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"THE DEADLY TRIO OF LITURGICAL HERESIES"

The title used above is taken from an advertisement of Open Church Ministries in *Christianity Today* (March 11, 1991). Here are the three sins unto death: 1. In worship the congregation has become an audience and the pastor a performer. 2. No lay preaching means that a "church probably doesn't allow laymen to *mature* into ministers." 3. No sharing means that the poor preacher "beats his brains out in the pulpit week after week to make a difference in people's lives" without any response from them. James Rutz, the author of the article-advertisement, provides this analysis of the problem:

> You find that the root problem, in a nutshell, is the "priesthood of believers," the central goal of the Reformation, still exists only on paper. In a very important sense, our churches remain closed to laymen.

It is with hesitancy that I mention that a booklet, *1700 Years Is Long Enough: A Guide to Creating an Open Church*, is available for $3.00. Lutherans will feel uncomfortable with this interpretation of the priesthood of believers. Some ideas are familiar under other disguises and can be easily critiqued. Especially problematic is the false opinion that the ministry is viewed as a higher level of sanctification within the reach of every Christian. The corollary is that it is not a special office established by Christ and derived from the apostles, the chief heresy for Open Church Ministries. If the ministry is a matter of spiritual maturity, then the apostles should have been disqualified. In closing, the article-advertisement says that, if the Open Church Ministries program is adopted, "you will never be the same, and your church won't either--praise God!" Certainly it will not be Lutheran.

David P. Scaer

FIGHTING FOR SOULS: MORMONS VERSUS ANGLICANS

A controversy has broken out over a Mormon attempt to obtain registrations of baptisms of the Church of England for the Mormon genealogical rolls in Salt Lake City. Such, at least, is the stated purpose. The real intention, an Anglican authority fears, is the Mormon rebaptism of the souls of the dead. Americans, who keep separate birth and baptismal rolls, are not faced with this problem. Many of our dear Lutheran ancestors have already been spirited away into the Mormon heaven (by vicarious baptism) by means of raids on county-seat and city-hall records. The response of the diocesan archivist of Chichester, the lord protector of the rolls, would be humorous if it were not intended to be serious. "The concern is that the baptism of the dead is an interference

with the souls of dead Anglicans (which the Mormons want to acquire) that is not in keeping with the traditions of the Anglican Church." This statement is capable of an exegesis of various sorts. On the surface the Anglican archivist has appointed himself as a St. Michael at the heavenly gates to prevent the Mormons from sneaking into the Christian heaven to carry off the souls of deceased Anglicans. We American Christians have no guardians, since our birth records can be obtained by anyone. Or perhaps the reference to "souls of dead Anglicans" has another meaning. Similar is the debate over 1 Peter 4:6. Just who are the "dead" to whom "the gospel was preached"? We leave this question to wiser men and to the archivist who has planted his feet at the door of heaven to fight off the marauding Mormons and to defend the inviolate Anglican traditions. "Onward Christian Soldiers" might be an appropriate hymn for the occasion. "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" might offend English sensitivities.

David P. Scaer

TWEAKING BISHOPS' NOSES: A SLIGHT RETRACTION

In commenting on Richard John Neuhaus's trek to Rome (*CTQ* 55 [January 1991], pp. 44-48), I said that "it seems unlikely that he will tweak the noses of Rome's bishops as he did those in the more tolerant ELCA." But tweaking is exactly what the ex-Missourian is doing. He has tilted the miter of Archbishop Weakland of Milwaukee, who has suggested a more open dialogue with women considering an abortion. Weakland states: "Our ability to defend the life of the unborn will only be deepened when we expand that kind of respectful dialogue" (*First Things*, 12 [April 1991], p. 68). The prelate claims that he upholds churchly opposition to abortion, but at the same time he has been "harshly judgmental toward those in the prolife movement." LCMS pastors in Wisconsin already knew the archbishop's position. We thank Neuhaus for telling the rest of us. Here is an issue where the LCMS and the Roman Church have stood together.

