

**WHAT'S
GOING ON AMONG
THE LUTHERANS?
A Comparison of Beliefs**

Patsy A. Leppien
J. Kincaid Smith

NORTHWESTERN PUBLISHING HOUSE
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Eleventh printing, 2010
Tenth printing, 2006
Ninth printing, 2000
Eighth printing, 1997
Seventh printing, 1994
Sixth printing, 1994
Fifth printing, 1993
Fourth printing, 1993
Third printing, 1992
Second printing, 1992

Cover photograph courtesy of Clifford Koeller and with permission from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin.

Scripture is taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide.

All rights reserved. Except for brief quotations in critical articles or reviews, no part of this publication may be reproduced in any manner without prior written permission from the publisher.

Library of Congress Card 83-61045
Northwestern Publishing House
1250 N. 113th St., Milwaukee, WI 53226-3284
© 1992 by Northwestern Publishing House.
All rights reserved. Published 1992
Printed in the United States of America
ISBN 978-0-8100-0427-6

DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to all those stalwart souls throughout past generations who have, by God's grace, held fast to the truth of his Word despite seemingly overwhelming odds.

And to our children and grandchildren, and future generations, who will be called to continue to fight "the good fight" and "contend for the faith" until the day of our Lord (2 Timothy 4:7; Jude 3).

CONTENTS

Preface	7
Acknowledgments	9

SECTION I

The Historic Lutheran Faith or the New Thinking?	13
1. What's Going Wrong Among the Lutherans?	15
2. Resources.....	26
3. The Controversy	30
4. Inspiration and Inerrancy	53
5. Creation	61
6. Adam and Eve	65
7. The Old Testament — Moses as Author	70
8. The Old Testament — Prophecy and Authorship	74
9. The Words of Jesus	78
10. Miracles	83
11. The Virgin Birth	88
12. The Deity of Christ	96
13. The Trinity	101
14. The Atonement	105
15. The Resurrection	113
16. The Immortality of the Soul	122
17. The New Morality	126
18. The Way to Heaven	159

19. Missions	170
20. The National Council of Churches and the World Council of Churches	189

SECTION II

The Great Strengths of Lutheranism	199
21. What It Means to be a Lutheran	201
22. Disunity and Division in the Church	210
23. The Roman Catholic Approach to Scripture	216
24. The Reformed Approach to Scripture	222
25. Pietism	250

SECTION III

American Lutheranism's Drift into the New Thinking	269
26. Lutherans in America 1634-1874	271
27. Unity and Realignment 1875-1988	301
28. Ecumenism Means Doctrinal Indifference	342
Appendix I Questions for Discussion	381
Appendix II Ask Your Pastor	389
Bibliography	391
Addresses for Resources	401
Name Index	402
Topic Index	405

PREFACE

This is an unusual book. It is a reflection of the struggle of the layperson to understand, and of the pastor-theologian to explain, the great theological changes taking place in most of Christendom. It is also the book the authors searched for and could not find. While many books and articles have been written regarding these changes, they are intended for the theologically trained audience, not the average layperson, and are not easily accessible to either pastors or laity.

The struggle that led to this volume began in 1984 when a small group of lay people in an American Lutheran Church (ALC) congregation engaged in extensive research on the coming merger that would make their church body a part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in 1988. When they became aware of the radical nature of the theological changes taking place in most Christian denominations, and how deeply these changes had infiltrated Lutheranism, they felt called to leave the ALC.

Convinced these changes could ultimately destroy their faith, as well as the faith of their children and grandchildren, they felt an obligation to share the results of their research with their brothers and sisters in Christ. Thus, in 1986, they joined with other concerned Lutherans and organized Lutherans Informed for Truth (L.I.F.T.). This book is the culmination of L.I.F.T.'s ongoing efforts to inform Lutherans in all synods of the real doctrinal differences dividing today's Lutherans.

The book is divided into three sections, with each chapter building upon those that precede it. Section I compares the historic Lutheran faith with the new thinking, identifies and explains the nature of the controversy, and thoroughly documents both positions. Section II points out the great strengths of historic Lutheranism and explains the fundamental differences between Roman Catholics, Lutherans, and other Protestants. This comparison illustrates how the great strengths of Lutheranism distinguish it from all other denominations. Section III describes American Lutheranism's drift into the new thinking through doctrinal compro-

mise and indifference and explains the error of today's ecumenical movement. It concludes with a call to the straying shepherds and sheep to return to their confessional Lutheran heritage.

