

THE DILEMMA OF AN ORTHODOX LUTHERAN PASTOR IN A HETERODOX CHURCH BODY

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In order to understand the dilemma of an orthodox Lutheran pastor who holds membership in a heterodox Lutheran church body such as The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod, it is first necessary to understand the distinction between the Church proper and a human institution like a Synod. The Church finds its full expression (*de iure divino*) as a rightly called pastor and his congregation gather around the rightly taught Word of God and the properly administered Sacraments of Christ. Wherever this occurs, there is the true Church.

As Dr. Luther put it:

"The Church of Christ is nothing but the spiritual gathering of believers wherever they may be in the world; and whatever is of flesh and blood, that is, whatever is peculiar to a person, place, time, and to those matters which flesh and blood can put to use, does not belong to the Church of God."¹

Or as the Apology puts it:

"According to the Scriptures, we hold that the Church, properly called, is the congregation of saints who truly believe Christ's Gospel and have the Holy Spirit. We confess that in this life many hypocrites and wicked people are mixed in with these. They have the fellowship in outward signs, are member of the Church according to this fellowship in outward signs and so hold offices in the Church (preach, administer the Sacraments, and bear the title and name of Christians). However the fact that the Sacraments are administered by the unworthy does not detract from the Sacraments' power. Because of the call of the Church, the unworthy still represent the person of Christ and do not represent their own persons, as Christ testifies, 'The one who hears you hears Me' (Luke 10:16). (Even Judas was sent to preach.) When they offer God's Word, when they offer the Sacraments, they offer them in the stead and place of Christ. Those words of Christ teach us not to be offended by the unworthiness of the ministers."
(Ap. Article VII, 28, Dau/Bente)

A Synod is a humanly invented (*de iure humano*) corporate structure that is supposed to be comprised of congregations and pastors who hold in common all articles of Christian doctrine and their biblical practice. This unity of doctrine and practice is precisely what a Synod calls "Walking Together". When this unity in doctrine and practice actually exists, then there is no dilemma for the orthodox Lutheran pastor. All is well.

The dilemma for the orthodox Lutheran pastor comes about when his humanly invented church institution strays from the Word of God and either tolerates or condones those who do not rightly teach the Word of God or who do not rightly administer the Sacraments of Christ in accord with our Lord's institution or tolerates these errors while also tolerating those who are orthodox in their midst. Thus, while the human institution strays from the truth of God's Word, the local orthodox Lutheran pastor and congregation (the true Church), does not.

This sad and tragic situation within the LCMS has not come about overnight. Rather, error comes about in an orthodox Lutheran church body incrementally over time. What has happened to The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod is nothing new. In E. Clifford Nelson's book, *The Lutherans In North America*, there is a table of all the existing Lutheran church bodies that existed in this nation between 1840 and 1875. Nelson lists 58 such bodies.² Of those 58 church bodies only one remains today in the same form: The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod.

What does this mean? It means while Christ preserves and maintains His Church and not even the gates of hell can prevail against her, humanly invented church bodies come and go over time. They are passing political entities that, if faithful, may support Christ's Church, but are not the Church herself. I would submit that our Lord is currently preserving His Church within the LCMS in hundreds, if not thousands of local congregations in which a faithful, rightly called pastor and his flock remain steadfast in teaching the Word of God in all its truth and purity and administering the Sacraments in accord with Christ's institution.

While we can rejoice in this truth, it does not relieve the faithful pastor and his flock from the dilemma of abiding in what has become a heterodox churchly institution. We orthodox pastors and laymen within the LCMS understand with both pain and clarity that this is a situation which ought not exist. The reality of the dilemma is that orthodoxy and heterodoxy cannot live together, at least not indefinitely. Even when the orthodox remain tolerated within a heterodox Synod, the fellowship has been broken and while the myth of "walking together" may still be spoken about, it is not a reality within the LCMS today. This co-dwelling of truth and error is not and cannot be a permanent arrangement. Barring a true return to the orthodox faith by the rank and file of the heterodox wing of the LCMS (highly unlikely in my opinion), or their exit from the Synod, someone must finally leave the LCMS. Indeed, if orthodoxy and heterodoxy continue to have fellowship with one another indefinitely, then at some point the orthodox who remain become intentional unionists themselves however orthodox their own doctrine and practice may be.

