

An Unholy Trinity: The Liberal, Charismatic, and Evangelical Movements in the Lutheran Church Today

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I. Introduction

Anniversaries are designed to be times of remembrance. This year is the silver anniversary of the departure of the Liberal faction of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in 1976 to form the Association of Evangelical Lutherans Churches, i.e., the AELC. It is time for members of the LC-MS to remember that history and to ask some deep questions about its impact on us today. What was going on in the Missouri Synod in 1976? The synod was on the verge of schism in the midst of a long and bloody ecclesiastical civil war.¹ In April 1976, President J. A. O. Preus of the Missouri Synod removed four district presidents from office for ordaining Seminex graduates. In December 1976, the AELC, was organized, taking with it about 250 congregations of the Lutheran Church-Missouri

Synod.²

Eventually about 200,000 people left the Missouri Synod for the AELC,³ a little bit less than 10% of its lay membership. In his memoirs, Liberal leader John Tietjen observed that 1200 congregations were expected to leave the LC-MS, but only 250 did.⁴ If his calculations were correct, that means that nearly 950 LC-MS congregations and their ministers, i.e., about 16% of the total, remained in the synod organizationally but were loyal to the goals and ideals of the Seminex group, Evangelical Lutherans in Mission (ELIM), and the AELC.

The exodus of the congregations forming the AELC proved to be a prelude to a mega-merger of churches resulting in the present Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, i.e., the ELCA. The ELCA was organized in April 1987. Some pastors I know in the ELCA say that it more closely resembles the AELC than its larger predecessors, the LCA and ALC. Therefore I think that you can argue, with some justification historically, that the essence of the modern ELCA was born in 1976.

II. Theme

Do the problems which faced the Missouri Synod in 1976 still face us today? If those problems have been resolved, are there other problems which are equally

threatening to the church? My answers are: Yes and Yes. Yes, the problems that faced us in 1976 still face us today, though in diluted form. And yes, there are other problems which are equally threatening in their own way. Taken separately, these problems could probably be handled in the normal way of the church. But mix them together, pack them into a political machine, and bombard the synod with effective propaganda and you have a recipe for a hostile takeover.

The threat of a hostile takeover is facing the Missouri Synod in the organization known as “Jesus First.” I have distributed copies of an article I wrote about “Jesus First,”⁵ which you can read later, so I won’t get into all those details today. What is “Jesus First”? From a sociological standpoint, it is a diverse political coalition of dissenting organizations and movements. From a theological standpoint, it is an unholy trinity of the three dominant religious movements in America today: Liberal, Charismatic, and Evangelical. These three dissenting movements, which are normally antagonistic to each other, have joined together in order to engineer the overthrow of Lutheranism in the Missouri Synod.

I should make clear at the outset that the organization “Jesus First” is not in itself the problem. It is a symptom of problems that have been brewing for some time. “Jesus First” could disband tomorrow and we would still be faced with the dissenting movements of Liberalism, Pentecostalism, and Evangelicalism within our church. The terms “Liberalism”, “Pentecostalism,” and “Evangelicalism” are

the generally accepted names in theological scholarship used for the phenomena that I am describing. The adherents of these groups usually admit that they are “movements” devoted to change, of one sort or another. I could spend our time today criticizing the writings of the “Jesus First” organization, or proving its connection to Liberalism, Pentecostalism, and Evangelicalism. I think it is more useful for us to look at the history and characteristics of these three movements and then you can judge for yourself whether or not “Jesus First” is guilty as charged.

The potential for serious and irreversible change from these three religious movements is seen in their history. On the American religious scene, the Liberal movement has affected and transformed the Episcopalians, the United Presbyterians, the United Methodists, the United Church of Christ, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Church of the Brethren, the Reformed Church in America, and the Disciples of Christ. The Evangelical movement has affected and transformed most of the Baptist conventions, which were originally Calvinist. It has also affected some of the Reformed church bodies and others. The Charismatic movement has affected and transformed many of the African-American churches, as well as some of the smaller Protestant churches with Pietist traditions.

The simplest way to explain the conflict that the Missouri Synod continues to experience is this. Some people agree with the original theology and biblical practice of the LC-MS, as found in Martin Luther, C. F. W. Walther, and Francis

Pieper. Other people have been influenced by one or more of these dominant American religious movements and are trying to remake the synod in their image.

III. Method

When a church-body goes through conflict, the easiest thing to do is to focus on the personalities involved and the various offenses given and taken. Many people join or remain in a church for social reasons, so the inter-personal drama is often all that they see and understand. But this never explains why normal, well-adjusted people get into such serious conflict. A focus on personalities or offenses can never provide enduring solutions to church conflict.

Another way of viewing church conflict is through the lens of doctrine. Here you compare what people say or write with the official standard of doctrine in your church. In our case, that is the Lutheran Confessions, plus a few secondary sources such as the writings of Luther and the “Brief Statement.” Although this needs to be done, it often is ineffective. The reason for its ineffectiveness is that a religious movement has power precisely because it has learned how to undermine the official standards of doctrine. Key terms are redefined, important statements are taken out of context, and ideas are transposed from one article of doctrine to another.

Another way of viewing church conflict is through the lens of Scripture.