Just as this book came about in an unusual way, so also has the joint authorship. As the book developed, most of the research and writing became this author's responsibility, a responsibility that could not have been fulfilled without the guidance of the other. Without Pastor J. Kincaid Smith's teaching, special insights, and many contributions to the manuscript—both quoted material and many other additions blended into the text—my task would have been impossible.

The book contains extensive quotes, so that the reader can see from primary sources in their original context what the real issues are. We have carefully checked and double-checked the quotations for accuracy. There still remains the possibility of some small errors slipping through, but to the best of our knowledge the quotes are precise.

Out of difficult trials flow abundant blessings, for when the Lord calls his servants to a task he provides for every need.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurable more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen (Ephesians 3:20,21).

Patsy A. Leppien
Reformation Sunday, 1991

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men (1 Corinthians 12: 4-6).

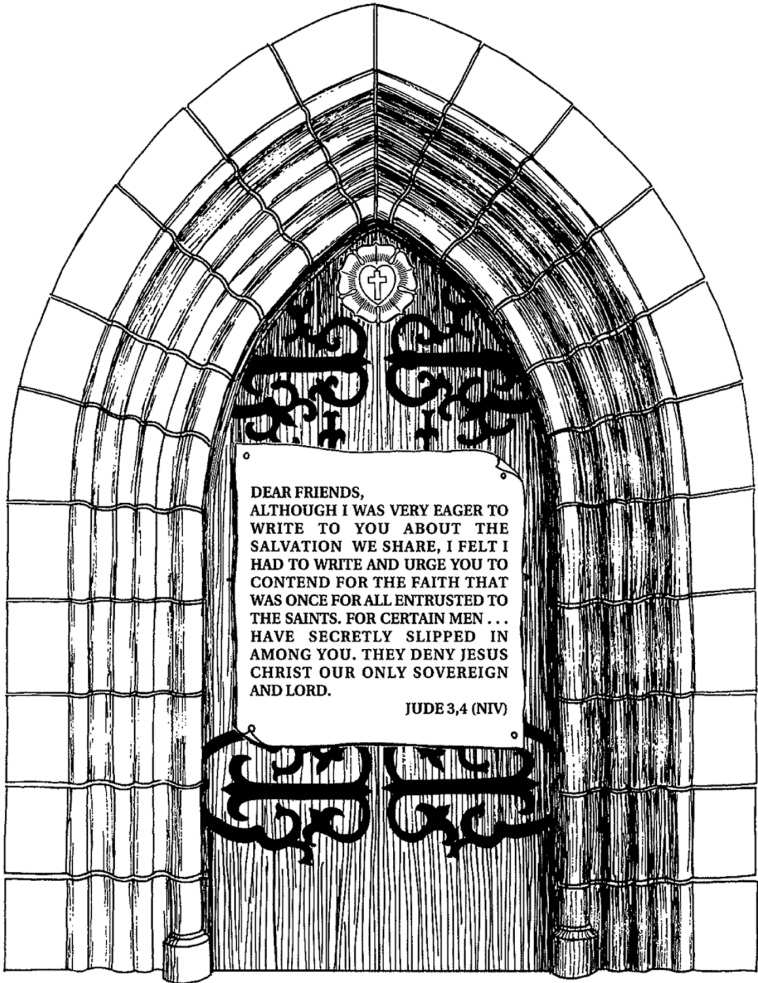
This book could not have been written without the support, encouragement, and talents of many people. The authors and Lutherans Informed for Truth (L.I.F.T.) would like to express their appreciation to all who helped make this book possible through formal and informal contributions. In particular, we would like to thank the following:

Pastors David Jay Webber, Paul R. Harris, Carl Hoffmeyer, James P. Olsen, Roland Cap Ehlke, Gaylin R. Schmeling, John A. Moldstad, Jr., and the Doctrinal Board of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod for their critical reviews of the manuscript and many helpful suggestions; Pastor James Sherod for the synodical charts; Nancy Ryan, who not only served as an editor but also taught us much about writing books; Lynn Metzker, graphic designer; and Claudia Eisberg, whose art work inspired the page featuring the Castle Church doors at Wittenberg, Germany.

A special note of thanks must go to Dr. Gregory L. Jackson, who not only reviewed the manuscript but shared many insights and resources while writing his book *Liberalism: Its Cause and Cure*. He also contributed the “Questions for Discussion” and prepared the index and bibliography-resource list.

