1: Punishment and Obedience Orientation.* At this stage, the goodness or badness of one's action is determined by what one anticipates to be the physical consequences of an act. Avoidance of punishment and/or deference to a higher authority serve as the key motivation. An example is an act which covers up the truth concerning an opponent because of a fear of incurring the wrath of one's superior. A Biblical illustration is Ahimaaz's report to King David after Absalom's

death. The Scriptures note that the servant's response to the king's question, "Is it well with the young man Absalom?" was evasive and did not report the young man's death because he lacked courage.<sup>10</sup>

*Lens No. 2: "A Shrewd Operator" Orientation.* Here, right action consists of what satisfies one's own needs while also satisfying some of the needs of another person in a very pragmatic way. "You scratch my back, and I'll scratch yours" is the basic orientation. A sense of gratitude, a concern for the welfare of another, or a desire for justice are all absent at this stage of development. When one makes a deal, he does what he has to do in order to "live up to the deal." It is a marketplace mode of operation accenting self-interest, coupled with a streak of altruism that is used to further one's own interests. In the Old Testament, this stage of decision-making appears in the actions of the Philistines who wondered what they should do with the ark of the covenant after their people had been afflicted with tumors. Their response was, "Send away the ark of the God of Israel, that it may not slay us and our people."<sup>11</sup>

*Lens No. 3: "A Good Boy-Nice Girl" Orientation.* This outlook is characterized by a conformity to one's expectations of what pleases others and is approved by them. There also is conformity to a stereotyped image of what the majority wants and will approve. One earns such approval by being "good" and "nice." An example of this stage of development is seen in Herod Antipas' treatment of John the Baptist after promising to give Salome whatever she might ask. The Scriptures indicate that Herod gave the command that John should be beheaded "because of his oaths and his guests."<sup>12</sup> Here, response to group approval and norms becomes a key determinant of behavior.



*Lens No. 4: "Law and Order" Orientation.* At this stage a person demonstrates a deep respect for a social order or institution and desires to maintain the institution or social order *for its own sake*. Such an individual sees authority, rules, and regulations as being the means through which an institution is perpetuated. Right behavior consists of members doing their duty and leaders implementing the letter of the law. The limitation of this perspective is that rules become inflexible and frozen, resulting in human need and welfare becoming subservient to a law or policy. Obedience to a law or regulation, for example, receives higher priority than response to individual conscience. A "law and order" stage of development is illustrated in the Bible when Luke writes that "the rulers of the synagogues became indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath."<sup>13</sup>

*Lens No. 5: A "Social Contract" Orientation.* At this level, right action is defined in terms of individual rights, obligations, and societal standards that have been critically examined and agreed upon by an institution or society. However, laws and regulations are not frozen as in the previous perspective. Rather, the possibility of changing an unjust law is seen in terms of its social or institutional usefulness and individual welfare. In this perspective, life based on rules and regulations has been replaced by commitment to a contract which recognizes certain rights of individuals as well as limitations of individual rights for the good of the whole. A Biblical example of this kind of decision-making is seen in Ahab's covenant with Benhadad, King of Syria, who said to the Israelite king, "I will restore the towns my father took from your father, and you may set up bazaars for yourself in Damascus as my father did in Samaria."<sup>14</sup> In politics, democracy in the United States functions ideally at this level.

*Lens No. 6: "Individual Conscience and Commitment to Justice" Orientation.* This lens defines what is moral on the basis of conscience which is shaped by a commitment to justice as the core of morality. Such a conscience has moved beyond the previous stages, because its focus is justice, the dignity of another human being, and the equality of human rights. When commitment to such an ethical principle as justice becomes the foundation of one's decision making, moral judgments will reflect such characteristics as: *universality* (a principle applies to all people rather than select individuals); *consistency* (a principle is to be applied consistently rather than arbitrarily being ignored in particular situations); and *equality* (a principle treats each man's claim impartially).<sup>15</sup> In the Scriptures, the sermons of Amos, Hosea, Micah and Isaiah reflect a passion for justice among the people of God. For example, Amos declared, "I know how many are your transgressions and how great are your sins—you who afflict the righteous, who take a bribe, and turn aside the needy in the gate . . . hate evil, and love good, and establish justice in the gate."<sup>16</sup>

*Lens No. 7: Responsible Freedom in Christ.* This lens is a Law-Gospel perspective in which an individual makes a faith response motivated by God's justification of the sinner through the work of Jesus Christ. From this ultimate Word of God, seen as the key reality in all of life, flows other values that relate to a moral dilemma. Here the decision-maker is asking, "What is the will of God for me in this situation?" In such a response, the grace of God inspires RESPONSIBILITY, that is, an ability to respond to God, one's conscience, the need and claim of a neighbor, the Law, and other facets of a moral decision. The particular act that follows becomes a paradigm that reflects the core of the Christian Gospel, the grace of God, which, in turn, stimulates compassion and a desire for justice. An example of this perspective in the Scriptures is seen in the Book of Philemon, where Paul discusses the question of what to do with a runaway slave who has robbed his master. A "law and order" lens would have called for severe punishment on the basis of an infraction of the law. Paul, however, while recognizing the legal rights of Philemon (v. 12) and including a Lens No. 3 appeal ("If you consider me your partner, receive him as you would receive me,"<sup>17</sup>) centers his letter in asking Philemon to look at the situation in terms of a faith perspective. When Paul writes, "That you could have him back for ever, not as a slave any more, but something much better than a slave, a dear brother; especially dear to me, but how much more to you, as a blood brother as well as a brother in the Lord,"<sup>18</sup> he is expressing the revolutionary power of the Gospel. In that situation the Gospel not only liberated two human beings from the clutches of the Law, but set both on a path of responsible freedom which abolished the

demeaning slave-master relationship.

When one reflects upon these eight lenses or perspectives, a number of observations can be made. (1) Each perspective advances beyond the previous lens. Wanting to be seen by others as "a good boy" will serve to reduce some of the egotism of the "shrewd operator," while a "law and order" outlook is likely to introduce a more human dimension within an institution or social order than actions which are based on the prior three perspectives. (2) The limitations of the fourth perspective, "law and order," become apparent when one asks, "When members of the church restrict their decision-making to 'the letter of the law,' to rules and regulations, does not the world have the right to ask, 'And what else is new?'" (3) The fifth perspective, that of a social contract, is a decided advance beyond the previous lens, for people responding at this level will demonstrate a deep concern for the welfare of the other person and a commitment to live together on the basis of a covenant that was agreed upon. However, the limitation again is the absence of a characteristic ascribed by the Scriptures to the church, that we are God's holy people because Jesus forgives our sins and calls us to go beyond a lifestyle based on a contract. (4) The least that can be expected within the church in time of struggle and conflict is the sixth lens which focuses on justice. In discussing "Church Discipline," John H. C. Fritz reflects such a perspective when he emphasizes that excommunication from the church should be so clear "that any Christian can see the *justice* in it."<sup>19</sup> Since the church is very much involved in what Werner Elert calls "nomological existence,"<sup>20</sup> an existence that involves structure, authority, and supervision, there is a place for discipline, warning, and even suspension

from office. When this happens, actions by the church need clearly to express justice. (5) The perspective which reflects what life in the Christian church is all about, a new life which arises from one's baptism and a faith response to the Lordship of Christ, is the seventh lens. Fritz reflects this orientation when he notes in his discussion of discipline in the church that the *highest law is the law of Christian charity.*<sup>21</sup> The love of Christ inspires a caring response to a brother/sister who confesses faith and obedience to the same Lord. In time of conflict attentive listening to one another, a careful mapping of a procedure for dealing with problems, and ministry to one another warrant a considerable investment of time and energy by the church. Caring and ministry know a way that is pastoral, patient, ethical, and dialogical.

