

*State of The Augustana Ministerium—May 18, 2010 A.D.*  
*Charity Evangelical Lutheran Church, Burleson, TX*  
*Pastor Bruce G. Ley, Superintendent*

## **“Among Those Who Seek the Truth with Honest Zeal”**

Over the past couple months I have been working on a theory, and I am hoping you can help me either verify its validity or reveal its achilles heel. Formulated as a conditional sentence it goes like this ...

If you are a member of *The Augustana Ministerium*, or *The Augustana Confraternity*, then you are **“Among Those Who Seek the Truth with Honest Zeal.”** Again, if you are a member of TAM or TAC, then you are **“Among Those Who Seek the Truth with Honest Zeal.”**

And when we consider the **“Lives [that are] in the Balance”** in this battle with the unholy trinity of Satan, the world, and our flesh, to find yourself among such people in a day and time when words and ideals like **“Truth ... Honesty ... and Zeal”** have seemingly all but lost their objective meaning in society—yea, even in the Church visible—it is a comforting and helpful thing to be among a part of the remnant who are still interested in pursuing such.

Little wonder that the Psalmist—using the 'stop and pay attention word' ... **“Behold!”**—bids the people of God to “observe and note attentively” ... *“how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity”* (133:1)!

Many of you know that the first attempt at a “ministerium” in the United States wherein Lutherans sought *“to dwell together in unity”* was in 1748 when the “Pennsylvania Ministerium” was formed under the leadership of Henry Melchior Muhlenberg.

Neither the founding nor the history of this first ministerium is of great interest to us today, but it is important to understand that it was formed in order “that they might work in cooperation.” Unfortunately, due to the influence of Muhlenberg's

Pietism and Dutch Reformed polity, they “did not insist on strict adherence to the Lutheran Confessions” (Wikipedia).

As a result, it is not surprising to learn that the most liberal and most disunited Lutheran Church body in America has its seeds in this organization.

While the Holy Spirit is 100% correct in ever drawing our attention to “*how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity*” (Ps. 133:1), the history of Christianity is replete with failed examples of those who have sought to do so on the basis of anything other than a strict adherence to a common, straightforward, zealous confession of the truth!

And, as has been amply demonstrated over the past half century or more by the synod to which I, and the majority of the members of *The Augustana Ministerium*, still hold membership, even those who claim to adhere “to a common confession of the truth” do not “*dwell together in unity*” as several of the “former” members of that synod, who are also members of *The Augustana*, are quick to remind us.

While some—perhaps even some in our midst—may be put off or offended by such reminders, I am one who is not, for I am more than aware of just how far our less than straightforward, zealous regard for Scripture's truth have allowed our synod to stray from her roots, and I appreciate being called back to what Scripture and the Confessions have to say on the matters that have wholly disrupted the “*good and pleasant ... unity*” Missouri once knew, when she was formerly “**Among Those Who Seek the Truth with Honest Zeal.**”

One of the great blessings of my sabbatical last year was the opportunity to read some of Martin Chemnitz's work.

In his book, “The Two Natures in Christ,” Chemnitz opens the 26<sup>th</sup> chapter using a sentence that helps us to understand why a common, straightforward, zealous confession of the truth is critical to any attempt to “*dwell together in unity.*”

In this chapter he takes up the topic of terminology, specifically, “The Terminology of the Ancient Church,” which is the chapter's title.

I want you to listen to his opening three sentences, the latter of which is what triggered my thoughts a few months back about how I might address you in my report on “The State of The Augustana Ministerium” in this Year our Lord 2010—which happens to coincide with *The Augustana's* 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of seeking to “*dwell together in unity.*”

Chemnitz writes: “As we have indicated above, our first concern must be that the matter itself, or the correct teaching, be correctly and explicitly established on the basis of Scripture and separated from all erroneous opinions. Having done this, we can easily decide concerning the terminology. **For when there is agreement concerning the matter itself, it is easy to agree as to the modes of speaking among those who seek the truth with honest zeal**”<sup>1</sup>

I repeat ... **“For when there is agreement concerning the matter itself, it is easy to agree as to the modes of speaking among those who seek the truth with honest zeal.”**

Contextually, Chemnitz's concern when writing the opening thoughts of this third sentence, **“For when there is agreement concerning the matter itself,”** relates to the question of rightly confessing the existence of the three genuses, and in particular, the third genus, which our Confessions call 'communicatio idiomatum,' the communication of attributes.

