

## Theological Agreement is the Foundation of the Synod

“Why can’t we all just get along? The LCMS is known for its constant internal fighting.” This oft expressed opinion points out two characteristics of life as a Synod, one positive and one negative. I will not comment, in this article, on the negative aspect, that of how we fight. There is plenty of sin to go around on all sides regarding how we speak and write about each other. We should be able to “get along” even when we disagree.

I would like to focus on the positive aspect of the statement, and that is our propensity for fighting. Yes, I believe it is a good thing for our Synod to be constantly wrestling with one another about the best ways to proclaim and practice the Gospel. The Holy writer Jude encourages us “...to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.”<sup>1</sup> This contention is to happen not only with unbelievers, but also within a Synod because theological agreement is the foundation of a Synod.

We, in the LCMS, have been blessed with a broad spectrum of theological agreement, as President Kieschnick has often acknowledged. Thank God we are not fighting about the divinity of Christ or the historicity of the resurrection. However, as President Kieschnick has also recently pointed out, there are areas where we need to work toward agreement: (worship, closed communion, the role of women, the office of the public ministry, participating in public ceremonies, etc.).

It will never serve the Gospel to rest on our laurels by concluding we have reached an acceptable level of agreement and agree to disagree on the rest. Paul pleads for us to continue talking for the sake of theological agreement. “I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.”<sup>2</sup> The reality of our own sinfulness demands the conclusion that the Church is *semper reformanda*, always being reformed. That means theological discussion is necessary for the health of the Church, and thus the Synod. This truly is a good fight.

This is our history. This is our tradition. This is a unique characteristic of being Lutheran. We keep striving, wrestling, fighting for theological agreement under the Scriptures and Confessions. For example, the Augsburg Confession was written in a well fought fight for the sake of theological agreement. “The desire was also expressed for deliberation on what might be done about the dissension concerning our holy faith and the Christian religion, and to this end it was proposed to employ all diligence amicably and charitably to hear, understand, and weigh the judgments, opinions, and beliefs of the several parties among us *to unite the same in agreement on one Christian truth...*”<sup>3</sup> (emphasis mine). These words from the Preface to the Augsburg Confession demonstrate that “Lutheranism” was born in the struggle for theological agreement.

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<sup>1</sup>*The Holy Bible : English standard version*. 2001 (Jud 3). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

<sup>2</sup>*The Holy Bible : English standard version*. 2001 (1 Co 1:10). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

<sup>3</sup>Tappert, T. G. (2000, c1959). *The book of concord : The confessions of the evangelical Lutheran church* (24). Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

Later on, when disagreement erupted among Lutherans the fight continued. “...these controversies deal with weighty and important matters, and they are of such a nature that the opinions of the erring party cannot be tolerated in the church of God, much less be excused and defended. *For that reason necessity requires* that such controverted articles be explained on the basis of God’s Word and of approved writings in such a way that anybody with Christian intelligence can see which opinion in the controverted issues agrees with the Word of God...”<sup>4</sup> (my emphasis). These words from the preface to the Solid Declaration show that Lutherans are intent on constantly contending for the faith.

This side of heaven it is necessary to contend for theological agreement. It is the foundation of our Synod. Notwithstanding some godly rules for how we fight, I would be very concerned if the LCMS didn’t have a reputation for fighting for theological agreement.

S.D.G.  
Terry Forke

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<sup>4</sup>Tappert, T. G. (2000, c1959). *The book of concord : The confessions of the evangelical Lutheran church* (503). Philadelphia: Fortress Press.