Here you take people by the hand to the Bible and say, “What does the Bible say?” Although this also needs to be done, this is also ineffective in some cases. Those cases are in which the method of interpreting the Bible has been changed. Most Christians do not realize that the major religious divisions in Christianity are caused by disagreements over how to read and apply the Scriptures. When you cannot agree on how to read and apply the Scriptures, then discussions become circular and end up becoming arguments. In the case of our synod, the Liberal and Pentecostal movements have a different method of reading the Bible from that of the Protestant Reformers, while the Evangelical movement is in the process of moving away from its Reformation roots

There is another way of viewing church conflict that is, I think, rarely practiced, at least for the analysis of contemporary movements. That is what I call the “historical-organic” method. Instead of looking at doctrine or Biblical interpretation in isolation, the “historical-organic” method sees the church as a complex body with different organs and extended across time and space. Indeed, Paul describes the church as the “Body of Christ” (Romans 12:4; I Corinthians 12:12-27), so I think my approach has biblical precedent.

IV. A Medical Analogy for Church Health and Disease

No analogy is perfect and neither is this one, but it is useful for our purposes

of trying to understand the religious movements that are affecting our church-body. I want you to think about a religious denomination as a distinct human body. It contains organs, such as local congregations, a common confession, common worship, common governing structures, officers, publishing houses, a treasury, and educational agencies. All the organs are made up of cells, which are the individual members of that denomination. A church body is self-contained and distinct from other church bodies, though it may be in relation with other church bodies through what is called “church fellowship.” A religious movement, on the other hand, has few or none of these organs, although it has leaders, meetings, and maybe publications. A religious movement thus is a “parasite” or a “virus.” It cannot survive on its own. It must either exist parasitically within a “host” denomination, or itself become another denomination and so cease to be a movement.

A parasitic religious movement feeds off of its “host” congregation, slowly but surely “absorbing” the cells, which are the lay members and other resources of that denomination. If the movement is not stopped, the organs begin to shut down and institutional death ensues. At that point, the parasite takes over the body and rejuvenates it. Externally, that is organizationally, the church-body appears to be as it once was, and it may even have the same name. Internally, that is spiritually, it is a different animal. For example, when the Evangelicals took over the Baptist conventions at the beginning of the nineteenth century, those church-bodies

became in essence Wesleyan-Methodist churches with the external face of believer's baptism and congregational polity. This sort of transformation has happened numerous times in church history. It explains why the name of a church often poorly describes it.

Another medical analogy can give us even deeper insight into the way that religious movements work. Recent studies of infectious disease have discovered that the diseases that kill the quickest are short-lived and short-ranged.⁶ This is because the pathogen immobilizes and kills its victim without warning, effectively preventing its further transmission. Pathogens that co-exist with their host organism before killing it are actually the most dangerous to the population, because they allow the host organism to transmit the disease to a large population before the host is killed. This is the reason that AIDS has proved to be so dangerous to the homosexual population of the world. AIDS is so virulent precisely because it works so slowly.

This new insight in medicine applies to the field of religion too. Religious movements that are obviously heretical are short-lived and short-ranged in their effects. Normal believers shun the "kooks" or "weirdos," who then are quickly isolated or pushed out of the religious community. Religious movements that co-exist with their host denominations awhile before transforming them are actually the most dangerous to the church at large. The parasite movements change the

religious ideas and practices of their host body little by little, often over a period of several generations. People in the host body don't realize what is happening until it is too late.

Like AIDS, the most dangerous religious movements are those which first destroy the immune system. For a religious body, the immune system is its authority system designed to combat alien influences. In the Lutheran church, the immune system is the authority over doctrine and practice exerted by two sets of writings: the Bible and the Lutheran Confessions. In the 1960s and 1970s, the Missouri Synod witnessed attacks on both immune systems. The practice of Biblical higher-criticism was specifically engineered to attack the Bible as the church's primary immune system. The historical-relativist interpretation of the Lutheran Confessions did the same, rendering them relevant only to their own time and place.⁷ The smart Liberals knew that they would win only if they destroyed the immune system of our church. The only reason that the Missouri Synod has survived as a recognizably Lutheran church is because we were successful in fending off these attacks on our church immune system.

Our analogy helps us understand how we Lutherans should view or treat other Christians or those caught up in false religious movements. When a doctor treats a patient, he does not view the patient as the problem. If the patient is the problem, the solution would be to get rid of him. The competent doctor views the

disease as the problem and the patient as the victim. This is how we should view Christians in other churches or those in our church caught up in false religious movements. They are victims. The real problem is the doctrine and practices of the false church or movement. The doctrine and practice is what has to be corrected for the patient to become healthy.

If false doctrine and practice are diseases in the body of Christ, then true doctrine and practice produces the “healthiest” Christians. Here we are talking about health in the spiritual realm, i.e., in your attitudes toward God and His Word. The “healthiest” Christians will be the strongest spiritually, the most productive ethically, and are the most likely to persevere in the faith until they achieve their heavenly goal. Christians caught up in false religious movements are much more likely to fall away from the faith, which is spiritual death. Thus we should not judge that all people who cling to false doctrine or practices are unbelievers, but we must affirm that they are all spiritually sick, sometimes with a “sickness unto death.”

Now that we have a general approach to false religious movements, let’s look at the three dominant religious movements affecting our church today.