We also appreciate the interest and support of the staff at Northwestern Publishing House, especially Pastor Roland Cap Ehlke, editor; Pastor Gary P. Baumler, vice president of editorial services; and Mark C. Brunner, vice president of sales and marketing.

The authors gratefully acknowledge their spouses, Carolyn Smith and Richard Leppien. Carolyn spent many hours typing the manuscript and making the editorial changes, while both served as readers and a constant source of encouragement.



DEAR FRIENDS,
ALTHOUGH I WAS VERY EAGER TO
WRITE TO YOU ABOUT THE
SALVATION WE SHARE, I FELT I
HAD TO WRITE AND URGE YOU TO
CONTEND FOR THE FAITH THAT
WAS ONCE FOR ALL ENTRUSTED TO
THE SAINTS. FOR CERTAIN MEN . . .
HAVE SECRETLY SLIPPED IN
AMONG YOU. THEY DENY JESUS
CHRIST OUR ONLY SOVEREIGN
AND LORD.

JUDE 3,4 (NIV)

Section I

**THE HISTORIC
LUTHERAN FAITH
OR THE NEW THINKING?**

1.

WHAT'S GOING WRONG AMONG THE LUTHERANS?

Most Lutheran lay people today are aware that there are differences among the various groups of Lutherans. Many became aware, as the merger of the American Lutheran Church (ALC), Lutheran Church in America (LCA), and Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches (AELC) drew closer, that these were very serious differences. Conservatives became the most alarmed, while moderates and liberals contended that the differences were minor and should not stand in the way of the merger.

The merger became a reality on January 1, 1988, when the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) was formed. The doctrinal differences remain, and every indicator points to an ongoing accelerated effort by the leadership of the ELCA to move the laity away from the teachings of the historic Lutheran faith (conservative) into a “new thinking” (liberal).

This book provides a comparison of the conservative Lutheran position, Position A, and the moderate or liberal Lutheran position, Position B. The conservative Position A identifies with the historic Lutheran teaching—Lutherans who believe the Bible is not only true but entirely free from error. The moderate or liberal Position B, on the other hand, identifies with the “new theology” or “new thinking” that has gradually come about over the past few decades.

The conservative Position A is that formerly held by all Lutherans, including the ALC (before the 1960s), and still held by the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS); its sister synod, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS); the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC); and various smaller Lutheran groups. This is also the *official* position held by the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS).

The liberal Position B is the position taught in the seminaries of the former ALC, LCA, and AELC (now those of the ELCA), as well as in most mainline Protestant and Catholic seminaries. Although not all moderates endorse each liberal position listed, they do ask for tolerance of them all.

The following pages provide a comparison of the commonly held beliefs of the two groups. Position A represents what conservative pastors openly teach and proclaim, both publicly and privately. Position B represents the commonly held beliefs of most liberal and moderate pastors. However, what they teach and proclaim publicly is often much more subtle than what they teach and say privately, especially among the seminarians, college students, and other young people. This will be demonstrated in Section I, which documents the comparison column.

POSITIONS A AND B: A COMPARISON OF BELIEFS

1.1 The controversy

Position A

There is a real doctrinal struggle in which the very foundation of the Christian faith, the gospel itself, and every other basic Christian doctrine is endangered and finally destroyed because much of the Bible is “questioned” and denied.

Position B

The only real differences among Lutherans today are minor, “picky” points of doctrine that don’t touch the heart of the Christian faith, which is the gospel. The real issues are more political and cultural than doctrinal.

1.2 Inspiration and inerrancy

Position A

All Scripture was inspired by God. The Holy Scriptures are absolutely true because God *gave the writers the very words* they wrote (verbal inspiration). The Holy Scriptures contain no errors or contradictions. Since God is the author of all Scripture, its teachings do not contradict one another. Only the canonical books of the Holy Scriptures are to be regarded as inspired.

Position B

All Scripture was “inspired” in the same sense that someone is inspired to write poetry, etc. The Holy Scriptures were written by well-intentioned men of God. They wrote what they *believed to be* from

God, but they were also affected by the cultural beliefs and influences of their times. The Holy Scriptures contain errors and contradictions. Since the Scriptures were written by many different men, their various teachings often contradict one another. The traditions of the church and the witness of Christians today may also be just as “inspired” as the Holy Scriptures.

1.3 Creation

Position A

God created all things, including man, within the six days of creation. It is contrary to Scripture to hold that man evolved from lower forms of life.

