

THE CHURCH, OUR SYNOD

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II Corinthians 11: 4 For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit, which we have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with him

Galatians 1: 6 I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: 7 Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. 8 But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. 9 As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.

Why Waco? Why Jonestown? Why the Shakers (who foresook procreation)? These we know were never more than sects or cults, but others grew from sects to both major and minor christian denominations, or to such as present day Islam. And why Zwingli and Calvin, and Lutherans even from Martin Luther's time to ours?

I Timothy 4:1 Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils;

I think answers to the questions posed above become apparent when the following sermon, not dated but preached at least 110 years ago, is read and studied. Are the issues the preacher addresses any less relevant today? Hardly. Were they of greater concern then than in earlier times? Only if people in the church of that time commonly asked, as so many do today: What is this world coming to?

Read what Dr. Walther said in the fourth paragraph in his introduction wherein he cites what St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians. Note what is said in the last sentence of this paragraph: "God often carries out His heaviest judgments through false teachers."

Near the end of this introduction Walther cites Matthew 7:15-23 as "...our Gospel for the day..." which he quotes in full.

THE SHEEP JUDGE THEIR SHEPHERDS

A Sermon by C. F. W. Walther

"God give you all much grace and peace through the knowledge of God and Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

"Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus!

Introduction: "God's church upon earth has from the very beginning been a militant church. It has ever been oppressed and persecuted by the mighty ones of the world. Also within the church at all times, men have arisen who have spread false teachings and made factions for themselves, thus disturbing the church and causing divisions and offenses. In Adam's church there was Cain, the self-righteous; in Noah's church, Ham, the despiser of his father; in Abraham's church, Ishmael, the mocker; in the church of the prophets, many false prophets preached though the Lord had not sent them and they gave the people false comfort and led them into the sin of idolatry.

"Even in the apostolic church, in nearly all places where the gospel was preached and received, there arose heretics who caused divisions, yes, often disturbed entire flourishing congregations. Among these, St. Paul especially names Alexander the coppersmith, Hymenaeus, and Philetus; and St. John mentions the whole sect of the Nicolaitanes. And

so also to this day. Wherever and whenever the pure doctrine has been heard, opponents have arisen. Satan has never been able to leave the church in peaceful possession of its heavenly treasures. The church therefore has ever had to use God's Word, not only as food for the soul, but also as a weapon in unceasing warfare against false teachers. If a church cease to strive, it cannot remain a church for long. Just as the sun in springtime calls forth not only the good seed, but also weeds from winter's sleep, so also, by the blessed preaching of God's Word, Satan is awakened, who seeks to get his tares planted among the wheat and thus choke it.

"Now we ask, why does God permit His flock which is to be guarded by its shepherds, also to be attacked by wolves, who present themselves as shepherds that they may deceitfully capture the sheep and destroy them? God could prevent this. Why does He not do so? Two reasons especially are given by God's Word. God permits it partly to prove His children and partly to punish the unthankful hearers. St. Paul says to the Corinthians, *For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you* (1 Cor 11.19). If no one ever assailed the pure doctrine, it would never truly be manifest who clung to it. But when false teachers and fanatics arise in the church, then also those who sincerely care for the pure word reveal themselves. Then the faith of the righteous is tested and certified. If pure doctrine were never attacked, the Christians would soon become indolent, lazy, and lukewarm. But the more clearly others depart from God's Word, the more a Christian is driven to search it diligently and to give painstaking attention to each word. The more falsifiers of the Word crowd in upon the orthodox teacher, the more closely he must examine all, and the more he will therefore grow in divine knowledge and assurance. Heretics, therefore, are nothing else than the grindstone of the church, whereby it learns to use the Sword of the spirit ever more keenly. Thus by the hand of God can good come from evil. God often carries out His heaviest judgments through false teachers.

"God often bestows upon the land or a church true teachers for a time. But then it often happens that they are despised and received ungratefully. Earthly treasures are esteemed more highly than the pure Word and sacrament. Men become ashamed before the world because of the pure doctrine. Nothing is done to maintain the orthodox ministry. God's Word is heard with a sleepy mind. Men learn to despise it. Finally God allows such unthankful disciples to lose the heavenly treasures, so that they who have despised the precious bread of the divine word, shall in retribution be fed with the worthless stones of man-made teaching. Thus St. Paul writes concerning the Christians in the last times: Because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusions that they should believe a lie (2 Thes 2.10-11).

"Therefore, my dear hearers, think it no a little thing, that you now can hear the pure word of God every Sunday. I know that I don't preach for you the thoughts of my heart, but God's counsel for our salvation, as it is revealed, expounded, and confessed in the confessional writing of the orthodox church. I know that when you take to heart, give heed to, and keep what I preach to you, you shall be saved.

"Yet my friends, in accordance with my office, I am to be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers. It behooves me not only to lead you upon the pastures of the Gospel, but also to warn you against false teachers. Therefore let me now seize the occasion which our Gospel for the day offers.