In a signed editorial, "More on the Gulf" (pp. 62-63), Neuhaus criticizes another prelate for writing in a letter made public by Senator Edward Kennedy that President Bush's "call for unity is specious" and "a demand that we abandon our own judgment, conviction, and, at least in some cases, moral principles for the sake of going along." Wryly Neuhaus adds, "So now you know what this President is really up to." The bishop's name is known to Neuhaus, but out of charity he is not revealing

it. Neuhaus will be admitted into the priesthood of the Archdiocese of New York. If the Roman Church had a collegial system like the LCMS Council of Presidents, the doors of that heaven might forever have been blocked to him. Neuhaus-watchers who want to read his statements first-hand may subscribe to *First Things*, P.O. Box 3000, Department FT, Denville, New Jersey 07834-9847, at $24 per annum. Special promotions may bring the cost down a little. The layout resembles the original issues of *Christianity Today* and its writing style the *National Review*, although without the latter's delectable humor.

David P. Scaer

FEMINISM: THE END OF THE FORWARD ADVANCE?

An Associated Press release (March 29, 1991) reported: "Bishops of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America say that the only doctrinally acceptable way for a person to be baptized is 'in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.'" Many LCMS pastors can breathe a sigh of relief that they will not have to face the touchy issue of determining whether baptisms administered in the name of the "Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier" are acceptable. The ELCA bishops had come under heavy fire for not exerting their role as their church's teachers. This statement is their second encyclical to gain public attention. The first was their opposition to homosexual ordination. Retreat from Moscow was the turning point for both Napoleon's and Hitler's armies. The episcopal pronouncement, unanimously adopted, leaves radical feminists with little hope of doing away with the classical and biblical trinitarian formula in ELCA. Encouraging was the statement by the bishops that "we must also be responsible in maintaining the integrity of our orthodox Christian tradition." It has been a long time since we heard that kind of phrase. Twenty years ago it should have been raised in the matter of women's ordination. Nevertheless, the besieging armies have been stopped in their forward advance for now.

Part of the AP report that "Christians 'dare not confuse our proclamation about God and our invocation of God'" shows that a retreat from radical feministic expressions is not total withdrawal. The bishops concede that "in speaking about God, creative use of both masculine and feminine metaphors, analogies, similes, and symbols are highly appropriate and recommended by both Scripture and tradition . . . ." Granting that there is a distinction between invoking God and proclaiming Him, this hardly means that feministic language unacceptable in invoking Him

becomes acceptable in preaching about Him. The language of prayer and invocation cannot undergo a metamorphosis in preaching. The Father of the trinitarian invocation cannot become a mother in our sermons. The God we confess is the God we preach.

Perhaps the bishops want to avoid appearing too harsh in a church body in which the proportion of female seminarians is approaching a majority. In this context the bishops' requirement of "Father-Son-Holy Spirit" terminology is courageous. Yet there must be a limit to the creative use of language in preaching about God. Similes provide a greater latitude than metaphors. God is *like* the woman sweeping the house for the lost coin. Some pastors who are overly sensitive to using feminine analogies have suggested that the woman is the church. Sometimes the Scriptures do use an analogy that would otherwise seem objectionable to call our attention to God's action. The coming of the Lord's day as a thief in the night can hardly suggest a lack of divine seriousness in the Seventh Commandment. God can be *like* a hen gathering chicks. Switching some analogies to metaphors may be slightly disrespectful. God can be like a mother in His care of Israel, but to change the analogy to a metaphor is to introduce an ancient pagan abomination. Such a metaphor as the bridegroom-bride imagery to describe the relationship of God to His believing community is laid in cement in both the Old and New Testaments--for example, the Prophets, the Synoptics, Paul, and the Apocalypse. Our language about God (theology) must first be drawn from and then be guided by the Scriptures. The bottom line to our confessional subscription is that the Scriptures are the source and norm of doctrine, especially our speaking about God. The unbridled creative use of metaphor would give us an entirely different religion. The libertine use of creative metaphor gave the ancient world its fertility cults. Having stopped the advance by maintaining the "Father-Son-Holy Spirit" invocation, the ELCA bishops can take up the more fundamental issue of why we *must* use this language in speaking about God.