Now If I were a member of WELS/ELS or the OLCC, the answer to the question respecting what an orthodox Lutheran pastor and congregation should do when it acknowledges that their Synod is, in fact, heterodox would be relatively straight forward:

According to the OLCC website:

"Church fellowship is to be broken as soon as it has been established that doctrinal unity

no longer exists, since it is not based on the subjective faith or repentance of individuals or churches, but on their objective unity in doctrine."³

The WELS would put it this way, but leaves a bit of "wiggle room":

"God directs believers not to practice religious fellowship with those whose confession and actions reveal that they teach, tolerate, support, or defend error (2 John 10,11). When error appears in the church, Christians will try to preserve their fellowship by patiently admonishing the offenders, in the hope that they will turn from their error (2 Timothy 2:25,26; Titus 3:10). But the Lord commands believers not to practice church fellowship with people who persist in teaching or adhering to beliefs that are false (Romans 16:17,18)."⁴

To be sure, this approach is also echoed by C.F.W. Walther who wrote in his 1870 essay to the Western District Convention entitled, "Communion Fellowship":

"Thesis IV - Everyone is obligated to avoid heterodox churches, and if one belongs to one like that, he is obligated to renounce it and leave it."⁵

Likewise Dr. Francis Pieper would also declare today's LCMS a heterodox church body:

"It is God's will and command that in His Church His Word be preached and believed in purity and truth, without adulteration...A congregation or church body which abides by God's order, in which therefore God's Word is taught in its purity and the Sacraments administered according to the divine institution, is properly called an orthodox church...But a congregation or church body which, in spite of the divine order, tolerates false doctrine in its midst is properly called a heterodox church...A church body loses its orthodoxy only when it no longer applies Rom. 16:17, hence does not combat and eventually remove the false doctrine, but tolerates it without reproof and thus actually grants it equal right with the truth."⁶

I understand that even the phrase, "An Orthodox Pastor in a Heterodox Synod" sounds to WELS/ELS and OLCC ears like a contradiction in terms. As I understand this viewpoint, no orthodox pastor would remain in a heterodox synod and if he does, then he is, by definition, heterodox himself. While this dilemma is certainly a theological inconsistency on the part of orthodox men in the LCMS, that does not negate the reality that orthodox Lutheran pastors and congregations within my church institution, are and remain manifestations of the true visible Church on earth because they teach the Word of God in all its truth and purity and administer the Sacraments in accord with Christ's institution. Martin Luther himself was an orthodox pastor in a heterodox church institution until he was excommunicated from Rome. Was the Great Reformer then heterodox prior to his removal from Rome because he yet remained a part of the Roman Catholic institution?

The WELS/ELS, and OLCC position begs a few questions that LCMS orthodox pastors truly

struggle with such as:

"As my brother's keeper, am I not obligated to attempt to show my brother his error in an effort to win my brother and restore my brother and my Synod to unity in doctrine and practice?"

"Since Scripture instructs us to be patient and long-suffering in dealing with an erring brother, how long must my efforts to correct my brother continue before concluding that further efforts are futile?"

"As an orthodox pastor serving an LCMS congregation whose rank and file members remain either convinced or confused that the Synod is a faithful church body, am I not obligated as their called pastor to catechize the members of my congregation respecting those errors before leaving the Synod together with them. If so, then this takes some time."

To be honest with you, however, there are also many within the LCMS who frankly have demonstrated that they love maintaining the political "peace" of the institution of the Synod itself more than they love the maintenance of pure doctrine. It is these voices within Missouri, (regardless of where they fall in the LCMS theological spectrum), that criticize any effort to point out error and correct it. Faithful pastors sounding the alarm on Zion's wall are labeled as "schismatic", "disturbers of the peace", "troublers of Israel", "liturgical nazi's", or my personal favorite, "Black snakes in the bedroom that need to be thrown out of the house."