Position B

The story of creation in Genesis is a myth. We got here by a chance process of evolution that God directed or at least used.

1.4 Adam and Eve

Position A

Adam and Eve were two real historical individuals created by God. Noah, Jonah, and Job were also real people. The Bible contains no myths.

Position B

Adam and Eve are symbols of humanity and not real people. They never really existed. “Adam” just means “humankind.” Their story is a myth containing important spiritual truth, just as the stories of Noah, Jonah, and Job are myths.

1.5 The Old Testament—Moses as author

Position A

Moses was the author of those sections of the Old Testament that are ascribed to him—the first five books, which are commonly referred to as the Pentateuch. Jesus Christ himself witnessed to this fact.

Position B

The first five books of the Bible were written centuries after Moses died and came from various sources commonly identified as J, E, D, and P.

1.6 The Old Testament—prophecy and authorship

Position A

The Old Testament prophets foretold the coming of Jesus Christ, God's Son, the Savior of the world. Whatever the New Testament

teaches about the authorship of the books of the Old Testament is true. The books of Isaiah and Daniel were written by Isaiah and Daniel, respectively. Jesus Christ himself witnessed to this fact.

Position B

There are no prophecies in the Old Testament that actually refer to the man Jesus Christ. Whatever the New Testament says about the authorship of the books of the Old Testament is not necessarily true. Isaiah and Daniel were written, at least in part, by others. Our Lord either accommodated himself to error or he did not know better.

1.7 The words of Jesus

Position A

Jesus Christ really made all the statements attributed to him and recorded in the New Testament.

Position B

Many, if not all, of the statements attributed to Jesus Christ in the New Testament were not made by Jesus but were added by the early church.

1.8 Miracles

Position A

All miracles recorded in the Old and New Testaments actually and historically occurred.

Position B

“Miracles” found in the Bible must be understood as ways of conveying spiritual truths, not as actual historical events.

1.9 The Virgin Birth

Position A

We believe that the Virgin Birth is a biological miracle as taught in the Holy Scriptures. Jesus Christ did not have a human father.

Position B

Jesus Christ was not born of a virgin. We are not sure who his physical father was—perhaps Joseph or an itinerant Roman soldier. The early church honored Jesus by pretending his only father was God.

1.10 The deity of Christ

Position A

Jesus Christ is God. His true deity is clearly taught in Scripture.

Position B

The doctrine of the deity of Jesus Christ is not taught in the Bible but was developed by pious early Christians.

1.11 The Trinity

Position A

The doctrine of the Trinity is clearly taught in Scripture.

Position B

The doctrine of the Trinity is not taught in the Bible but was developed by pious early Christians and made a later addition by the church.

1.12 The Atonement

Position A

Jesus Christ died for the sins of the world. God took his anger for our sins out on his Son to save us and thus revealed a Father's heart toward us. He is not angry with us anymore; we are forgiven and reconciled to him because of Jesus. This action of God through Jesus is called substitutionary atonement or propitiation and is the heart and center of the Christian faith.

Position B

Jesus Christ "died for us" in the sense of a man dying for his friends, not in the sense of God punishing him for the sins of others. Such would portray an unjust God. God has always loved us. Jesus has shown us this.

1.13 The Resurrection

Position A

The resurrection of the body will occur on the last day of history. The souls of all who died in faith will be reunited with their glorified bodies to live forever in heaven with Jesus Christ. Jesus actually *physically* rose from the dead and *physically* showed himself to the disciples. The tomb was empty on Easter morning.

Position B

It is doubtful what the "body" is. The corpse that is buried is not the body. Therefore, "resurrection" concerns some kind of "spiritual body," not our earthly remains. The tomb was not empty on the first Easter morning. Jesus Christ did not "physically" rise from the dead. Perhaps we may speak of some "spiritual" resurrection.

1.14 The immortality of the soul

Position A

We believe, as the Bible teaches, that man has a soul that survives temporal death. At death the soul of the Christian believer goes to heaven, while the unbeliever's soul goes to hell.

Position B

We should not speak of the soul, because the Bible does not teach that we have an immortal soul. We really cannot speak of what may be beyond death. Perhaps in some sense we may "be with Jesus."