V. The Liberal Movement

The Liberal movement in the Christian church really began in the Anglican

church in the seventeenth century.⁸ In the seventeenth century, England was wracked by disputes in both the church and state. In the church, the disputes were between the traditionalist Anglicans and the Calvinist Puritans. In the state, the disputes were between the Cavaliers, who supported the King, and the Roundheads, who supported the Parliament. These disputes resulted in the English Civil War, from 1642 to 1648. It was just as bloody as the American Civil War, but with religious strife thrown into the mix to make it really nasty!

While the king and the bishops were busy defending their turf, the Roundheads descended on the university town of Cambridge in 1642 and turned it into their military stronghold.⁹ Many of you may have heard of the King's College Boys Choir, one of the best choral groups in the English-speaking world. If you have seen pictures of the King's College chapel where they are based, that is Cambridge University. Cambridge University is also where C. S. Lewis spent the latter part of his career, at Magdalene College. In any event, in 1642 professors who were suspected of Anglican or Cavalier leanings were expelled from Cambridge. Chapels were stripped of their ornaments and artwork by the notorious iconoclast William Dowsing. All this was reversed in the Restoration of the monarchy in 1660.

In this political environment which was noted for its proclamations of freedom from the king and bishops, Cambridge University experienced a unique

period of “academic freedom.” Professors who had sympathies for previously censored ideas found that they could propagate their ideas without fear of reprisal. The professors at Cambridge who exercised this new found freedom have been called “Cambridge Platonists” by later historians, but that name obscures their real intent. The Cambridge Platonists were really busy reviving the theology of Erasmus of Rotterdam,¹⁰ who was the first professor of Greek at Cambridge and a primary conduit of Renaissance ideals to that school.

The theology of Erasmus was out of favor in the church for a time, both among the Protestants and the Catholics. Luther’s Bondage of the Will alienated Erasmus from the Protestants. Pope Paul VI censored Erasmus’ writings among Catholics, even though Erasmus vowed obedience to the pope until his dying day. The re-emergence of Erasmus’ theology under a different name hid the real source of the Liberal movement for centuries. It has only been with the Renaissance and Reformation scholarship of the twentieth century that Erasmus has gotten the credit that is his due. One of the scholars involved in this detective work was the now deceased Dr. Lewis Spitz of Stanford University, a notable scholar and member of the Missouri Synod.

What was the goal of the Cambridge Platonists? Their goal, which they shared with Erasmus, is summed up in the word “simplicity.”¹¹ They believed that there are only a few essentials for truth in religion. Or put another way, only a few

truths are important to salvation and they are all clearly contained in the Bible. This ideal of simplicity was shaped not only by a hostility to dogma and confessions, but also by an antipathy to all ceremonial in worship.¹² The Cambridge Platonists applied the Puritan “stripping of the altars” to the “stripping” of the confessions. In this sense, they are the ancestors of modern fundamentalism, which believes that only a few truths are important for salvation.

The theology of the Cambridge Platonists was more Erasmian than Puritan in tone and result. They took the humanist denial of original sin to its logical conclusion by asserting that salvation is not a matter of appeasing a rigorous and imperious God.¹³ Salvation, in their view, is rather the cultivation of an ethical motivation resulting in moral action and the ultimate possibility of perfection. This meant that the traditional dogmas of the divinity of Christ, the atonement, the doctrine of justification, eschatology, the sacraments, the church, and the divine ministry were all made irrelevant. Traditional Protestant dogmas were trivialized, not rejected outright. In Lutheran language, this meant that “works righteousness” became the center of religion, while other doctrines were made peripheral or optional. This completely ignored Jesus’ Great Commission, which required the church to “teach them all things that I have commanded you.”

The next stage in the Liberal movement was the Latitudinarian party, which was dominant in the Anglican church in the latter half of the seventeenth century.¹⁴

The goal of the Latitudinarians was to be as inclusive as possible by seeking a middle ground between Anglican traditionalists and Puritan iconoclasts.

Latitudinarians were the original “moderates,” and were the predecessors of the “Broad Church” Anglicans today. Issues of doctrine and worship which divided the Anglicans and Puritans were declared by Latitudinarians to be *adiaphora*, i.e., “open questions.” Thus was born the liberal strategy of “reductionism,” which was not logically coherent but politically astute.

The most famous Latitudinarian was John Tillotson (1630-94), who became archbishop of Canterbury in 1691. He defended the idea that “natural religion” is the foundation of all institutional and revealed religion.¹⁵ Tillotson described “natural religion” as the practice of natural law, i.e., of moral duties. Here Tillotson, the highest church leader in Anglicanism, was setting up Reason to be the judge of Revelation. Even Thomas Aquinas, who had the highest respect for natural law, never went this far along the path toward rationalism. The celebrated philosopher John Locke (1632-1704),¹⁶ also of the Latitudinarian party, expressed the same sentiment when he stated that Christianity was entirely defensible because of its reasonableness.¹⁷

The next stage in the Liberal movement was again found on English soil. These were the theologians and philosophers known as the Deists. This is a movement familiar to North Americans through our own history. Our famous

Deists included Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826) and Thomas Paine (1737-1809). The first authentic Deist was Charles Blount (1654-1693), who questioned many of the miracles of the Bible, including the virgin birth of Christ.¹⁸ He was also the first to put forward the idea that the Jewish religion did not come from God through Moses and Abraham, but was an adaptation of Egyptian customs and priestcraft. The assertion that the religion of the Bible was not revealed by God, but was derived from neighboring cultures, has been a staple feature of the Liberal movement ever since.