However, it seems to me—and this may be the seedbed of an achilles heel, if there is one—that what Chemnitz postulates is that when the teaching is based on objective truth and all erroneous opinions have been declared out of bounds, then the matter under consideration, whatever it may be, can be easily agreed to by all involved ... with the proviso that all involved are **“Among Those Who Seek the Truth with Honest Zeal.”**

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1 “The Two Natures in Christ,” Martin Chemnitz, Chapter 26, First thru third sentence, p. 395.

I submit that such was exactly the case with *The Augustana Ministerium's* self-understanding of itself and its Confession of Faith formulated five years ago ... and I quote:

12 We believe, teach, and confess that the Canonical Books of the Old and New Testaments are the  
13 Written Word of God, infallible and inerrant, and the only rule and norm for all Christian  
14 doctrine and the life of the Church.

15

16 We unconditionally subscribe to The Book of Concord of 1580, which contains The Three  
17 Ecumenical Creeds, The Unaltered Augsburg Confession of 1530 (AC), The Apology to the  
18 Augsburg Confession (Apol), The Large Catechism, The Small Catechism, The Smalcald  
19 Articles, The Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope (Tr), and The Formula of Concord  
20 (Epitome and Solid Declaration) as a true exposition of the doctrine of Holy Scripture and the  
21 Articles of Faith contained therein, which constitute the true evangelical faith of Jesus Christ.  
22 Our insistence upon unconditional subscription to these Lutheran Confessions precludes any  
23 understanding by which one may claim subscription to them only insofar as they are in  
24 agreement with the Sacred Scriptures. Rather, we subscribe to them because of our conviction  
25 that they are in agreement with the same.

26

27 We require acceptance of the Augustana Ministerium's "Statement on the Holy Ministry" as a  
28 condition of membership. This statement is not a new confession, but a summary of the teaching  
29 of the Lutheran Confessions concerning the Office of the Holy Ministry and our reason for  
30 existence.

In short, for those in Peoria in 2005 at the constituting convention of *The Augustana Ministerium*, our **"agreement concerning the matter itself"**—namely, the need for and commitment toward an organization which, and again I quote:

33 exists to defend, encourage, and admonish its members; to uphold  
34 the Office of the Holy Ministry, to foster missionary activity; and to promote the raising up of  
35 qualified men into this holy office

was unshakable. And it was unshakable, I submit, because there was **"agreement concerning the matter itself,"** and we were **"Among Those Who Seek the Truth with Honest Zeal."**

The question is: Does it remain unshakable in this year of our Lord 2010? Are we still **"Among Those Who Seek the Truth with Honest Zeal?"** Are we as

convinced of the need for and commitment toward the work of *The Augustana Ministerium* today as we were in 2005?

To address the importance of those questions, I would take us down two roads, and then conclude with a brief birds eye view of both roads simultaneously.

First, is the road which I call the view from the floor of the valley. Those who live in a valley, as do I, know that there are dangers there that differ from living on a hillside or a plain. One of the dangers in our part of the country is water ... massive bodies of water stored behind huge dams, huge dams which if breached would cause catastrophic flood waters rushing down narrow canyons into the valley. In fact, where I live, I would be dead in minutes should some of the major dams upstream fail, taking out smaller dams on the way down. Oh, and I would not be alone, for most of the other people on the floor of the Willamette Valley would likewise be dead. Life is risky, but you can't see that very real danger when you live and travel the road of life in the valley.