Additionally, LCMS Synodical leadership has a rather long history of treating the concerns of the orthodox with silence and indifference regardless of the theological leanings of those who occupy the Synodical presidency. From the 1945 issuance of the misguided ecumenism of the "Statement of the 44" within the LCMS up to the promotion or defense of one of our current St. Louis seminary professors of the so-called "Plastic Text" of Holy Scripture, the voices of objection arising within Missouri have been met with silence from the Synodical bureaucracy. From my personal perspective, it is this resistance to address error under the Word of God and our Lutheran Confessions that is the most damning aspect of life in a heterodox Missouri Synod. Since the Statement of the 44 in 1945 the Synod has yet to reject and condemn the errors contained in that document. After 71 years of inaction, is there really any hope that even these errors will be condemned? I think not.

Moreover, while the LCMS did take decisive action in the 1970's respecting the upholding of the veracity of Holy Scriptures against the faculty majority of our St. Louis seminary, those who publicly supported and continue to support the higher-critical method of biblical interpretation remain within our Synod to this day. Likewise, those who publicly support and advocate for the ordination of women into the pastoral office within Missouri have yet to be removed, with the exception of Rev. Dr. Matthew Becker who was actually removed due to his unbiblical interpretation of Genesis 1-3 and his corresponding support of evolution as a legitimate way of explaining God's creative work. Again, the objections to the infamous

participation in an interfaith worship service at Yankee Stadium by Atlantic District President David Benke still has the blessing of the Synod's Dispute Resolution Process and has yet to be condemned by the Synod.

At some point, either already passed or about to be passed what Dr. Hermann Sasse calls the "Institutional Lie" is, or will soon become, a reality in the LCMS:

"Among the lies which destroy the church there is one we have not yet mentioned. Alongside the pious and dogmatic lies, there stands an especially dangerous form of lie which can be called the *institutional* lie. By this we mean a lie which works itself out in the institutions of the church, in her government and her law [*Recht*]. It is so dangerous because it legalizes the other lies in the church and makes them impossible to remove. Such a lie exists, for instance, where the governance of the church grants to those who confess and those who deny the Trinity and the two natures in Christ [*Gottmenscheit Jesu*] the same legitimacy. It exists where the preaching of the Gospel according to the understanding of the Reformation enjoys the same right as the proclamation of a dogmaless Enlightenment religion, so long as the latter only appeals to the Bible. It exists where it is the rule that at a church with two pastoral positions one must be filled with a pastor of the 'free' bent, so the 'liberals' in the congregation do not have to go to another congregation with an 'orthodox' pastor.

Such canon law...makes it completely impossible to distinguish between truth and error, between true and false doctrine. A church so composed can no longer see that the Gospel is plainly and purely preached and heresy opposed. It must protect open heretics when the 'orthodox' side denies that they possess an equal legitimacy in the church. The congregations of such a church, the youth who are educated in it, the people to whom it attempts to preach the truth of the Gospel must come to the conviction that it simply does not matter much what one believes or does not believe. Since what is to be believed or not believed in the sermon is left up to the individual, his inclinations and aversions, his worldview and soon also his faithlessness will become the norm for the proclamation in the church. In place of the objective message of that which God has done in Christ, subjective religious feelings and convictions soon form the essential content of the sermon. Thus, the church sinks to the level of an institution for the satisfaction of the manifold religious needs of the people and ceases to be the church of Christ, the pillar and foundation of the truth...But the moment the falling away of the church from the Gospel finds its expression also in church law and thus is legitimized, the entire awfulness of what we have called the institutional lie applies. For this lie makes the return to the truth as good as impossible.

A church can fall into terrible dogmatic error, it can open door after door to heresy by tolerating it and doing nothing about it...But if it has solemnly acknowledged the right of heresy in its midst, then heresy itself has become an organic component of the church concerned. It can then no longer fight against heresy, and the burning struggle against false doctrine in its midst would be an entirely illegal fight of one wing of this church

against another.⁷

Can it be honestly contended at this point in Missouri's history that women's suffrage (which we insisted for the first 122 years of our history was against the Word of God), be corrected in the LCMS after 47 years of drinking the feminist "Kool Aid"? Has not this issue achieved the status within the LCMS of a new "orthodoxy" when district constitution committees will not allow biblical texts to be used in congregational constitutions to deny women the franchise at voter's assemblies, deny them the opportunity to serve as Elders, congregational presidents and vice presidents, or permit them to read the lessons in public worship or assist with the distribution of the Lord's Supper at the communion rail?

