

22 February 1956

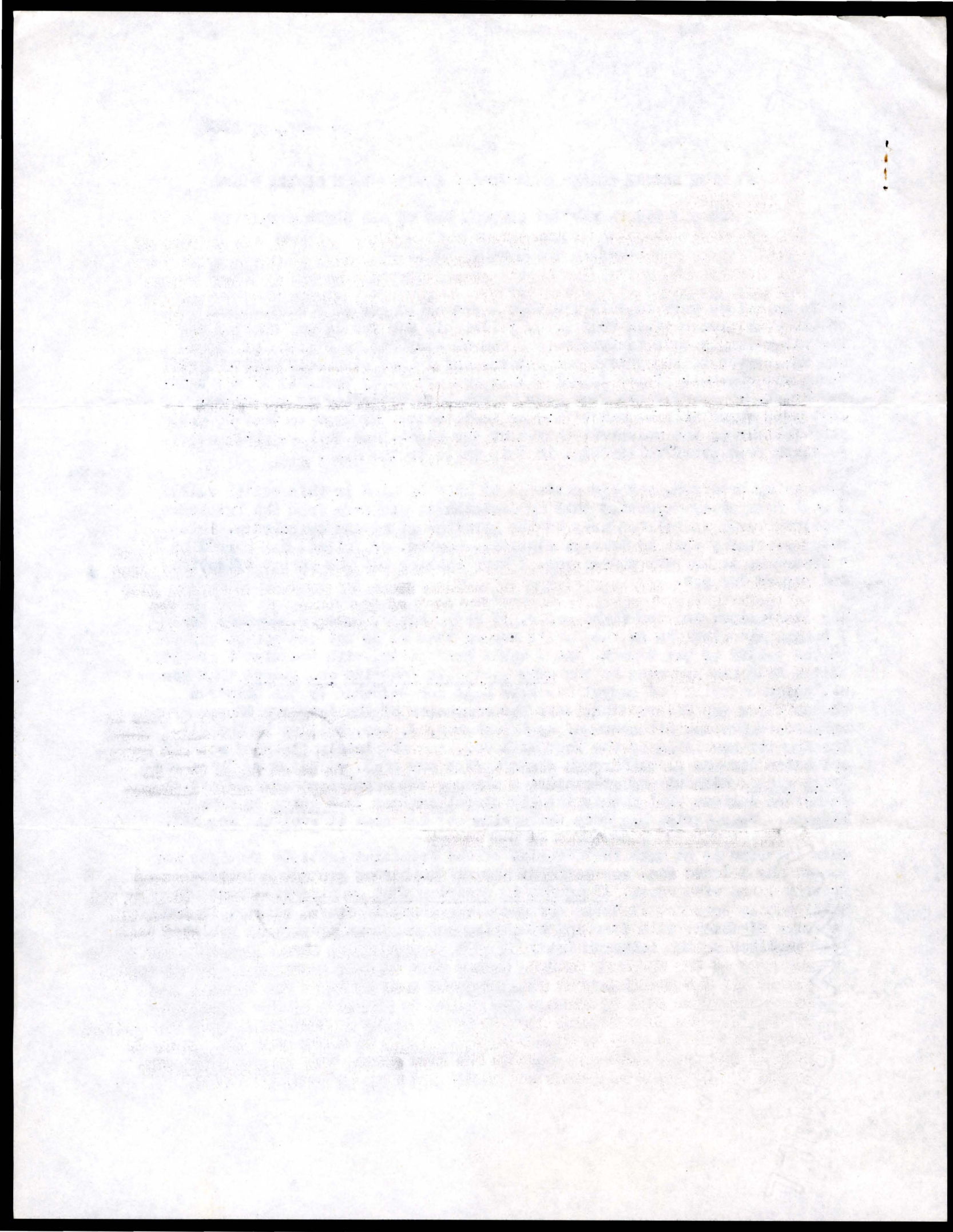
AN OPEN LETTER TO THE MEMBERS AND CONGREGATION OF THE WELSH
TRACT OLD SCHOOL BAPTIST CHURCH, AND TO ALL OTHER PRIMITIVE
BAPTISTS THROUGHOUT THE LAND

It is my solemn duty to tell you that I can no longer be a communicant of the Primitive Baptist Church. My fellowship for you is not changed in the slightest by this decision; as a church body and as a group of people you shall ever be in my love and esteem, and I hope sincerely that you will think not unkindly of me. In all things you are in my thoughts in the bonds of Christ. My going forth from your church book satisfies my conscience that good order will be maintained in God's house. My hope is that we are yoke-fellows of the universal church of the elect, and that we shall never go forth from sweet fellowship, in this world or the next.

