

*In Nomine Jesu*

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Fifty Years in the Ministry - 500 Years after Luther

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Grace and Peace - Concord,

Lord Jesus, grant me Your Spirit that I would speak Your Word in truth and power, that all who read would understand what You have to say to them. To the glory of the heavenly Father. Amen.

It is 500 years since Martin Luther posted the 95 Theses in Wittenberg. The local printer set them in type. Other printers saw and made more. Copies spread across Europe. Luther had his eyes and ears open to what was going on. He was deeply troubled. People were being lead away from salvation and refocusing their faith on the Church. Some other people were also troubled. Most people had their eyes and ears closed, "see no evil, hear no evil".

It is 50 years since I entered the Ministry of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (LCMS). Those entering today cannot understand what we experienced. We entered into a Synod, the whole Christian Church "on top". Since then, we experienced stunning reversal. There are many explanations.

I find interesting, significant, that the pundits, leaders do not consider the long repeated record. Both in the Bible and in church history, times of expansion and retreat occur. The rise and fall of nations is similar. The prophets announced why God so ruled, controlled the destinies. Are there parallels? What are the differences? I dabble here and there in reading. The Chinese say that a dynasty ends when it loses the "Mandate of Heaven". If a ruler was overthrown, the ruler was unworthy. They had the right to rebel against rulers who oppressed the people.

The Prophets announced God's condemnation for two different (to us) failures. Abandoning proper worship and oppressing the weak. God punishes, people repent, amend their ways, turn back to God and God blesses again. We live with limited spans. Sometimes we see this in our lifetimes. Could we observe the pattern, in past blessing and present reverse?

The Western Church, Europe and the US, is collapsing. Scandinavia, recent vibrant Lutheran, now prides itself of being leader in irreligion. The great "Main Line" denominations have fallen. The Christian Church in the present day is exploding with growth everywhere else<sup>1</sup>. I was amused to listen to a leader explain our decline while in the room were Lutheran clergy from East Africa who are leading explosive growth. He did not know what they knew. They did not understand, what brought about the decline.

*The Sign of Concord*

*Soli Deo Gloria*

He died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves,  
but for him who died and was raised for them. 2 Cor. 5:15

You may know the hymn verse, “Built on a Rock the Church will stand even when steeples are falling.” Throughout history there have always been ruined churches, basically for the same reason. The Gospel came, people believed, churches were built, the church got fat and self centered, the people went away. New reformers were raised by the Spirit of God and the cycle repeated: Benedictine, Carthusian, Franciscan, Dominican, Luther, Jesuit, Salesian, Old Testament Judges, Prophets.

Norway, when that hymn was written, was a time of orthodox Lutheran doctrine, pure Gospel preaching. People were turning their backs on the church. They saw that church was for the educated, the cultured, the powerful. They were nobodies, common people. High Theology, superb Scripture does not correlate with great faith. We all know that. Question: Do marriage counselors have a higher or lower than average divorce rate? Brief contemplation reveals the truth. Where do you find powerful living faith? In the Seminary and monastery or with the common folk? Jesus lived at the time of great theologians. Gamaliel and Shammai were prominent among other greats still known today. He had not studied under the greats. Jesus was criticized, He picked twelve common folk as disciples.

The Church in the US and Europe is filled with excellent theologians and scholars. Perhaps that is more cause of the decline than we are willing to acknowledge. CFW Walther, founder and leader of the LCMS, said the reason for Synod’s rapid expansion was not its orthodox theology but its reputation as seelsorge, caretaker of souls. He said, churches looking for a minister came to the LCMS to get a loving Pastor. The central idea of the Congregation at that time was to take care of each other. When I was young I heard echos of that. There was not much about the Pastor as evangelist or congregational outreach. Today we have a succession of programs. It is worth noting, the “Church Growth” gurus agree, the key to increase in membership is caring for your members, closing the back door out. The key is not getting more in the front door. In business, it is called customer service. People need to be, want to be, loved. Without love, the people come to worship as performance, entertainment, duty.

