

Paper delivered at the 1960 Western Wisconsin District Delegate Convention at Northwestern College, Watertown, Wisconsin by Pastor William Lange, 231 - 14th Ave. S., Wisconsin Rapids, Wisconsin:

COMMERCIALISM IN THE CHURCH

In assigning this essay the Praesidium requests that the essayist remember that this is a District Convention with laymen present, who have in times past complained that the papers delivered were too scholarly, too deep, and up on cloud nine as far as they were concerned. I almost expected President Mueller to announce, that the Praesidium had hoped to have a noted wit up here on the podium today, but seeing that they were unable to obtain one, the Convention will have to be satisfied with a half-wit.

It has become customary in learned circles for the lecturer to announce at the beginning of his paper that it will take him 57 minutes and 3/8 of a second to read his essay. I am unable to do that, seeing I've merely written this paper-- up to now I haven't read it. And yet I would beg the indulgence of the Convention that you hear me thru at one sitting, without pause for discussion. I once was discussing "Gemuetlichkeit" with a now sainted Christian Day School teacher of our Synod. He was telling that in a congregation of our District in the western part of the state they had a Men's Choir. Also a brewery owner as a member of the congregation. Every Tuesday one of the drivers of the brewery had a standing order to leave off a pony of beer in the school basement. "At night we'd sing for about an hour," he reminisced, "and then we'd have the 'Bier-Pause.'" "And you know," he continued in the glow of those memories, "many is the time we never got back to singing." Thus it might go us if ever we stopped for discussion in the midst of this paper.

And now, into the midst of things. The title of the essay assigned to me is: Commercialism in the Church. Webster's Universal Dictionary defines commercialism as the methods of commerce and of business men. To a pastor who had a congregation elect him a treasurer of the congregation who couldn't even write-- to a pastor, who had a congregation elect him a treasurer who collected more church dues (an odious term) in the municipal liquor store than he did in church, and

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would put the church dues in his wallet, and after a few beers, wouldn't know where his money ended and the church's began--to one who was weaned in the ministry on the classic story that went the rounds of the Dakota-Montana District. A pastor was helping his treasurer to get the congregational books in order at the end of the year. To put it mildly, the books were a mess, but the pastor could decipher and decode most of it, but one item--that had him stumped. As diplomatically as he could he told the treasurer that he could get everything but this one item. What was that, and he put his finger on it. The treasurer put on his glasses, and spelled it out--j-u-s--\$20.00--jus--ch, yes--jus for the lights--the methods of commerce and of business men in the church--neat and precisely kept records, a C.P.A. system, or its equivalent for recording the receipts and disbursements of monies--in the words of the noble bard--"Tis a consummation devoutly to be wished." For this kind of commercialism in the church I'm sure there is 100% agreement amongst us. We are for it, and all the way!

However, I'm quite positive that it was not the intention of the Praesidium that I should present to you several excellent methods of keeping financial and other records in the church. My dictionary has another definition for commercialism, namely, the prevalence of the commercial spirit. Now we hit pay dirt.

The prevalence of the commercial spirit in the church raises the basic question: Has the external, visible church, or one of its organizations the right to buy and sell? For commercialism by the church means any type of buying and selling by the congregation or societies that stem from it. May a Ladies' Aid hold a bazaar? May the congregation have a supper and sell tickets? May a congregation sell Christmas cards, devotional booklets, etc. for a profit? This subject alone has done yeoman's service in helping the Church of Christ to maintain its reputation as "the ecclesia militans," "the fighting church."

For our answer to the question: Has the external, visible church the right to buy and sell?--we Lutheran Christians turn to the Bible. What does the Bible say? In Deuteronomy 14, 24-26, we read: And if the way be too long for thee, so

that thou art not able to carry it; or if the place be too far from thee, which the Lord thy God shall choose to set his name there, when the Lord thy God hath blessed thee: 25. Then shalt thou turn it into money, and bind up the money in thine hand, and shalt go unto the place which the Lord thy God shall choose: 26. And thou shalt bestow that money for whatsoever thy soul lusteth after, for oxen, or for sheep, or for wine, or for strong drink, or for whatsoever thy soul desireth; and thou shalt eat there before the Lord thy God, and thou shalt rejoice, thou, and thine household. The motives in the beginning were excellent. To always have available, as a convenience, clean animals, and doves, and clean and proper food and drink for the worshippers from afar, the external, visible church of the Old Testament dispensation practised merchandising under the Lord's sanction. There were also money changers in the temple. Every Jew had to contribute a half of a shekel--Exodus 30, 13--as a ransom for his soul, yearly, to the temple. The money was also used to defray the cost of the sacrifices. These money changers sat near the Lord's treasury in special niches at 13 tables. When a person came who did not have the currency of the temple, he was required to pay an exchange rate to get his money exchanged into the temple currency. Again the external, visible church of the Old Testament dispensation practiced commercialism under the Lord's sanction.