If the honest concerns and objections of members of the LCMS are subjected to nothing but silence and indifference, then the institution itself has become corrupt and no longer appears to be willing to correct itself or even to engage in broad-based dialog regarding the real issues of doctrine and practice that divide it. It must be acknowledged that this situation in which heterodoxy and orthodoxy co-habit cannot go on indefinitely.

This situation was precisely why I took on the challenge to gather together a group of orthodox Lutheran people within the LCMS to attempt to garner the attention of my own church body so as to bring about the acknowledgement and correction of the errors of doctrine and practice that divide our Synod. These efforts culminated in the formation of the Association of Confessing Evangelical Lutheran Congregations (ACELC), at its convening conference in 2011, in Kearney, Missouri. It was the intention of those forming this association that this was to be a last-ditch effort to bring about the identification of errors, a discussion of these errors, and the resolution of the errors under the Word of God and our Lutheran Confessions. It was understood by the Steering Committee forming the ACELC that our efforts could well result in our expulsion from the LCMS (especially under the administration of then President Gerald Kieschnick.) Thus far, none of us have gotten the boot, primarily (in my opinion) because of the election of Matthew Harrison as Synodical President in 2010. Additionally, none of our identified errors have been acknowledged, discussed, or resolved except for the violation of Augustana XIV by Licensed Lay Deacons and a slight improvement in ecclesiastical supervision at last month's convention.

To be sure, many efforts had preceded those of the ACELC. Christian News, The Lutheran Concerns Association, the Consensus group, the Northern Illinois Confessional Lutherans (NICL), the Faithful Alliance, and others have all done their best to bring about orthodox change in our heterodox Synod. Confessional Lutheran websites like the Brothers of John the Steadfast and Lutherquest have also added their voices to the effort for a restored orthodoxy in the LCMS.

The formation of the ACELC is, however, somewhat unique from those preceding it. The prior organizations have been organizations of individual pastors and laymen. The Synodical administration has clearly demonstrated over time that it was unwilling to address the concerns of individuals. Thus, the ACELC membership is limited to congregations and their pastors, and it is as a group of member congregations of the Synod (true manifestations of the Church) that are

trying to address concerns to our own Synod. This fact caused more than a bit of consternation among the Council of Presidents of the LCMS.

Has the election of a more Confessional Synodical President resulted in getting a better hearing for the identified 10 errors of the ACELC? At first there was a brief glimmer of hope. Not long after the ACELC issued its "Letter of Fraternal Admonition" in July, 2010, the newly elected First Vice President of the LCMS, Rev. Dr. Herbert Mueller, sent me an email requesting a meeting between representatives of the ACELC Steering Committee and representatives of the Council of Presidents in St. Louis. We quickly agreed. This first meeting lead to nearly 16 hours of discussion with 1st VP Herb Mueller, Missouri District President Ray Mirly, and Nebraska District President Russ Summerfeld. To my knowledge this was the first time that such a discussion had taken place within the LCMS regarding doctrinal concerns of her member congregations. It turned out to be rather short-lived.

At first the meetings were productive and brotherly, but soon it became clear that the overwhelming goal of the COP was simply to make the ACELC disappear. We were to be "folded into the Koinonia Project" (which after 6 years had not progressed passed the "pilot project stage" but was approved at the Milwaukee convention to begin on a Synod-wide basis). They wanted us to utilize the appointed avenues of redress like the corrupt Dispute Resolution Process and bureaucratic dead end known as the Dissent Process. These processes are part of the problem in resolving matters under the Word of God and our Lutheran Confessions, not part of the solution. It should be pointed out that the Koinonia Project is itself outside of the Synodically appointed avenues of redress, but it didn't stop the COP from insisting that the ACELC make use of them even if it is acknowledged that the Synod itself can't seem to use them to resolve our differences. In retrospect it is my opinion that the moment the ACELC took leaving the Synod off the table, the interest in dialog with the leadership of the Synod ceased to exist.