**So What? I read words that sound good, but I wonder how does that work out in the real world. So the following is an attempt to put flesh on what went before.**

It is vital to pay attention to the actual words: I read historians’ comments about Pascal, “Letters to a Country Gentleman” and selected letters. They called it a dispute where the influential side moved the Pope to disestablish the Jesuits. Then I found an unabridged copy. That was no theological dispute. Words sounded good! Words worked out that a Lord could rape his maid, kill a man for stealing his apple, murder a man who embarrassed him by saying the truth, even did not have to tithe to the Church or attend worship. The historians either had not read them, or deliberately lied. <sup>2</sup>

How is proper worship abandoned? I know some who rail against entertainment styles and Pentecostal enthusiasm, some who decry medieval liturgics. I prefer some styles of worship, chanted well. Worship is a dialog between people and God. It has to be in language the worshiper appreciates. “When you spread out your hands in prayer, I hide my eyes from you; even when you offer many prayers, I am not listening your hands are full of blood! Wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight; stop doing wrong. Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow.” When that message was given to Isaiah 1:15, it was not a complaint that worship was not properly done, that false gods were being worshipped. <sup>3</sup>

I have puzzled about the great decline of the Church. I have seen it with my eyes. I hear, read the words of great ones. Often I agree, but feel they have missed the point, good words, meaning nothing. Lutheran clergy at ordination pledge conformity to pure Doctrine and the Holy Scriptures. Words sound good! But in reality, I have seen them work out far from what would be expected. “It is not adultery. I am sharing the love of Jesus!” “This folder has complaints we have acted on. I can not violate confidentiality and tell what the complaint was or who made it.” LCMS Constitution from the very first said the denomination has no interest in the property of a congregation yet \$1.5 million and years were spent in a lawsuit.<sup>4</sup> Constitution, By Law, forbid the District President passing judgment when he was a party. Yet when that was done, three other District Presidents at the formal appeal with no refutation, denial, defense offered. They ruled there was no problem.<sup>5</sup> It publicly announced a Minister unfit to serve anywhere. No reason was given. Later, privately, the condemnation was withdrawn, no apology. A formal “Clergy Shortage Study”<sup>6</sup> was commissioned. It reported large numbers of very unhappy Clergy, angry families. No action resulted. There is a formal “Dispute Resolution Process” for reconciliation of problems. Nothing may be recorded. No documentation made, no rules of evidence. The DRP is mandatory and it forbids any civil legal action.

To me the most astounding ignored issue in the LCMS has been the coming shortage of Pastors. Statistics on the number in training have shown this coming. When I was young one third of the total budget subsidized training, now almost nothing. The cost recently to the student pastor, has been high. Either he has to be wealthy or have great student debt. A money focused man is not good as a parish pastor. We will have a small supply. Pastors will have large number of vacant congregations to chose from. Their average income should increase. Recently a large amount of money has been found to reduce the cost of education. At the same time our only historically Black college is being closed. It was not getting much funds from the church before.

If no problem is admitted, no change required. Leaders are pledged to the scriptures and doctrine, their position is to lead the Church. Therefore what they say and do is the action of a pledged leader, because that is what they are. When you are the greatest you can not acknowledge failures. It makes you look bad, so problems are covered over to maintain the image of excellence. If you are perfect Theological controversies can not be acknowledged so nothing can be done to resolve them. There is only one way left, issues can only be decided by the ballot box, elections of leaders. Politicians say and promise all kinds of things to appeal to the largest number of voters. The voters seek power to control, to bring change. Politicians disappoint those who voted for them. Therefore the conflict moves on to the next election. Luther did not seek and use power to control. It is not the way of the Gospel, the Church.

It took me a long time to wrap my head around how this could be. Junior College was spiritually unhealthy. One third of the clergy in preparation went there. The next two years were superb educationally and spiritually. We knew the Seminary would be downhill. It was. There was warfare, concealed and open. The sides had no concern how a Christian should treat a brother. Issues were not discussed. The wrong side was unworthy; either relics of an ignorant past or semi secret infiltrators of anti-christian modernity. The great were idolized and sycophant was the path. Dissent was not acceptable in this open minded place of learning. I left with a catch phrase. “Closed minded liberals and conservatives who did not believe what the Bible actually said.”<sup>7</sup> The thing that mattered was loyalty to the side, the party, the tribe. Those great leaders of high intelligence did not demonstrate an independent thought. Lemmings on the path to self-destruction.