By employing these eight lenses, one is able to respond more adequately to the question, "How are we treating one another?" Any assessment, of course, needs to be made in relation to specific situations, for ethics involves exploring such basic questions as "Who is involved in the dilemma?" "What are the facts that relate to the conflict?" and "What kind of procedure is being followed?" In viewing conflict and moral dilemmas in the church, it can be said that sin can cause one to use the wrong lens and sin against others. For example, when one responds to a moral conflict in terms of a fear of punishment by one's superiors (lens number one), he will miss the mark of Christ's call to serve Him and one another. When one caters to the wishes of a majority and makes a moral judgment on the basis of what "a good boy" would do in that situation, he is likely to ignore the rights of others involved in the conflict. Or when one makes a response to a conflict on the basis

of "law and order," there is a high probability of appearing to use a law to impose one's own will while ignoring a concern for justice and dismissing claims of conscience made by others.

These lenses also alert one to signals which suggest that some of our troubles in the church today are related to the ways in which we are treating one another. Concerns for the welfare of individuals who have been deeply bruised and battered by the conflict continue to be expressed. Responding to members of the church as "enemies" continues to be evident. Protests based on conscience continue to be made. When looking at these kinds of concerns, at our actions, and ourselves in the light of God's Law, who among us believes that he/she is without sin? Who among us will not say, "*Mea culpa*, I have sinned."

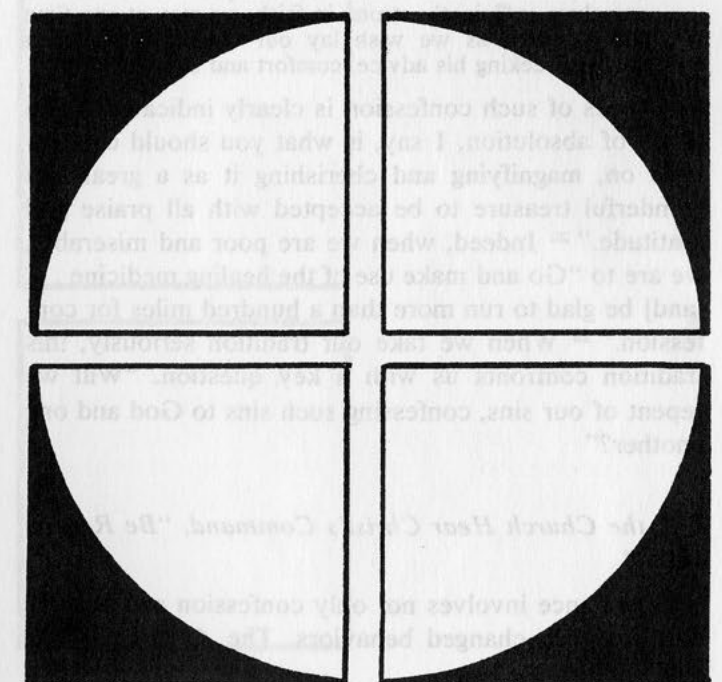
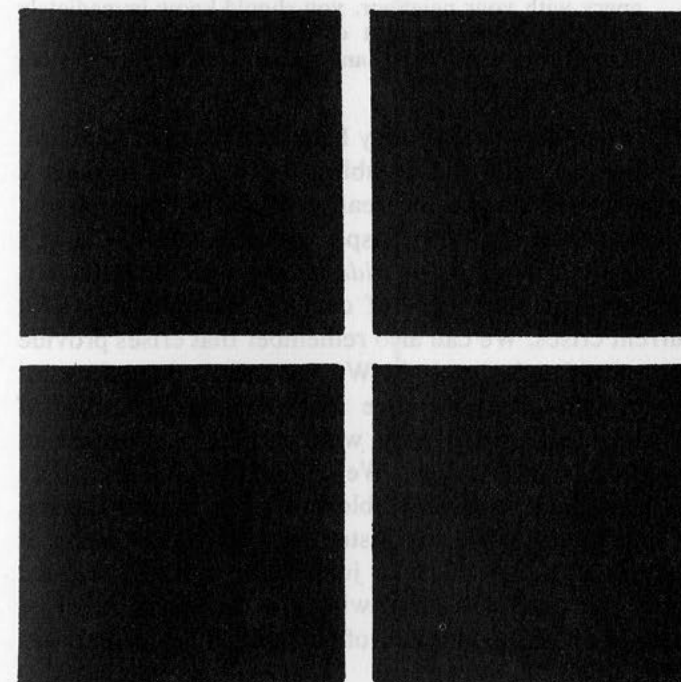
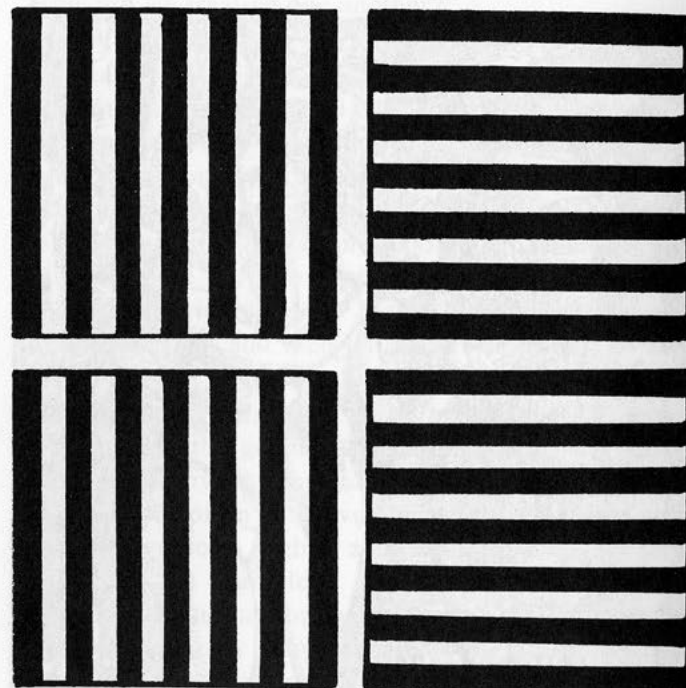
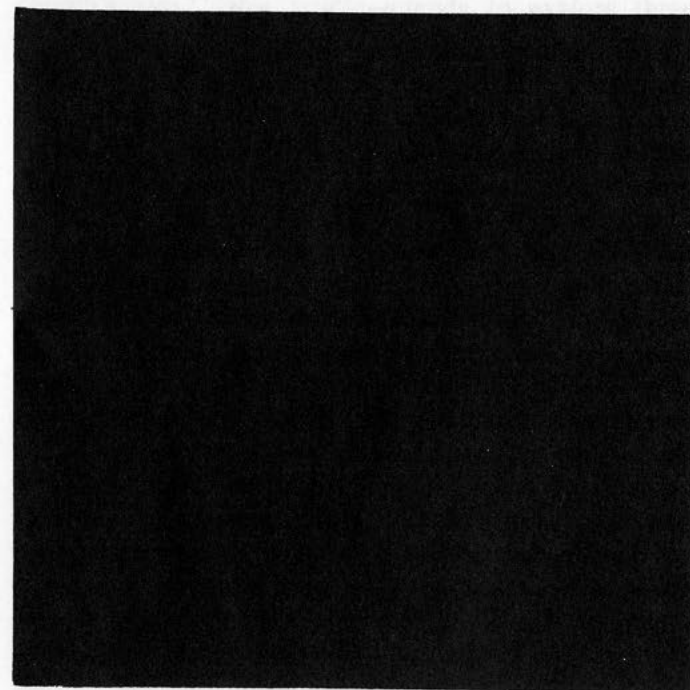
Instead of seeing the previous paragraph as a public display of soiled linen, such events and concerns underscore what the apostle John and *The Book of Concord* are talking about, the presence of sin in the church and the need for repentance. Luther recognized both when he wrote:

Man must hear such a judgment as this: "You are all of no account. Whether you are manifest sinners or saints [the Latin adds "in your opinion"], you must all become other than you now are and do otherwise than you now do, no matter who you are and no matter how great, wise, mighty, and holy you may think yourselves."<sup>22</sup>

A theological perspective reveals that the key problem in the LCMS is not personality clashes or church politics, but the reality of sin in our lives and the need for repentance.