Over the six years of concerted effort by the ACELC, leadership has changed and so has its goals. At our most recent conference in Nashville, Tennessee this last April, the goal of the ACELC became one of incessant confession regardless of whether or not there will be a response from the LCMS. Gone is the idea of being a last ditch effort to encourage correction of error prior to leaving the Synod. Proposed intermediate efforts to garner the attention of our Synod by declaring a formal "Mark and Avoid" fellowship practice by ACELC member congregations to pick and choose where to worship and commune within the LCMS failed to gain support, even though it is the common practice among us. A declaration of a true *In Statu Confessionis* by ACELC congregations will not even be discussed. The ACELC conference made it very clear that regardless of a lack of response from the LCMS leadership, the ACELC will simply continue to confess truth to error. While confessing truth to error is a laudable thing, unless and until the ACELC is willing to put their Synodical membership on the line, the LCMS will simply not give them a hearing. In my opinion, the work of the ACELC has become an exercise in futility. It seems that the collective voice of one half of one percent of LCMS congregations (31) belonging to the ACELC is not a significant enough voice to be heard among 6,105 LCMS congregations.

Part of the frustration accompanying this dilemma resides in a generational problem. Virtually every new crop of seminary graduates from our Fort Wayne seminary wants their own crack at "saving" the Synod. After beating their heads against the Synodical brick wall for a few decades the reality of the situation finally settles in only to have another group of young seminarians insisting that they have their chance to "fix" things. Thus the matter never seems to come to a head, and we do not seem capable of learning from the past attempts of others.

An additional issue is one of geography. Please permit a personal example here. I am a retired pastor and thus I do not lead a congregation. I am blessed to live in a beautiful, but isolated community in southwest Colorado. I live 100 miles from the closest Sam's Club, 50 miles from the closest full-service hospital, a five hour drive from Denver, I am 161 miles from the closest Interstate Highway, and 3:40 minutes from Albuquerque, NM. I am also blessed to attend an LCMS congregation served by an orthodox Lutheran pastor who rightly proclaims the Word of God and rightly administers the Sacraments. If I wanted to leave the LCMS and join the closest ELS congregation, that would be a nine hour drive away in Phoenix. The closest WELS congregation is 100 miles away, and the closest OLCC congregation would be here in Sioux Falls, nearly 1,000 miles away.

Theological concerns aside, why would I do that? Would I hear the Word of God preached more purely than I do now? No. Would my participation at the altar be a better expression of true unity in all articles of the Christian faith? Perhaps, but that would only be true because lots of folks vacation in our community and we get the occasional LCMS visitor from non-orthodox LCMS congregations who think they have a right to a place at our Lord's altar because they too are LCMS. Generally, the progressive wing of the LCMS also practices a "selective fellowship" so as to ensure that they worship and commune only with those who agree with "Progressive Missouri." For me and my wife there simply is no realistic alternative congregation to join, and I trust my orthodox Lutheran pastor to do the right thing as best he can as an orthodox pastor in a heterodox church body. That said, like many orthodox pastors and congregations in the LCMS we must find an alternative standard for admission to the Lord's Table other than Synodical membership.

Is that a perfect situation? No. Life in a heterodox church body is intrinsically untidy but both my pastor and I are doing the very best we can with the situation with which we must live. Do I wish that there might be a better alternative available? Of course I do, but there isn't - at least not at this time.

The tri-annual Synodical convention that was held in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, on July 9th - 14th. With each passing triennium the orthodox hope is that there will be positive, orthodox change that will occur with the LCMS. Sometimes we get it, and sometimes we don't.

One of the things that continues to keep orthodox Lutheran pastors in a heterodox Lutheran church body is that from time-to-time the Synod does do something right. This time around that something is the Synod's long-standing error of permitting unordained laymen to perform Word and Sacrament ministry in congregations in violation of Augustana XIV has been

corrected or will be by 2018. Also ecclesiastical supervision authority has been improved so that the Synod's Praesidium is empowered to consider appeals by members of the Synod that could by-pass uncooperative District Presidents when the ability to bring charges of false doctrine or unbiblical practice is denied them. Because these things have been done, that would signal a move toward a more orthodox way of operating as a churchly human institution, at least in those particular areas of concern. Such a move would encourage more orthodox men to remain for a while longer in their errant Synod. The hope of many an orthodox Lutheran pastor in the LCMS is that this trend of doing things right and correcting the errors of the Synod will continue. This hope is, of course, subject to the political whims of the tri-annual convention. It is also subject to who gets elected President of the Synod every three years.