I felt one of the foundational causes was confidence in superiority. Our denomination was the pinnacle of the theologically superior Lutheranism: the most orthodox, the most biblical, the purest pedigree. Since all Christendom was beneath, they paid little attention to it. Certain selected Lutherans were worthy of notice. Gradually I realized there were other matters. There is nothing wrong in striving to be the best. There are two ways to be the best. With eyes and ears open to identify problems and fix them or to have eyes and ears closed so no problem is seen. The second has definite advantages. Nothing disturbing is seen, nothing needs to be repented, no effort is needed to repair. We do prefer uncomplicated situations. But there is more.

The heart and core of Christianity is the Gospel, the Good News of God's saving love. We are a Gospel People called by God to share His Love with all. That sounds so good, so true. Words sound good, how does that work out in the real world. In some paragraphs above are actions, diametrically in opposition to clear words of scripture that caused great harm. More is documented on the web site. No problem? How? I spent some time with an organization that evaluates clergy. Attached is a report on their findings and methodology.<sup>8</sup>

Words that in practice do not mean what they appear to mean. I had my best listening ears on. I was curious how what appeared one way was turned upside down. "Self control, slow to judgement, intellectual rigor, deeply principled, forgiving, accepting, inner peace, strength of character" were the reasons for disqualification. I urge the reader to get this off the web and carefully read it. Their ideal minister could be described as "wishy washy Charlie Brown.", totally inoffensive.

Human experience, Sociology, prove people prefer strong leaders, even when they are wrong to spineless ones. To be gentle, requires strength. The word is docile for those who are weak. The strong can admit error, confess, repent, make amends. The strong can be comfortable, non judgmental with the troubled, murderer, addict, bisexual.<sup>9</sup> They are both sinners standing before the throne of God. They seek righteousness, justice, comfort the injured. A weak man stands on his position, authority. People know a weak man even when he is right can not be depended on. He looks out for himself, his own short term benefit. The organization I was at boasted denominations select ministers based on their evaluation. Those ideal ministers are docile to denominational leadership, loyal herd animals, promote the program. They lead declining congregations.

How does this all happen? The Bible clearly states God's will. While I have seen it and heard it, understanding is hard. The documentation referenced clearly demonstrates that there is an absolute conflict between God's Word and human actions. God promises eternal condemnation. So how come so many are happy doing evil? The adulterous minister said he was sharing the love of Jesus, he did nothing wrong. If he said she was hot and he gave into temptation, that would have been understandable. In the matters in the documentation, I have not seen the slightest guilt or shame. Even when I knew they were face to face with great damage they brought on friends, no concern. Not even when their actions and words were publicized, the slightest acknowledgement.

But aren't we supposed to be humble, meek? We are not to put ourselves forward. "I am nothing special." Is that what meek, humble mean? Just do what is necessary. If someone is being hurt, help them. If hungry feed them. Humble people protect others and do not show off as heroes. Humble people are not cowards hiding in a corner to avoid doing what is needed. They do not fight for their own privilege, Leaders of docile sheep are cowards, spineless. Authority is their strength, not righteousness.

“Beloved do not avenge yourselves, vengeance is mine saith the Lord. The measure you give is the measure that you will receive. Forgive as you have been forgiven.” Personally, I have one opinion of a person who follows error. He is wrong but understandably so. The person who knows the truth and teaches error is in another category. Example: long ago I heard a “Great” teach the “Third use of the Law” was unLutheran. That afternoon I read in the Book of Concord, Lutheran pinnacle of Doctrine, the section “The Third use of the Law.” Recently, I read Luther never used the phrase, so it is not “Lutheran”. Luther did emphatically in word and action support the meaning of the third use of the law.

Simply, “Third use of the Law” means Christians should look to the Bible to guide words and actions. What does it mean to reject the third use of the law? “Adultery is Old Testament. I am living in the New Testament freedom of the Gospel.” Anything you want is free to take and do, if you call it loving. The minister who considered adultery sharing the gospel was a friend, a supporter, of leadership. He never missed a Sunday leading worship until going to a large church out of state. His very public actions damaged churches, schools, families, people I knew. We had a long personal conversation. The rest of the story is worse. I know and respect another minister, who divorced and married his secretary. It was a totally different story.

How can we determine what is good and what seems to be good? Our hearts are devious and those around us are no better. Very few give into temptation to evil, when it is presented with the words: “This is horrible, you will hate it”. Temptation comes dressed in fine words, from good friends, “Come, this is good. You will like this.” We hear at times about the dangers of legalism. It is uncomfortable to live in a legalistic society. The opposite is not talked about much. It is called antinomian. It is even more uncomfortable, for then society is lawless. Anything people want is theirs. People would rather have harsh rulers than no rulers.