#### *Will the Church Repent?*

Whether we in the church repent depends on our



responses to two questions. First, will we hear God speak to us through His Law? God's Law becomes the thunderbolt by means of which God with one blow destroys both open sinners and false saints. He allows no one to justify himself. He drives all together into terror and despair. This is the hammer of which Jeremiah speaks, "Is not my word like a hammer which breaks the rock in pieces?"<sup>23</sup>

Will we in the church today hear this Word of God, or postpone such a hearing and be confronted by the same Word in another form, the process of "attrition," that is, a grinding away and a wearing down caused by friction and continuing conflict? The second question which determines whether the church will repent is, "Are we grasped by that power which is the principal doctrine of the Christian faith, the forgiveness of sins?"<sup>24</sup> Do we really believe that

the content of the gospel is this, that the Son of God, Christ our Lord Himself, assumed and bore the curse of the Law and expiated and paid for all our sins, that through Him alone we reenter the good graces of God, obtain forgiveness of sins through faith, are freed from death and all the punishments of sins, and are saved eternally.<sup>25</sup>

Will the church today hear this astounding news, that for Christ's sake the sins of the accused and the accuser, the slandered and the slanderer, the silent and the vociferous, the "shrewd operator" and the "law and order" person, the one possessed by a zeal for justice are all forgiven through the work of the crucified and risen Son of God?

Repentance involves not only confessing sins to God, but also confessing one's sins against a neighbor to that person. Luther writes that "we are to confess our guilt before one another and forgive one another before we come into God's presence to beg for forgiveness."<sup>26</sup> Luther adds an instructive word:

When some problem or quarrel sets us at one another's throats and we cannot settle it, and yet we do not find ourselves sufficiently strong in faith, we may at any time and as often as we wish lay our complaint before a brother, seeking his advice, comfort and strength.<sup>27</sup>

The focus of such confession is clearly indicated. "The Word of absolution, I say, is what you should concentrate on, magnifying and cherishing it as a great and wonderful treasure to be accepted with all praise and gratitude."<sup>28</sup> Indeed, when we are poor and miserable, we are to "Go and make use of the healing medicine . . . [and] be glad to run more than a hundred miles for confession."<sup>29</sup> When we take our tradition seriously, this tradition confronts us with a key question. "Will we repent of our sins, confessing such sins to God and one another?"

#### Will the Church Hear Christ's Command, "Be Reconciled"?

Repentance involves not only confession and absolution, but also changed behaviors. The *Apology of the*

*Augsburg Confession* states, "There can be no true conversion or contrition where mortifying the flesh and good fruits do not follow."<sup>30</sup> Such fruits of faith are described in this way:

What these fruits are, we learn from the commandments—prayer, thanksgiving, the confession of the Gospel, the teaching of the Gospel, obedience to parents and magistrates, faithfulness of one's calling, peaceable conduct instead of murder and hatred, the greatest possible generosity to the needy, restraint and chastisement of the flesh instead of adultery and fornication, truthfulness.<sup>31</sup>

When brothers and sisters meet one another as forgiven sinners at the foot of the cross, a dynamic is unleashed that enables God's people to converse, to accept one another, to listen to one another's problems, to explore differences, to confront one another with the testimony of God's Word, and to deal with conflict and hate in constructive ways. Jesus' words in Matthew 5 speak to our situation and provide a specific directive: "So if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift."<sup>32</sup> Luther, in one of his 16 sermons based on this passage, declared that

Many people who are otherwise fine, respectable, learned, and upstanding become filled with secret anger, envy, and hate, and are embittered by it. Still they never become aware of it, and their conscience is satisfied that what they are doing is in pursuit of their office or in obedience to righteousness. . . . You see, that is why Christ warns everyone so diligently to be on the lookout here and not to be fooled by this hypocrisy and pretense. It is incredible that such a simple bit of instruction can be so far-reaching and strike such great people. By the words "if you are offering your gift at the altar" He makes it clear that He is talking about people who serve God and claim to be His true children. . . . Therefore He says now: "If you intend to serve God and to offer a sacrifice, but are guilty of harming someone or of being angry with your neighbor, you should know immediately that God wants no part of this sacrifice. Lay it right down, drop everything, and go straight to your brother to be reconciled."<sup>33</sup>

Will we in the church today hear this Word of God?

When we view our troubles and conflicts through a lens that recognizes the reality of sin, focuses on the freeing power of God's Gospel, and responds to Christ's promise that *He does provide the power that reconciles*, then we can find ways of dealing constructively with current crises. We can also remember that crises provide opportunities for growth. We can take a step forward toward this goal when we recognize the absurdity of insisting that one identify with particular personalities involved in the struggle. We can admit blindness when we talk about "not being able to see any light at the end of the tunnel." We can listen intently to one another instead of being quick to judge one another. We can state that reconciliation with the neighbor involves restoration and restitution of that which has been taken

from a servant wrongfully and unjustly. We can take seriously the claims of conscience, remembering a "young man Luther," and not attempt to deal with matters of conscience through a "law and order" lens. We can cease to see others as enemies who differ and yet confess faith in Jesus Christ, acknowledge the Scriptures as the source and norm of Christian faith and life, and pledge a *quia* subscription to *The Book of Concord*. We can abandon any practice of secret meetings designed for the purpose of securing acceptance of a particular program. We can stop making predictions of failure prior to major reconciliation efforts. We can, instead, anticipate miracles and surprises evoked by One whose rule does usher in a new day. We can ask that Christ teach us a better way of dealing with controversies and conflicts. We can remember what we said in convention in Detroit, 1965, and reaffirmed at Milwaukee, 1971, "The Church is God's mission." We can pray that the Lord of the Church give us eyes to see our sins, the grace to repent and accept His forgiveness, and the strength to forgive one another and be reconciled in His name.

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<sup>12</sup> Matthew 14:9

<sup>13</sup> Luke 13:4

<sup>14</sup> 1 Kings 20:34

<sup>15</sup> For a fuller discussion of the first six perspectives, see Lawrence Kohlberg, *Moral Education: Interdisciplinary Approaches* (New York: Newman Press, 1971), pp. 86-92.

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<sup>19</sup> John H. C. Fritz, *Pastoral Theology* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1945), p. 236. (Italics mine.)

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<sup>21</sup> Fritz, p. 232. (Italics mine.)

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, (The Large Catechism, V, 13).