It is interesting that the theme for this summer's convention was, "Upon This Rock: Repent, Confess, Rejoice". President Harrison has often said (echoing the first of Luther's Ninety-Five Theses) that the Synod's first order of business is to repent. Unfortunately, in the resolutions adopted to right past errors, there is no language of repentance. Instead, it is the Synod's practice to simply move on from error, rather than to repent of them and then do the right thing. We really ought to admit that we've been wrong when we have been! Incremental improvement is no substitute for repentance.

Issues remaining to be resolved in the LCMS are:

1. The wide-spread practice of open communion among LCMS congregations.
2. The lack of uniformity in worship forms, the abandonment of historic liturgies, and the wide-spread adoption of so-called "contemporary worship" within the Synod.
3. The on-going confusion respecting involvement in unionistic and syncretistic worship.
4. The continuing confusion and out-right error respecting the role of women in the life of the congregation (inclusive of women's suffrage) and the lack of discipline for those in the LCMS openly supporting the ordination of women to the pastoral office.
5. The on-going confusion respecting the divine call of pastors and their unbiblical removal from the congregation at times aided and abetted by district presidents.
6. The abandonment of proper ecclesiastical supervision in many LCMS districts.
7. Convoluted and malfunctioning procedures for the resolution of disputes within the Synod resulting in man-made Bylaws having precedence over the clear Word of God.
8. The lack of discipline respecting the latest version of historical-critical Biblical interpretation by Rev. Dr. Jeffrey Kloha and his "Plastic Text" at the St. Louis Seminary.

Obviously, we have a long road ahead to restore to our a legitimate claim to be described truthfully as an orthodox Lutheran church body.

One thing is absolutely certain. Despite some seeming return to orthodox theology and

practice at our recently concluded convention, it must be understood that orthodoxy is not merely correct words in resolutions. Orthodoxy must finally remove the unrepentant supporters of heterodoxy from the Synod or it simply cannot rightly apply the term "orthodox" to itself. Absent repentance by our errorists, someone simply must leave our Synod.

As always there remains a fond, if unlikely hope, that the Church Growth, Plastic Text, and Missional factions of the "Progressive" LCMS that drives so much of our false doctrine and unbiblical practice, will just get fed up with us stodgy, ultra-orthodox, liturgical nazi, black snakes in the bedroom, and just leave the LCMS themselves and live happily ever after in their own ELCA-lite Synod unhindered by the burden of the historic liturgies, pure doctrine and biblical practice. Unfortunately, the provisions of the Concordia Health Plan and the Concordia Retirement Plan mitigate against such a circumstance just as they hinder orthodox, Confessional men from leaving the Synod for other surroundings.

All of us in the LCMS know that the efforts by President Harrison to move the Synod in a more orthodox direction can evaporate like a mud puddle on a hot summer's day if he does not continue to be re-elected. Harrison's well-intended but fatally flawed Koinonia Project to heal the wounds of error within the LCMS could evaporate as quickly as did President Kieschnick's *Ablaze!* movement if Harrison does not continue in office. For now, it looks like the current direction toward incremental orthodox advances is likely for the next three years since he was re-elected for another three year term, but who knows what the future will bring?

What the LCMS desperately needs, in my opinion, is a division of the house. I was probably one of the few orthodox men in the Synod who was actually a bit disappointed when Matt Harrison was first elected. Why? Because his election has basically only delayed what seems to be the inevitable division of the house that is sorely needed in Missouri. It is my opinion that the election of Matt Harrison has prolonged the life of the LCMS as an orthodox/heterodox Lutheran church body for about a generation at best. My overall opinion, however, was that the Synod is essentially lost as an orthodox Lutheran institution. It is painful watching a once faithful Synod in its death throws. I pray that I am wrong, but I fear that I am not.

I hope that I have accurately painted the portrait of the dilemma of an orthodox Lutheran pastor in a heterodox church body. It isn't a pretty picture. Life in the Church Militant rarely is. That said, our Lord Jesus Christ is preserving His Church within our heterodox church body despite the errors of the institution. The Lord does not bless our errors, but He does bless the faithful pastors and laymen in Missouri who gather around His purely taught Word and His rightly administered Sacraments. So it has always been.

