

Protestant thinking in general. This created a serious crisis among the Lutheran groups who with Missouri had been deeply concerned with preserving the truth of God's Word against all attacks, new and old. This movement of tolerance for error, which is known as the ecumenical movement, is worldwide and affects everyone's thinking. The spirit of compromise and indifference to doctrine has cut through the church bodies horizontally, as well as estranging groups from one another. Weakness and compromise has affected almost every group. It has been a period of grievous trial and also of realignment of church bodies.

### Our Church

Out of this crisis our Church of the Lutheran Confession was born. Our congregation is a member of this group. As we saw our priceless Gospel endangered by the spirit of compromise and indifference, we have been compelled to set forth these truths again in a new organization. We are committed to honor Christ, and to proclaim His good news of forgiveness without additions, without changes, without any doubts cast upon the truthfulness and clearness of God's Gospel. We know that we are human beings and capable of error, but we are committed to the principle that error cannot be tolerated in our pulpits and schools, and must be dealt with as soon as it occurs. With the strength of God we have labored to preserve the truth of Jesus Christ, and we are in this city to share that Truth with all men. God's Gospel excludes all human teaching; but God's Gospel includes all human beings in its gracious offer.

# *You have one Master, The Christ*

*Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*

W Schaller, Jr.

With this pamphlet we shall try to introduce ourselves to you. In so short a space we can hardly tell you all about ourselves, but we shall try in a general way to tell you who we are and why we have formed another Lutheran Church.

## We Are Christians

Exactly what is a Christian? Long before they were called Christians, the followers of Jesus Christ were called *disciples*. Jesus told them to "follow me." He said to these followers, "You have one Master, the Christ." When most of the people no longer wished to follow Him, He asked some of His followers, "Will you also go away?" One of them answered, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." A Christian is first of all a follower or disciple of a person, namely, Jesus of Nazareth. In matters of religion, His followers listen to no other voice.

The New Testament also calls Christians by the name "*believers*." Jesus often used this word. He said, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved." And, "Whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." Jesus was not vague about what a believer believed. At one point in His ministry the people held many different views about Him (just like today). He asked twelve of His followers to tell Him these views, and then asked them what they believed about Him. They answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God." A Christian believes that Jesus is God. Jesus was also definite about what His followers should believe concerning His work. He came "to seek and to save the lost." His entire life pointed toward His crucifixion as He told a man named Nicodemus. "So must the Son of man be lifted up (crucified), that whoever believes in him may have eternal life." Before Jesus was born, an angel told His legal father to name Him Jesus, because He would save his people *from their sins*. A Christian believes that Jesus has taken away his guilt and saved him from the punishment of his sins. The first followers believed Jesus was their risen Lord and God who had complete authority in heaven and earth, and that He was with them always, wherever they might be. They also believed Him when He said He would return again and bring an end to the world, at which time He would judge all men, the believers and the unbelievers. Jesus insisted that man could come to God and heaven only through Himself. He called Himself the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

death many Lutheran teachers began to change the Gospel truths which he had proclaimed to the world.

Another new principle has been at work in the past 100 years or so. As reason divided the churches into many sects, so now men are trying to bring them back together again. This is not being done by asking all churches to submit to the Word, but it is being done on the basis of reason. Many leaders in this movement to unite the churches do not even consider the Bible to be God's Word. Reason tells them that all churches have some truth and some errors, and so all come together to negotiate the teachings, to compromise their individual beliefs for the sake of a united church. This has led to a general lack of concern for doctrine of any kind, be it good or bad. This is known as religious unionism, that is, groups approving of each other and joining in church work and worship without agreement in teachings. In 1830 a Prussian ruler tried this by decree; by law he united the Protestant churches with the Lutheran churches in his domain. This led some Lutherans to migrate to America to have the right to preach the Gospel according to the Holy Scriptures.