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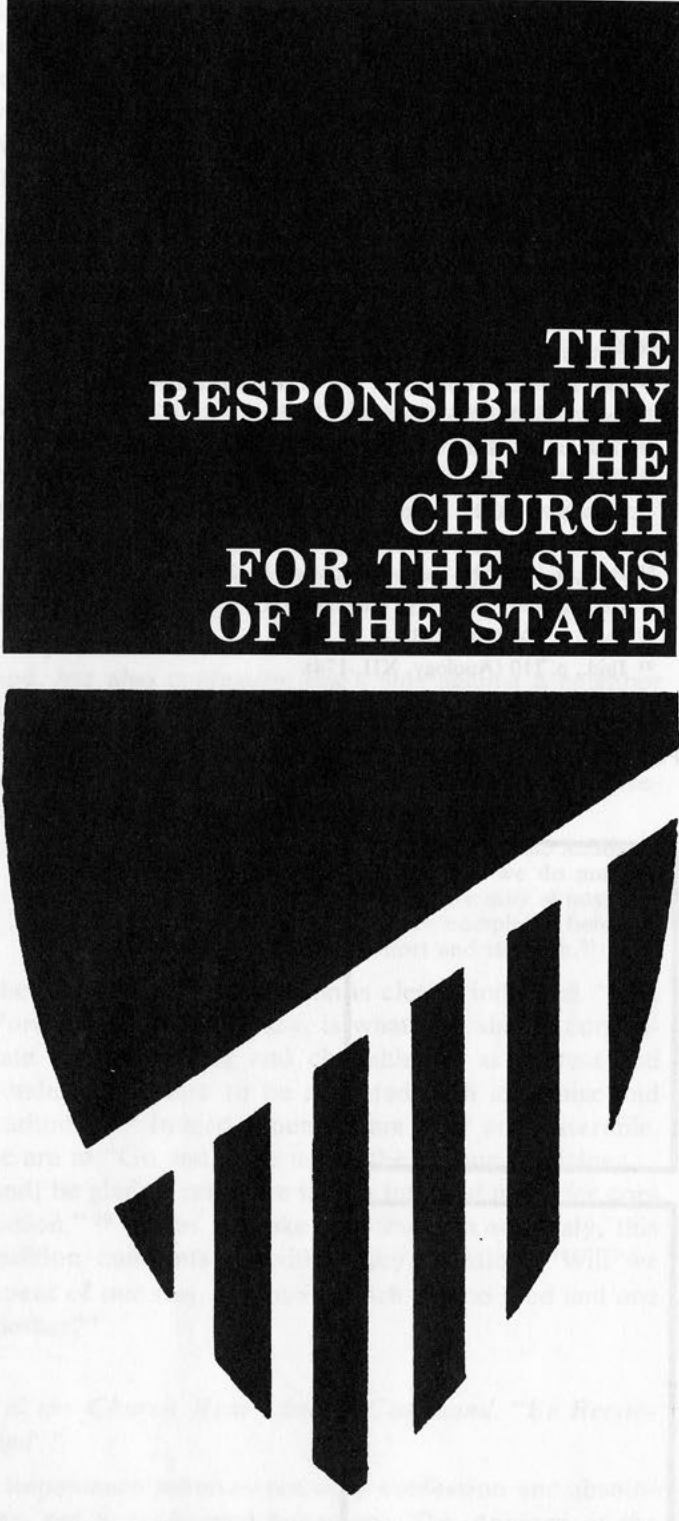
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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 210 (Apology, XII, 174).

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## THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE CHURCH FOR THE SINS OF THE STATE

by Larry Grothaus

ON MORAL ISSUES MANY DENOMINATIONS ARE CLEAR in opposing birth control, abortion, alcohol, dancing, and card playing. While some of these issues are significant, others have little importance and have little to do with major concerns in a time of rapid social change. If Lutherans are well known for their views on justification by faith, why are they not known for their views on migrant labor or the equal rights amendment? Is it because we view ethics as only a personal concern and avoid that which we prefer to call secular? The church ought to become involved in the world to denounce the sins of man and community and to promote justice and fairness in our society. The contention of this article is that the church needs to address itself to all the affairs of man, and it needs to develop structures locally and nationally to express its views.

### Sins in Government Today

Almost 200 years after the heroic deeds at Lexington and Concord the United States now finds itself still supporting wars seemingly without end and governments that represent only themselves. While this nation originally fought to escape a colonial status, we now feel duty bound to support puppet regimes that cannot exist without our constant aid. We have justified war, political

interventions, and foreign policies by a strongly moralistic anticommunism ideology and by economic advantage to ourselves.<sup>1</sup> If our nation has been less guilty than some of its strongest critics would have us believe, it can hardly claim innocence. Ought not the church using its own criteria determine its stance and make it known?

Almost two centuries ago great leaders proclaimed the principles on which they rested their nation's declaration of independence from Great Britain. These principles included the equality of mankind and the rights of man secured by a government formed by a people who have consented to be governed. Tragically, in the face of massive evidence that has convicted many government officials and has caused others to confess their crimes, an administration—president and vice-president—has resigned in disgrace, as the people's representatives in orderly fashion forged the articles of impeachment. One might find solace and comfort that the system worked relatively well and that persevering figures insisted on justice, but the shame and disgrace has cast a pall upon the celebration of the Bicentennial.

When a former president cheats on his income tax and his tax consultant is put in jail, one can only speculate on the extent of crime by others. Lies, false witness, theft, forgery, and bribery are all a part of Watergate and other infamous deeds. These are not new sins to politics nor are such sins confined in time or place. As this is written a former United States Senator is on trial and elected officials in Chicago have been indicted.

One might also question the morality of the system or systems under which we live. Why, for example, do federal regulatory agencies, originally intended to protect the public interest, appear to be more concerned about promoting and protecting the businesses they are supposed to regulate? Why does a powerful union in apparent cooperation with business seek to stop and destroy the struggling union of Cesar Chavez? What has happened to the graduated income tax originally designed to redress the inequities in the distribution of wealth but now without success in the past 30 years? By what sense of equity and fairness do the very rich pay no income tax? By what sense of justice do the rich get richer and the poor get poorer? How can we as a nation justify the discrimination that remains to plague individuals and groups whose color or sex vary from the white male but who cannot get equal pay for equal work, or any work at all?

### The Examples Set by Prophets, Christ, and Luther

The church has faced and struggled with these and other injustices for thousands of years. The prophets of the Old Testament decried the inequities and injustices of their society in which the rich took every

advantage of the poor and showed no mercy. Old Testament prophets Joel, Amos, Micah, and Malachi denounced a variety of sins including cruelty by government, miscarriages of justice, fraud, and malpractices that caused poverty and malfeasance in government.

The New Testament church has also fought the sins of men and society. Christ condemned a host of sins and set the highest standard of good works for the brotherhood of man. Ultimately He gave His life for us all. The apostles and the early Christian church pursued the same goals. Likewise, Luther fought for the well being of others and against injustice. He opposed economic injustices and unfair commercial and labor practices and urged reforms in government, education, and society. To the present day the Christian church (or major portions of it) has fought sins that ranged from slavery to economic inequities. Recently we have affirmed the church's mission to the whole man, and we ought to mean what we say.<sup>2</sup>

### All or None Views of the Church's Responsibility

Christians acting as individuals and Christians in corporate bodies as congregations, districts, and synods need to follow the demands for reformation that the church has made in the past. But how does the church play its role as reformer? How can the church promote change that results in freedom, equality, and justice? How does the church deal with a corporate world in which decisions are made by boards, commissions, agencies, faculties, or other groups instead of individuals?

Some people would find very little for the church to do. They conveniently divide affairs into those belonging to the Kingdom of God and those belonging to the province of men. Indeed, the division is Luther's conception, but some would suggest that the division does not permit the church to become involved in secular affairs. Consequently, these people believe the church has no responsibility toward social, political, or economic ills. They would ignore the fruits of racism, corruption, and the shortcomings of an economic system. Such compartmentalization allowed one American clergyman who was a consultant to the State Department to conclude that "... as a Christian he should not obey an order to fire nuclear weapons, but that his moral reservations are irrelevant to matters of policy because they require political, not moral, judgment."<sup>3</sup> Such thinking allows governments to do as they wish while minorities practice slavery and genocide with, at times, little protest from the church.

An opposite extreme is also possible. The Social Gospel in American Protestantism was a reform movement that pointed Protestant churches toward meeting the social, political, and economic problems of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. As such the church became interested in the problems of city living, political bosses and corruption, labor-management relations,

and other national policies.<sup>4</sup> Few could complain that the church did not care, and many good things happened as a consequence of the church's interest and activities.

