

## THE HISTORY OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH IN 1000 WORDS

### 100-300

Within several hundred years, congregations of believers were worshipping in Greek throughout the Eastern Mediterranean, in Latin in the Western Mediterranean, and in Syriac throughout the Middle East. Despite being treated with suspicion, abuse, and occasional official persecution, the church continued to grow. As it did, it developed more formal worship practices (liturgy, pericopes, and the church year). It organized its leadership with priests/pastors assisted by deacons overseeing local congregations, and bishops overseeing city-wide churches. The bishops met regularly in church councils to ensure consistent teaching and practice. Statements of faith like The Apostles' Creed were used by new Christians to confess their faith at baptism. The Nicene Creed was developed to express true Christian teaching against the false teaching that Christ was not eternal God (Arianism). Intense Bible study resulted in more detailed descriptions of the Triune God, the divine and human natures of Jesus Christ, original sin, and man's inability to contribute to his own salvation.

### 300-1500

During the fourth century within the Roman Empire, Christianity first became legal, and then became the only legal religion. This led to rapid growth, but also to new problems. Some came into the church bringing their pagan superstitions with them. Others thought the church had become worldly, and went into the deserts and mountains to live as monks. Early church heroes, including Mary, began to be given special honor, eventually leading to the practice of venerating and praying to them as saints. After confessing and repenting of their sins, Christians did not just receive absolution, but also were told to make earthly satisfaction, leading to unbiblical doctrines like purgatory and indulgences. As education declined in Europe after the barbarian invasions, clergy received less education and the laity also became less literate in Christian teaching. Performing the liturgy and sacraments was seen as continuing or restoring a right relationship with God, and the work of Christ receded into the background. Meanwhile the Gospel continued to be spread to Northern Europe by the Latin church, to India and China by Syriac-speaking missionaries, and to Russia by Greek missionaries. But the church in the Middle East was overrun by Islamic armies and Christianity became a minority religion there.

### 1500S, THE REFORMATION

By 1500, Europe saw an educational revival as universities developed and the Renaissance flowered. God used these to promote a Reformation of the western church (known as the Roman Catholic Church) through men like Martin Luther. He based all teaching on Scripture alone, showing how salvation came simply by believing that Christ died in our place so that we could live eternally—a totally free gift from God. Luther and his teaching was rejected by the Catholic church, and so the Lutheran Church was born. Similarly, John Calvin formed a new church that spread in Switzerland and Holland (the Reformed Church), and in England the church was put under royal control as the Anglican or Episcopal church. In Scotland, the new church became known as the Presbyterian Church. These churches all rejected many Catholic traditions and took their teaching directly from Scripture, but their view of the sacraments and the use of reason in interpreting the Bible led each to hold some teachings distinct from each other. Others, known as Anabaptists, were more radical in seeking direct guidance from the Spirit more directly (not just through Scripture), in rejecting clergy, and denying the authority of the state. The Baptist church developed as a hybrid of Reformed and Anabaptist teaching.

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§ Written and contributed by Dr. Glen L. Thompson (Asia Lutheran Seminary).

## 1600S-1900S

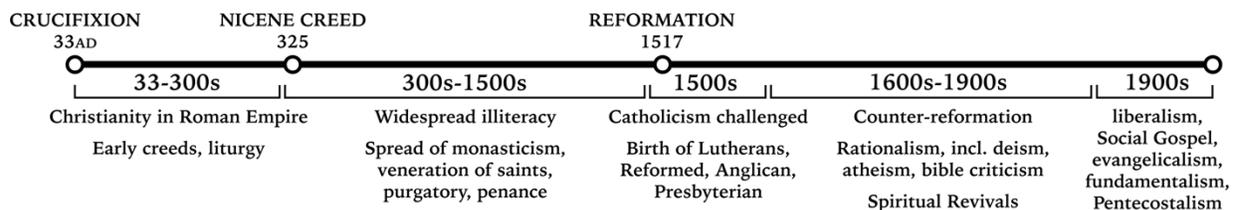
The Catholic Church sought to fight the Reformation by re-affirming its teachings and spreading them through a Counter-Reformation, led especially through the new monastic order of the Jesuits. Its teachings were carried to the newly discovered Americas and to Africa and Asia by Catholic missionaries. But the new churches also sent missionaries to spread the Reformation teachings to the lost. The nineteenth century became the great mission century.