1.15 The New Morality

Position A

Moral absolutes are clearly taught in Scripture. Moral teaching in the Bible is clear and does not allow for exceptions dependent upon the situation. Extramarital and premarital sexual relations are sins clearly condemned in the Holy Scriptures. Homosexuality, both the act and the thoughts (lust), are sin and are condemned in Scripture. As with any sin, the repentant fornicator, adulterer, and homosexual have forgiveness and the grace that can change their lives.

Position B

Many questions of moral behavior must responsibly take all circumstances in a given situation into account. Narrow, rigid application of moral values would be legalistic and inconsistent with the precept of love in the gospel. Extramarital and premarital sexual relations are not always sinful but must be judged by the situation and the precept of love. Homosexuality in the life of a responsible loving Christian should be acknowledged as a valid lifestyle. Even if viewed as sin, homosexuality is no worse than any other sin.

1.16 The way to heaven

Position A

Jesus Christ is the only way to heaven. Those who die without faith in him are lost in hell.

Position B

Jesus Christ is not the only way to heaven. Sincere followers of non-Christian religions may also get to heaven. We must allow for the possibility of Universalism.

1.17 Missions

Position A

The primary mission of the church is the proclamation of the saving gospel of Jesus Christ. Genuine Christian love, of course, will always result in ministering to the earthly needs of people as well.

Position B

Once the shift in our thinking takes place and we see behind the mythical notions of the divinity of the man Jesus Christ, primitive ideas of spreading a message about a spiritual, other-worldly redemption from sin can be seen as missing the authentic message of the man Jesus. Jesus must be seen as the man for others, especially the poor and downtrodden. His chief concern was the elimination of poverty and oppression.

Christians should not seek to “convert” sincere followers of other religions that also teach love and concern for mankind. Instead, we should join our efforts with theirs in the true spirit of Jesus. Other religions sincerely followed are as equally valid as Christianity.

1.18 The National Council of Churches and the World Council of Churches

Position A

Lutherans should not join the National Council of Churches or the World Council of Churches. Not only are these organizations not Lutheran, but their primary emphasis is political and social and leans heavily on Marxism.

Position B

Lutherans should join the National Council of Churches and the World Council of Churches.

1.19 The Ecumenical Movement

Position A

All doctrines of the Bible are important and provide foundation and support for the chief doctrine, the gospel. While God's Word commands our fellowship in the body of Christ, that fellowship is to be the outward expression of unity in faith and doctrine. Therefore, Lutherans should join in fellowship with those bodies that subscribe to the Lutheran Confessions and whose teaching and practice is consistent with their confession.

Position B

Joining with non-Lutherans, both in worship and eventually even merging with them, is desirable as long as we agree with them, in a

sense, that “Jesus Christ is Lord.” Our differences can be worked out through dialogue and compromise.

* * *

The doctrinal differences described in the preceding comparison columns are the differences directly responsible for the absence of altar and pulpit fellowship among the larger Lutheran synods and various smaller Lutheran groups.

Within ELCA, Position A describes the beliefs held by the majority of the laity, whereas Position B is held by the vast majority of theologians and pastors. While the pastors and leadership of all Lutheran bodies know of these differences, most lay people are completely unaware of them.

OTHER COMPARISON COLUMNS

At this point we should note that Lutherans Informed for Truth (L.I.F.T.) is not the first concerned group of Lutherans to write such a comparison of beliefs in an attempt to reach others with the truth. This comparison column is a composite of three other comparison columns written over a period of 24 years. The sources of these comparisons will be of interest to the reader.

1. *Lutherans Alert—National* (LAN), sponsor of Faith Evangelical Lutheran Seminary and the congregations of the World Confessional Lutheran Association (WCLA), Tacoma, Washington. LAN was formed in 1965 by a small number of conservative ALC pastors and congregations. Their comparison of beliefs was written as a part of an ongoing effort to halt the ever-increasing apostasy (a deliberate turning away from the faith) in the former ALC and LCA after the mergers of the 1960s and now of the ELCA.
2. “What Is Going On? Going Into Exile,” Herman Otten.¹ It was written by conservatives at the time of the split that occurred in 1974 in the LCMS with the organized walkout at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri, of most of the professors and more than 400 students. Those who walked out formed Christ Seminary-Seminex and later joined with sympathetic LCMS congregations to form the AELC. Otten is a

¹Herman Otten, “What Is Going On? Going Into Exile,” *Christian New Encyclopedia*, 4 vols., ed. Herman Otten (Washington: Missouri Publishing Co., 1983), 1:632. We highly recommend these volumes as an unparalleled source of information about American Christianity.

conservative Lutheran pastor serving an LCMS congregation. As editor of the *Christian News*, he has been documenting both sides of the controversy since 1962.