The most significant thinker among the early Deists was John Toland (1670-1722), an Irishman who became Protestant.¹⁹ In his treatise Christianity Not Mysterious (1696), Toland argued in principle against the possibility of revelation, miracles, and supernatural phenomena. He distinguished between the purely natural religion of Moses and the religion of petty laws and cultic rites added to the Bible at the time of Ezekiel. The goal of Biblical scholarship, he argued, was to distinguish and separate the true religion from the false within the Bible itself. Once this principle was accepted in the church, the Bible could no longer stand as an authority. The Biblical criticism begun by John Toland was actually the most serious virus ever devised to destroy the immune system of the church.²⁰

The next stage of the Liberal movement was a development on German soil. Here the seminal thinker was Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803),²¹ a Lutheran

pastor in Weimar, the ducal capital of Saxony. Herder was a close associate of Johann Wolfgang Goethe (1749-1832) and Johann Christoph Friedrich Schiller (1759-1805), who also lived and worked in Weimar at the end of the eighteenth century. Herder, Goethe, and Schiller were among the fathers of the Romanticist movement, which was a cultural movement that affected theology, philosophy, literature, poetry, drama, physical science, and all the arts. What people today call “post-modernism” is really a sophisticated type of Romanticism.

By the time of Herder, the Deist notion of a universal natural religion had met stiff obstacles in the form of real life data. Missionaries and scientists who accompanied explorers in the New World, into Africa, and other non-European lands, discovered that there was no universal natural religion, at least as imagined by the Deists. If there was any common thread, it was what we call “animism.” Animism is the widespread belief among native peoples that certain material objects, e.g., trees and stones, are possessed by spirits which are the cause of their movements and characteristic qualities. Concomitant with animistic beliefs were the practices of sacrifice or offerings given to such spirits to gain their favor.

Herder solved this problem posed to Deist thought by arguing that God has guided the evolution of human societies in history.²² He believed that God reveals himself gradually through every culture and religion. Herder thus believed that the truth about God was not to be found at the beginning of history, as the Deists

believed, but at its end. Herder was probably the first to expound the modern notion of evolution and apply it to religion, culture, and natural science.

After Herder, the principle of cultural and religious evolution became a chief critical principle for Liberals interpreting the Bible. Because he was not a scientist, Herder's evolutionary theories were clearly philosophical speculations. It took scientific minds, such as the French botanist and zoologist Jean-Baptiste de Lamarck (1744-1829) and the English naturalist Charles Darwin (1809-1882), to dress up Herder's philosophy in scientific clothes and persuade the public that it was pure, empirical science.

Herder's religious ideas were popularized in Germany by Gotthold Lessing (1729-1781) and Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834). With these two theologians, the Liberal movement came into full bloom and essentially destroyed Lutheran theology and practice in Germany. From the beginning of the nineteenth century, the church in Germany was Lutheran in name only. Becoming institutionalized, the Liberal movement simply became known as "Liberal Protestantism." A small resistance movement was started among those pastors and laymen committed to the Bible and the Lutheran Confessions. This was called the "confessional movement" and they were called "Old Lutherans" or "confessional Lutherans." It was from these Germans that the Missouri Synod was founded in the mid-nineteenth century.

Since the Missouri Synod was founded on principles directly opposed to the theology and practice of Liberal Protestantism, you might wonder why the Liberal movement ever became a threat in our church. Some of the causes were ignorance of this history that I have just outlined, ignorance of modern philosophy, and a cultural preference for all things German, whether or not they were Liberal. But I think the biggest reason for the Missouri Synod's dip into the waters of Liberal Protestantism was that this is the "establishment," i.e., the dominant culture, in the United States.

All so-called "mainline" churches in the United States are Liberal Protestant. Most political and academic leaders are Liberal Protestant, if they are religious at all. Pastors and professors in the church who have personal ambitions think that if they are going to "succeed," they have to accommodate their ideas to those people who have power and money. Furthermore, the lay people are inundated with the Liberal perspective at school, in the media, in books—almost everywhere you turn. Unless you bury your head in the sand, you can't help but being influenced by Liberal religious and cultural ideas.

The only reason that the Missouri Synod was resistant to the Liberal virus was that, until World War I, it was an almost exclusively German-speaking church. The language barrier proved to be an effective form of cultural quarantine, as long as it lasted. Only when the German language was dropped and the new generation

no longer wanted to be like their parents was the barrier breached. Then the Liberal virus came in, infected the seminaries and colleges, and caused the conflict we suffered in the 1960s and 1970s. We survived the Liberal attack, but the virus did not go away. It is still with us and has mutated into new forms.

VI. The Evangelical Movement

1976 was not only the year of the founding of this Bible conference and the AELC, it was also deemed “the year of the Evangelical” in the religious press. Most of the attention paid to Evangelicals was probably due to the election of President Jimmy Carter that year, who was a Southern Baptist. A Gallup poll conducted and published that year also discovered that 34% of the people in the United States claimed to be “born again,” a key experience among Evangelicals.²³ Politicians and academicians suddenly realized that Evangelicals were a force to be reckoned with. When the Evangelicals realized this, they became politically active in such groups as Jerry Falwell’s Moral Majority and to this day have a great influence within the Republican party.