But rationalism, which had become part of western thought during the Enlightenment period of the 17th-18<sup>th</sup> centuries, became a new threat. It caused many to view the Bible and its teaching as superstition. Some came to believe in an abstract creator who no longer involved himself in the world (Deism), or became atheists. Some Christians tried to find a middle ground by developing rational systems of Christian theology or by purifying the Bible of myths and superstitions (Bible criticism). Both of these developed into liberal movements within the church. Some Bible-believing Christians responded by emphasizing inner-spiritual experience over doctrinal teaching (Pietism), or stressing the need for people to personally commit themselves to Christ (Arminianism). The Methodist church was one example of these developments. Pietism also led to several “Great Revivals” in 18<sup>th</sup> century Britain and North America. In the century that followed, churches heavily influenced by Arminianism and individualism proliferated across America—Baptists, Methodists, and a host of new “free church” denominations that made each congregation almost totally independent from any larger church body. Clergy were de-emphasized and the church and its doctrine became more democratic.

## 1900S TO TODAY

The twentieth-century began with liberal Christians supporting new scientific and evolutionary approaches to the Bible and its teaching, stressing the church’s role in changing society (Social Gospel). They were opposed by the Fundamentalists who emphasized traditional Bible teaching. As travel and communication made the world smaller, there was a push for all branches of the church to cooperate, and even unite (Ecumenism). But increasingly the church was divided into liberals who controlled the older “mainline” denominations, and conservatives who founded new churches stressing “simple” Bible teaching (Evangelicals), but often down-playing or even rejecting the traditional denominational labels that had grown up since the Reformation (Non-denominationalism). All these groups were also increasingly influenced by the growth of charismatic (Pentecostal) teachings, and rededicated themselves to spreading the Gospel through personal evangelism, mass-media, and foreign missions. Thus evangelical Christianity became a prominent movement in Africa, South America, and Asia. The older Lutheran churches of Europe were thoroughly infected with rationalism, liberalism and Bible criticism, but the biblical teachings of Luther continue to be taught in smaller Lutheran denominations throughout the world.

Today there are many different churches with huge variations in Bible teaching. Although God still works wherever his Word is preached to bring people to faith in Christ, it is up to each Christian to make sure that he is hearing and his church is spreading the clear and accurate message of God’s free gift of salvation.



# ARE LUTHERANS EVANGELICALS?

## WHAT IS AN EVANGELICAL?

The term evangelical broadly refers to church bodies that formed after the Reformation, motivated by Luther's break from the Catholic church and based on the teaching we are saved by grace alone. According to this definition, **WELS Lutherans are evangelicals**. The term evangelical more narrowly refers to church bodies that have their roots in the revival movements in Britain and North America in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. According to this definition, **WELS Lutherans are not evangelicals**. This is the definition that will be used for the rest of this summary.

## HOW ARE EVANGELICALS SIMILAR?

In general, evangelicals recognize the need to focus on the gospel, teach justification by faith alone, and have a high view of Scripture (that is, consider it the inspired and inerrant word of God). These are all good things. Evangelicals also tend to practice fellowship loosely (*ecumenicism*), have a low view of sacraments (e.g., communion is not a means by which God gives us his grace but just a remembrance of Christ's death), and stress religious experience and reason in conversion. These are not biblical things.

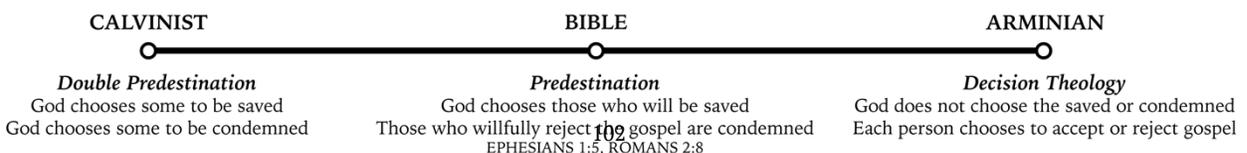
## HOW DO THE MAIN EVANGELICAL CHURCH BODIES DIFFER FROM EACH OTHER?

