



THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF LUTHERAN CHURCHES

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Dear Brothers and Sisters of The American Association of Lutheran Churches,

Grace, mercy, and peace be multiplied to you from God our Father, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

I write this letter with a heavy heart due to the recent action taken by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America at their church wide assembly. Though the action taken was predictable, the results were saddening. Because of this action countless millions of souls are in dire jeopardy of everlasting punishment. This is a scandal and a shame. My colleagues, this is not about sex, or same gender relationship, or ordination. The problem is much deeper and more pervasive than that.

By all the polls America is a very religious nation, but its religion is not New Testament Christianity but neopagan Gnosticism. The word Gnosticism comes from the Greek word "gnosis," which means "knowledge." The knowledge in question concerns the secret mystery of life that arises from within the self. The "God" of Gnosticism is the experiential "God" identical with what seems most authentic and real in each individual soul. The God of the Bible is exactly opposite from that and comes from the outside through the Word that He speaks.

The "God" of the gnostics and the God of the Bible are mortal enemies. It was so in the early church when the apostles fought against the gnostics, who denied Jesus Christ had come in the flesh. That's Gnosticism. Irenaeus fought the heretic Marcion, who taught that the Old Testament God who created the world is not the same as the New Testament God who redeemed the world through Jesus Christ. That's Gnosticism.

The truth is that Gnosticism is deeply embedded in our culture. It is as American as apple pie.

American believers are religious in a general sense with scarcely no correlation to the specific beliefs of historic Christianity. Many churches and their teachers have lost the will or the ability to teach the Christian faith to those who enter through the front door, and so they have only themselves to blame for the masses who are now exiting through the back door.

Christianity is like a bucket brigade. It is handed down from generation to generation. Each generation of believers must take responsibility to pass on the "faith once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). The result of doing that for 2000 years is the mainstream of the Christian tradition. We have received that tradition, founded on the Bible and the Lutheran confessions, and it is our turn now to pass it on to our children and grandchildren without abbreviation, without compromise, and without tailoring it to suit our own whims and fancies. In other words, we are called to be

faithful. To the faith of our forebears, the faith that will never die. It lives because He lives.

We must discern the times! We must discern the spirits. Not everything is up for grabs. We have sound criteria to tell what kinds of change are good for the gospel and what are not. We do have an agenda faithful to our confessional Lutheran tradition, a tradition that claims to be true to the teachings of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church, standing firmly on the pillars of Holy Scripture and the orthodox Creeds. This is not an agenda of a right-wing coalition of conservatives trying to turn back the clock. Martin Luther was not a right-wing conservative in his day. His reformation movement was an attempt to retrieve the tried, true, and time-tested truths of the Bible and the Christian tradition. That's what his Large and Small Catechisms were all about.

Our central concern is theological, what we believe about the triune God, salvation through Christ alone, the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, true preaching of the Word and faithful administration of the Sacraments, the divine institution of the holy ministry signified by the sacred rite of ordination, the ecumenical work to promote the unity of the church, the Great Commission of our Lord to preach the gospel of salvation to all the nations, to teach and to baptize people from all religions or no religion at all, so that they may become disciples of Christ and members of his body. These are the central truths in the Great Tradition of evangelical, catholic, and orthodox communities down through the centuries and across all cultural boundaries.

Ecclesia semper reformanda! That is a Latin slogan of our Lutheran tradition. The reformation of the church must continue. When the church finds itself living in the dark ages, as it is today, we trust that God will create movements for renewal and reform, as He always has done in the past. We have His promise that the gates of hell will not prevail against the Church. We must understand that we are back into the raw missionary situation of New Testament Christianity, one in which true Christian faith cannot count on the culture in a neopagan environment. The only thing that matters in true Christian worship is the presence of the Living God through the audible words of preaching according to the Holy Scriptures and the visible words of Holy Communion according to our Lord's institution. Such worship will not cater to the worldly gurus who tell us it must be simple, fun, and entertaining, to make people feel good about themselves.

Today more than ever we need to be reaching out, but it is equally important to re-evangelize our Lutheran brothers and sisters, to make it clear that our church is different from the world, stressing that the Christian faith is utterly unique and fundamentally different from other religions and ideologies, and that we have something to offer the world. To pray and work for a new reformation is not to wait for things to happen elsewhere; rather it is reformation in each of our local congregations. ***This is where the action is!*** Don't think it is anywhere else. We meet Christ at home in our local parish. Every ordinary congregation is endowed with an extraordinary message. It is a message of the dying and rising of Jesus and that all who believe in Him share in the salvation He brings. What more do we want? What more do we need?

Collegially yours,



Rev. Franklin E. Hays
Presiding Pastor, The AALC