The Evangelical movement is almost as old as the Liberal movement. Some American religious writers trace it back only as far as the Fundamentalist movement in the early twentieth century. “Fundamentalism,” as it is known to religious historians refers to the conservative wing that fell out of power in the

Presbyterian church at the beginning of the twentieth century. The term comes from the series of books called “The Fundamentals” that was authored by those conservative leaders and published from 1910 to 1915.²⁴ The basic doctrinal stance of the Fundamentalists was outlined in 1910: 1) the inerrancy of Scriptures, 2) the Virgin Birth of Christ, 3) Jesus’ substitutionary atonement, 4) his bodily resurrection, and 5) the authenticity of miracles.²⁵ This outline does not reveal that most fundamentalists were pre-millennial in their eschatology and many were influenced by the Keswick Holiness movement.²⁶ The Keswick movement, by the way, is expressed locally at Valley Bible Church, with connections to Prairie Bible Institute in Canada and Moody Bible Institute in Chicago.

I believe that the modern Evangelical movement, as it is known to us today, should really be traced back to John Wesley and the Great Awakening of the 1720s. This mutated and arose in a second form in the Second Great Awakening in the early 1800s.²⁷ Wesley’s religion took several forms. On the one hand, it was institutionalized in America in the Methodist church bodies. On the other hand, it remained a religious movement among the “Evangelical” party within the Anglican church.²⁸ In that form, as a religious movement, it came to the United States and infected several church bodies, such as the Baptist conventions. Wesley’s religion also spawned revivalist and Holiness movements in the United States. All of these can properly be considered “Evangelicals.” Historian Nathan Hatch has recently

documented how these Evangelicals had a great affinity for populist democratic principles, thus leading to their great success among the common peoples of North America.²⁹

How do the Evangelicals differ from Reformation Protestantism, which was either Lutheran or Calvinist? The Evangelicals share with the Calvinists a rejection of the sacraments' role as a means of grace. But that is about all they have in common with the Calvinists, who are in other matters closer to Lutherans. Theodore Engelder, a Missouri Synod theologian from the early twentieth-century, wrote: "Methodism appears on the whole as an advocate and propagandist for Arminianism."³⁰ I agree with this assessment. In other words, Evangelicalism believes that natural man has a sufficient ability to approve of the divine Law and to accept God's offer of grace by the freedom of his own will. This is the reason that Evangelicals have "altar calls," in which they emphasize the ability that an unregenerate sinner has to make a personal decision for Christ.

Evangelicalism also is an advocate and propagandist for the ancient heresy of Pelagianism. In essence, Pelagius argued that a Christian could achieve a state of sinlessness, or perfection, and that this was the goal of the "Christian life."³¹ Pelagius also argued that Romans 7:7-25 does not describe the Christian as both sinner and saint simultaneously, but describes Paul in his unregenerate state before conversion. In other words, Pelagians believed that Christians should get better

and better all the time and that a fall into sin is a fall from grace. This theology was thoroughly critiqued by Bishop Augustine of Hippo and eventually condemned by the church at the Council of Ephesus in 431 A.D.

John Wesley was influenced by several sources in the matter of believing that Christians are capable of perfection and that this is the goal of the Christian life.³² Wesley helped start an organization of Bible believing students at Oxford called the “Holy Club.” We can see from their name that their concern in Bible study was focused on Christian sanctification and holiness. Wesley’s movement was not accepted by the established church, though not officially condemned. At 8:45 P.M., on May 24, 1738, Wesley had a “conversion experience” during a meeting of the Moravian Brethren, followers of Jan Hus. Thereafter Wesley began preaching about the necessity of having a conversion experience, i.e., of being “born again.” In 1739 Wesley began preaching out in the fields to miners. This practice grew into “revivalism,” with the preacher outside of the church, both physically and organizationally.

One other feature of Wesley’s religion and Evangelicalism deserves mention. That is the belief expressed in the words “the Lord told me . . .” Perhaps you have heard people say this. Usually it pertains to a decision in their life, but it also may affect you. I remember one young Christian man in high school who would date a Christian girl for awhile, then tell her, “I am sorry, but the Lord told me that we

need to break up.” This was always devastating to the girl if she liked him. She could not reason with her boyfriend, if that was her way, nor could she persuade him any other way, because “the Lord has spoken.” Nor could she get angry with him for playing with her emotions, because it was God’s will.

Historians have used several words to describe the belief that God speaks to you directly, apart from the inscripturated Word and sacraments. In the medieval period it was called “mysticism.” Wesley was not a medieval mystic, but he did believe in a form of “illumination” or “divine guidance.”³³ When most Evangelicals talk about seeking God’s will, this is what they mean, not a careful study of the Bible. I have not been able to determine whether the modern form of “seeking God’s will” is the same as Wesley’s. It may actually have come from Pentecostal influence, so we will analyze it under our next section.