David P. Scaer

ANOTHER GLOOMY ADVENT

Any doubt of the Lutheran seriousness about original sin is removed when the number and length of the liturgical penitential seasons are considered. Alongside the forty-day period of Lent one must place the two and a half weeks of pre-Lent beginning with Quinquagesima and the whole season of Advent. If one adds to these the ten-day period between

Ascension and Pentecost and the final three weeks in the Trinity season, nearly one quarter of the church year is penitential. Some have perhaps tipped the boat too far in the other direction by stressing each Sunday as a celebration. Yet an unnecessarily heavy emphasis on penitence might negate the place of the gospel in Christianity. Not only may gloom and doom betray the gospel, but the church might find it difficult to attract outsiders and to keep its own members. A preacher with a penitential mind-set may be tempted to preach sermons heavily oriented to the law. He has another opportunity to castigate his people for their sins. The genius of Christianity is not simply that people are confronted with the grotesqueness of their sin, but that they find sweet comfort in Christ. Our liturgical seasons should reflect this genius.

The earliest apostolic and post-apostolic church did not know of such long penitential seasons. Lent was the first and lasted only several days before Easter. Marked by nearly complete fasting, it was both shorter and more severe than our longer forty-day period, characterized by half-hearted resolutions to give up the inconsequential luxuries of life. Often these are hardly more than second attempts to carry out failed New Year's resolutions. It seems that the older custom of a shorter and more intense penitential season has much to offer. But apart from the questions of how long we make Lent and how we observe it, do we really need a pre-penitential season before Lent and a penitential season before Christmas?

This question is prompted by the Reverend Clark Morphew, an ELCA clergyman in the Minneapolis area and a nationally syndicated columnist. In an article entitled "A Few Carols Lift Spirits at Advent," he begins with this telling sentence: "Sunday we begin Advent, one of the dreariest seasons of the church's liturgical calendar--and the time that preachers set aside to drive people wild with greed and desire." Morphew is not so radical as to suggest that Advent be abolished, nor is he in any way a crypto-Arminian who denies sin's control over human life. His is only a humane suggestion that perhaps each Sunday during Advent the pastor might let the people sing one Christmas carol in church.

As he points out, the whole scheme is off-balance. The people reach Christmas only after four gloomy Advent Sundays, following perhaps three Sundays stressing divine judgment (at the end of the ecclesiastical year), and are then left with very little Christmas. It is no wonder that Christmas *has* to be celebrated outside of the church. Dante's *Inferno* or a Roman requiem mass for the poor souls in purgatory could not be more depressing. The pastor's proclamation on Christmas Day that the world's

celebration is ending and that the church's is only beginning is simply untrue. Christmas begins on December 24 and ends on December 25. There quickly follow the holidays of St. Stephen the Martyr, St. John the Apostle, and the Holy Innocents, and somehow that momentary Christmas joy is swallowed up. Epiphany might be called the Christmas of the Gentiles, but we all know it really is not. Christmas was two weeks before. Unless Christmas were celebrated in the shopping malls and with television specials, it would almost be missed in the churches. Hymn for hymn the weight is on Advent and not Christmas. Some of the greatest Christmas music is neither sung nor heard in the church. Advent loses its role as preparation and becomes a thing in itself.