"Matthew 7:15-23: Beware of false prophets which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them. Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name have cast out devils? And in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

"After Christ had presented the true doctrine, He now, in the text just read, warns against false teachers and says to His hearers, *"Beware"*. With these words, Christ takes judgment from the teachers and gives it to the pupils. He takes it from the shepherds and gives it to the sheep. I therefore present for your devotion that:

"The Sheep Judge their Shepherds"

"1. That the sheep are the judges;

Christ says in His sermon on the mount, where not only disciples, but also a great multitude were present, *"Beware"*

of false prophets Ye shall know them by their fruits." This admonition by the Son of God shows us plainly how entirely false the principle is that the preachers should teach and the hearers only listen, that the shepherds should lead and the sheep only follow, that the clergy should resolve and the congregation only acquiesce.

"All that is taught in the church of Christ concerns our soul's salvation. In these matters no one shall be dependent upon some other person. No one shall establish his faith upon another person. Each one shall live in accordance with his own faith, and only by his faith be saved. No other person can die for us, no other person can appear in our stead before God. No other person can stand before his judgment seat in our place. Everyone shall sometime answer to God for his own faith and his own life. Then he will not be able to refer to another and say, "This one or that one taught me thus and I have believed and followed him." No, in matters which concern your soul, you shall not look with the eyes of another person, but with your own eyes. If you permit yourself to be deceived, you have deceived yourself. The responsibility is yours. God says, certainly, that He will demand at the hand of the false teacher, the blood of those he has led astray, but he says also that the deceived one shall die because of his sin. (See **Ezekiel 3:17-21; Ezekiel 33:1-9**)"

Ezekiel 3: 17 Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. 18 When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. 19 Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul. 20 Again, When a righteous man doth turn from his righteousness, and commit iniquity, and I lay a stumblingblock before him, he shall die: because thou hast not given him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he hath done shall not be remembered; but his blood will I require at thine hand. 21 Nevertheless if thou warn the righteous man, that the righteous sin not, and he doth not sin, he shall surely live, because he is warned; also thou hast delivered thy soul. Ezekiel 33: 1 Again the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, 2 Son of man, speak to the children of thy people, and say unto them, When I bring the sword upon a land, if the people of the land take a man of their coasts, and set him for their watchman: 3 If when he seeth the sword come upon the land, he blow the trumpet, and warn the people; 4 Then whosoever heareth the sound of the trumpet, and taketh not warning; if the sword come, and take him away, his blood shall be upon his own head. 5 He heard the sound of the trumpet, and took not warning; his blood shall be upon him. But he that taketh warning shall deliver his soul. 6 But if the watchman see the sword come, and blow not the trumpet, and the people be not warned; if the sword come, and take any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at the watchman's hand. 7 So thou, O son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me. 8 When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. 9 Nevertheless, if thou warn the wicked of his way to turn from it; if he do not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul.

"In God's Kingdom we are all equal. Holy Baptism takes the purple from the king, and the rags from the beggar, and clothes them both in the robes of Christ's righteousness. In divine matters it does not depend upon learning, or holiness, or cleverness, or prudence. It often happens, rather, that the most learned are the most perverse. Human wisdom is foolishness to God. Human righteousness is to Him sin. If a learned man would enter heaven, he must climb down from the heights of his human wisdom and become a child. For God reveals His mysteries only to the babes who humbly acknowledge their natural blindness and darkness. Therefore in divine matters no one is excluded from the judicial office. All Christ's sheep are judges, both learned and layman, man and wife, bachelor and spinster, young and old, for it concerns each one's soul, his own life, his own salvation.

"Therefore we find that even the holy infallible apostle **Acts 17:11** praised the Bereans because they did not receive the apostles without testing them, but compared the revelation of the New Testament with that of the Old, and daily searched the writings of the prophets to see whether matters were as preached by the apostles. Also St. John advises his hearers: **I John 4:1** *Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God.* But above all it is noteworthy that St. Paul writes to the Corinthians whom he had several years before brought to the faith, **I Cor. 10:15** *I speak as to wise men, judge ye what I say.* You see then, my dear ones, God does not desire that you shall, without testing, receive either a human book, or a human lecture, or a human resolution, or instruction.. You shall let no man rule over your conscience. **Mt 23:8,10** *"One is your master, even Christ."* Such matters are not to be decided by majorities. At the famous ecumenical church meeting at Nicea, there were three hundred eighteen orthodox bishops gathered from

the whole world. One only, and he a bachelor by the name of Paphnutius, arose against all, showed from God's Word the propriety of the marriage of the clergy, and because of this one voice, all three hundred seventeen bishops withdrew their vote and the one vote prevailed.

"Oh, my dear friends, if you at one time had realized that the office of judge belonged to you, you would not have entered upon so many and such dangerous by-paths. Your preachers went on false paths and you followed without testing, in false confidence in man. How sorrowful the consequences have been. Therefore know and protect your right. **I Thess. 5:21** *Prove all things and hold fast that which is good.* But this leads me to the second part of our consideration, namely this, that this if the sheep are to judge the shepherds, then they should also know the true doctrine and be sure of it."