Listen to what people say that leads to such error. They say: “The God’s love is what it is all about. We are a Gospel People. We live in and share God’s love. We are free to live in the Love of Christ. We have the Spirit. We have been transformed by God. Love motivates our lives, what we do and say. What we want is ordered, approved by God because we have His love in our heart and He has placed us in our positions of leadership.” Doesn’t that sound so wonderful. “Since God has placed us in positions of authority to guide His Church, we have to use our best judgment, guided by His Spirit to the good of the Church. Those under our position do not have the wide vision and breadth of information, knowledge. They do not have the whole picture. They seek solutions that they think sound good but that would actually interfere. Things like open financial books (how their contributions were spent), public record of disciplinary counseling (when they feel they were not given proper judgment), They might want to know who made secret complaints about them and what was said. Some on that lower level do not recognize our goodness and sadly complain.”

Remember what I wrote before about herd mentality, group thought? If the previous paragraph sounds odd to you, realize it is exactly what many think and say. Not just now but it is normal for those in positions of authority. Can you understand how Caiaphas and the Council condemned Jesus? If you were there, would you have joined them? Only two of the 70, Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea objected. I am sure they were expelled and suffered great loss.

Sadly it is a joke to think that academia promotes diversity and free thought. The opposite is true, for those who do want a career inside. If anyone would like to advance to the rank of professor, they must faithfully support the school position, the party line, defend their tribe. The School of Athens, of

Hillel, of Paris, of Occam, Dallas, St. Louis, Ft. Wayne, Fuller maintain their traditions. It is very difficult for authorities to promote people and positions contrary to the tradition. Insiders seldom bring change and outsiders are not heard. The undergraduate can change to another tribe when he selects a graduate school. That is about the only chance he has, but he leaves his old tribe. Was the old practice of private study and tutor was more conducive for independent thought?

The top administrators can make changes. If they want to be remembered as great leaders, they have to do so. However they need be very careful. There are always competing currents, select and promote the future winning party. They need to be early advocates. They can do this directly or by promoting others to try the route, catch the opposing challenges. Something like this has just happened in my denomination. They recently published a new systematic theology. "Pieper" was nearly 100 years and was a modest reworking of a much older German book. So there was great need and great opportunity to set the course of the church for generations to come. Great temptation to be the great fearless leader. Everyone wants to be in on this.

The denomination's core self identity is the pinnacle of Biblical faithfulness and conservative Lutheran Doctrine. A task of a Systematic Theology is to survey and respond to the surrounding thought. Pieper was fatally flawed in my opinion because it barely saw past the 1600s. It did not recognize the Arminian split in Calvinism (basic US Protestant) or the spiritual power of the counter reformation. Those who minds were shaped by Pieper are blind to the realities of today.

A couple reviewers of the new work noted some glaring issues. There are internationally known Biblical conservative Lutheran Theologians who are not included, "overlooked". A number who are included are relatively unknown. A major Lutheran issue is the teaching on the Inspiration, the authority of Holy Scripture. The greatest work on that in 20th century America is by Dr. Carl Henry. He is omitted. If the task of a systematic Theology is to survey and respond to the surrounding thought, it does not attempt to do so. Should we suspect there is adequate examination of Roman Catholic Vatican II? Or do we suppose there is light on the massive world wide expansion of the Christian Church?

I have a much more significant question. Are we a Gospel Church? Is the Love of God, reconciliation central to who we are? This paper has been a recounting of evil! Where is the love, good news? That question came to me first about the Book on Systematic Theology. I expect the authors would object and say that is not what their task. I disagree. I think they should not only present the differences (why their position is the correct one) they should explain everything in the kindest way. Are the others misunderstood brothers in Christ or are they really satanic? We read and witness unloving words and treatment of people who are expected to be companions in heaven.

People who speak and act wrong are seldom evil. Satan is the father of lies. He deceives us by offering us what seems to look good, what we want. He twists pride which is good into conceit, hubris. Attacking, condemning, tearing down people results in resistance, fighting back, prolonging warfare. These Public Letters are an illustration of that. Had I not been continually attacked without hint of reconciliation, they would not have been written. Minor matters do blow over and are forgotten. Jesus said Mt. 5 "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift." It is not the right of the malefactor to decide. It is not our right to decide the injured should let it blow over. We are "required" by God to comfort and support the injured. The meek and humble do that, the docile do not. There is light. There is darkness. There is love. Can we call self-serving cowardice love? "Really, secretly, I love them in my heart".