Early in our Lord's ministry we find Him in the temple. John 2, 13-22. And the Jews' Passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem, 14. And found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting: 15. And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changer's money, and overthrew the tables; 16. And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; and make not my Father's house an house of merchandise. 17. And his disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up. 18. Then answered the Jews and said unto him, What sign showest thou unto

us, seeing that thou doest these things? (The Jews wanted to know by what authority Jesus did these things, seeing the commercialism was allowed by Moses.) 19. Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. 20. Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days? But he spake of the temple of his body. 22. When therefore he was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them; and they believed the scripture, and the word which Jesus had said.

Toward the close of our Lord's ministry, Matthew 21, 12-13--Mark 11, 15-19--Luke 19, 45-46, we find a second cleansing of the temple recorded. We cite the account as given by St. Matthew: 12. And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the money changers, and the seats of them that sold doves, 13. And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves.

Three things strike us in these accounts of the cleansing of the temple by our Lord. First of all, the degeneracy of the merchandising in the temple had led to a desecration of that which was holy, in the second place, the raucus cries of the sellers, and the outraged screams of those being fleeced, the lowing of the cattle, bleating of the sheep, and cooing of the doves, and the odor, disturbed the worship, and in the third place, the transactions, without exception, were dishonest to the core.

And because of these three points your essayist would appreciate it very much if the passages dealing with Christ's cleansing of the temple would not be used as a *sedes doctrinae* (seat of doctrine) against any and all commercialism in the church. We shall look more closely at the point--the desecration of that which was holy. At the time of the dedication of the temple erected by King Solomon, the Lord, visibly, in a cloud, entered the temple. From that time on the Jew of the Old Testa-

ment era was convinced that there were spots that were holier than others, that there were places where he could be closer to God than others. The Samaritan woman asked Jesus--John 4, 19: The woman saith unto him, Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet. 20. Our fathers worshipped in this mountain, and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship. 21. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet in Jerusalem, worship the Father. 22. Ye worship ye know not what; we know what we worship; for salvation is of the Jews. 23. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father seeketh such to worship him. 24. God is a Spirit; and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth. The Christian of the New Testament era is convinced of the fact that the Lord is interested in the "how" of our worship, and not in the "where." We no longer make pilgrimages to holy spots. Our church buildings are but protection against the elements; they are utilitarian in character: not holy places in the sense in which the temple of the Lord was in the Old Testament days. For this reason, in my humble opinion, the passages dealing with Christ's cleansing of the temple, in regard to the desecration of that which is holy, do not apply to our churches and merchandising conducted in the basement. One of my parishoners told me that she had been educated years ago in a Lutheran School in Nebraska. The church had a school room added on to it. And the pastor told the children, "So far you can play. Where the church stands is holy ground. There you dare not play." Such an attitude, to put it mildly, is far fetched, and without Scriptural support.

Point 2--The raucus cries of the hawkers at the booths where animals were sold--can't you hear them?--"Come right up--the best animals for sale here--Our animals are guaranteed to make your worship profitable and pleasant." The lowing of the cattle, the bleating of the sheep, the cooing of the doves added to the deafening din. The outraged screams of those who had come to buy and worship, and were being charged outrageous prices, added to the aforementioned racket, certainly

was not conducive to meditation and prayer on the part of those who were trying to worship the Lord. In fact, the noise, and the stench, had changed the purpose of the temple as a place of worship and prayer into a market place. Where a pop and ice cream stand is running wide open during a Mission Festival service, and there are more people swizzling pop and slurping ice cream and visiting in a loud voice around the stand than there are worshippers in the church service; and when the worshippers are disturbed by all the commotion at the stand-- then brethren--the stand has got to go. Now the passages dealing with Christ's cleansing of the temple apply.