**CALVINISTS:** Also called Reformed, based on the teaching of John Calvin (1509-1564). Calvinists focus on God's sovereignty and **double predestination**, that God not only elects some to be saved (which the bible teaches), but elects others to be condemned (which the bible does not teach). This has the unintended consequence that Christians can focus on whether they are elected rather than on whether Jesus has died for their sins, and so focusing on one's life of sanctification as evidence that you are one of the elected.

**ARMINIANS:** Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609) taught what he believed were corrections to Calvin's teaching. This included a form of **decision theology**, that is, with the help of the Holy Spirit, a person needs to make a conscious free-will decision to become a Christian. This has the consequence of Christians focusing on whether or not they made the right decision rather than on whether Jesus has died for their sins. This can further lead to focusing on one's life of sanctification as evidence that one has really made this life-changing decision. Many Arminians are also influenced by the Pentecostal focus on supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit as evidence that one truly is a Christian. Some groups also teach **perfectionism**, that in this life one can attain a state of lacking all voluntary sin. Many also teach **dispensationalism**, that the world goes through several stages ending in some type of millennial rule by Christ.

**BAPTISTS:** Historically traced to the English Separatist Movement (16<sup>th</sup> century). Baptists reject confessional statements and insist on the complete autonomy of each congregation. This results in a wide diversity in biblical teaching. Many lean towards Arminianism, some lean towards Calvinism, while some borrow from all traditions. The only unifying teachings are congregational independence and baptism—insisting that infants should not be baptized, and that the only valid form of baptism is immersion.

**NON-DENOMINATIONALISM:** Today many Christians from Calvinist, Arminian, Baptist, and Pentecostal backgrounds prefer to join churches that have no denominational links or identity. These churches stress the unifying fundamentals of traditional Christianity, but remain shallow in their biblical teaching in order to avoid controversy over disputed teachings.



## HOW ARE LUTHERANS DIFFERENT FROM CATHOLICS?

In 1517, Martin Luther, a monk and Catholic professor, nailed *The 95 Theses* to the door of the Wittenberg Cathedral to question certain teachings within the Catholic Church. In 1530, only 13 years later, the Catholic Church officially condemned Luther's teachings at the Diet of Augsburg, marking the split of the Lutherans from the Catholic Church. What follows is a simplified treatment of the reasons why Lutherans have separated from the Catholic Church. The three *solas* below were slogans from the Reformation.

### ***SOLA SCRIPTURA (BY SCRIPTURE ALONE)***

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***Ephesians 2:20*** [The Church is] built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.

The bible teaches that only the Bible is a legitimate source of God's revelation to man and message concerning God's plan of salvation. And so, all doctrines can come only from Scripture. If someone claims to be speaking for God, the Bible tells us to measure it against God's revelation within the Bible.

The Catholic Church uses more than the bible as a source of God's revelation. Believing falsely that the apostolic line and authority of Peter is present in the Papacy, the Pope's official pronouncements are considered divine additions to Bible teaching. Catholics also look to church councils, traditions, and the Apocrypha as sources for church teaching. Many false teachings within the Catholic Church are from these non-biblical sources: purgatory, false beliefs about Mary, praying to Saints, indulgences, the clergy celibacy and many more.

### ***SOLA FIDE (BY FAITH ALONE)***

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***Romans 3:28*** We maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.

Luther taught that the central issue "by which the church stands or falls" is justification by faith alone. And the Bible agrees. We are declared innocent by God because of the work of Christ, and that declaration becomes ours when the Holy Spirit creates faith in our hearts. We contribute nothing, nor could we.

The Catholic Church teaches that people can perform certain meritorious works that contribute towards salvation in addition to faith, such indulgences (gifting money to the church in exchange for a shorter time in purgatory), masses for the dead, and the necessity of works of penance after confession.

### ***SOLA GRATIA***

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***Ephesians 2:4-5,8*** God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions... For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.