I don't know if what is presented here, so far, strikes others as it does me. We, that is all of us as individuals, are responsible for the precious gift of faith which we received through Baptism. Walther places great stress on the simple fact that each one of us, every individual, must see to his own faith, to his own salvation. My faith belongs to me alone, not to another. It was given to me as the work of the Holy Ghost when I was baptized and only I can lose it and my salvation through my lack of diligence, not that of another. Had I received some material thing of great value, such as diamonds or gold, and did not protect it from theft because of the cost of guarding it and it was then stolen from me, the loss would have been mine. Scripture sometimes uses the term steward this sense as in **I Cor. 4:1-2** *Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.*

Watch for: "2. That therefore they shall know the true doctrine and be steadfast in it;" in a future column.

Sola Scriptura.

THE SHEEP JUDGE THEIR SHEPHERDS: PART II

Last month's column closed with **1 Cor. 4:1-2** *Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. 2 Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.* and then: "Watch for '2. That therefore they shall know the true doctrine and be steadfast in it;' in a future column."

1 John 4:1 Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. **2.** Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: **3.** And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.

THE SHEEP JUDGE THEIR SHEPHERDS

A Sermon by C. F. W. Walther

"2. That therefore they shall know the true doctrine and be steadfast in it;

"Even in secular, temporal matters a judge dare not pass sentence arbitrarily; nor may a sworn juryman do that; for there is a lawbook by which men are to judge. He who rules in a state according to his own desires is called a tyrant. There the innocent finds no refuge, the criminal receives no punishment. If it be so in the state, it is even more so in the church, where not secular and temporal matters, but spiritual and divine matters are at stake.

"To be sure, it is the holy, inalienable and unassailable right of the whole congregations and of every member to judge doctrine, to prove it, to receive it or reject it. But in the church no one is to rule and control with force — not even the congregation. Christ says, [Mk. 10:42] 'They which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. [Mk. 10:43] But so shall it not be among you; but whosoever of you will be the chiefest shall be the servant of all.' Neither shall the congregation give orders. It shall not say, 'This is our will; this we command; thus it shall be, for we are many and we have the power.' No, not man, but God, Jesus Christ, his holy Word alone shall rule among us. As it is written in the 82nd Psalm: 'God standeth in the congregation of the mighty; he judgeth among the gods.' Or as St. Peter says, [I Peter 4:11] 'If any man speak, let him speak as the

oracles of God.' In the church no one sits upon the throne but Jesus Christ; He is the head of the church, the Chief Steward, the Lord, the Master, the Judge; and all the church sits at His feet and judges as lesser judges in accord with the Lawbook of its heavenly Monarch.

"With respect to love, we are one another's debtors, servants, and slaves; but with respect to faith, no one is another's slave. They all are slaves only of Christ, subject to His most holy Word, as the only and unchangeable rule and guide. All shall bow before this Word, shepherd and sheep. In accordance with this Word, all, whether teachers or hearers, shall permit themselves to be judged.

"Since the sheep are to be the judges of their shepherds, you see that each Christian is hereby seriously admonished to search daily in the Scriptures, so that he can separate the true from the false and gold and silver from hay, straw, and stubble.

"Give earnest consideration then, my friends, to the fact that you are called to the office of judge in the congregation. Become ever better acquainted with the Lawbook in accordance with which you shall judge. Use daily diligence that you may be ever better acquainted with the pure doctrine in order that you may be ever more capable of using the divine scale, the divine rule, and touchstone.

"Do not despise diligent searching in the Holy Scriptures, in the books of orthodox teachers, and especially in the public confessional writings of the orthodox Lutheran church. Don't think that you lack time, that you must look out for your earthly calling. The salvation of your soul is concerned. Should you not have time for that? If you would be true judges in the church, you must not only regard the pure doctrine of God's Word as more dear and more precious than anything else in the world, you must also be so firm in your doctrine that you would rather die, than depart from it by so much as a letter. You must be so faithful that you do not ask if the learned ones, the wise ones, the esteemed ones are on your side; for your faith shall not rest upon the authority of men, though they be ever so holy and wise, but alone upon the infallible Word of God. From the heart you must be able to say with the disciples, [John 6:68-69] 'Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou has the words of eternal life, and we believe and are sure that thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.'

"Why is it that so many Lutherans now turn to the sects? It is because they have not known the teaching of their church, or if they have known it, because they have accepted it, not on the basis of God's Word, but only on the recommendation of others. Such people let themselves be 'tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine.'

"But here many will perhaps say, 'I am so weak in knowledge. How shall I test the teachings?' You also, my dear Christians, have been cared for. You have Luther's Small Catechism. There you have a glorious summary of the whole Christian faith and its chief articles. What is not in accord with that you can boldly throw out, you make no mistake. All that is necessary for you to know for your salvation and for the testing of the pure doctrine is found briefly and simply in your Catechism. In the first part you learn of true God-pleasing works. In the second part of saving faith, in the third of proper acceptable prayer, and in the fourth, fifth, and sixth of the true sacraments and the Office of the Keys. In the table of duties you learn the true Christian attitude toward your calling and condition.