Many Lutheran churches have been influenced by the union movement. Some have become very active in joining with false teaching churches in work and fellowship. As a result they have become very tolerant of errors in teaching within their own denominations. False teaching is not taken very seriously. One group of Lutheran churches in America for 100 years practiced a strong confessional Lutheranism, that is, they were opposed to compromise of any kind in the matter of religious truth. They would not tolerate any false teaching in their schools and churches. They insisted the Church has one Word to proclaim, Jesus' word. They knew error can infect anyone and everyone, yet they considered it completely contrary to Jesus if such differing teachings were tolerated in His Church. When differences occur, we are bound by our Lord to solve the problem by searching His word. To agree to disagree denies that Jesus is the only Author of our religion.

As we said, for 100 years this body opposed the modern inroads and laxness in matters of doctrine. But since 1935 the largest church in this group, the Missouri Synod, has been moving rapidly to a more liberal and tolerant position working together with Lutheran churches which had always been more lax. This synod is bringing itself in line with their thinking and with the stream of modern

the meaning of the Bible to make it more agreeable with man's reason. This led of course to many divisions and differences, since each man's reason would come up with various interpretations of the Bible. The churches can only find unity when all submit to the Word of God.

Thus some could not understand how Jesus' body and blood could really be present in the Lord's Supper. They formed sects which taught that the bread and wine *represented* the body and blood. Some reasoned that little infants could not believe and started churches which would not baptize infants. This mixing of reason and Scripture has continued through the years to multiply the sects. Now we have about 250 sects or denominations. Human reason always stresses this life more than the life to come. Some insist upon certain external behavior like not smoking or not drinking as signs of Christianity; others will stress the earthly welfare of people and engage in social work and legal action to remove poverty and discrimination, trying to make this world a better place in which to live. In the last 100 years this mixing of reason with Scripture has led almost countless teachers in the Protestant churches to deny that books written by men could at the same time be the Word of God. They have rejected almost every teaching of Christ from the creation of the world to the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. As followers of Jesus we are compelled to reject the principle of "Scripture and reason" as the authority for doctrine every bit as much as the principle of "Scripture and pope." Jesus asks us to be faithful to Him and speak His words. Loyalty and honesty make it impossible for us to approve of churches that deny part or all of Jesus' teachings. There is too much at stake, for the Word of truth gives salvation. We cannot submit to a pope or to human reason as our teacher of the way to heaven. Thus we are called Lutherans, not because we follow any interpretations of Martin Luther, but because he insisted on a submission to God's Word, whether that Word agreed with man's reason or not.

### **Why So Many Lutheran Churches?**

Catholics and Protestants are divided. Lutherans are divided from the other Protestants. And the Lutherans are divided among themselves. Having the name Lutheran does not protect a group from the attacks of Satan. False teachings again and again creep into the churches and do their destructive work. Right after Luther's

This believing and following Jesus makes a person a Christian. Jesus also showed that sinners couldn't become followers or believers by themselves. He called His followers and gave them power to follow Him and believe in Him. He promised to send the Holy Spirit who through the preaching of the disciples would bring people to believe that Jesus was God and to confess Him as their Savior. So a Christian is no better by nature than anyone in this world. The goodness of God made him into a believer, a disciple. The believing, or faith comes through the hearing of the Word of God. The Holy Ghost makes believers or Christians by the power of the Gospel, the good news about Jesus. Baptism is another way the Holy Ghost changes the heart of a man from an unbeliever to a believer, and even in Baptism the power is in the mighty Word of God.

The Holy Spirit, we noticed, uses believers to preach and baptize so that others may come to believe and follow Jesus. Before He left this earth Jesus breathed the Holy Ghost on His followers and gave them His power, the power to forgive the sins of people all over the world. The believers taken collectively are called the Church. The Church is really the family of Jesus; in fact He once called them His brothers and sisters. When Jesus brings a person to follow Him, He also makes him a member of the whole family of God together with all believers, the Christians, the congregation, or, the Church.