The Bible teaches clearly that only one person deserves any credit for our salvation. God died on the cross for us, God creates faith in our hearts, and God works through us to do good. All good things we have are gracious gifts from God.

The Catholic Church teaches people not to seek help, aid, and grace from God alone, but also from Mary and the Saints. They teach that a Christian's own meritorious works can help complete God's justification in his life. And they believe certain spiritual acts have power in themselves to bring about God's grace (*ex opera operato*).



## ARE LUTHERANS MAINLINE PROTESTANTS?

### WHAT IS A MAINLINE PROTESTANT?

The term typically refers to a group of Christian denominations that were dominant in North America until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, now a minority. They are called *mainline* because they have ties to older denominations that pre-date the newer denominations with roots in the Great Awakening and Pentecostal movements of North America. Note that many branches of Protestantism (such as Reformed) have divided and now have both Evangelical and Mainline Protestant church bodies. Mainline Protestant church bodies are recognized for their liberal theology and heavy involvement in social issues, such as the Social Gospel movement, civil rights, and equality for women. Denominations and traditions include:

- United Methodist
- Episcopal and Anglican
- Presbyterian and United Church of Christ/Canada (Reformed)
- Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCC)
- Unitarianism

### WHAT DO MAINLINE PROTESTANTS TEACH?

Mainline Protestants are particularly active in the Social Gospel movement, which seeks to apply Christian ethics to social problems: global poverty, social injustice, racism, the environment, war, etc. Although clearly Christian ethics can be applied to these and all problems, the Social Gospel movement errs in placing the main emphasis of the church's activity on fixing these social problems rather than preaching the gospel.

An increasing majority of Mainline Protestants affirm the ordination of women as pastors and bishops, the practice of homosexuality, and liberal politics. Mainline Protestants are also more likely than Evangelicals to teach theistic evolution, and to deny Christ's virgin birth, miracles, and bodily resurrection.

### WHY DO MAINLINE PROTESTANTS TEACH THESE THINGS?

Many Mainline Protestants have been heavily influenced by *higher criticism* in biblical studies. This often means treating the Bible as a text that has changed throughout time, and that a person cannot discover the one natural meaning of a passage intended by the original author. Mainline Protestant scholars often believe we can be certain about few details of Jesus' life, and so about God's plan of Salvation.

Mainline Protestantism is also at the center of the *ecumenical movement*, which privileges working together for common social and political goals over addressing doctrinal differences. These denominations rarely have detailed confessional statements, and denominations merge without addressing clear historical differences in doctrine. Consider the United Church of Canada as an example: This denomination is a union of Methodists, Presbyterians, and Brethren.

Although most Lutherans in North America are Mainline Protestants, WELS Lutherans are not. We teach what the bible teaches: that a united commitment to all the Bible teaches is more important than ecumenicism, that preaching and preserving the clear gospel is the priority of the church (not social or political involvement), and that we do not change what we believe the bible teaches when societal norms change (such as views on homosexuality).



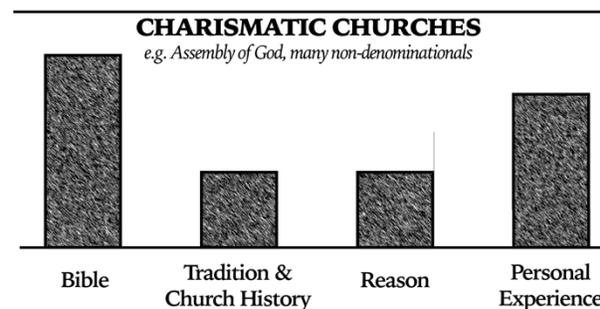
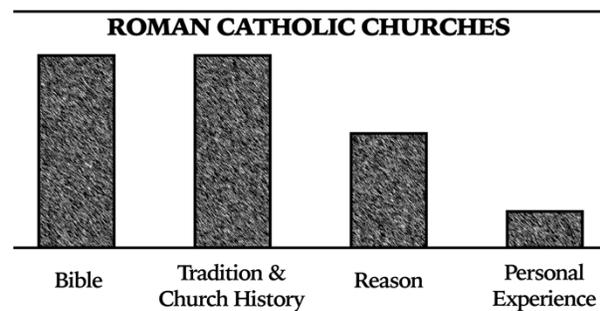
## HOW CAN CHURCHES' TEACHINGS BE SO DIFFERENT?