Point 3--The transactions, without exception, were dishonest to the core. The worldly and wily High Priest Caiaphas had a lucrative racket going. Either he charged outrageous fees for "concession" spots in the temple, or he got a rake off on every sale. Conditions were such, that usurious rates had to be charged for exchanging money, and outrageous prices had to be asked for the animals and doves by the concessionaires, so that they could make some money. As an example, if you could buy a lamb for \$2.00 in the markets of Jerusalem--you paid \$10.00 for it in the temple. The concessionaires were in business to make money, not for the benefit of the worshippers. The commercialism of the temple, as it was carried on in Christ's day, was a flagrant violation of the Seventh Commandment: Thou shalt not steal. If, in our day, a Ladies' Aid would overcharge for merchandise at a bazaar, or overcharge for a meal, in short, if the church's merchandising were dishonest in any way, then the passages dealing with Christ's cleansing of the temple would apply, and the commercialism of the church would have to cease.

We move on. Passages often used from the Old Testament to condemn any and all commercialism in the church are--Genesis 14--Abraham and Melchizedek and Abraham and the King of Sodom--Genesis 23, 13-15, Abraham's purchase of a burying ground in which to bury his wife Sarah--1 Chronicles 21, 22-25, David's purchasing the threshing-floor from Ornan--are irrelevant and immaterial. The last two men-

tioned are merely historical accounts of business transactions as carried on in Asia Minor. It is a hermeneutical principle that we do not deduce doctrines from Old Testament historical events. In answer to the question whether the church in the days of the Old Testament had the right to buy and sell, to engage in commercialism, I would answer--"Yes."

In the New Testament we find the visible Church of Christ, shortly after Pentecost, becoming a martyr institution, bitterly persecuted under 10 Roman emperors because of its message, and driven underground to exist. It had no rights or privileges, or tolerance, or property, or buildings. The Christians worshipped in desert places, underground in catacombs, furtively in homes. Not until the Emperor Constantine embraced Christianity, he died in 337 A.D., was the Christian Church granted equal rights with the heathen religions--the right to own property, worship in public, and erect buildings. In other words, while the New Testament was being written, the Christian Church having no rights at all, the subject of commercialism isn't mentioned in the New Testament. We have here an adiaphoron, something neither commanded nor forbidden in Scriptures, like the driving of an automobile, playing golf, piloting an airplane, playing cards, or smoking cigarettes, to mention a few.

I believe it was in 1940 that an article appeared in the American Lutheran entitled: "Give" is His command: not "Buy and Sell" by the Rev. August W. Brustat. Using such a procedure to interpret Scripture could also be applied to walking. Many are the passages in the New Testament that encourage us to walk in one way or another. Nary a one tells us to ride in an automobile. Therefore "Walk" is His command: not "Ride in an automobile"--could be the title of a very profitable paper at a pastoral conference attended by pastors who, on the whole, are head over heels in debt trying to keep an automobile rolling.

From 337 A.D. on, the visible Church has answered the question: Has the visible, external church the right to buy and sell with a "Yes." This has always been

the position of our Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Church from its inception. The Revised Constitution of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod reads in Article V--Rights and Powers--Section 1. For the better performance of its various functions the Synod shall have the legal right and power to (a) Secure, maintain, administer, regulate, and manage endowments, legacies, bequests, trust funds and any and all types of funds entrusted to it; (b) Purchase or otherwise acquire, own, and hold real estate, buildings, personal property of every kind and description in the interest of the Synod, and convey, sell, assign, transfer, lease, mortgage, pledge, exchange, or otherwise dispose of any of its property, real, personal, or mixed, as may be for its best interests; (c) Take, hold, and receive by gift, devise, or bequest property of every name and nature, and hold and use such property for any and all purposes designated in this Constitution or any of its Bylaws. Again quoting from our Synod's Constitution's Bylaws--Section 7.01 Northwestern Publishing House Board of Directors (a) For the purpose of carrying on and conducting a general book-selling, publishing and printing business, and particularly the printing, publication and dissemination of all such books, periodicals, and literature as may be considered by its members beneficial to the Evangelical Lutheran faith and principles, the Synod shall maintain a publishing house and book concern under the name Northwestern Publishing House. (e) The Board of Directors shall convey to the Treasurer of the Synod such portion of the net profit of the Northwestern Publishing House which shall not, in its judgment, be required for reinvestment.--Again quoting from the Bylaws: Section 4.03, The Trust Funds Committee (e) The Investment Committee shall submit an annual report of its investments to the Board of Trustees of the Synod. Again quoting from the Bylaws: The last sentence of (c) under Section 4.07 Parsonage and Teacherage Fund--At the discretion of the Board of Trustees, it may dispose of the real estate on the open market. (Quotations from proceedings of the 35th Convention, 1959)