There is yet another issue. I wonder if it is not a foundational reason the people in the West have been abandoning Christianity. In the “modern” period there have been some major changes in Christian ethos. Before there was a principle that the person who did harm, confessed to God and the victim, did what he could to amend the harm and given proper punishment. The proper punishment might include execution. The old illustrations show three at the gibbet: the condemned, the executioner and the clergy. The condemned was asked if he repented. If he said yes he was given absolution. If not, not. Either way he was executed.

Now several radical changes. Today if the perpetrator says nice words, the judge reduces or eliminates the punishment. The victim is hurt again. An even worse matter, when a person feels guilty for causing harm and talks to his minister, the minister assures him he is forgiven. It did not used to be that way! The old normal, from the beginning of time, required, telling the person you harmed, you were sorry, asking for their forgiveness and restoring, amending, as much as possible the damage. If they would not do that, the minister would not promise God’s forgiveness. I have talked with many clergy over the years, nearly all are horrified that the penitent should ask the victim for forgiveness or amend their damage. “Give it to Jesus”. Modern Western Christianity is useless. People have realized it is unworthy of respect or adherence. Alcoholics Anonymous has it right in the 12 steps. When you look the person in eye and pay for the damage, there is change, peace, reconciliation.

“Give it to Jesus!” There is conflict, pray do nothing. God is not mocked. He will not do for us what we are to do for ourselves. Jesus said: Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’ His brother James wrote ‘teachers will be judged with greater strictness than others.’

The Isaiah passage near the beginning announcing judgment ends with this:

Come now, let us settle the matter,” says the Lord.

“Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow;  
though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.

**If you are willing and obedient**, you will eat the good things of the land;  
but if you resist and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword.”

In the name of one called by God to proclaim His Love for all,

/ S /

Stephen H. Funck

Ezekiel. 3:16ffc

PUBLIC LETTER VI <sup>10</sup>

I am sure some are unhappy with me. However no one has identified anything I have said or done that is not true or in violation of the scripture. What do you think I should do now? What should you do now?

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- 1 Even in the worst parts of the US <https://worldchallenge.org/devotion/exciting-future>
  - 2 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blaise\\_Pascal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blaise_Pascal) [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lettres\\_provinciales](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lettres_provinciales)
  - 3 If this is a “Christian Nation” God must be very angry. For a first world nation we have the highest incarceration rate, the harshest prisons, vast numbers of citizens impoverished. Our health statistics, maternal death rate, are below “first world nations”. Non Christian nations treat their people far better than we do. We boast we are the greatest nation in the world. True. We used to be. Blessed, favored by God. True. For how much longer?
  - 4 [http://thesignofconcord.com/uploads/LCMS\\_Lawsuit\\_Oakland\\_Congregation.pdf](http://thesignofconcord.com/uploads/LCMS_Lawsuit_Oakland_Congregation.pdf)
  - 5 [http://thesignofconcord.com/uploads/2001-9-10\\_Summary\\_1987-2001.pdf](http://thesignofconcord.com/uploads/2001-9-10_Summary_1987-2001.pdf)
  - 6 <http://cslmedia.org/DMin/Pubs/Forms/clergy%20shortage.pdf>
  - 7 Scripture interprets scripture. It almost never talks about finer points of theology or proper Bible interpretation. God speaks at length about many things that never merit a mention in theology today.
  - 8 [http://thesignofconcord.com/uploads/Report\\_on\\_fitness\\_for\\_Ministry.pdf](http://thesignofconcord.com/uploads/Report_on_fitness_for_Ministry.pdf)
  - 9 We get all worked up about the minor sins of the common folks and are blind to the deadly sins of the great [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seven\\_deadly\\_sins](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seven_deadly_sins) God from beginning of the Bible to the end is furious over crushing the poor, injustice. God destroyed nations for doing what we are comfortable with.
  - 10 Earlier Public Letters and supporting documentation are at [http://thesignofconcord.com/Pastoral\\_Ministry.php](http://thesignofconcord.com/Pastoral_Ministry.php)