"Yet, my friends, Christ cautions His hearers that they should not let themselves be deceived by a mere good appearance, and that is the third thing of which I now speak to you.

"3. That they must not let themselves be deceived by a mere good appearance;

"Christ says, 'Beware of false prophets, which come to you in Sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.' There are, my hearer, especially in this last age of apostasy, persons, who though baptized to Christ, deny His deity and atonement. They mock the Triune God and declare the most holy Bible to be a book of fables. These are wolves in wolves' clothing. If a person be led astray in his faith by their mocking of the Most High, then he must certainly have previously lost the true faith from his heart and have willfully turned away from God. A Christian can surely guard himself from such prophets of Satan.

"Christ does not properly speak of such false prophets in our Gospel. They are not the only ones against whom a Christian must be on guard. No, dear Christians, if you would be safe against deception, then realize that the most dangerous false prophets are those who have a good appearance. When Satan would lead astray the children of God, he clothes himself like an angel of light. When the wolf would enter the sheepfold, he puts on sheep's clothing.

"Christ would say this: True prophets in all their teaching appeal to the Word of God. If then you meet a man who appeals to God's Word, who also in many cases teaches the divine truth, who asserts that he proclaims nothing but the pure doctrine of Scripture, then do not trust him immediately, but take care lest this be only sheep's clothing. All heretics in the church without exception have appealed to the Scriptures. Even the prince of darkness, when he would tempt the Son of God, said, 'It is written', [Mt 4:6] but the Lord answered, 'It is written again' [Mt 4:7]. If then the Scriptures be appealed to, take care. Compare Scripture with Scripture and you will soon discover the enemy.

"True prophets do not propose themselves as teachers, or force themselves on people, but they are regularly called by the Christian congregation. Now if you hear a preacher appeal to his office, which God has commanded him to administer, you shall of course not reject this office, for that remains powerful and valid, even if a Pharisee or Sadducee administer it. But do not let yourself be deceived by it. Take care that the office of the preacher be not sheep's clothing. The call can be right and yet the teaching can be wrong. If those who are rightfully called become wolves, Christ bids us flee from them.

"True prophets shall lead a godly life. They shall be examples to the flock. If you see a preacher, who is friendly to all, pleasant to those who offend him, charitable to the poor, helpful to the unfortunate, zealous in his office and calling, honorable in his life, unselfish in his endeavors, then certainly you should not reject all this. But take care, that this be not merely sheep's clothing. A teacher's life can be blameless before men, the while his teaching is ruinous. But what good will his hypocritical life do, if his preaching lead you away from the simplicity in Christ? Alas, innumerable inexperienced persons, beholding an appearance of holiness, zeal, love and humility, are at once thoroughly convinced that there the doctrine must also be true and Christian. They behold the beautiful sheep's clothing, deliver themselves to the world hidden under it, and thus permit their souls to be torn asunder and destroyed.

"True prophets, finally, are often equipped by God with great spiritual gifts. You may hear a preacher who has great glittering gifts. His discourse moves the hardest hearts. He enthralls the most sluggish dispositions and moves them to great zeal in pious practices. With fascinating oratory he can move souls to tears, or he shows a deep insight in the system of Christian doctrine. He can lift up the depressed, comfort the sorrowful, and with striking arguments meet the unbeliever. If you see this you must not let yourself be deceived by it. Also false prophets are often in possession of great natural gifts. Take care that this be not sheep's clothing to deceive you.

"You see that though the appearance of God's Word, the office and call, the holiness of life, and finally the fruits of the Spirit be ever so impressive, yet Christians are not to let themselves be deceived thereby. 'Beware,' Christ says, 'of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.' But he adds, 'Ye shall know them by their fruits.' This suggests the fourth matter which we should take up in considering the judgment of the sheep over the shepherd, namely that they must above all look for the proper fruit.

"4. That they must above all look for the proper fruits.

"With these words Christ would certainly seem to teach that the true prophets are to be recognized by their good deeds, but this only seems to be so. When Christ in our Gospel speaks of fruits which a teacher shall bear, then these are not first and foremost the fruits of life, but the fruits of doctrine. If a teacher does not bear the fruit of pure teaching, he is a false prophet, though he be a Paul or an angel from heaven. No one is sent by God except he who proclaims his dear son, Jesus Christ, as the only way of salvation for poor sinners. For it is the heavenly Father's will 'that everyone which seeth the Son and believeth on him, may have everlasting life.' [John 6:40] And St. John says, [1 Jn 4:3] 'Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God; and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God.' He is a true prophet, who as a called teacher obeys this command of God to proclaim his dear Son plainly before the world and lay this foundation correctly, for 'To him give all the prophets witness, that through His name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.' But where souls are not helped by the plain preaching of Christ, there are false prophets, though they be ever so wise, and ever so gifted and ever so holy. For Christ says, 'Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name have cast our devils? And in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.' [Matthew 7:22, 23] Where false prophets have arisen, there has always been this deficiency. They have not proclaimed Christ alone, who of God is made our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. But where this article has been kept pure, there all soul destroying errors have had to depart as the mists before the sun. When

you learn from a teacher's sermons how you can come to Christ, how you can abide with Christ, suffer with Him and die a blessed death through Him, then you have a true prophet. For if you find Christ, you find enough. If you have Him, you have everything.