And that, briefly, is what we are, simple Christians or disciples of Jesus: people who believe whatever Jesus tells them in His Word. We have become such through hearing the Gospel and belong to the Church, where each of us daily grows in the understanding of our Lord, grows in the assurance that with Jesus he is a child of God through the forgiveness of sins, and as a result, grows and increases in his efforts to serve and love his Savior-God. Each one still remains a sinful person and often, and unfortunately, looks no better on the outside than a non-Christian. But there is a great difference: the believer finds forgiveness in Jesus and new strength to live more like his Master and Teacher. He is ready and waits for the day when His Savior will take him in death from this sinful world to the perfect joy of a life with his Lord in the world to come. During this waiting the Christians have a deep sense of urgency in bringing the good news of their Lord to as many people as they can.

## Why A Particular Church?

Since all the followers of Jesus believe His words and are members of one family, there should of course be only one Church. All Christians should be working together, strengthening each other, and together bring the good news to all men. Let's see for a few minutes what has happened in the 2000 years since the first disciples spread their message to the men of their time.

As the church brought its faith to more and more people in a wider and wider area, it not only influenced the Greek and Roman world, but unfortunately was also influenced by Greek and Roman philosophies and religions. This was a gradual process. St. Paul had warned that this was going to happen. One thing Jesus insisted upon was that in His Church there would be no human authority; He was the only Teacher and Master. He alone established what men should believe and what His Church should teach. But gradually a worldly influence took over. The leaders took more and more power to themselves. Eventually the institution of the papacy developed. The main bishop, or earthly head of the church, claimed he was the vicar or representative of Jesus; therefore he could make new rules and teachings which the followers of Jesus must accept and follow. He taught, for example, that people should pray to Mary for help. He taught that there was a place between heaven and hell called purgatory where the souls of the believers went after death. Here they must suffer until satisfaction had been made to the Church for their sins. For though Jesus died for their sins, they said the Church could impose penalties on the believers, such as special works, special prayers, pilgrimages, and so forth. Now if a person in his lifetime had not made enough satisfaction by his good deeds, this could be finished for him after death, but he must linger in purgatory. His release could be accomplished through masses being said for him. How does this work? Well, it was taught by the popes that special saints (like Joseph, Mary, Paul, John, and Peter) led such excellent lives that they had done more than enough good works. These extra works formed a treasury and this surplus could be used for believers, who had not made enough satisfaction for their sins. The masses spoken by the priest applied part of the surplus to the account of a departed friend or relative. Another way to cut down the purgatory time was to buy indulgences, that is to pay a sum of money for a special project in the church. The pope could authorize that certain gifts could deduct time. This is just

one of the many false teachings introduced by the popes and his church councils which he convened.

Loyalty to the Master, Christ, requires that His followers do not accept teachings which He has not taught and which contradict what He said. Though the people were kept in ignorance for many years, when people began in the middle ages to study and learn the Bible, men pointed out that the papacy and many rules and teachings of the popes were contrary to what the Lord Jesus had taught. Martin Luther was one such student of the Bible who was forced by his conscience to preach what Christ and His apostles had taught. The Roman Church did not listen to the voice of truth but condemned Luther and the biblical teachings he set forth. Loyalty to Christ, the living Lord, requires His followers to separate from those who teach contrary to what the Savior taught. The Word of God and its life giving beliefs are the most precious things in the world, and we cannot submit to human teachings which are mixed with the pure waters of salvation. That is why today we are separate from the Roman Catholic Church: they introduced false teachings and at the time of the Reformation made it very clear that they condemn the true teaching and preaching of the Gospel.

## Why So Many Protestant Churches?

This is another sad story and demonstrates that since the Devil tempted Adam and Eve he has never stopped trying to turn people away from the true religion which God gave man through Christ. During the Reformation many teachers beside Luther studied the Bible and took issue with the Roman church. But now another factor divided the several protesting groups. This was also the period of new study in all fields and gives the period the name of the Renaissance, or a new revival in learning and the arts. The human reason was elevated to a high position. This is good in science and arts, but it is most dangerous in religion. Here reason can either be a man's servant and help through the study of language to dig into the truths of God's Word; or reason can become man's master and lead him away from the truth. For man is corrupted by sin and his reason opposes the ways of God. Therefore reason must always be kept captive to the Word of God. Many reformers who opposed Rome gave reason too high a place and allowed human judgment to give interpretations of God's doctrine. If God's Word contradicted reason and common sense, these teachers would adjust