Just about everybody says, “My church’s teachings are based on the Bible.” But if that’s true, why do churches teach such different things? The “Wesleyan Quadrilateral” (named after John Wesley, founder of the Methodist church) can be a helpful way to look at the differences in how church bodies establish their doctrine. John Wesley said that there are four “pillars” that every Christian (and Christian denomination) uses to filter their beliefs: (a) **the Bible**, (b) **tradition or church history**, (c) **reason**, and (d) **personal experience and emotions**. The beliefs of Christian individuals and groups depend on which pillars they most emphasize. This is the reason for the many different teachings within Christianity. While every Christian church uses the Bible to some extent, the Bible’s authority may be challenged or even trumped by other perceived sources of truth. Let’s look at a few examples.

The **Roman Catholic Church** accepts the Bible as the inspired Word of God. Nevertheless, the decree of “papal infallibility” declares that the leader of the Catholic church has the authority to reinterpret the doctrines of the Bible as he wishes. This has led to a number of unbiblical doctrines such as purgatory, prayers to Mary and the saints, and justification by good works.

**Charismatic churches** tend to focus on personal experience (emphasizing “the day I decided to become a Christian”) and human emotion (emphasizing an “emotional high” in worship.) The gospel is still preached in these churches, but sometimes the emphasis on our feelings can lead to “flash-in-the-pan” Christianity – that is, I believe it as long as I can feel it, and when I can’t feel it anymore I drift away.

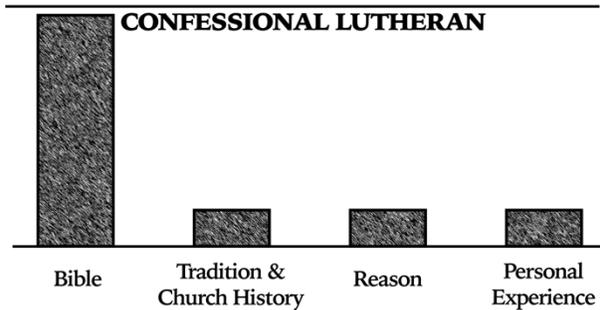
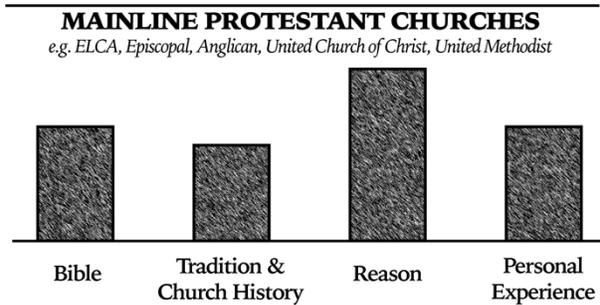
**Reformed churches** generally follow the theology of John Calvin, a humanist lawyer. Calvin believed that if God gave us our reason, he also wouldn’t give us anything in the Bible that we can’t understand. This led to teachings such as “Double Predestination” (the belief that in addition to predestining believers for eternal life, God also predestined other people to eternal damnation.) While this may be a logical conclusion, it clearly disagrees with Scripture, which says “God wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.” (2 Tim 2:4) The biggest danger with a purely logical approach to Scripture is that God does illogical things all the time! The main teachings of the Bible – creation, redemption, the resurrection of Jesus Christ, our hope of eternal life in heaven – are not “logical” and “reasonable” by any means. Thus Calvin’s theology led people to doubt and question their salvation, rather than simply accepting the promises of a God who operates above and beyond our logic.



\*\* A summary of an essay written by Pastor James Hein (Milwaukee, WI). For the full essay, go to <https://pastorjameshein.wordpress.com/tag/wesleyan-quadrilateral/>

**Mainline Protestant** denominations have been slowly shrinking for years now, in part because even they

don't know exactly what they stand for anymore. This is inevitable when the Bible, tradition, reason, and personal experience are all given roughly equal roles in determining truth. In fact, one could argue, what is the point of even using the Bible if everybody is free to change and interpret it however they wish? When Scripture is not the primary source of truth, it ceases to be a source of truth altogether.