"A pious life without pure teaching does not make of a preacher a true prophet. But on the other hand, the godly life of an orthodox preacher is a most glorious confirmation and adornment of the pure doctrine. The good works of a false preacher are like the short-lived blossoms on thorn bushes. But the good works of an orthodox teacher are the good fruits of a good tree. For, 'A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.'" [Matthew 7:18]

"Where the pure doctrine is preached, there certainly most hearers do not take it to heart. But at least some few will become fruitful trees of righteousness and bear the fruits of the Spirit, which are 'love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.' [Gal. 5: 22,23] Where false prophets rule, there they certainly also often show one another much love, but it is a sectarian love. They love only those who belong to their party. But where God's love is shed abroad in men's hearts by the true gospel, there men love as their brethren all those who love Jesus Christ, and they love as their fellow-redeemed all men, including the wayward and the fallen.

"Conclusion

"Now then, my precious brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus, 'Beware of false prophets which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits.' [Mt 7:15, 16]

"AMEN"

The author of this message, Dr. C. F. W. Walther, was the first president of the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod and of the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America. He was a towering theologian and for many years professor and president of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. Concordia Cyclopedia refers to him as the "most commanding figure in the Lutheran Church of America during the nineteenth century: and as being the author of numerous theological books and articles, "enough to make a full sized 'five foot bookshelf".

1 John 4: 4 Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world. 5. They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them. 6. We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.

Watch for Part III of this topic in a future column which will offer reflections and comments on Walther's sermon. Additional source material will appear as well.

Sola Scriptura

THE SHEEP JUDGE THEIR SHEPHERDS: PART III

"Since the sheep are to be the judges of their shepherds, you see that each Christian is hereby seriously admonished to search daily in the Scriptures, so that he can separate the true from the false and gold and silver from hay, straw, and stubble."

What does this mean? [I take this from Luther's Small Catechism. He asks this in each of his explanations of The Ten Commandments and The Lord's Prayer. I'm sure he would not object!]. Here it means, first, that from the Scriptures we ourselves learn which is true from which is false teaching of what the Scriptures actually say and, second, that we discern for ourselves what is commanded or forbidden by God. This latter concerns as well that which is neither commanded

nor forbidden by God and thus is *Adiaphora*, meaning unimportant. It would include such non-issues as whether or not the aisle must be carpeted, or if the carpet fibres must be natural (wool) or may be synthetic. The list can be endless. It is amazing and most disquieting that such *adiaphora* can be a cause and basis for "Judge Their Shepherds"!

Now, how about the frequently taken position that "We must not be judgmental" citing Matthew 7:1 Judge not, that ye be not judged. 2 For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. My Defenders Study Bible (KJV) has this commentary on Mt. 7:1, in part: "On the other hand, He has commanded us to 'judge righteous judgement' (John 7:24). We should be able to recognize false teachers and 'from such turn away'....In other words [where have we heard this before?], we should be able to judge that which is wrong, in either doctrine or practice, and avoid (or correct) those who are involved,..." John 7:24 Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment.

What does this mean? We must be extremely careful in proceeding to "judge". There must be witnesses and evidence, and there must be a determination that these are both credible and sufficient. Then a defense must be heard. This is "due process" by which rule we are bound. C.F.W. Walther's emphasis on the primacy of the 'local congregation' was not intended to empower the lay voter's assembly against its pastor, but to empower the voters and their pastor, who together constitute the 'local congregation,' against the district president. As is well known, Walther's decentralized polity was a defense against any form of *Stephanism*, i.e., the autocratic power of the synod or district president."

It should be obvious by now that we as Christians are to judge teaching, and that only according to Scripture and the Confessions, this latter containing Luther's Small Catechism. We are not to judge matters *adiaphoria*. That is certainly not to say we should merely acquiesce in such matters which sometimes are things desirable (or not) as found in 1 Cor. 14:40 Let all things be done decently and in order.

I have presented the above excerpt from Dr. Walther's sermon as a sort of refresher. Readers will recall that he had a great deal to say along this line. Now I need to state my conclusion from all of what Walther had to say and from what else I have learned. Let me start by quoting him again, in part:

"Human wisdom is foolishness to God. Human righteousness is to Him sin. If a learned man would enter heaven, he must climb down from the heights of his human wisdom and become a child. For God reveals His mysteries only to the babes who humbly acknowledge their natural blindness and darkness."