However, in some cases critics pointed out that the church seemed more interested in sociology than theology. While the church did much that was good to help people and improve society, it did not always preach the Word. Though good works abounded, the articulation of the Gospel did not happen. Unhappily the church was not much different than a welfare agency or reform club of the neighborhood.

While preaching the Word could have readily solved that problem, other problems remained. Chief among these was the doctrinal basis of the Social Gospel. As revealed in the writings of Walter Rauschenbusch, the Social Gospel promised or seemed to promise the Kingdom of God on earth. Perfection was not to be delayed until heaven, but a millennial dream could be achieved here and now. Such hopes were to be dashed just as President Woodrow Wilson's hopes that World War I would end all wars and make the world safe for democracy. Original sin was still with us, like it or not, and soon came Mussolini, Stalin, and Hitler who would prove how evil man can be.

#### Why Must the Christian Be Involved in Civic Affairs?

Because of that sinful nature of man, reform is a constant necessity in the affairs of man. Though Luther was not a major social reformer as such, he had a strong sense of social responsibility. If he had had no such concern, he would not have posted the 95 theses. Indeed, his entire life was one of social action. As Luther put it on one occasion, "Look, there are plenty of good



works to be done! Most of the mighty, most of the rich, and most of their friends are unjust and exercise their power over the poor, the lowly, and over their opponents. The more powerful they are, the worse their needs. And where one cannot prevent this by force and help the truth, one can at least confess the truth and do something for it by our words, not the kind which please the unrighteous or agree with them, but those which speak the truth boldly."<sup>5</sup>

Luther believed that man is justified by faith through grace and that his faith should be active in love toward his neighbor. Love is not self interest but the giving of one's self for others. One might ask, "What action is really of help to my neighbor?" Luther's ethics were both Biblical and practical. One's faith and love led to good works and these resulted in the improvement of society.<sup>6</sup> As the great reformer put it, "Now since the being and nature of man cannot exist for an instant unless it is doing something, putting up with or running away from something (for as we know, life never stands still), well then, let him who wants to be holy and full of good works begin to exercise himself at all times in this faith in all his life and works. Let him learn to do and leave undone all things in such continual faith. Then he will find how much work he has to do, and how completely all things are included in faith, and how he may never grow idle because his very idling must be the exercise and work of faith. In short, nothing can be in or about us and nothing can happen to us but what must be good and serviceable to us, as long as we believe (as we ought) that all things please God."<sup>7</sup>

Luther protested wrongs and thus created tension between the church and society. The corporate church and individual Christians need to develop a healthy tension in our contemporary situation. Luther advised, "But if you can stir up the authorities to do something and to give commands, you may do so."<sup>8</sup> The church must attack not only immorality, fraud, deceit, crime, but also failures of government to act or the injustice of its actions, the lack of fairness in labor-management relations by either side, and whatever other wrongs may exist. We should always ask, "How shall we in the midst of our given situation bear witness to our conviction that Jesus Christ is Lord over all? How shall we assert the Lordship of Jesus Christ with special reference to the political problems of our time in such a way that our claim regarding His lordship is clear, whether we are enthusiastically received or not?"<sup>9</sup>

The church must resist all wrongs and promote truth and righteousness in all things. The church must decide fairly and not join this group or that group in its efforts to promote justice. All men and all groups sin, not just the rich or the poor. As Luther said, "We dare make no distinction of persons, as do some who fight most actively and busily against the wrong which is done to the rich, the mighty, or their own friends, but who are

quiet and patient when wrong is done to the poor, or to those of low estate, or to their own enemy. These people see the name and the honor of God not as it is but through a colored glass. They measure truth and righteousness according to the persons and are not aware that their eye, which looks more on the person than on the truth of the matter, deceives them. They are hypocrites under the skin and only appear to be defending the truth. They know quite well that there is no danger in helping the rich, the mighty, the learned, and one's own friends. In turn, they can enjoy their help, and be protected and honored by them."<sup>10</sup>

#### Ways the Church Can Use to Improve Government

If those who would reform society have no hidden agendas and seek only justice and righteousness, they must also accept the responsibility of creative reconstruction. As God has provided for government, Christians will respect the institution, but they will help it to achieve the goals of repressing evil and promoting the well-being of society. A major criteria by which Christians as well as others must judge the natural orders is reason. Since the natural orders are reasonable, our politics, economics, and society must be interpreted by our reason. In depending upon reason the church must be a close observer and student of the conditions which face us. Church people must read and digest considerable information and theoretical studies to come to reasonable conclusions concerning its judgments and the change toward which it would counsel the world.

The church often finds it easy to cite wrongs but far more difficult to constructively offer alternatives. The church must denounce drunkenness as sinful, but it must be aware that the solution is not simply to call upon the sinner to stop and to condemn him if he does not. The sinner needs to recognize his sin and to seek pastoral counseling. If he is an alcoholic, he may also need medical and psychiatric help. The church ought to denounce the pollution of our streams as a sin inflicted upon nature and our ecological well-being. But the church also needs to promote those scientific methods and legislative and executive actions by which pollution can be prevented, alleviated, and controlled. The church needs to go beyond the denunciation of sin and to urge, in a positive sense, what might be done. People need to be convinced of the need for conservation, new priorities and responsibilities, legislation, and spending money.

Some dangers exist for the church as it pursues such a ministry. The danger of visualizing an ideal may lead to a belief in man's ability to establish a Kingdom of God on earth. Psychologically the church must be prepared to fall short of its dreams. The frustration that may develop from failures can be especially difficult in this country which has often thought of itself as

a city on a hill, religious or political, that has succeeded for all the world to behold.

Another danger is the inadequacy of reason. No matter how pure its motives might be, and they are not always pure, the church cannot always think thoroughly enough or well enough to always have the right answers. In depending on rationality the church like any other institution or any person needs to recognize the limits of reason. The present dissatisfaction with economists that seems to be current in society reflects the awareness that social scientists have been able neither to reason out the problem nor agree upon what should be done. Reason is limited by the extent of information we have, the cultural limits we subconsciously place on our information, and the final necessity of making national decisions that are in fact acts of faith.

Still, reason remains our best method for determining our judgments and actions. The church as well as individuals may err, but the risk and responsibility cannot be avoided. We cannot be uncritical of institutions such as government, unions, businesses, and schools because their coercive powers are employed by people whose goals may be other than justice.<sup>11</sup> We cannot decide to be nonpolitical because that is a political decision which is essentially a vote of confidence in the established system. Though we know we may be wrong or lacking in wisdom, we also know that our Christian faith goes beyond justice to love. Life is not fulfilled in self love but in sacrificial love. (1 Cor. 13) Life is not the accumulation of material goods (Matt. 10:28; Mark 8:30) but the witnessing of Christ and the sharing of one another's burdens.<sup>12</sup>

To successfully function in our society the church needs to have the love for others to want to act and the expertise to act intelligently. Our love is a product of our faith, a gift of the Spirit. The expertise we need to amass is the ability to evaluate the collective wisdom of our times. We need to have synodical and/or inter-Lutheran committees or commissions that study the issues which face us as citizens. Such groups need to reflect the views of all sides, but the ultimate goal is to evaluate conditions and situations in government, business and labor, and society from a spiritual concern based upon spiritual values. While we cannot Christianize politics, business, or unions, we can speak to people and to society of love and justice. The Lutheran Council in the USA is one step that we have taken, but other commissions and study groups are needed to cope with the variety of problems facing modern man.

