

UNIONISM AND SYNCRETISM

Why can't we just get along?

Why don't we participate in religious things?

- *“I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy lies in my name, saying, ‘I have dreamed, I have dreamed!’ How long shall there be lies in the heart of the prophets who prophesy lies, and who prophesy the deceit of their own heart, who think to make my people forget my name by their dreams that they tell one another, even as their fathers forgot my name for Baal? Let the prophet who has a dream tell the dream, but let him who has my word speak my word faithfully. What has straw in common with wheat? declares the LORD. Is not my word like fire, declares the LORD, and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces? Therefore, behold, I am against the prophets, declares the LORD, who steal my words from one another. Behold, I am against the prophets, declares the LORD, who use their tongues and declare, ‘declares the LORD.’” (Jeremiah 23:25–31, ESV)*

- *“If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works.”* (2 John 10–11, ESV)

*⁴² To dissent from the agreement of so many nations
and to be called schismatics is a serious matter.*

*But divine authority commands everyone not to be allies
and defenders of impiety and unjust cruelty.*

- Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope

WHY DO WE BOTHER WITH THIS?

- Interfaith participation (after tragedy; community events; ministerial associations)
- Public activities of the congregation (what does it confess?)
- Public activities of the pastors of the congregation (what does it confess?)
- Local examples:
 - Family Promise (2012)
 - Laramie County Right to Life Day (2017)
 - Recent example of “faith build” for Habitat for Humanity (2020)
 - Life Choice (2019)
- Why are we so strict about this?

NEWTOWN...2012...

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OgygwfTGcJ0>
- What does it do to appear to bless false religions or teachings?
- Does participation in outward things give the impression of some kind of greater unity?
- See also Yankee Stadium, 2001

TRUE UNITY

- True Unity
- 1 Cor 1:10

Augsburg Confession, VII

¹ Our churches teach that one holy Church is to remain forever. The Church is the congregation of saints [Psalm 149:1] in which the Gospel is purely taught and the Sacraments are correctly administered. ² For the true unity of the Church it is enough to agree about the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. ³ It is not necessary that human traditions, that is, rites or ceremonies instituted by men, should be the same everywhere. ⁴ As Paul says, “One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all” (Ephesians 4:5–6).

HOW SERIOUS IS GOD ABOUT HIS WORD? DOCTRINE? WORSHIP?

- First Commandment (Exodus 20 & Deuteronomy 5)

You shall have no other gods.

What does this mean? We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things.

- Second Commandment (Exodus 20 & Deuteronomy 5)

You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God.

What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we do not curse, swear, use satanic arts, lie, or deceive by His name, but call upon it in every trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks.

- Is God just trying to show how stern He can be? Is He just wanting to be a tyrant?
- What is at stake if God so warns us about this? Why does God do anything He does?

FIRST COMMANDMENT

- Does God tolerate other gods?
- Should they be given equal standing to God?
- Trust from the heart...

SECOND COMMANDMENT

- False doctrine is a sin against it, the chief sin against it.
- Large Catechism, Ten Commandments, II: ⁵⁴ But the greatest abuse occurs in spiritual matters. These have to do with the conscience, when false preachers rise up and offer their lying vanities as God's Word
- Nowhere in Scripture is there ever a single verse that permits a teacher to deviate from the Word of God.
- “love” is often used to want acceptance or tolerance or “working together” despite differences in belief. The Commandments properly define love, and the Second Commandment forbids false doctrine (false doctrine is unloving, to partner with it is also unloving)
- First Commandment had to do with trust of the heart; Second has to do with the confession of the mouth (heart ==> mouth)

WHAT IS FALSE DOCTRINE THEN?

- Sin.
- Dangerous to the soul (as dangerous as sin that we see more easily)
- Does false doctrine lead away from the true Jesus or to the true Jesus? (remember the warning... many will come in my name saying... I am he...).

DISTINCTION IN USE OF FAITH

- Faith – the doctrine believed (individual and corporate)
- faith – the trust of the heart (individual)
- The Faith (doctrine) is easy to judge by the Scriptures. Trust (faith) is not so easy as it is a matter of the heart.
- This study largely deals with the Faith (doctrine), not faith (trust).

FAITH MIXING (TEACHING/DOCTRINE MIXING)

- Unionism and Syncretism (briefly describe each)
- CFW Walther defines it: (who is CFW Walther?)

“external ecclesiastical union without inner unity in faith, doctrine, and confession”

- Outward appearance of unity where in fact none inwardly exists
- CFW Walther quoting Baier (main doctrine text in early LCMS)

J. W. Baier: "In the second place, the unity of the Church is disturbed by syncretism, or the religious union of dissenting parties in a brotherly and ecclesiastical fellowship in spite of dissension, so that either the errors in doctrine on the part of the dissentients or at least the erring persons themselves are tolerated within the communion of the Church and the latter are regarded as brethren in Christ and coheirs of eternal life. Either class of tolerance, however, is sinful."

TOLERATION OF ERROR FOR APPEARANCES...

- This includes the toleration of error – which we are never told to do, but to flee from false doctrine and have nothing to do with it.

Second Commandment (Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5)

2 Thessalonians 2:15

2 Timothy 1:14 (guard/keep the doctrine)

2 Timothy 3:14-15

STILL MORE WARNINGS FROM SCRIPTURE

- Titus 1:9, 13
- 2 Timothy 3:16, 4:2
- Matthew 5:12ff, 16:6
- Galatians 1:6-9
- 1 Timothy 1:3
- Warnings about “leaven” – Mt 16:6, 11, 12; Mark 8:15; Luke 12:1; 1 Cor 5:6-8; Gal 5:9;

LUTHER ON ERROR IN THE CHURCH

"The holy Church sins and stumbles or even errs at times as the Lord's Prayer teaches, but she does not defend nor excuse herself. She humbly prays for forgiveness and improves herself as much as she can. Therefore she has forgiveness, and her sin is no longer counted against her."