Clark Morphew is not suggesting that we scrub Advent. Certainly one would not destroy the anticipation of Advent by letting the poor people sing just one Christmas hymn each Sunday. The characters of Advent and Lent are *not* identical. Lent leads downward to Good Friday, but Advent leads upward to Christmas. Easter joy is built on the surprise that the crucified one has risen from the dead. Christmas is the joy over what we all know is going to happen. An analogy using pregnancy and birth might be the best one. The liturgical categorization of hymns is hardly the law of the Medes and the Persians. The editors of *Lutheran Worship* have transferred St. Ambrose's and Luther's "Savior of the Nations, Come" from the Christmas section to the Advent section. Following Clark Morphew's suggestion, a few more liturgical transgressions would not only be in order but welcomed by the people. Advent may not be Christmas, but it is the prelude to and, indeed, the beginning of Christmas. Our preaching may take on a different character with an occasional Christmas carol.

David P. Scaer

CLOSED COMMUNION: SAYING IT BETTER

Some time back I wrote a brief piece on how the expression "closed communion" and not "close communion" expresses the ancient and traditional church policy of admitting only those to the Lord's Supper who belong to the fellowship of the church. In an article in a recent issue of the *Concordia Journal*, Norman Nagel of Concordia Seminary in Saint Louis provides the necessary biblical and historical data to support this assertion and states his preference for "closed communion" to say what the church really intends to say about this practice. His article, "Closed Communion: In the Way of the Gospel; In the Way of the Law" (17

[January 1991], pp. 20-29), attempts with much success to determine the origin of the phrase, "close communion," which is clearly of recent invention. For me the phrase was a puzzle and I could trace it back no further than Fritz's *Pastoral Theology* (1931). It is not known to Pieper. With the wide use and influence of Fritz, it attained virtually doctrinal status, especially among those who wanted to maintain some sort of communion practice. Nagel convincingly shows that the phrase "close communion" came from the Baptists and probably migrated into Lutheran theology in the early part of this century. This fascinating story is contained in a footnote (pp. 27-28, note 8) which may have escaped less persistent readers. The phrase, which has no biblical origin, has taken on a life of its own and has given rise to theological disputations. A random selection of Sunday church bulletins suggests that my contribution of some years back was completely ignored. Nagel's superior argumentation should be elevated from a scholarly footnote to popular dissemination. "Close communion" is the unofficial "official" substitute for "closed communion" in LCMS circles, even though its origin among the Baptists might be sufficient reason to ignore it.

Only in English is it possible to make the transition from "closed" to "close" to give the impression--and I might add the false impression--that with both words we are saying the same thing. For example, in German "closed" would be *geschlossen* and "close" *nah* or *eng*. Both words do have the same Latin ancestry in *claudere*, "to shut," but have descended into the English language by different paths. The word "close" has a chumminess about it which conjures up the picture of the communicants holding hands during the reception of the sacrament while singing "Let Us Break Bread Together on Our Knees," a Protestant hymn which has been strangely showing up in Roman Catholic "missalettes." (The use of the word "missalette" for the throw-away services in the Roman Catholic Church shows that not even it is immune to Protestant trends.) In any event, the contemporary church is more comfortable with "close communion," and the matter should rest there. "Close" and "closed" are at least linguistic second cousins, but conceptually each is saying something different than the other. "Closed" implies that someone is kept out; at the time of the eucharistic celebration the doors were closed. "Close" implies that "we are all in this together." Since no other major Protestant denomination is even concerned about such matters, this terminology is strictly the business of the LCMS.

The Holy Supper is first of all a participation in Christ and secondarily a sharing with others who are receiving. Fellowship among Christians is

dependent on and an extension of the participation in the eucharist. We are part of one another not directly but through Christ's body and blood. If one switches the order, the biblical model is replaced with Schleiermacher's, as is shown in Werner Elert's *Eucharist and Church Fellowship*. (Nagel deserves our thanks again for the English translation of this volume.)