The modern Evangelical movement stems from the merger of conservative Presbyterians into the mainstream of Evangelicalism, signaled by the departure of J. Gresham Machen from Princeton Theological Seminary to Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia in 1929.³⁴ The conservative Presbyterians gave the Evangelical movement some genuine theological substance. Machen was himself a Greek scholar of the first rank. One of his most famous students was Francis Schaeffer, the founder of L’Abri, who achieved international fame in the 1970s. The conservative Presbyterians and other Calvinists were prominent in the

founding of Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, in the development of the journal Christianity Today and its related concerns, and in the organization of the “Evangelical Theological Society,” which includes some theologians of the Missouri Synod. Even the Missouri Synod became allied, to some extent, with the Evangelical movement during our “Battle for the Bible,” most specifically through the “International Council on Biblical Inerrancy” among whose leaders was Robert D. Preus.

Those who have subscribed to Christianity Today since the 1970s know that something has changed in the Evangelical movement in America. As it has become more accepted in mainstream life, it has also become secularized in several ways. One Evangelical leader who warned of these changes early on was Francis Schaeffer, in his book and movie titled The Great Evangelical Disaster.³⁵ So we cannot assume that the Evangelicals are the same as they were twenty-five years ago, when we worked together with them on the Scripture issue.

One indicator of the change is the “Church Growth” movement, which claims to be some sort of sociological science for promoting the growth of local churches and missions.³⁶ The old-time missionary would go out into the field with his Bible, with prayer, and faith. He may or may not have been successful in planting a church, but you knew that he trusted in God. The “Church Growth” devotee trusts in his sociological science that analyzes growth with statistics,

surveys, and demographic profiles of communities. The “Church Growth” devotee may use the Bible, but he also uses all the tricks of the marketing houses on Madison Avenue. The “Church Growth” devotee aspires not to a deep understanding of Biblical truths, but to an MBA in church management. I am not saying that sociology, marketing, and management are necessarily wrong in the church in and of themselves. I am saying that these things are completely alien to the traditional spirit of Evangelicalism. I also want to assert that the “Church Growth” movement, as it has affected the Missouri Synod, fails to recognize that the true church is essentially invisible and unmeasurable, as Augsburg Confession Articles VII and VIII teach us.

Other issues that are bellwethers of change in the Evangelical movement are: the prominence of social justice issues, the increasing population of women ministers, the use of pop psychology under the cover of biblical language, the increasing tolerance, if not approval, of the gay lifestyle, the increase in teenage promiscuity and divorce among Evangelicals, and the loss of the notion that Christians are supposed to be different from the surrounding culture, i.e., what the Bible calls the “world.”

A number of Evangelical leaders have become quite concerned about these changes and convened the “Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals.” Its first meeting was in Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1996. Conservative Presbyterians and

Missouri Synod Lutherans were prominent at the meeting, leading some to suggest that the conservative Presbyterian alliance with the older Evangelical culture may be drawing to a close. Since 1996, there have been several joint projects of the attendees, including the “White Horse Inn” radio program, the “Modern Reformation” journal, and several books authored by conservative Presbyterian, Calvinists, and Lutherans on the secularization of the Evangelical movement.³⁷ It remains to be seen whether or not the “Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals,” or similar groups, will be able to stop the secularization of the Evangelical movement.

VII. The Charismatic Movement

The Charismatic movement, or Pentecostalism as it is also called, came out of the Holiness groups in the Evangelical movement.³⁸ Holiness church bodies include the Church of the Nazarene and the Christian and Missionary Alliance. The Holiness groups emphasized a “second blessing” of complete sanctification which follows conversion. The American revivalist Charles Finney (1792-1875) preached in this way about the “baptism of the Holy Spirit” and used revival methods that led to real emotional crises in his hearers. Most Holiness groups have adopted Pentecostal teaching and practices, to a greater or lesser degree.

In October 1900, revivalist Charles Parham started Bethel Bible College in Topeka, Kansas with about forty students. By December he had led his class

through the major teachings of the holiness movement, including the power of divine healing. As they began to study the book of Acts, Parham asked his students to search for biblical evidence of receiving the “baptism of the Holy Spirit.” When the class met again, they unanimously reported that the evidence for the “baptism of the Holy Spirit” was speaking in tongues. This was confirmed on December 31, 1900 when he laid hands on student Agnes Ozman for the baptism of the Spirit and she began speaking in tongues. Soon the whole college was doing the same. This is the first time in history that the Pentecostal “speaking in tongues” was associated with the “second blessing,” “baptism in the Holy Spirit,” or other mystical experiences.

What is “speaking in tongues”? The best way to find out is to go to a Pentecostal church and watch and listen to those around you. It sounds like what my two daughters do sometime; they are ages four and two. One will babble silly sounds with her mouth, and the other will laugh contagiously. Then the babbler will start laughing too. Once they have quieted down, it is the other girl’s turn to babble something even sillier. Scientists who have analyzed “speaking in tongues” can detect no known language in it. It is certainly not the “speaking in tongues” of Pentecost (Acts 2:4 & 11). That is made clear by Acts 2:6 which states of the people in Jerusalem that “each one heard them speaking in his own language.”