To remove the category and marking of error is to remove any possibility for confession of sin and thus remove the opportunity for forgiveness.

TRUTH AND UNIONISM

Unionism/Syncretism abolishes the difference between Truth and Error
(all are equally accepted)

Toleration of erring persons and groups is included here

Romans 16:17	2 Cor 6:14, 17	Gal 1:8-9	Gal 5:12
2 Thessalonians 3:6	1 Tim 6:3	Titus 3:10	

UNIONISM/SYNCRETISM IN VARIETY... OR THE WAYS IT SHOWS UP

- Toleration of error and erring teachers
- Both sides changing doctrine to agree with each other on a new doctrine (Absorptive)
- Both sides give some ground but tolerate each other in other areas of dispute (Temperative). [Augsburg Interim for example]
- Both join in one church body despite differences, declare differences to be “open questions” or not firmly settled by Scripture (Conservative)

DENOMINATIONS

- Error is found among denominations (this limits our involvement with them – what is error again? What commandment?)
- People belonging to those denominations we cannot know for sure (do they believe the error of their denomination? Would they flee the error and denomination?)
- Since we do know the error of the denomination but do not know the individual person, we must 1. Remain apart from the denomination and 2. Remain apart from the person out of caution

HETERODOX (OTHER/CROOKED PRAISE/CONFESSION)

- Openly teaches error
- Accepting error in their public doctrine
- Tolerates false doctrine in their midst
 - Designation for denominations and congregations
 - Christians still exist in these denominations and congregations

ERROR AND “CHURCH”

- So does error make a denomination no longer “church”?
- No – see Galatians example
- No, but with a warning – Revelation 2 and 3 – Christ threatens to take away the lampstand
- What makes a Church Christian? Doctrine of the Holy Trinity, Divinity of Christ

ORTHODOX (RIGHT/STRAIGHT PRAISE/CONFESSION)

- Congregation or denomination in which God's Word is taught in its purity and the Sacraments administered according to their divine institution. (see Augsburg Confession Article VII)
- Not just the paper confession (public doctrine), but what is actually done in the pulpits, catechism classes, altars, etc. (this is troubling for the LCMS)
- Casual intrusion of error does not remove this, unless it becomes tolerated or accepted. (note on LCMS on this)

WHY DOES GOD ALLOW FALSE TEACHERS?

- Christians may show obedience by avoiding them (Rom 16:17; Deut. 13:3; 8:2; 1 Cor 11:19)
- Apology of the Augsburg Confession, VII/VIII par 48

⁴⁸ Ungodly teachers are to be deserted because they no longer act in Christ's place, but are antichrists. Christ says, "Beware of false prophets" (Matthew 7:15). Paul says, "If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:9).

WALTHER

"If a Lutheran Synod does not want to plant the seeds of dissolution in her very midst, its members must be bound, by provision of its basic law, to refrain from even the most subtle forms of syncretism...Let us faithfully confess the truth, and not attempt to help the kingdom of God by deviating from the instructions that God gave us."

FRANCIS PIEPER

- (1912, opening sermon on Romans 16:17-18 at Synodical Conference)

“But isn’t the avoidance of all heterodox teachers an unattainable ideal? This is how men see it, but the apostle sees it differently. The apostle is not describing an unattainable ideal which remains somewhere up in the clouds, floating around in the air. He is describing a realistic practice which is to be implemented when he admonishes Christians to “Mark those who cause divisions and offenses among you contrary to the doctrine that you have learned and avoid them!” But some will still cry out: How can Christians, simple Christians, recognize heterodox teachers and distinguish between truth and error? But it is precisely simple Christians who are capable of doing this.

Their Savior, who calls upon them to remain in His Word, has given them the means in hand to do so. The Holy Scriptures, the Word of the Prophets and the Apostles, is not a mere collection of advice for Christians. It is a lamp for their feet and a light for their path. Christians can only err in their thoughts, speech, or judgement if they hide the light of God’s Word under the bushel. If only they will see that which is their light and their right - if they will hear the Word of the Lord and believe - they will know the Truth and the Truth will set them free from slavery to the doctrines of men.”

LUTHERAN WITNESS, 1917

- F.W. Jesse (1917 Editorial in the Lutheran Witness on Romans 16:17-18)

“These words of St. Paul thus rebuke, in one embracing sweep, all the unionistic practices of modern weak-kneed Christianity. In the light of these words, no Christian minister who feels convinced that he and his church teach the Word of God in its truth and purity, can, without sin, permit a minister of another faith in his pulpit - for the Bible says: “Avoid them!” No member of one church who feels convinced that he and his church hold the right faith can, without sin, take active part in the worship, or - still worse - commune at the altar of a church of a different denomination - the Bible says: “Avoid them!” Union services among those who differ in belief are nothing more than a mutual agreement put into practice to violate the command “Avoid them!” And interdenominational organizations and societies and interdenominational or union Bible Classes are, in the light of these words, attempting to break down the wall of separation which according to God’s command should remain. These are strong words, you say? Do not blame me, I did not write the Bible. I did not issue the command, “Avoid them!” The Lord has done that. Take your complaints to him.”