The organization of the church should not only face national and international problems but should also reflect regional and local concerns. The regional church or synodical district needs to organize people for problems at that level. In Nebraska we need to know about the specific problems of pollution, strip mining, relations with native Americans and other minorities, water sup-

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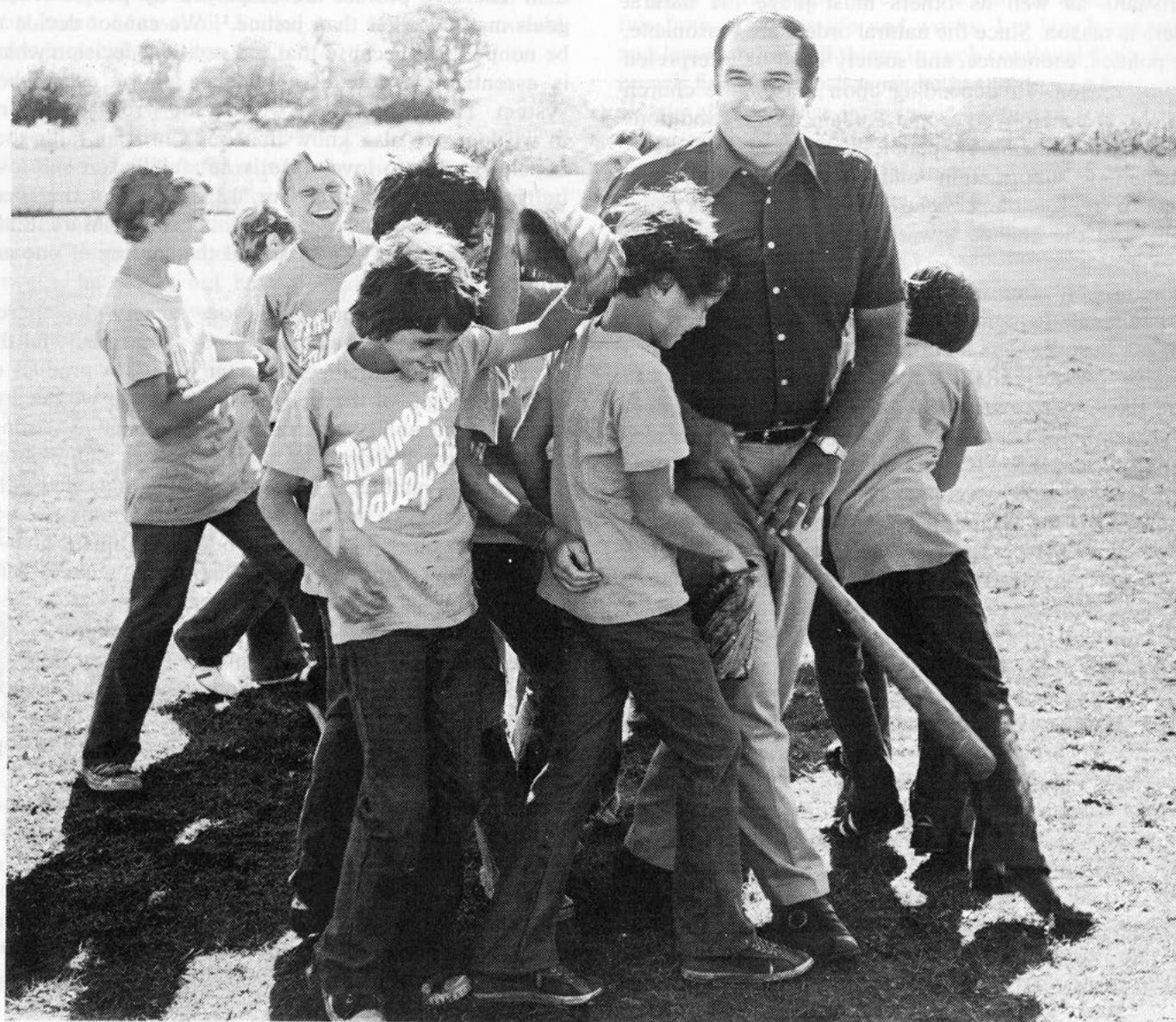
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ply, all aspects of agriculture, and many other issues. In our state legislature Lutherans have informally established a lobby by which to influence government and society. This is not an activity of partisan politics but of Christian witness. In local areas congregations or circuits can also address themselves to whatever issues confront the populace.

The church may lack sufficient funds to feed the poor and cure the sick and all the unfortunates in the world or in the community, but it is rich in love and in people. The church needs to help people meet their material needs to the fullest extent of available resources. Such actions express its love very effectively. The church also needs to show its concern and love for people who are the victims not only of their individual shortcomings but also the inequities of a social, political, or economic system.

The church is blessed locally and nationally with people familiar with these problems. They should contribute their knowledge to help the church come to an understanding of the problems and to find a spiritual concern for a just and God-pleasing solution to the problems. We have youthful idealists, the wisdom of the aged, the practicality of businessmen, and the interests of laborers, politicians, and professional churchmen. We need to get organized, and we need to forget self interest and think of others. Too long and too often we have compartmentalized our lives into unintegrated roles in which being a Christian has nothing to do with meeting a payroll, dealing with racketeers, showing concern for farm laborers, or providing a truly just system of criminal justice.

Christians are their brothers' keepers; therefore the church needs to go beyond pious words and moral platitudes. Love is acting, is people getting involved. However, most problems are complex, and Christian citizens need all the information and expert advice they can get. Then motivated by love for others they can add a di-

mension and voice that seeks justice to the affairs of men. That voice can be more than a platitude if we know and understand the problems and seek reasonable and God-pleasing solutions. One of the last activities of Martin Luther was his effort to find a solution to a conflict of ownership over some mining property. He accepted the responsibility, and we ought not to do less.

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**SELF DISCOVERY AND SOCIAL AWARENESS.** by Everett Ostrovsky. New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1974.

My first reaction after scanning through this book was one of scepticism. The author's goals seemed too lofty and his trust that the individual reader would work hard at thinking through the questions involved seemed to be totally unrealistic.

After working through the material presented I am very impressed with the rich resource which this book provides persons who wish to be actively involved with the concepts of personal and social development. The book not only facilitates thinking through concepts which are involved but it is an outstanding resource for sharpening the perceptiveness skills of persons entering the helping and learning professions.

Ostrovsky's book is an innovative translation of third force psychology into educational practice. In part one of his work Ostrovsky presents 56 episodes about children, adolescents, and adults which he developed from his professional and personal experiences. These episodes are intended to be used as fuel for the groups which discuss them. In addition to the short episodes the author has carefully and comprehensively selected 26 theoretically based articles written by outstanding behavioral scientists. The material in part one is organized to correlate with standard texts in child and adolescent psychology.

In the second part of his book the author presents an excellent introduction to role-playing and the use of this technique in learning environments. He follows the introduction with 50 roleplaying situations and four case studies. These situations are well constructed and provide rich opportunities for learning under the direction of a skilled instructor.

Part three is a unique attempt to bridge the gap between the present and the past within each individual. I suspect that many readers may initially react negatively to the subtitle "Quotes and Proverbs." I believe part three provides a starting point for an examination of the symbolic meanings of each individual's heritage.

One of the strengths of Ostrovsky's work is that he has selected the articles which he includes with great insight. His book is a scholarly and fresh attempt to provide a supplementary resource to the standard works available for education, psychology, and sociology courses. His bibliography is outstanding, and the book is well organized for maximum utility. The book is not a self-help text. It is not suitable for use by students on their own outside of a group context or without the assistance of a director or teacher. This book will make an excellent supplementary resource for an undergraduate course in the behavioral sciences.

EUGENE OETTING

**THE CRUCIFIED GOD: THE CROSS OF CHRIST AS THE FOUNDATION AND CRITICISM OF CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY.** by Jürgen Moltmann. Translated by R. A. Wilson and John Bowden. New York: Harper & Row, 1974.

World War II ended while Christian theologians were absorbed with attempts to answer the question: "How do I know there is God?" Theological leadership soon passed to the proponents of "the New Hermeneutic" who gave as their answer that God is revealed in His Word, so long as the interpreter uses the proper method of interpretation to discover Him in that Word.