**Confessional Lutheranism** gives the Bible the role God always intended it to have: our ultimate source of spiritual authority. Paul writes, “All Scripture is God-breathed, and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” (2 Tim 3:16)

Confessional Lutherans follow faithful believers who have gone before us, but only because their teaching was in line with God’s Word. They use their God-given reason, but also understand that many things in the Bible are above and beyond our reason, and must simply be accepted by faith. They have experienced the work of God in their own lives, and feel strong emotions when they recognize God’s love for them. However, the reason they know that God is always with them (Matt. 28:20), working all things for their good (Romans 8:28) is that God has promised them those things in the Bible, whether they feel it or not. Many Christian churches say, “Our teachings are based on Scripture.” Confessional Lutheran churches say, “Our teachings come from Scripture alone.”

## DO ALL LUTHERANS BELIEVE THE SAME THINGS?

*Galatians 5:9* A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough.

In 1971, Dr. Lawrence Kersten (who at that time belonged to the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod) was Assistant Professor of Sociology at Eastern Michigan University. He did a study in the three-county area of metropolitan Detroit to determine the impact of religion on the attitudes and values of the Lutherans in that area, and to see if Biblical, traditional Lutheran beliefs remained viable in 20th Century America. The results were published by Wayne State University Press in 1971, in a book called, *The Lutheran Ethic*.

Kersten surveyed a random sample of the members of the congregations of the different Lutheran groups, parish pastors of the different groups (241 parish pastors completed questionnaires), and students from the four groups. Below is listed a sample of the data collected from the pastors. The synods involved were the Lutheran Church in America (LCA), the American Lutheran Church (ALC), the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LC-MS), and the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS). **The number after each statement represents the percent of pastors who agreed with the statement.**

	LCA*	ALC*	LC-MS**	WELS
The Bible is God’s Word and all it says is true.	10%	19%	74%	100%
The Bible contains some human error.	76%	74%	18%	0%
The account of Adam and Eve falling into sinfulness is simply a story which did not take place in reality.	83%	72%	20%	0%
A child is sinful at birth.	67%	74%	96%	100%
Only those who believe in Jesus as their Savior can go to heaven.	43%	52%	84%	100%

These church bodies didn’t start by questioning whether Jesus was the only way to heaven. They started when error or false teaching was tolerated in their midst as “minor”. When these church bodies started questioning whether practicing church fellowship principles was important or they grew tired of practicing them, error snowballed. Soon even the most fundamental teachings of Scripture were endangered. A little yeast **does** work its way through the whole batch of dough!

We thank God for those Christians and pastors who remain faithful to the truth of God’s Word in those groups. At the same time, we recognize the tremendous danger that exists for their faith. Jesus’ words will remain true unto the end of time: “If you hold to my teachings, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” (John 8:31-32)

\* On 1 January 1988, the LCA and ALC merged (along with a third group) to form “The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.” (ELCA). Sadly this group has become what is today the most liberal Lutheran church body in the United States. The Canadian church body in fellowship with ELCA is the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCC).

\*\* The Canadian church body in fellowship with LC-MS is the Lutheran Church Canada (LCC).

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†Originally created by Prof. Tom Kock (Mequon, WI), edited by Pastor Jeremiah Gumm (Liverpool, NY).

## WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN WELS AND LCMS?

The Wisconsin (WELS) and Missouri (LCMS) Synods were in full doctrinal fellowship for about a hundred years until the mid-1900's. By God's grace the Wisconsin Synod has been largely spared from any serious doctrinal controversies throughout that time, but sadly the same cannot be said for Missouri, especially during the mid-1900s. For the most part the Missouri Synod has much to commend—it is very solid in its core salvation truths and so the souls of its people are in good care—but the following are some lingering differences between the WELS and LCMS that keep them from being in fellowship with each other today.

