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Foreword

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Foreword

Conventional wisdom within our faith tradition proclaims that Lutheranism has not been at the avant-garde when it comes to matters of social justice. Frequently it is pointed out that the emphasis on individual salvation by grace alone through faith alone and Luther's teaching of the "Two-Realm" ethic are behind this tardiness in social matters. There is important truth to such contentions, but they remain simplistic and partial when confronted with both the complexity and reality of the situation. In order to provide more definitive descriptions and analyses of the "why" or "why-not" of Lutheran commitment to social justice, two tasks must be undertaken with a great deal of seriousness. First of all, there must be continuing study and dialogue on the theological issues involved in the question, and secondly, we need to be in touch with the historical and social realities of how our faith is and has been put into practice.

These essays on the theme, "Canadian Lutherans and Social Justice: Sampling of a Heritage", direct themselves to this latter task. They provide examples of how Canadian Lutherans and their institutions have wrestled with society's concerns and how the gospel has impinged upon these.

Elaine Scott-Thomas sets the stage by comparing and contrasting Canada's major social gospel churches (Methodists and Presbyterians) with the English-speaking Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Central Canada (1908-1925). What emerges most clearly is how very complex has been our churches' entry into "social gospel" concerns, an entry coloured not only by theology but also social and immigrant realities.

For his part, Matthew H. Diegel gives us a detailed history and portrayal of how one social issue was debated and shaped in two legislative bodies of our Canadian church. Set

against the broader backdrop of both our society in general and parliament in particular, Diegel compares and contrasts the abortion debate in both the Eastern Canada Synod of the Lutheran Church in America— Canada Section (ECS) and the later national church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC). The article demonstrates, with its balance and detailed research, how difficult it has been, over an almost two-decade period, to reach consensus on so delicate an issue. As well, we are treated to the structural process of how social statements emerge in the life of the church.

David Pfrimmer, in the third article, describes the origin, development, values and structures of the Institute for Christian Ethics. Not only are we treated to a thorough picture of this recently created body but also we are receiving this perspective from the director himself. Although the account is descriptive and balanced in perspective, it is enriched also because it has been penned by the very insider who leads the institute in a dedicated and creative way. It is interesting to note as well the historical context that led to the Institute's development, a context that reminds us that the history of which we are a part has also shaped who we are and what we do.

Finally, Nancy Vernon Kelly has provided an article describing how the crying need for social justice has been catalyst to a transformation within an urban Lutheran parish. St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church in Toronto has been in the downtown core for almost a century and has witnessed radical changes in its neighbourhood. Kelly looks at those changes and traces the painful and inspirational journey of the congregation and its pastors as they seek to be a presence of Christ's gospel in the midst of poverty and ethnic diversity.

Although the full range of causes for Lutheran involvement and/or non-involvement in social issues has not been answered by the following articles, they do provide portraits of how Canadian Lutherans have addressed these concerns in life's daily experiences. This history is firm ground upon which we all can build. Their successes and failures are both instructive. We are their sisters and brothers, and their journey shows us that we are not alone in the daily struggles of the gospel in the midst of life.