Theologically those who are members of TAM and TAC live in a valley. We do not live there alone, of course, for theologically we are there together with all of the Church visible, and indeed the rest of the world. Now, in a very real sense, this place where we live is "*the valley of the shadow of death*" (Ps. 23:1), for we all live in "*the shadow of death*" everyday, and none of us escapes the deluge that began when Satan breached Adam and Eve's impregnable defense system by tempting them to doubt God's Word. When Eve began to listen to that other voice, and we have no indication that Adam sought to warn her or stop her, then the impregnable defense system had for all practical purposes already been breached, and it was all over but the "dying," so to speak.

Now as members of TAM and TAC we are spread all over the valley floor physically, but theologically we are not so far apart; and we are doing our best through a monistic confession of the faith in the midst of a pluralistic world "*to dwell*

*together in unity,*” as we carry out the work for which we were formed. Since, by virtue of our common confession and purpose set forth in the constitution, **“there is agreement concerning the matter itself,”** and the fact that we are **“Among Those Who Seek the Truth with Honest Zeal,”** the question is, what dangers are around us that would hold us back from accomplishing even more than has already been done—and please don't hear me wrong here, for we thank God for all that has already been done these past five years?

It is no secret that *The Augustana Ministerium* learned a hard—a very hard, but important and valuable—lesson from our Dean of Communications' “sin in Kansas City” a couple years ago. I believe there are still unanswered questions falling out of that experience, and I by no means claim to have the answers. Suffice it to say, however, that some very recent news has shed a positive ray of light on the whole matter. Last week's announcement of the fellowship agreement between the Evangelical Lutheran Diocese of North America (ELDoNA) and the Association of Confessional Lutheran Churches (ACLC), is in my judgment a very positive sign that those of us living on the valley floor, who are **“Among Those Who Seek the Truth with Honest Zeal,”** have not lost sight of the vital fact that there is a second road from which we can view life on the valley floor.

It is the road which I call the view from the hills, or in my part of the country, the mountains. When you look at a valley from the top or near the top of a mountain you get a wholly different view of life on the valley floor. Not only are you able to see much more clearly and up close the very real danger and threat posed by the dams I spoke of, but you see much, much, more.

And so, while there is much more yet that could be explored and learned from the road of life on the valley floor—and that is the place where your Administrative Council must operate from as it seeks to carry out those things set forth in our constitution—let us now move to the second road near the top of the mountains on one side of the valley. As we transition to that view, let me add by way of the

Superintendent's perspective, to my knowledge there is and continues to be among the Administrative Council unanimous **"agreement concerning the matter itself,"** which is to say, the need for and commitment toward the work of TAM as "a pastoral association formed to preserve and promote Lutheran Pastors and distinctly Lutheran Ministry of Word and Sacrament to Lutheran congregations."

Battered ... torn ... abused ... ignored ... these are some of the terms that come to mind off the top of my head which describe the condition of the Bride of Christ, the Church, not just in our day but since the days of the Apostles. And this is basically the view that is revealed from the road above the valley—the view from the mountain, the view from above the fray. If there is something in our particular time and in our day that makes it seem worse than at other times in history, it is most likely tied very closely to the lack of honest, up front, forthright, full-force preaching and teaching of Law and Gospel to our people and to one another.

So closed and so dull has become the hearing of modern man that we neither fear God aright, nor live in the promises of His grace, except in the most superficial ways. So run over with modern translations of the Bible, study Bibles for every occasion under the sun, and self-proclaimed Internet experts who have glutted the blogosphere with their opinions and proclamations, that we seem to have forgotten that the Word made flesh was not some image on a screen—not some sort of virtual Jesus—but a real, live, flesh, and blood God-Man who breathed, bled, died, was buried, and rose again, and who calls us to "*hear [His] voice*" and to "*follow [Him]*" (John 10:16).