The real problem is not whether the practice is called "closed communion" or "close communion," but whether our church will be able to implement any restrictions at all on those who wish to commune. Equally important is how the practice of restrictive communion will be maintained without offending the proclamation of the gospel. On the surface there is the theological problem of a seeming contradiction between the invitation of the gospel urging *all* to come to Jesus and the rule that only *some* (and not others) may receive the eucharist. Any relaxation of our communion practices probably comes from an effort to overcome this tension. The one stranded in the pew is fully aware that he has been "closed" out--excluded--in spite of the fact he has been informed by the bulletin or communion card that "close communion" is practiced. He knows that he is not "close" enough to be included. A restrictive communion practice can make inviting the unchurched--whether they are nominal Christians, Christians of other denominations, or non-Christians--awkward, to say the least. These invitations are important because, within the context of the hymns, the liturgy, the Scripture readings, and the sermon, conversion takes place. Here the unbeliever is confronted with the law and the gospel, just as the believer is. The outsider is invited to participate in hearing the word, but is excluded from the sacrament for which he is properly deemed unprepared. He cannot be put in a position where he will take the holy things lightly, and thus he must wait.

The early church did not have to face this problem since only the baptized in communion with the celebrating church remained for the eucharist. This second half of the service was called the *missa fidelium*, because only those who had confessed the faith were there. Constantine's "christianization" of the Roman Empire made infidelity politically inexpedient and almost extinct. Soon all citizens of the empire were *ipso facto* members of the church. The matter was resolved and stayed resolved up through the eighteenth century when princes and governments still largely determined the religious persuasion of their subjects. To be Spanish was to be Roman Catholic, Scottish to be Presbyterian, and Swedish to be Lutheran. One physician treating my sainted pastor-father informed him that he would not have been Catholic but Lutheran, if he

had been born a few kilometers in another direction. Political boundaries were synonymous with religious ones, and thus in Europe whole towns and states were of one religion. With the exception of the colonial period, America has not known this kind of monolithic religious situation. Thus, visitors to our congregations may not belong to our denomination. In certain cases members of the church may account for a small portion of the assembly--for example, at some weddings, memorial services, baptisms, and confirmations. To avoid the embarrassment of excluding most of those present the pastor has no difficulty in overcoming the temptation to celebrate Holy Communion. Since the early church knew of no other Sunday services than those at which the communion was celebrated, no one can seriously suggest that we have fewer such services in order to maintain our restrictive policy. That course of action would be "closed communion" with a vengeance and "close communion" of no kind!

It seems totally unlikely that any church with a restrictive communion practice will revive the ancient custom of dismissing the non-members after the sermon in order to restrict the communion to the baptized. Churches of the Roman and Eastern Orthodox communions certainly do not do so. A church with a "closed communion" policy will have to be sensitive to those who remain in the pew. Through special prayers in the bulletins and the singing of hymns, some spiritual participation can be provided for those who do not receive Holy Communion. Luther prepared the hymn, "O Lord, We Praise You," to help communicants understand the Lord's Supper. This hymn, with others and various prayers, can also serve those who are not communing.

In some Lutheran congregations many of the members themselves leave at the time of the communion. We are, however, overcoming the unfortunate custom of having, not the *infideles*, but the *fideles* leave before the communion, simply because the length of the service interferes with their schedules. In any case, usage of restricted communion can be awkward simply because some can receive and others not. Calling the practice "close communion" and not "closed communion" attempts to remove the awkwardness of having those who are allowed to commune and those who are not at the same service. In reality it might even worsen matters, since it suggests that some do not belong to the "club." Exclusion from the Supper says less about not belonging to the group and more about not being ready to receive what the early church called "the holy things."

"Open communion," in some sense of the term, is common practice in the mainline Protestant denominatons and in not a few Roman Catholic parishes (despite the official policy of Rome). In actual practice attendance at the Holy Communion is not problematic for some denominations since it is so infrequently celebrated. Many Protestant churches are without altars and so have no special provisions for a ritual of this kind. Some churches with a eucharistic piety--for example, the Episcopal Church--resolve the issue of who may attend by simply inviting all baptized Christians. But even these churches do not have a completely "open communion," since the suggestion is made in the bulletin that only those who have been baptized may receive. As open as this invitation is, it might offend those who find baptism unnecessary. It is hard to believe that any church has a completely "open communion" policy to allow, let alone encourage, non-believers to commune. But anything is possible.