"But above all it is noteworthy that St. Paul writes to the Corinthians whom he had several years before brought to the faith, [1 Cor. 10:15] I speak as to wise men, judge ye what I say. You see then, my dear ones, God does not desire that you shall, without testing, receive either a human book, or a human lecture, or a human resolution, or instruction.. You shall let no man rule over your conscience. [Mt. 23:8,10] 'One is your master, even Christ.' Such matters are not to be decided by majorities. At the famous ecumenical church meeting at Nicea, there were three hundred eighteen orthodox bishops gathered from the whole world. One only, and he a bachelor by the name of Paphnutius, arose against all, showed from God's Word the propriety of the marriage of the clergy, and because of this one voice, all three hundred seventeen bishops withdrew their vote and the one vote prevailed." There was one reason for this surprising outcome: It is evident that everyone present relied upon "The Scriptures of the Old and the New Testament as the written Word of God and the only rule and norm of faith and of practice." [Article II, LC-MS Constitution]

Now, having seen the above and having read the two previous columns I pose a very strange question: Just who are to Judge Their Shepherds? Your answer is probably: "What a dumb question! Haven't you already told us that The Sheep Judge Their Shepherds?" Well, the answer is even dumber than the question. Why? Because The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod has effectively disavowed and discarded C.F.W. Walther's stand and that of the Book of Concord which is an exposition of the Scriptures. Please read again the last two sentences of the paragraph above. Our synod in convention has by means of changes to bylaws (and in other ways) over many years taken away the congregations' right to self-government stated so clearly and plainly in Article VIII of the LC-MS Constitution.

What does this mean? Synod Constitution Article II requires that the Synod and every member of the Synod accept without reservation 1. The Scriptures as...the only rule and norm of faith and of practice; and 2. All the Symbolical Books...(the Book of Concord). Therefore, each delegate, pastor and layman, is under this same constraint as is each officer, commission member, district president and circuit counselor--each is a pastor. Does this mean that apparently

many have confused "gold and silver" with "hay, straw, and stubble"? Is it more likely that convention delegates have been insufficiently prepared to address the issues raised at conventions? Being unprepared is not too often the fault of the delegate, considering the complexity of the overtures brought to the convention floor. Delegate selection is doubtless a strong factor. The primary cause has really been the nature and purpose of overtures and reports presented at the convention, many of which have for the "good" of Our Synod rather than The Church

Dr. Walther has certainly made quite clear the propensity which the natural man, even a churchman, has for seeking man's way rather than the way God has shown through His Word in Holy Scripture. The reason for the title of this column appearing the way it does, THE CHURCH, OUR SYNOD, is to stress that the first is of God whereas the second is of Man. I'm afraid that over the one hundred fifty-one year history of Our Synod we have too often ignored the distinction. This has resulted in institutionalism.

What does this mean? It means that, although usually (or at least often) the intentions may have been to support the work of The Church, actions taken by the Synod in Convention have too frequently been to support The Institution. This movement toward ever-increasing centralization did not start just a few years ago or even earlier in this century. It began in 1854, only seven years after the formation of our synod! This is described in an excellent and most informative essay, MINISTRY IN MISSOURI, by Rev. John C. Wohlrabe, Jr., Th.D., in which he describes the creation of the office of district president at the synod convention in 1854 "when the church body divided itself into districts for administrative purposes. At this time, district presidents received virtually all of the rights and duties which were originally held by the synodical president. This included the authorization to ordain and install and the power temporarily to suspend."

An essay presented to a Lutheran Free Conference by Rev. Martin R. Noland, Ph.D. titled: DISTRICT PRESIDENTS AND THEIR COUNCIL: BIBLICAL AND CONFSSIONAL LIMITATIONS, is quite enlightening. He states: "The essence of decentralized polity is the explicit and strict limitations that are placed on bishops and judicatories, or their synodical and district equivalents, so that local pastors and congregations have the freedom to govern their own affairs. This essence has been preserved in the Missouri Synod's Constitution Article VII, although it has admittedly suffered encroachment since the 1970s.

"Why should decentralized polity have such a profound influence on the growth and health of denominations? Common sense argues that a centralized organization is the best form of polity, since a top-down approach provides both uniformity and maximum efficiency in managing cooperative efforts. However a centralized structure is more vulnerable to hostile takeover than a decentralized one.

"...I believe that the decentralized polity of the Missouri Synod thwarted a hostile takeover by Liberal Protestants in the twentieth century. There was no single center that the liberals could dominate at any one time to control the rest of the synod. The survival of Biblical and confessional theology in the Missouri Synod was chiefly a result of its decentralized polity, not of any particular virtues in its membership or even its theology."

"In Missouri Synod polity, the powers of supervision and inspection [visitation] are chiefly vested in the district presidents. Like regional supervisors in other churches, the district president relates primarily to congregations and their pastors. [I disagree here. Distr. presidents do relate to each other to a very large extent, through the Council of Presidents.] Other church officials relate primarily to each other. Thus the degree to which the district president controls the congregation and its pastor is the degree to which the denomination is centralized." [Emphasis added]

"The intent of this thesis is not to invent a new polity, but to restore and preserve the original polity of the Missouri Synod. C. F. W. Walther's emphasis on the primacy of the 'local congregation' was not intended to empower the lay voter's assembly against its pastor, but to empower the voters and their pastor, who together constitute the 'local congregation,' against the district president. As is well known, Walther's decentralized polity was a defense against any form of Stephanism, i.e., the autocratic power of the synod or district president."