If I were to risk being a prophet, I would like to point to a shining future of resplendent orthodoxy at the end of Missouri's struggles, but we don't always get what we want and I would likely end up being a false prophet. According to Scripture the Church of the End Times does not appear to the world as resplendent, grand, or even successful. Another Lutheran pastor of another time wrote:

"However, the words of [Rev. 3:10] nevertheless contain a serious truth, namely the Church of the Reformation will have to pass through the fiery trial of the last great temptation, a temptation which consists of a general falling away from faith. And this falling away will take place in particular in the Church of the Reformation, that church which has the word of "His patience," namely that word of the cross, that pure Gospel.

At that time the true Church of the Reformation, which is called the Lutheran Church, will be but a small body. Large masses will bear the name Lutheran, but in name only; namely, there will be a great deal of talk about Luther and his works ... yet Luther's spirit and interpretation, his faithfulness to the Truth, his zeal to retain God's honor only, his courage to confess this, these will not exist or be known, yes, there will be no desire to know this. On the contrary, those who will immovably insist on clinging to the whole truth as Luther taught it will be despised, they will be reviled as being destroyers of peace, troublemakers, and schismatics.

In Luther's days it was the Pope who did this ... However, in the last days, in that hour of great temptation, this time the true evangelical Christians will not be branded schismatics by the Pope, but by those who carry the name Lutheran. This will be a time in which the "Lutherans" will not be satisfied to leave the old confirmed teachings as they are, but they will nevertheless cling to the name Lutheran, and this will help to fill the measure of confusion, through which untold numbers of weak Christians will be offended, since the so-called Lutheran Christians will separate into many factions, but nevertheless calling themselves brethren. We are now living in these sad days, the days which are portrayed to us in the picture of the congregation of Laodicea.

When here we speak of the Church of the Reformation which we see pictured in the congregation at Philadelphia, we are not referring to that church body which carries the name of Luther, but to all real believers among that despised body of true believers, including the many innocent souls who are scattered here and there among the sects, namely as our Confession says: Those who walk in simpleness of heart, who do not understand correctly, and who would, if they were properly instructed, come to the Church which holds the truth, who therefore worship at the feet of the body of true believers, at the feet of the Church of the Reformation.

It was Luther who prophesied that it would get so bad that the true word of God would in time be found only in the homes. That time is at hand, and we may yet live to see the day that the Church of the Reformation, namely the Church of the true doctrine, will not be found in any external body or synod named Lutheran."⁸

And yet, the Lord will preserve His Bride!

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- i Luther, Martin, (W 5, 451- E op ex 15, 357 f - SL 4, 968) *What Luther Says: A Practical In-Home Anthology for the Active Christian*, Ed. Ewald Plass, Concordia Publishing House, Saint Louis, MO., p. 257.
 - i *The Lutherans In North America*, Ed. E. Clifford Nelson, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, PA., p. 175.
 - i Orthodox Lutheran Confessional Conference website, Doctrinal Articles, "On Church Fellowship and the Distinction Between Orthodox and Heterodox Churches; <http://olcc.us/articles/church-fellowship/>.
 - i WELS website: <http://wels.net/about-wels/what-we-believe/this-we-believe/church-and-ministry/>.
 - i Walther, C.F.W., *Essays For the Church*, Tr. Lawrence White, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, MO., "Communion Fellowship", p. 210.
 - i Pieper, Francis, *Christian Dogmatics*, vol. 3, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, MO., 1953, pp. 422-423
 - i Sasse, Hermann, *The Lonely Way*, vol. 1, "Union and Confession", Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, MO., 2002, pp. 268-269.

 - i "The Judge Is At the Door", was written by an Australian German Lutheran pastor in 1899 in his commentary on the book of Revelation, *Der Richter ist vor der Thur!*, by Rev. J.F. Peters, who served as the pastor at Murtoa, Victoria, Australia. In the 1960's it was translated into English by an American lady, Helma Stenske. In 1989 it was republished in Australia by Rev. Bryce Winter of the Evangelical Lutheran Congregations of the Reformation (ELCR) with a few corrections with the approval of Helma Stenske. It was published at Kingaroy, Queensland, Australia and the quotation is found on page 53 of that publication.