3. "Twenty Questions," Roger Kovaciny. Kovaciny is a conservative Lutheran pastor of WELS. The occasion for his comparison was the 500th birthday of Martin Luther. Following are a few remarks from the introduction:

If Luther were here for his own 500th birthday party, I am sure that one game he would insist on playing with all the preachers would be Twenty Questions. Luther's Twenty Questions would surely be about theology. And while I can't claim that the following twenty are the twenty he would pick, surely he would want them answered. Because there is a great theme that runs through the Scriptures and is reflected in Luther's writings. That theme is the fact that all through history, there have been true and false churches running parallel to each other . . . the major heresy of the day is religious liberalism. Luther would want to know which a pastor is [conservative or liberal]. And this little chart will help you play Twenty Questions with your own pastor.²

LIBERALISM IN OTHER DENOMINATIONS

The doctrinal differences noted in the preceding comparison column are not unique to the Lutheran church. In fact, L.I.F.T. research reveals that the departure from historic Christian doctrine began in virtually all of the old mainline denominations³ in America at the turn of the century. Lutheranism in America did not begin to capitulate to the onslaught of the liberal theologians until the late 1930s, the problem worsening after World War II. Many books have been written on the subject of the mainline denominations departing from the faith, and many mainline denominations have conservative groups within their ranks that publish materials similar to L.I.F.T.'s. A few of these books are listed in the Bibliography.

One such book is *Baal or God*. In the preface to the second edition, the author (Otten) tells us:

²Roger Kovaciny, "Twenty Questions," *Christian News Encyclopedia*, 4:2636.

³The most prominent mainline denominations today are the United Methodists, the United Church of Christ, the Presbyterian Church (USA), the Episcopalians, and the American Baptists.

The author wrote *Baal or God* in 1965 to show Christians in all denominations what was happening within Christendom and how far major denominations and modern liberal theologians had departed from historic Christianity. . . . *The Christian News Encyclopedia* shows that since the first printing of *Baal or God* there is considerably more evidence to show that theological liberalism has thoroughly infiltrated most major denominations. The National Council of Churches at a special anniversary convention used the evolutionary confession of a Roman Catholic theologian together with the non-Trinitarian Statement of Faith mentioned in *Baal or God's* chapter on the Trinity. A year after *Baal or God* was published, the NCC admitted into full membership the Church of the New Jerusalem, a Swedenborgian cult which has a unitarian theology [they deny the doctrine of the Trinity]. A survey taken by the NCC at one of its conventions revealed that only about one fourth of the delegates at the NCC convention believed in such miracles as the virgin birth of Christ. The leaders of the World Council of Churches at their last assembly in 1983 repeatedly made it clear that they did not believe that Jesus Christ is the only way to heaven. Spokesmen from various non-Christian religions, who addressed the assembly, were greeted as fellow believers in the true God.⁴

In the introduction to his book, Otten describes the nature of the controversy and makes some interesting and accurate observations:

Baal or God shows there are basically two different religions within external Christendom. The difference between these two religions is the difference between God and Baal. Informed Christians ought to recognize that the real difference within external Christendom does not lie along traditional denominational lines but within the major denominations. On the one hand there are those within these denominations who accept the fundamental truths of historic Christianity; on the other hand there are the modern liberals within these same denominations who reject historic Christianity. The situation in Christendom is like that in American politics. There are conservatives and liberals in American politics. There are conservatives and liberals in each major political

⁴Otten, *Baal or God* (Washington: Missouriian Publishing Co., 1988), p. ii.

party. So there are believers in historic Christianity and modern liberals in the major denominations.

One honest clergyman, who admits: "I identify myself as a liberal," claims that most liberal protestant clergymen "simply do not realize that they have already rejected basic, historic Christianity." He correctly observes, "Should the majority of liberal Protestant ministers ever decide to be intellectually honest with their congregations, the Lutheran Reformation would seem altogether mild by comparison. Protestant parishioners would, I am convinced, leave their churches wholesale."⁵

The remaining pages of this book will be devoted to documenting the truth of the claims made in the comparison column as they apply to the Lutheran church. It should be noted, however, that liberal theologians all speak the same language. While the quotations are from the lips and pens of Lutherans, they are representative of the manner in which all liberal theologians speak and teach, regardless of their denominational affiliation.

⁵Ibid., p. iii.