My dear brothers, as we each "*hear [His] voice*" and each seek to "*follow [Him]*" as we live, move, breathe, and interact with one another, and with the world, on the valley floor, things can look really messy and ugly. And they are messy, and they are ugly, and that is life in a fallen world ... and yet, they ought not be, especially in Christ's Church, for Christ's prayer for us is: "*that they all may be one, as You, Father, <are> in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the*

*world may believe that You sent Me*" (John 17:21). That prayer for unity—*"that the world may believe that you sent Me"*—together with the messiness of life, is what makes this year's conference all that much more important in this year of our Lord 2010.

**"Lives in the Balance"** is meant to help us learn anew, to refresh our aging memories, to turn us again back to the 'abc's' of "equipping people for the world's fight and the soul's salvation." Make no mistake, the stakes are high, but the rewards are eternal, and thus our vigilance in this effort must of necessity be unrelenting.

King Solomon once advised his son, *"Of making of many books <there is> no end"* (Eccl. 12:12), and I would add that today the proliferation of individual opinions and proclamations made possible through God's gift of the internet is not always all that helpful in seeking to confess and live in the unity for which Christ prays. In fact, it sort of reminds me of what St. Paul found so unsettling in the Corinthian church!

St. Paul's advice to St. Timothy seems like exceedingly good advise for us all in light of today's challenges: *"Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus"* (2 Timothy 1:13). Now, as of the time I write this, I have not spoken directly with any of the men from either the ACLC and ELDoNA, but I have little doubt in my mind that both parties *"held fast to the pattern of sound words"* in evaluating each others doctrinal positions, and that gives me renewed hope for what may well be very dark days ahead.

Dark days, I say, because most on that road of life on the valley floor are not **"Among Those Who Seek the Truth with Honest Zeal."** And yet among those in which there is **"agreement concerning the matter itself"**—as I know there is with these two confessional bodies—just as I know they are **"Among Those Who Seek the Truth with Honest Zeal"**—then the confession and public expression of such unity was bound to come.

We, *The Augustana Ministerium*, have assumed important and vital work to do in this time and this place, because others, to whom these responsibilities assumed by TAM really fall, have failed to uphold their office. The result of their failure has led to many confessional pastors being persecuted and abandoned and wrongly deposed! We have by no means stopped these abuses, but we are serving to lessen the blows these faithful servants under the cross have had to endure.

While every bone and fiber of my body yearns to be in fellowship with all of you at the table of our Lord, here and now, because I too am **"Among Those Who Seek the Truth with Honest Zeal,"** I recognize that as of today, it can not be, even though we, on the basis of our common confession of faith and **"agreement concerning the matter itself,"** are one ... and yet, we are not ... and that is true regardless of which road you view life from.

Nonetheless, when you view the valley floor from the mountain, and do so together with others who share a common commitment to the truth, it is possible to discover that though the expression of that oneness we all desire is not yet, there is still hope **"Among Those Who Seek the Truth with Honest Zeal"** it will yet come and where hope exists there is need to continue our labors in the vineyard, for *"the harvest <is> great, but the laborers are few"* (Luke 10:2).

And even if it is not to be in this life, then let it remain what it is, for we know there is yet another perspective on this valley, and that is the bird's eye view—which is to say, Christ's view ... first from the cross, and now from the right hand of the Father! And in spite of all that we do not know about the future of TAM, or our own lives, this much we know ... we know that there is no greater body where **"agreement concerning the matter itself"** is held than in the God-Man body that died for us all and even now intercedes for us and for our salvation. And because we know we are **"Among Those Who Seek the Truth with Honest Zeal,"** we know beyond a shadow of doubt that in the Jerusalem which is from above all vestiges of those things that now divide us will be no more.

Until that day when our oneness is manifest—be it on earth or in heaven—may the Lord Christ look with favor and mercy on *The Augustana Ministerium*, and may He grant that many more join us who are **“Among Those Who Seek the Truth with Honest Zeal”** in supporting our efforts to “uphold the Office of the Holy Ministry, to foster missionary activity; and to promote the raising up of qualified men into this holy office.”

Sola Deo Gloria!

Pastor Bruce G. Ley, Superintendent