We are interested in putting the subject of commercialism by the church in its correct pigeonhole, in once again, amidst all of the controversy on the subject,

reiterating the principle, that the visible Church or segments, or organizations thereof, have the basic fundamental right to buy and sell. Here is definitely a case of what is sauce for the goose, is sauce for the gander, and we might add for the gosling. If Synod can engage in commercialism, then so can the local congregation, and if the local congregation can engage in commercialism, then so can an organization of a congregation. In this connection let us ever remember the old Latin proverb: *Abusus non tollit usum.* (Abuse does not do away with the use of something.)

However, we ought always remember that just because something is delegated to the field of the *adiaphora* (things neither commanded nor forbidden by Scriptures) is no sign that now we have to go out and energetically do such a thing. Just because smoking is not commanded nor forbidden in the Bible is not the reason for us to assume that we have to smoke to prove our Christian liberty. And just because we put commercialism by the church in its proper category of the *adiaphora* does not mean that your essayist recommends that all now go home and get the ladies of the congregation enthused to hold a chicken supper next week. If, as a magazine article recently stated, "Breathing is dangerous," we ought to be on guard against any and all abuses of commercialism by the Church, for that too can be dangerous.

It would take us too far afield to discuss every and all abuses of commercialism by the Church. The commercial spirit is altogether too prevalent in the hearts of all of us and we make up the Church. Constantly we must be on our guard lest it become our controlling interest. The Church has the commission to preach the Gospel, and commercialism dare never supersede this commission, but if engaged in, must remain a humble handmaiden. For example, our Northwestern Publishing House dare never become the consuming interest of our Synod, like the pamphlet publishing and selling has become in the Jehovah's Witness sect, so that our Church conventions deteriorate into salesmen conventions, as the press reports, the conventions of the Jehovah's Witness are.

Abuses of commercialism by the Church are, like the spirits in the poor dem-
mented soul whom Jesus healed, legion. My father received his ministerial train-
ing in Michigan Lutheran Seminary when it was the theological Seminary of the
Michigan Synod. When many in the Michigan Synod joined the Wisconsin Synod my
father also joined the Wisconsin Synod when the two Synods amalgamated. And be-
cause each Synod had a congregation in the small town of Ludington, Michigan, both
Synod's pastors were called to Wisconsin. My father was called to a mission in
Milwaukee. In his first meeting with the then chairman of the mission board, the
sainted Pastor Bergmann, Sr., he was told of the beer picnics in the Milwaukee area
staged by many of our Lutheran churches. This was 1911. My father always remem-
bered Pastor Bergmann's angry lament: "And then, when things get out of hand be-
cause of excessive beer drinking, the pastor has to use his cane to crack a few
skulls and restore order." I can well remember attending one of our Lutheran
church picnics in the Milwaukee area as a young lad, and seeing 4 men stagger from
the picnic, wailing, "It's a long, long way to Tipperary." Brethren, as becometh
saints, let it not be once named among you, applies also here. Bingo parties,
paddle wheels, and all other gambling devices, come under the same stinging in-
ditement. Even the world admits that gambling tears down the moral fibre of an
individual and a community, and then the Church, which is to make saints of sin-
ners, perverts it's high calling to make people more the slaves of Satan than they
were before the Church got ahold of them. Not so is the Church the spotless Bride
of Christ. Such commercialism is a cancer in the Church which can only be cured
by surgery, namely, the offense must be cut out or off at once.

Across the pastor's desk come magazines, and circulars devoted in many cases
to getting the ambitious ladies of the Church to act as salesladies for this or
that product. Some items are offensive, some a waste of time and energy on the
part of the ladies for the insignificant returns realized, some items not worth
the price to be asked. A judicious pastor will steer the majority of this stuff

into his waste basket. If it is brought up by a lady in an Aid meeting, oftentimes pointing out one or the other, or all of the objections just mentioned, will be enough to get the majority to vote "No."