Lutheran congregations may be tempted to let down some barriers to communion simply in order to be like other churches. Our practice of restricting admission to the altar was the uniform usage of the church in its first seventeen centuries and is in line with the official positions of the Roman and Eastern churches. The professors of St. Vladimir's Seminary, a Russian Orthodox institution, were both surprised and delighted to learn that the LCMS adhered, as they do, to the ancient custom of closed communion. Simply put, "closed communion" is neither sectarian, as if it were a private custom, nor schismatic, as if it were bringing unnecessary divisions to the church. We should neither feel awkward nor be embarrassed. The historical and ecumenical arguments overwhelmingly favor placing restrictions on who may approach the altar to receive Christ's body and blood, as Nagel has shown. The Holy Communion is, after all, more than an opportunity to get spiritually acquainted with the person sitting next to us in the pew.

Our own churches handle a restrictive communion practice in a variety of ways. Communion registration cards are in a very real sense restriction cards. They are more than a means of obtaining names and addresses to keep track of who was really there. In nearly all cases they require belief in the real presence, membership in the denomination, or more specifically membership in the celebrating congregation. Others tactfully require that those receiving for the first time see the pastor before the service begins. This approach removes some embarrassment, since both visiting Lutherans and non-Lutherans must see the pastor before communion. But this requirement presents problems in logistics. Arriving at the church at 10:25 for a service beginning at 10:30 does not really allow any time for

the would-be communicant, even if he is Lutheran, to find the sacristy and announce his desire to commune. Demonstrating membership in a Lutheran congregation resolves the problem easily. Just how the pastor can explain our communion policy in a minute or two at the most to the non-Lutheran is another matter. The tactfully stated requirement of speaking to the pastor before the service can never really be carried out when it is read for the first time only minutes before the beginning of the service. It is simply a polite way for the church to say that the communion is closed to visitors. If the visitor reads the notice and takes it seriously, the pastor in the overwhelming majority of cases does not have to explain the practice.

In most churches the matter of who may come to the communion is handled by a notice in the bulletin. One of the more thorough announcements, touching all bases, reads as follows:

> Our congregation observes the historic church practice of "close communion." "Communicant" membership testifies of a "closeness" in faith, in doctrine, and in "mutual conversation and consolation of brethren." God's Word admonishes each individual communicant to "examine himself" before participating in the Lord's Supper, for "worthy participation" means repentance and faith. At the same time God warns us to "judge ourselves" in this matter; therefore we practice close communion. Those desiring to receive the Holy Eucharist with us for the first time are asked to speak with one of the pastors before approaching the altar.

This announcement is so thorough that even the veteran members of the congregation may not comprehend it all. The phrase, "mutual conversation and consolation of the brethren," may be without immediate meaning to some. Non-members, especially those with severely limited church backgrounds, may understand only that the pastors should be consulted, a requirement which, as mentioned, cannot really be carried out before the service. The reference to the word of God admonishing self-examination is sufficiently foreboding to settle any marginal cases. It is questionable whether "close communion," defined as a closeness in faith and doctrine and as the mutual consolation of the brethren, accurately describes the ancient church practice of "closed communion." If agreement in faith and doctrine is intended, then that word and not "closeness" should be used. How or when is "close" close enough? Do we have here an unnecessary play on words?

In the ancient churches and those of the Reformation bishops and pastors declared communion fellowship on the basis of an agreed doctrine. Then it was simply a matter of one church being in communion with another and of an individual belonging to that church. It was not a matter for individuals to decide for themselves. Each church had its confessions, and communion was not a matter of interrogation by the pastor or soul-searching by the communicant. The LCMS previously followed this practice of the early church and Reformation. Then there is the description of "repentance and faith" as necessary to a "worthy reception." The presence of contrition and faith in sinners is essential, to be sure, but in a Reformed context these terms are understood quantitatively. People may absent themselves from the communion because they find themselves insufficiently worthy. This feeling of lack of personal worth and so dependence on God in Christ is really the only attitude in which they should approach the altar.