In April 1906, William J. Seymour, a black preacher who was a student of

Charles Parham began to hold meetings at 312 Azusa Street in Los Angeles. With Seymour's preaching, a sustained revival on Pentecostal foundations began. People began to experience various "gifts of the Spirit," not just tongues speaking. Visitors came from throughout the country, then eventually from throughout the world to see what was happening on Azusa Street. The Pentecostal movement spread throughout North America, both in denominational and non-denominational form. It spread to Scandinavia, Germany, Switzerland, Great Britain, later to other parts of Europe. It spread to Africa, Asia, and Latin America, where it now challenges the Roman Catholic church for the hearts of the common people. Pentecostalism is expressed denominationally in the Assemblies of God, the Four Square Gospel churches, the Church of God in Christ, the Pentecostal Church, and many small church bodies and independent congregations.

In the late 1950s, the Pentecostal movement began to flow over the banks of the Evangelical traditions into the mainline Protestant churches. This is when it became known as the "charismatic" movement. The first leader of the charismatic movement was David du Plessis, a Pentecostal minister in South Africa, who believed in 1951 that God had told him to witness to the leaders of the World Council of Churches. At about this time, the Full Gospel Businessman's Fellowship was founded, offering men's prayer meetings with a charismatic emphasis. This group became a key organization in the propagation of charismatic

ideas and practices to non-Evangelical denominations.

The second charismatic leader was an Episcopalian priest, Dennis Bennet in Van Nuys, California, who announced his “baptism in the Holy Spirit in April 1960. Bennet influenced the “conversion” of Larry Christenson, a recent graduate of Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota. He began speaking in tongues in August 1961, and so became the founder of the Lutheran charismatic movement. The Catholic charismatic movement began in 1967, after a number of laymen at Duquesne University at Pittsburgh read David Wilkerson’s Cross and the Switchblade. The movement quickly spread to the center of Catholicism in the Midwest, i.e., Notre Dame University. In September 1967, the first National Catholic Pentecostal Conference was held at Notre Dame, which has continued to grow by leaps and bounds. Unlike the mainline and Protestant churches, the Catholic church has generally accepted the charismatic movement, seeing a deep affinity between their experience and that of the Catholic mystics. The Catholic hierarchy’s primary concern is that the charismatics remain subservient to their bishops and the pope.

The charismatic movement has continued to evolve in many and fascinating ways. Novelty seems to be its stock in trade. In 1967 the charismatic movement adopted some of the hippie ideals when it established the “Word of God” hippie commune in Ann Arbor, Michigan. A similar commune was established in

Chicago known as “Jesus People USA,” the home of the “Resurrection Band” rock music group. Many of my friends in college who had come from our Concordia College in Ann Arbor had been influenced by the “Word of God” community. Charismatics were also easy to adapt themselves to the new styles of popular music in the 1960s and 1970s. “Christian Rock Music” was mostly the product of charismatics, who were often called “Jesus Freaks.”

In recent years, the charismatic “Jesus Freaks” have gone mainstream. Calvary Chapel in the LA basin has gone national, with affiliated congregations in most major cities. John Wimber, a professor at Fuller Theological Seminary, founded “The Vineyard,” which is a charismatic church-body that emphasizes all of the spiritual gifts, especially supernatural healing. At the end of the century, the charismatic revivals have seen a new phenomenon known as “Holy Laughter,” which includes uncontrollable laughter and the vocalization of various animal sounds. Again I am reminded of my two daughters having fun babbling and laughing at each other.

Putting the best construction on the charismatic experience, I judge that it is simply childish behavior. Of this St. Paul clearly said:

Brothers, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults. In the Law it is written: “Through men of strange tongues and through the lips of foreigners I will speak to this people, but

even then they will not listen to me,” says the Lord. Tongues, then, are a sign ,not for believers but for unbelievers (I Corinthians 14: 20-22).

Here it is very clear that the “speaking in tongues” mentioned in the Bible is an ability to speak in foreign languages, nothing else.

But then again, it might be something else. The charismatic movement is characterized by a firm belief in God’s direct communication to believers, apart from the Word and sacraments. Luther had some very stern words for this in the Smalcald Articles. Criticizing the “enthusiasts” of his day, he wrote:

They boast that the Spirit came upon them without the testimony of the Scriptures. . . . Even those who have come to faith before they were baptized and those who came to faith in Baptism came to their faith through the external Word which preceded. Adults who have attained the age of reason must first have heard, “He who believes and is baptized will be saved,” even if they did not at once believe and did not receive the Spirit and Baptism until ten years later. For even to Moses God wished to appear first through the burning bush and the [external] spoken word. . . . We should and must constantly maintain that God will not deal with us except through his external Word and sacrament. Whatever is attributed to the Spirit apart from such Word and sacrament is of the devil (SA III, viii, 6-10).

If you think that God has spoken to you, apart from the meaning of the

words of Scripture, you have either deceived yourself or the “voice” came from the devil. God does not speak through an “inner voice,” apart from the meaning of the words of Scripture. He limits his communication to us for our sake, not for his, so that we know who is speaking. The outer voice, through the external Word and sacrament, is God’s voice. The inner voice is Satan’s or our own sinful flesh. St. Paul warns us, “Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light” (II Corinthians 11:14).

IX. Conclusion

It is easy to become despondent when one looks at the forces arrayed against Lutheranism, both within our church body and without. The ELCA and Lutheran World Federation has gone into merger mania, even to the point of abandoning the Lutheran doctrine of justification in its recent agreements with Rome. Our sister churches in Australia and Germany are coming close to adopting the practice of woman’s ordination. Our own members have become increasingly enthralled with various aspects of the Liberal, Evangelical, or Charismatic movements, a fact which the organizers of “Jesus First” have capitalized on. Is this the end of the Lutheran Church?