The prevalence of the commercial spirit may become so strong in a congregation, that the stewardship of a congregation is torn down. Things can get into such a state, that every time the money isn't there to pay salaries, or to paint the church, etc., the ladies of the congregation have to throw a supper. Then a consecrated pastor will begin the slow process of indoctrinating his membership in the principles of Christian stewardship so that commercialism by the Church is brought into it's proper place. The commercial spirit is so prevalent that people who attend church suppers or bazaars are of the opinion that this entitles them to a place in heaven. Such need to hear again the words of Jesus: He that is of God, heareth God's Word, ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God. In a larger congregation with many organizations there is the possibility of far too many commercial ideas being put into practise, so that there is the possibility of two or more money-making affairs being scheduled for the same month. Enough is enough, and a few brakes applied in the right places often brings the situation under control. (Chicken-leg story)

And yet, in spite of the many abuses in connection with commercialism in the Church, your essayist feels constrained to state that not all church suppers or bazaars, or ice cream socials, or plays, or book stores are rivals of stewardship and in themselves sinful. We dare not overlook the fact that believers form a family, and that there is a social side to family life. The ancient church had its agapes, its love feasts. No doubt they were something like our pot-luck suppers. The point I wish to make is that the desire to be together and eat together can be an expression of Christian fellowship. I believe we have something similar at our Mission Festivals, dedications, anniversaries, conference meals, etc. One does see a lot of good-natured visiting on the part of those who are waiting to eat or have eaten and are waiting for the next service to begin. And a free-will

offering at the table is one solution to the problem. But a reasonable charge is another, and does eliminate some disorder. I have yet to walk into our Publishing House and purchase something, and find there a basket to throw in what I think the article is worth. There's a set price to the item--it eliminates disorder for one thing.

We oftentimes complain about our young people, that they expect the world with a fence around it as a gift. And with glorious inconsistency we ask the congregation to hand them everything on a platter. If the young people's society had to rehearse a play and present it, in order to help the congregation purchase a 16 millimeter film projector, it might appreciate the projector just a mite more, and take care of it just a little better.

Once again I would like to stress that our Synod has no official ruling on this matter, and if it presumed to prescribe certain ways of raising money to the exclusion of others not in themselves sinful, no congregation would in any sense be held to obey. Church sales and suppers are not condemned by our Church. Every congregation has a right to say whether it wishes to limit money raising to direct giving. It will certainly not maintain or introduce methods disapproved of by its pastor. But it will not prescribe to other congregations that they too must limit themselves to direct donation as a means of supporting their church. And it would be well for pastors especially, and for Christian Day School teachers to heed the words of our Lord: Judge not. There is altogether too much heartless and senseless judging engaged in by many. A pastor who permits commercialism, is often condemned by those opposed to commercialism as a liberal, one who is lax in his pastoral ministry, one who is deviating from the Word of God. A pastor who opposes commercialism, is often condemned by those who allow it as a crackpot, a legalist, an enthusiast. My brethren, such things ought not so to be!

I would also like to say a word to such who feel that they have a congregation, or an organization which is too commercially minded, which spends too much time in the kitchen. Vigorous efforts are exerted to eradicate all commercialism.

And success is achieved. Now, in physics I wasn't an Einstein, but from a distant and hazy past I recall the sentence that "Nature abhors a vacuum." And so does a church or an organization of the church. If your church members like to work, don't squelch their enthusiasm, channel it into the right direction. Get them busy studying the Scriptures, visiting the sick, the poor, the missionary prospects, sewing for Bethesda or the Lutheran Children's Friend Society, or our Apache Nursery, leading Lutheran Pioneers for Boys and Lutheran Girl Pioneers, helping with the teen-agers in the Young People's Society, get them working in a Preaching-Teaching-Reaching mission, and you can keep your members busy until Jesus returns to take His Church to glory.

A man was going to take the subway in New York. Unfortunately he slipped at the top of the stairs and went tumbling down. About half-way down he knocked a lady off her feet, and she joined him bumping down the stairs. At the lower landing the man came to rest with the lady sitting on his lap. He is to have looked at her and to have remarked: "Lady, kindly get off of my lap. This is as far as I go."