### GOD'S WORD ISSUES

WELS has always believed that the whole Bible is God's inspired, inerrant, infallible Word. The official teaching of LCMS currently is the same as WELS. However, the break between WELS and LCMS was first caused by LCMS theologians throwing out the principle of Scripture's divine inspiration. This led the synod to damaging relationships with other similar church bodies that only corrupted each other further. Though that issue has now been largely resolved in LCMS and the people who first espoused it are gone (Seminec, 1974), its influence may still spook around those who studied under those theologians.

### FELLOWSHIP ISSUES

WELS has always taught that all forms and expressions of fellowship should be based on total agreement in doctrine and practice (Ephesians 4:3-5, John 17:20-23, see lesson 3.2). This is called the *unit concept* of fellowship. LCMS practices what's been called *levels* or *degrees* of fellowship. Only LCMS pastors may lead LCMS worship services and (officially) only LCMS members may commune in their churches. Yet, other forms of worship and expressions of fellowship with any other Christian person or group (prayer, ecumenical services, weddings, etc.) are at least periodically tolerated because total agreement in doctrine and practice is overlooked. This has especially led to tolerating churches lax in upholding close communion. This issue is dangerous because "Bad company corrupts good character." (1 Cor. 15:33)

### CHURCH AND MINISTRY ISSUES

The WELS position has always been as Jesus said: "For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them" (Matthew 18:20). This is just as true for the synod at large as for the local congregation. LCMS holds that the local congregation is the only true church gathering; schools or the synod as a whole are merely human arrangements that have no special institution or authority from God. WELS also holds that public Gospel ministry can be carried out in any number of visible forms which may vary by need and circumstance – not just the pastoral office. "It was [Christ] who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers..." (Ephesians 4:11-13). The LCMS position is that only the office of the parish pastor is God-ordained and called, and that all other forms of ministry in the church, school, and synod are subordinate (or at least auxiliary) to that.

### THE AUTHORITY OF WOMEN IN THE CHURCH

Because WELS grants that many positions, including all leadership positions in the church, involve spiritual authority, WELS recognizes that only men should have roles of authority in congregational governance, including voting. Although this is politically incorrect, it flows directly from how the bible teaches authority in the church ought to be exercised. Because LCMS teaches falsely that only pastors have spiritual authority, most congregations grant women full voting rights.

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‡ Written and contributed by Pastor Mark Reichert (St. Paul, Norfolk, NE), edited by Luke Thompson.

Prof. John Brug, in his *WELS and Other Lutherans* (NPH), offers some of the following differences in doctrine and practice between WELS and LCMS. (For the full chart, see p. 58-60 in *WELS and Other Lutherans*.)

WELS	LCMS
<b>Fellowship</b>	
<p><b><i>Agreement in all scriptural teachings is required for all forms of fellowship.</i></b></p> <p>The same scriptural principles apply to all forms of church fellowship.</p> <p>All joint prayer is an expression of fellowship.</p> <p>Only those in confessional agreement may receive the Lord's Supper together (close Communion)</p>	<p><b><i>Full agreement in doctrine is required only for pulpit and altar fellowship.</i></b></p> <p>Full agreement is not necessary for worship at occasional joint Christian celebrations, Reformation services, convocations, rallies, meetings of theologians, etc.</p> <p>There can be joint prayer that is not an act of church fellowship.</p> <p>The official position holds to close Communion, but numerous pastors and churches practice "open Communion," allowing joint communion with those not in doctrinal agreement.</p>
<b>Church and Ministry, and the Roles of Men and Women</b>	
<p><b><i>The pastor of a local congregation is only one form of the divinely instituted public ministry.</i></b> Other forms are teachers, professors, called administrators, etc. The specific form is determined by the church's call.</p> <p>Because Scripture assigns a headship role to man and a helping role to woman, women do not participate in voting at meetings or governing boards of the congregation or synod.</p> <p>Only men may serve as pastors and in other leadership roles that exercise authority over men.</p>	<p>The official position seems to be that <b><i>the only divinely instituted form of the public ministry is that of pastor</i></b> in a local congregation. All other positions are auxiliary to this.</p> <p>Women are granted full voting rights in most congregations.</p> <p>Women may not serve as pastors but may serve on the church governing boards.</p>