Yet the generation of Germans who spent their formative years during that war found little comfort in knowing there is God. Their problem was, where was this God at Auschwitz. If God were remote from and unaffected by the holocaust, would it not be better to believe in the nonexistence of God, in atheism? Living after the brutal slaughter of six million Jews, they could not understand how God could be both omnipotent and merciful. Living after Hitler, they were filled with hopelessness.

In their despair they found the dominant theology of Bultmann, Fuchs, and Ebeling to be irrelevant. It did not help them answer their questions or meet their needs.

First of all they found this existentialist theology too self-centered. Its prime concern was with what a given text means to an individual. As long as one's chief focus is on what the Word means to the self in terms of an I-Thou relationship, that Word cannot in a relevant way speak to the social and political needs of people oppressed by a Hitler or a Stalin. This generation needed a way to say "we" as the first word of their religious vocabulary — not "I."

In addition, because existentialist theology separates the Word from the event the Word claims to report, history as a relevant category ceases to exist. Such a separation made it easy for some to cop out on the question of where God was at Auschwitz. The Christ who rises in the sermon for the individual hearer need not be personally involved in the mass tragedies of the past.

Existentialism's concern with "meaning," whether the events reported by that Word happened as described or not, dissolves the past into the present. This then makes it impossible for it to speak hopefully of the future. It speaks relevantly only to the timeless now of the present. But this new generation of Germans above all else needed something to give them hope. They needed a theology of the future, not the present.

Their need for hope was met through a fresh look at the resurrection of Christ as a real event of the past that provides very real hope for the future. And by giving meaning to both past and future, the resurrection gives meaning to the present—even during or after Auschwitz. Thus was born a move-

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## book reviews

ment called the "Theology of Hope." But since the foremost concern of the movement is liberation from all oppression, it could more appropriately be called "Political Theology."

The most popular spokesman for this development in theology is Jürgen Moltmann. *The Crucified God* is the second major statement of his political theology—following his programmatic *Theology of Hope* and numerous intermediary works. Thus this book, which has been called the most important theological book of 1974, is an effort to speak relevantly of God in the midst of human suffering, speaking in a way that the one who thus knows God is propelled into the midst of that suffering to work with God for liberation.

While showing awareness of the very real dangers of oversimplifying a work of this scope and import, Moltmann seeks to do theology after Auschwitz by recognizing that in its worship of Jesus, a man of history, Christianity worships the human God. In its worship of one who died as a political criminal, Christianity worships the crucified God, the God who has identified Himself with the suffering and oppressed peoples of the earth and who bears with them their struggle for liberation.

Unlike Zeus, who is unaffected by human misery, the crucified God suffers at Auschwitz because He suffered at Calvary. As a consequence, faith in Christ liberates the believer from oppression so that he, like his crucified God, can suffer with those who suffer oppression and, like his human God, can struggle with the politically oppressed.

Yet the crucified God is the God who rose from the dead. Therefore in worshipping Him Christianity has a basis for confidence and hope in the future of humanity, for that future is the future of the crucified and risen Christ. It is this hope that has the power to change the future and provide a new dimension to the present.

It is from this dimension that Moltmann develops his message. Unlike the "New Hermeneutic," Moltmann does not rest his case upon interpretation of the Word. He rather uses arguments tested by the canons of historical research. Scripture is used, of course, but only as one datum of history whose veracity must be determined by the criterion of historical scholarship.

It is this element that this reviewer regards as the basic weakness of the book. Its message is ultimately dependent upon the accuracy of its handling of historical evidence. That, in turn, depends upon the legitimacy of certain unproved historical assumptions.

One difficulty with the New Hermeneutic is that God is "found" only through the use of proper methods of Biblical interpretation. Yet Moltmann would replace one form of synergism with another, one that seeks to prove Christ is the crucified God on the basis of historical research and theory. Hence, as is true of the New Hermeneutic, salvation can only be found by the scholar—ergo, salvation rests in part upon human merit and achievement.

This synergism is most evident in the fact that Moltmann seems unable to construct a meaningful dogma of the Holy Spirit. Classical Lutheranism has protected against synergism by stressing that the Holy Spirit speaks through the prophetic Word to call sinners to faith in Christ. Moltmann, in the chapter in which he seeks to present a Trinitarian view of God, can only speak in meaningful fashion of the Father and the Son, reducing the Holy Spirit, in Augustinian fashion, to "the spirit of the surrender of the Father and the Son." (p. 245)

Perhaps the biggest problem this book will cause for the readers of *ISSUES* is that so much of it is devoted to polemic against competing theological systems. In order to fully understand much of what Moltmann means the reader would need to be well versed in continental and American theological movements since Kant. The nonspecialist in these movements will probably find himself often wondering just what Moltmann is trying to do with these extended attacks or defenses.

The volume is nevertheless extremely provocative. If one can wade past the polemics to the kernel of the argument, the reader will find many, many provocative questions that demand profound attention. The one who struggles with these questions as does Jürgen Moltmann will find his spiritual life and his ministry enriched. He may arrive at different answers, and on occasion he should, but the effort should prove extremely rewarding.

ARNOLD KRUGLER

*AN ETHIC FOR CHRISTIANS AND OTHER ALIENS IN A STRANGE LAND*, by William Stringfellow. Waco, Texas: Word Books Publisher, c. 1973.

The book is hardly devotional, but devoutly written; hardly a prophet's oracle, but written with all the solemn and somber tones of an Amos. Stylistically it is most readable, but difficult to read without wanting to set its unflinching judgments on America aside.

Stringfellow sets the stage for his "doomsday oracle" by drawing parallels between our nation and the Nazi regime and reapplying the *Book of Revelation* as a political-theological document and parable of our time. If one did not know the man Stringfellow, such an introduction would suggest that the book is nothing more than another sample of radical fundamentalistic-millennial theology. Or worse, it could be nothing more than a handbook for extremist politics and revolutionaries who by their own hand seek to bring in "The Kingdom of God." But Stringfellow shows himself neither to be a new style millennialist nor a throwback to the Social Gospel movement. Of course, there will be much with which you disagree. There is much with which the reviewer has a problem, but the standard criticisms of such works will not do.

With coolness and candor Stringfellow shows himself to be something of a "graveyard poet" of the 1970s, writing the epitaph of America against the backdrop of *The Apocalypse* and describing her death as moral impoverishment at every strata of society. If for you it is difficult to keep track of the barrage of social and political problems which have flashed before your eyes in the last decade, Stringfellow's book will be for you a catalog of those issues. His portrait of America is not beautiful, but neither is the picture of Babylon-the-fallen in *Revelation*. As Stringfellow paints and portrays, most readers will be infuriated, frustrated, and even disgusted. And if such is sometimes among the good-making qualities of a book, then such may be counted as a "plus" in this volume.

Stringfellow's major thesis goes beyond the Babylon analogy. His primary concern is to provide some guidelines to the Christian living in such a world. Stringfellow provides no easy answer to the question, insisting that above all the gift of discernment and moral sensitivity to issues of justice and goodness is to be sought after in the Church. He describes the Christian as living in the epoch of the Fall, standing between the first Advent and the second. Like Christ Himself, the Christian finds himself victimized by principalities and powers, abandoned by all, living as an alien in a strange land. Like Christ, the citizens of the New Jerusalem await God's rescue and the consummation, not striving to undo the power of death let loose in the world since in Christ's resurrection death has already been undone.

The author provides no curative or panacea for what "ails America." He does not seek to replant our feet on the once-solid ground of the American Dream. He has no

## book reviews

illusions of America's building the Kingdom of God through her technology nor saving the world through an enforcement of a global Monroe doctrine. Stringfellow is no "Dewey-eyed" optimist. He reminds the Christian that our citizenship is in the Jerusalem to come. No longer can America be equated with the children of God. For Stringfellow America has become an idol, enslaving human beings, demanding human sacrifices, capturing and captivating Presidents as well as intimidating and dehumanizing ordinary citizens.