Are we caught between surrendering our restrictive communion policy and printing a policy that cannot really be appreciated by those for whom it is intended? The real problem is that we are caught between the universal call to salvation and the limited invitation to participate in the eucharistic mystery, which is offered only to those who have first confessed the faith and been baptized. In placing a restriction on the Holy Communion, two things must be kept in mind. (1.) This restriction is imposed by Christ through the Apostle Paul. (2.) More importantly, God intends that all people should receive Christ's body and blood. The unbelief preventing one from receiving is of one's own doing and not God's. The practice of "close communion" or "closed communion" can never suggest a reward for moral or spiritual achievement. The words "given and shed for you for the remission of sins" suggest that sinners, not saints, are coming to the altar. In the sacrament our lack of holiness is exchanged for the Lord's abundant holiness.

Since we will never go back to the practice of dismissing those who are not in full membership with the church before the eucharistic celebration, perhaps it might be better to eliminate the longer theological discourses from our church bulletins and simply say something like the following:

> We welcome to this celebration of the Lord's Supper those Christians who are not fully united with us. It is a sad consequence of the division in Christianity that we cannot extend to them a general invitation to receive communion. Lutherans believe that the Lord's Supper is a celebration of the congrega-

> tion signifying a oneness in faith, life, practice, and worship. Reception of the Holy Communion at this time by Christians not fully united with us would imply a oneness which does not yet exist and for which we must all pray. We invite you to join us in praying for the unity of the church in the confession of the true doctrine.

Prayers could be provided in the bulletin or elsewhere for both those who are and those who are not receiving the Holy Communion so that those who do not receive the communion are not entirely "closed" out of the worship. The Holy Communion expresses our unity with each other by being made one in Christ by baptism, but at the same time it uncovers the deep rifts in Christendom. The tragedy of a divided Christendom becomes evident in the celebration of the Holy Communion, but at the same time it can be a time of commitment to remove barriers to full fellowship by working for a complete and full confession of the doctrine of our Lord Jesus. What we cannot attain here on earth will be given to us by His grace in the banquet of heaven, where all the saints will participate at one table--one altar--with one host who is both victor and victim.

An open communion policy would proclaim a false unity, but our doctrinal integrity also requires that we show concern for those who may not at this time be admitted to our altars. The LCMS has been able to do this in the past without compromising her doctrinal integrity or surrendering her sensitivity and solemn duty to proclaim Christ to those who are not members of her fellowship.

David P. Scaer

PATRIOTIC SERVICES

During this past summer I had occasion to attend a service at a congregation where I had worshipped a number of times in the past. It happened to be Sunday, July 1, but I had not anticipated the service that awaited me. The first hint came when we entered the nave and found flags tied to the candlestick holders at each pew. The pastor, in some opening comments, described the service as "kicking off" the week of celebration.

The service itself began with the pledge of allegiance, followed by the singing of "The Star Spangled Banner." During the course of the service we also sang "God of Our Fathers," "America the Beautiful," and "The

Battle Hymn of the Republic." I confess that of these four I found myself able to sing only the second and fourth. While the offering was gathered, a soloist sang "God Bless America," exhorting all of us to join in (with drums accompanying) on the second time round. The lessons read were not those appointed for the Fourth Sunday after Pentecost but were from Romans 13 and Matthew 22 ("Render unto Caesar").

I thought I had been around a good bit, but I left rather taken aback. I have since learned, however, that such services are not altogether uncommon in LCMS congregations. If so, there is theological reason for concern. We have, of course, ample cause to be thankful for the many good things about our country, although we ought to love it, not chiefly because of those blessings, but simply because it is the land given us. Indeed, in a variety of writings over the years I have defended the American tradition of liberal individualism and thought myself rather devoted to it. But I could not worship in the service I described above. What is wrong theologically with such a service?