If the laymen and pastors of the Missouri Synod sit back in their easy chairs and do nothing to counteract these aggressive movements, then the Lutheran

doctrine, which is the only “healthy” doctrine in the Christian church, will cease to exist in the next generation. But this doesn’t have to be. Those of us committed to the Bible and Luther’s teaching can be equally aggressive, in a kind and gentle way, and stand our ground against all comers. Continue to elect like-minded people to synodical and district offices. Continue to sponsor invitational conferences like this, for the benefit and instruction of your fellow Lutherans. And most of all, continue to diligently study the Word of God in your church and your home, so that “when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand” (Ephesians 6:13).

NOTES

1. The best single account of the LC-MS crisis in the 1960s and 1970s is still: Kurt Marquart, Anatomy of an Explosion, Concordia Seminary Monograph Series, No. 3, eds. D. Scaer and D. Judisch (Fort Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1977). A useful account from the “moderates” perspective is: John Tietjen, Memoirs in Exile: Confessional Hope and Institutional Conflict (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1990).
2. Tietjen, 269. See also the useful chronology, Tietjen, xiii-xvi.
3. See Daniel Preus, “The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod Holiday from History: The 25th Anniversary of the Walkout,” speech given to the Lutheran Concerns Association, April 7, 1999, Itasca, Illinois.
4. Tietjen, 269.
5. Martin R. Noland, “What is Jesus First?” Affirm 25 #2 (May 2001): 6-9.
6. See Paul W. Ewald, “The Evolution of Virulence,” Scientific American 268 #4 (April 1993): 86-93; also Ewald, “A Host with Infectious Ideas,” Scientific American 276 #5 (May 2001):32-33.
7. See my essay, Martin R. Noland, “What Did It Mean to Be Lutheran in the Liberal Protestant Tradition?”, in What Does It Mean to Be Lutheran?, The Pieper Lectures, volume 4, eds. J. & J. Maxfield (St. Louis & Crestwood, MO: Concordia Historical Institute and The Luther Academy, 2000), 70-72; see also Charles P. Arand, Testing the Boundaries: Windows to Lutheran Identity (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1995).
8. See Henning Graf Reventlow, The Authority of the Bible and the Rise of the Modern World, tr. J. Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 91-288.
9. Mercia Mason, Oxford and Cambridge, 3rd ed., The Blue Guide (London: A & C Black, 1987), 13.

10. See Reventlow, 39-48, 170-173. Erasmus was a resident scholar and taught at Queen's College, Cambridge from 1511 to 1514. His lodgings are known as "Erasmus Tower" today, see Mason, 162.
11. Reventlow, 173.
12. Reventlow, 173.
13. Reventlow, 172-173.
14. Reventlow, 223-225.
15. Reventlow, 236-237.
16. Locke was associated with the college of Christ Church, Oxford University, see Mason, 54.
17. Reventlow, 243-285.
18. Reventlow, 290-294.
19. Reventlow, 294-308.
20. For the development of Deist Biblical criticism, see John Drury, ed., Critics of the Bible, 1724-1873, Cambridge English Prose Texts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).
21. On the importance of Herder, see Karl Barth, Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century: Its Background and History (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1973), 316-318.

22. See Noland, "What Did It Mean to be Lutheran in the Liberal Protestant Tradition?", 66-68. See also my dissertation, Martin R. Noland, "Harnack's Historicism: The Genesis, Development, and Institutionalization of Historicism and Its Expression in the Thought of Adolf von Harnack" (unpublished diss., Union Theological Seminary, New York, 1996), 129-179.
23. See Richard Quebedeaux, The Worldly Evangelicals (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), 3-4.
24. See George M. Marsden, Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870-1925 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 118-123.
25. See Marsden, 117.
26. Marsden, 117-118.
27. For a proponent of this view, see Evangelical theologian Richard Lovelace in his Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1979), 27-48.
28. For this definition, see Frank L. Cross, ed., The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 486.
29. Nathan O. Hatch, The Democratization of American Christianity (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).
30. See Theodore Engelder, Popular Symbolics (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1934), 284.
31. See article on "Pelagius," in Augustine Through the Ages, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999), 633-640.

32. See John Wesley, A Plain Account of Christian Perfection (London: Epworth Press, 1952); also Engelder, 284-285.
33. Engelder, 285-286.
34. See Marsden, op. cit.
35. Francis A. Schaeffer, The Great Evangelical Disaster (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1984).
36. A fine criticism of the Church Growth movement from a Lutheran perspective is the recent document issued by the Church Growth Study Committee of the LCMS, "For the Sake of Christ's Commission" (St Louis: LCMS, 2001).
37. James M. Boice and Benjamin E. Sasse, Here We Stand: A Call from Confessing Evangelicals (Waco, TX: Baker Books, 1996); John Armstrong, The Coming Evangelical Crisis (Chicago: Moody Press, 1996); and Michael Horton, A Confessing Theology for Postmodern Times (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 2000).
38. For a brief, but accurate, history of Pentecostalism, see Charles Hummel, Fire in the Fireplace: Contemporary Charismatic Renewal (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 40-52. The following is based on Hummel's account.