There is much which can be criticized in the book and much to be commended. As a social-theological commentator on our times Stringfellow is his own man and consequently fails to reflect what might be called the "common consensus" of what has gone wrong in our land in the past decade. As a book addressed to all Christians in the land, it may well serve as a corrective of certain kinds of extremism. One thing I am certain of, no political or religious figure will be able to equate the destiny of America with that of the Kingdom of God without the specter of Stringfellow mocking his every word.

If you have read nothing of Stringfellow, this is a good place to start. It is a short book with much to muse on. Like the man, Stringfellow's books are "events" after which you are never quite the same. What Stringfellow says need not be adopted, but I think much can be adapted to do as Luther urged in his Lectures on Isaiah: "Whatever we teach, order, and declare is done for one purpose only: that the godly should learn to expect the advent of their Savior on the Judgment Day."

DAVID P. MEYER

*WHATEVER BECAME OF SIN?* by Karl Menninger. New York: Hawthorn Books, 1973.

Sin pervades our lives, but few people recognize it, laments Karl Menninger in this book. In spite of our continuing troubles as individuals and as a nation, we have not seen sin as the root cause. In failing to do this, we have prevented ourselves from experiencing the refreshing act of confession and renewal.

In Menninger's opinion 20th century people have converted acts previously regarded as sinful into either crimes or symptoms of mental disorder. As society designated various sins as crimes, the responsibility for stopping wrongdoing increasingly fell on police, judges, and penal authorities.

Simultaneously, Menninger argues, the vogue of psychiatry and psychoanalysis

caused many people to consider all misbehavior as an involuntary symptom of underlying psychological problems. Hence, these people wanted to turn all transgressors over to psychiatrists to determine what was "really" wrong with them.

The demise of sin as an explanation for personal and social ills precipitated other unfortunate effects, writes Menninger. People have come to tolerate all sorts of wrongdoings as long as the responsibility for it falls on a group or on society as a whole rather than on themselves as individuals.

For Menninger the solution to our problems lies in a new recognition of sin and of each person's individual responsibility for it. Clergymen need to assume the position of prophets, pointing out people's sins and calling them to repentance. Other key people, such as policemen, politicians, journalists, and psychiatrists, must emerge as moral leaders in our society so that a general revitalization may occur.

"This book is not to be a theological treatise," writes the psychiatrist Menninger, but his work is laden with theological overtones. In his view sin is willful harm done to someone. This definition undoubtedly will raise eyebrows among some students of theology, for it deemphasizes sinfulness as a condition of human existence and focuses on conscious actions of men against other men.

As a psychiatrist who is still interested in treating individual wrongdoing as a symptom of mental disorder, Menninger treads lightly when he identifies personal sins. He does not want to create guilt, the psychiatrists' old enemy. He seems more comfortable naming social sins which people commit or tolerate as a group, such as the "sins" of affluence, waste, pollution, or war.

Repentance and renewal are not very carefully delineated. What brings people to repentance? What sort of renewal is possible? Menninger does not explore these questions extensively.

Menninger includes a number of interesting tidbits. For example, in 1953 Dwight Eisenhower was the last President to mention sin in an official statement. More importantly, *Whatever Became of Sin?* evokes serious thought about the reasons for our avoidance of the word "sin" in our lives today.

The book contains shortcomings, especially in its simplified conceptualization of the problems and solutions. But Menninger writes well and the book reads very easily. Certainly he is quite correct in asserting that confession and absolution would be refreshing experiences for Americans today.

CHARLES PIEHL

*SIN AND THE NEW AMERICAN CONSCIENCE*, by William Emerson Jr. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1974.

A better book than this could be written about sin and the conscience of Americans. Even though William Emerson mentions some of the most pressing social issues of our times, he fails to offer more than a few flashes of insight for readers who wish to comprehend the problems around them and to work for solutions.

Emerson's thesis is that Americans are emerging from the ignorance and intolerance of our past into a new age of national self-awareness and harmony in which we will discover remedies for our serious social ills. In this respect the book falls into the category of "the future will be brighter" volumes which have appeared in recent years, including Charles Reich's *The Greening of America* and Jean-Francois Revel's *Without Marx or Jesus: The New American Revolution Has Begun*.

Weaknesses abound in Emerson's argument. What does he mean by "sin"? Apparently, sin is merely the sum of our individual greed and prejudice which contributes to everything wrong with Americans, from our penchant for violence to our double sexual standards. Nowhere does the author ask if this is an adequate definition of sin, nor does he relate his usage of the word to a religious context.

What does Emerson mean by the "new American conscience"? As with "sin," the term is used carelessly. Emerson seems to portray it as a vague process by which old patterns of thought are broken down and replaced by "self-knowledge," something he says was occurring in the 1960s. He fails to explain why this "conscience" developed. In fact, he does not adequately prove that intolerance and greed will disappear, especially considering the fact that they have a long history both in America and elsewhere.

The book's most interesting sections are not Emerson's attempts to analyze American "sin" and "conscience," but rather his response to the changes in American life during his lifetime. In the best passages the author recounts his reaction to the emergence of racial protest in his native South.

Emerson emerges as a man of rather traditional opinions trying hard to accommodate himself to the many-faceted social movements of recent years. He feels guilty about his generation's self-satisfaction, but his attempts to place himself within the "reborn society" he believes is on the way sound forced and hollow.

CHARLES PIEHL

Karl Menninger's query: "Whatever became of sin?" is a peculiarly modern question. Previous centuries have asked: "Whatever became of a united definition of sin?" or "Whatever became of man's universal derogation of sin?" But the present century has the dubious distinction of coming up with the question: "What person in his right mind still believes in sin?"

What lies behind this development? I think the emergence of two disciplines, psychology and sociology as strong influencers of contemporary thought, have had a lot to do with it. Each of these disciplines has developed its own conceptual framework for a theoretical understanding of man. Each has moved away from the concept of "sin," ignoring it as a theological term not subject to empirical observation or scientific measurement. Each has moved toward the concept of "deviant behavior," assuming that man's departures from laws and norms are the result of natural and social forces, which presumably are susceptible to measurement.

Psychologists, generally, view man as going from a "tabula rasa" birth to socialized adulthood. In this view, man starts neutral. His development is shaped by his environment. What he becomes in later life is not so much the result of his native equipment as of his developmental experiences. When his behavior deviates from his society's standards, it's because of some flaw in the socialization process, not in the nature of the man.

Sociologists, generally, view man as a creature of his culture. His aberrations, according to this theory, are departures not from universal standards, but from the rules of his own society. If he grows up Western and Christian, bigamy is sin. If he grows up Eastern and Moslem, having more than one wife may, in fact, be a sign of holiness. In William Graham Sumner's words: "The mores make anything right." Deviance, according to this view, is relative to each society's norms.

This switch from "sin" to "deviant behavior" is not limited to academia. It has become the property of the masses, especially in America, with the effect that our whole society has become "culturally relativized," to use Peter Berger's term. And cultural relativism, Thomas Hoult points out, leads to moral relativism, which claims that each of the many moral, ethical, and religious systems has its own validity.

Can Christians live with this contemporary switch? Not really. Sin is basic to the Christian understanding of both man's nature and his need. The syllogism goes as follows: Man is a sinner, separating him from God; Christ died to atone for man's sin, reconciling him to God; man's restoration to fellowship with God is the result of Christ's having paid the penalty of man's sin. Take "sin" from those sentences, and the phrase "Christ is Savior" becomes hollow words.

The implication of Menninger's question is apparent. We must restore sin to a place of greater consciousness in men's minds, so that the wonder of Christ's salvation will shine through more clearly.

## LAST WORDS

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