"Among C. F. W. Walther's treatises, the one which most thoroughly treated the office of Visitor was his 1879 Iowa District Convention essay Duties of an Evangelical Lutheran Synod. In that essay, Walther gave four purposes for the office of Visitor, which he patterned after the Reformation office of Visitor. First, the Visitor is to maintain the unity of faith and confession. Second, the Visitor is supposed to protect the congregations from church-workers who are heretical, dissolute, or tyrannical. Third, the Visitor is supposed to defend church-workers against unjust treatment by

congregations. Fourth, the Visitor is to advise and counsel, but not dictate any matter which the Word of God has not expressly commanded or prohibited."

"In the same way, local congregations and pastors naturally deteriorate spiritually over time. The Visitor's job is to find items of potential danger so that they can be fixed. This is based on a written standard known as "Instructions." When a church-worker becomes an immediate danger to a congregation, or vice versa, the Visitor has the authority to suspend or remove to protect spiritual lives. Of course, the Visitor cannot suspend or remove anyone he pleases, but must use "immediate danger" as a rule of thumb. The Visitor may make other recommendations that are only advisory in nature.

"IV. Biblical and Confessional Limits of the Office of Supervisor

"Do the Scriptures permit any church supervisor to exercise authority over the local congregation or the local pastor? The Biblical testimony is that all pastors are equal by divine institution. In Luke 22:24-26, Jesus said:

The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather let the greatest among you become as the youngest and the leader as one who serves.

"In I Corinthians 3:5-9, St. Paul argues that all ministers are servants of equal rank:

What then is Apollos? What then is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. . . . He who plants and he who waters are equal, and each shall receive his wages according to his labor. For we are God's fellow workers.

"In I Corinthians 3:21-4:1, St. Paul argues that all congregations are equal because all have the same mandate and sacramental mysteries:

Let no one boast of men. For all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future, all are yours and you are Christ's and Christ is God's. This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.

"Thus Christ designed the church to have a decentralized polity, especially so that the orthodox faith would endure against attempts at hostile takeover."

"The most important document in the Lutheran confessions on the authority of church supervisors is the 'Treatise on the Power and the Primacy of the Pope.' The Treatise uses the Biblical passages noted above, and others, to demonstrate that all pastors are equal (§§ 7-11). This is the reason that the Treatise can justify ordination by 'mere' parish pastors in the place of bishops (§§ 65)

The Treatise gives some specific reasons why errant church supervisors should be opposed:

It is the wickedness and tyranny of bishops that give occasion to schism and discord, for Paul commands that bishops who teach and defend impious doctrines and impious forms of worship should be regarded as anathema (§§ 72).

"Anathema" means "cursed by God." Notice that the supervisors do not need to actively promote false doctrine and false worship. If they simply defend false doctrine and false worship, by refusing to protect congregations against heretics, then they are anathema. Notice too that impious worship is just as dangerous as impious doctrine.

The Treatise gives one more reason for opposing errant church supervisors (§§ 80-82):

[The bishops] themselves should remember that riches have been given to bishops as alms for the administration and profit of the churches, as the rule states, "The benefice is given because of the office." Wherefore they cannot possess these alms with a good conscience. Meanwhile they defraud the church, which needs these means for the support of ministers, the promotion of education, the care of the poor, and the establishment of courts . . . Peter predicted that there would be wicked bishops in the future who would consume the alms of the churches for luxuries and would neglect the ministry. Let those who defraud the church know that God will require them to pay for their crimes.

The Reformers thus understood that alms were not to be wasted on the constant growth of an ecclesiastical career

machine.

"The idea of limiting the bishops is expressed most clearly in the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, XXVIII, §§14:

A bishop does not have the power of a tyrant to act without a definite law, nor that of a king to act above the law. But he has a definite command, a definite Word of God, which he ought to teach and according to which he ought to exercise his jurisdiction. . . . [The bishops] have the Word, they have the command about when they should exercise their jurisdiction, namely, when anyone does something contrary to that Word which they have received from Christ.

Here it is quite clear that no church-worker or congregation can be disciplined or removed unless it has been proven that they have violated the New Testament. According to the Confessions, no one can be removed or disciplined merely because they failed to follow synodical bylaws. Any supervisor that would discipline or remove a worker or congregation just because a bylaw has been broken would be considered a Romanist and papist by the Lutheran Confessions.

"The other side of this passage in the Apology revolves around the term "definite command." This means that a church supervisor does not have the option of ignoring impious doctrine and impious worship. He is commanded to visit, inspect, and root out all sources of heresy without partiality, based on the book we all have in common, the Holy Scriptures.

"A fine summary of this subject in the confessions is found in Smalcald Articles, Part II, article iv, §§9. Luther writes:

The church cannot be better governed and maintained than by having all of us live under one head, Christ, and by having all the bishops equal in office (however they may differ in gifts) and diligently joined together in unity of doctrine, faith, sacraments, prayer, works of love, etc. So St. Jerome writes that the priests of Alexandria governed the churches together and in common. The apostles did the same, and after them all the bishops throughout Christendom, until the pope raised his head over them all."