It is, first of all, unseemly for *us* in particular to engage in such mixing of Christ and culture. Knowing that many of our fellow Lutherans did not acquit themselves altogether admirably during the Nazi rise to power, we should be alert to danger here. (Unfortunately, however, there are still among us some who would rather deny Nazi atrocities than admit the mistakes of some of our fellow Lutherans.) For us in particular, therefore, Romans 13 ought to be a passage to be handled with great care. For us a church decorated with flags of our country--at a time when emotions have run high over proper treatment of the flag--ought to be an impossibility. For us, above all, the thought of incorporating the pledge of allegiance into a service of worship ought to be taboo. But, sadly, it is not. And just as sadly our congregations may respond enthusiastically. I have, as I noted above, worshipped on a number of occasions at the congregation whose patriotic service I described. I have always felt that its singing was not very robust. But its members sang well this past July 1. Indeed, they positively blared out the patriotic songs. It is absolutely inconceivable that they would have sung "For All the Saints" with as much gusto. These are *our* tendencies. Perhaps they are tendencies of most Christians--about that I am uncertain. But we, above all, should have no pledge of allegiance in our services. It would be better to become Mennonites.

The issues go deeper than our peculiar heritage, however. Consider some of the words we were invited to sing in that service:

O beautiful for patriot dream
That sees beyond the years.
Thine alabaster cities gleam
Undimmed by human tears.

Had St. Augustine heard these words, he would have assumed that they must refer to the *civitas dei*, that city of God of which glorious things are spoken. They could not possibly refer to any earthly community in human history, and to make such an identification would be to create an idol (in Augustine's language, to "love inordinately" a good thing). And, of course, the language *is* biblical; the description of the heavenly Jerusalem "undimmed by human tears" is here applied to America. Another stanza of the same song begins this way:

O beautiful for pilgrim feet
Whose stern, impassioned stress
A thoroughfare for freedom beat
Across the wilderness.

That "errand into the wilderness" (as historian Perry Miller called it) was undertaken by Puritan feet, and the use of such biblical imagery (as the trek into the wilderness) to describe the building of an earthly city is quintessentially Puritan--its roots in Calvin's theology. The attempt to build "a city set on a hill" that John Winthrop set before his fellow Puritans is something quite different from the Lutheran sense that the political order can never be Christianized and remains, at best, an organized use of force for the sake of justice.

Or, again, we were invited to sing these words from "The Star Spangled Banner":

Then conquer we must,
When our cause it is just.

I suppose they might seem at first an admirable bit of modesty--anticipating victory only when our cause is just (though few will be the occasions when we think it is not). In fact, however, these words inculcate political falsehood and encourage political messianism. Where are we guaranteed that we must conquer simply because our cause is just? Where are we guaranteed that the righteous need never suffer in human history? If, however, we tell ourselves often enough that we must conquer because our cause is just, we may teach ourselves to do whatever is necessary--even the evil that is necessary--to win when we think our cause a righteous one. In the technical language of ethics, this is a failure to

distinguish *jus ad bellum* (the justice of going to war) from *jus in bello* (what is just in war). In more ordinary language, it is an attitude that may enable us to firebomb cities or use atomic weapons on civilian targets.

I do not suppose, of course, that every worshipper singing these songs has all the thoughts in mind or makes all the theological mistakes I have described here. However, unless we suppose that worship shapes no attitudes, unless we suppose that the *lex orandi* is never the *lex credendi*, we should want our clergy to be more theologically alert. If we must have something called a patriotic service, we should sing G. K. Chesterton's great hymn, "O God of Earth and Altar" (*LBW*, 428; omitted, unfortunately, from *LW*):

> O God of earth and altar,
> Bow down and hear our cry;
> Our earthly rulers falter,
> Our people drift and die;
> The walls of gold entomb us;
> The swords of scorn divide.
> Take not Thy thunder from us,
> But take away our pride.

I fear, however, that the singing might not be done with as much gusto.

Gilbert Meilaender
Oberlin, Ohio (1990)