"Another change in the Missouri Synod has been the abolition of due process in cases of restriction and suspension, which dates back to both the 1965 and 1986 conventions. Combined with the 1992 revision of the judicatory structure, district presidents now have unrestricted power to remove from the Synod whomever they please under the category of 'offensive conduct.' Restriction, suspension, and dispute resolution have specifically been designed to overrule judicatory decisions by the local congregation.

"George Wollenburg has noted how the district president exerts extraordinary influence over the church-workers on the District Board of Directors, because the president controls the call process that affects their careers. This means that the selection of judicatory reconcilers by that Board can easily be manipulated so that only the district president's buddies are appointed. Thus anyone whom the district president doesn't like will be sure to lose his case in church court. This is not 'justice.' This is papacy masquerading as 'reconciliation.'"

In another essay by Rev. Noland, titled LAW AND DUE PROCESS, offers the following:

"III. Innocent Until Proven Guilty"

"Under our current bylaws, a District President may restrict or suspend anyone that they please, for any reason that they please, without due process." [1995 Handbook Bylaws 2.21 to 2.25]

"Restriction" has been defined as a punishment which completely circumvents the judicial process found in the bylaws. Any church-worker who is forced out of office or is between calls, and who is "restricted" by their District President, will not be able to get a job or call any place in the Synod. This punishment cannot be appealed, except to the oligarchs in the Council of Presidents, who can take their own sweet time, while the poor man has no money to support his family and no health insurance to keep them healthy.

"Suspension" has been defined as a punishment automatically inflicted upon anybody formally accused of any sort of "offensive conduct." It includes the penalties of "restriction," plus other penalties. Anybody employed through the synod or district will automatically lose their job when suspended, and will not be eligible for another call. The Praesidium,

consisting of the synodical president and vice-presidents, may override a District President and force a suspension. This means that the Praesidium has absolute and arbitrary powers of suspension over any church-worker in the Synod.

"Restricted and suspended status" can find no bases in the Scriptures or the Confessions. [In the old bylaws of the Missouri Synod, District Presidents were permitted to suspend a church-worker only after the verdict was announced by the District Board of Appeals, see LC-MS Handbook (1963), Bylaw 5.31] In this capacity, the presidents were acting as officers of the court. The Missouri Synod District Presidents gained real episcopal powers at the 1965 convention, which gave them the power of suspension, so that the accused could be "relieved of his rights as a member of the Synod and duties and responsibilities of office" before due process had determined guilt.

We are now into a companion aspect of The Sheep Judge Their Shepherds, Due Process, which, while having a direct bearing on this topic, is too large an issue to deal with here. Readers can see, though, how it is part of the problem.

Now, in summary: What does all of this mean? It means that Our Synod, that is Our Institution, has placed itself above THE CHURCH and, in complete disregard of Our Synod's constitution, has indeed usurped the God-given rights of congregations; first, to govern themselves; and second, to Judge Their Shepherds. Who, then are our shepherds? Are they only the pastors of congregations (flocks)? According to Scripture and the Confessions there is no higher office than pastor. The office of district president is of Man, not of God and his power and authority is therefore of Man, not of God. A district president's only true authority is that of Visitor, an office he seldom, if ever, performs and therefore a man in this office can be no less a Shepherd than a pastor. What then, a Shepherd who may not be Judged? Noland states above: "C. F. W. Walther's emphasis on the primacy of the 'local congregation' was not intended to empower the lay voter's assembly against its pastor, but to empower the voters and their pastor, who together constitute the 'local congregation,' against the district president. As is well known, Walther's decentralized polity was a defense against any form of Stephanism, i.e., the autocratic power of the synod or district president."

Where there used to be redress under Due Process, that avenue is virtually closed to congregations and pastors alike. Why is this? C.F.W. Walther provided the answer: "Now we ask, why does God permit His flock which is to be guarded by its shepherds, also to be attacked by wolves, who present themselves as shepherds that they may deceitfully capture the sheep and destroy them? God could prevent this. Why does He not do so? Two reasons especially are given by God's Word. God permits it partly to prove His children and partly to punish the unthankful hearers. St. Paul says to the Corinthians, [I Cor. 11:19] For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you."

"God often bestows upon the land or a church true teachers for a time. But then it often happens that they are despised and received ungratefully. Earthly treasures are esteemed more highly than the pure Word and sacrament. Men become ashamed before the world because of the pure doctrine. Nothing is done to maintain the orthodox ministry. God's Word is heard with a sleepy mind. Men learn to despise it. Finally God allows such unthankful disciples to lose the heavenly treasures, so that they who have despised the precious bread of the divine word, shall in retribution be fed with the worthless stones of man-made teaching. Thus St. Paul writes concerning the Christians in the last times [II Thess. 2:10], Because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. [II Thess. 2:11] And for this cause God shall send them strong delusions that they should believe a lie."

We must recognize that THE CHURCH which is of GOD is eternal whereas OUR SYNOD as an institution of Man is not

Soli Deo Gloria