Now, as my brethren, you are entitled to know my mind in this matter fully. I must absolutely emphasize that my decision to withdraw from the Primitive Baptist Church is related only to the workings of my own conscience. This means precisely that no Baptist minister, member, or friend, has harmed or offended me in any way whatsoever. I have nothing but the purest affection and regard for you.

The discipline, and the right order, of God's house, however, demands that I cannot sit with you at the Lord's Supper when we do not see eye to eye on the polity of his Church. And I would here state, with the utmost gravity, that I hold now and ever to the same apostolic doctrine and gospel that you do, which doctrine and gospel has been held and defended by the Lutheran Church since the Reformation. Into the communion of the Lutheran Church my conscience has now directed me. As a Lutheran, I, too, believe in the all-knowing foreknowledge of the Most High God, the absolutely finished work of salvation for the elect through Jesus Christ our Lord, effected by Grace and Grace alone, without any propitiation through the worthless works of man. Lutherans believe that man is totally sinful and can do nothing to save himself. Jesus Christ has done the saving and has done it once and for all.

This doctrine is so much the doctrine of the Primitive Baptists that you may wonder why I leave you, and perhaps, why all Lutherans are not Primitive Baptists, and vice versa. It is not in doctrine that we differ. I must now spell out in some detail these serious differences in church polity, in the exercise of which, with fear and trembling and constant prayer, my soul has been impelled to the Lutheran fold:



1. The Liturgy

The Lutheran communion is liturgical and worships God with the singing of choirs, with organ music, and with symbolic adornment of the chancel for the several seasons of the Church year. Lutherans do not do these things for pomp or show, or anything of like nature, but simply that God may be praised in His tabernacle. We believe that our richest raiment are but filthy rags in His sight. As the Lutheran service begins, the entire congregation is on its knees, confessing that we are by nature sinful and unclean, and with the minister's words: "...wherefore we flee to Thine infinite mercy, seeking and imploring Thy Grace..."

The liturgy is a means of public confession which we freely believe is without effect unless it be stimulated by the presence in our midst of the mediating grace of God. In this liturgy I have often felt His Very Presence. It is an humbling experience for a sinner's soul.

2. The organization of the church

Lutheran churches are independent republics of believers in the same sense that Baptist churches are. We acknowledge no overseers beyond the individual congregation. A Lutheran Synod, however, is more closely knit than a Baptist Association. It may have clergy in various roles of service. Lutherans give of their time and means to support the work of the Synod, as well as the local congregation, because the Synod is but a further expression of the Body of Christ.

3. The paid clergy

Lutheran ministers are salaried pastors of their congregations. Since this is a thing which the congregations have decided in their free consciences, there is no aspect of coercion in it. In this world's goods, that man who has become my own pastor is but a poor and simple man. There can be no doubt that he has thousands of fellow-workers whose positions are much the same. Lutheran ministers are called by the individual churches, just as Baptists are.

4. The associated activities of the church

Herein are the most serious differences in polity. Lutherans have vigorous and active Sunday Schools, Mission Boards, colleges, and hospitals. They do not believe for an instant that in these human institutions, they, as humans, can save anyone. God alone, through Jesus Christ, does the saving. But from their viewpoint, it is desirable to have such institutions, whose justification is in the hope of the Grace of Christ, rather than in cold secularism. In all things, and in all our dealings with men, we would seek to honor Our Blessed Lord. We would therefore seek to educate our youth, to minister to the non-Christian, to care for the ill, through the agency of church institutions, with the fervent prayer that if to many we give a head-knowledge of God's love and power, to some He may apply salvation through His free grace. Only He knows His own. To Him is all power in Heaven and Earth, and whom He will, He moveth.

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I have told you but some (---but the more important---) of the deviations in our outlook. The customs, the apparatus, the associated activities of the Lutheran Church, I accept because I find nothing in them which deny Christ or which is dishonoring to God. This is what my conscience tells me. No Primitive Baptist can hold these things and remain a Baptist.

I must now confess unto you my own grievous sins and shortcomings. For two years I have not filled my place in your midst. In sorrow I confess my uselessness to the Baptist church. I am not fit to loose the latchet of your sandals. The least among you is more justified than I.

Our dear Lord has blessed even such a sinner as me with a hunger for His word and a thirst for His service. With much searching of soul, in dark places and in stormy times, I have had to wait for His appointed way. The incessant question in my heart has been: Tell me, O Lord, wither shall I turn?

My role in this temporal world seems to be that of a worker with the things of nature...what we, perhaps with poor justification, call a "scientist." I burn with desire to spread the Gospel; but of all men, I am the least qualified. In the Primitive Baptist communion I must ever keep silent. It is unthinkable that one such as I could preach the Gospel. In the Lutheran communion I can perhaps be a teacher, and....a sinner among sinners....say a few words to the young lambs to the praise of His holy name.

Think not that you have seen the last of me! Let everyone who names the name of Christ cleave unto his yoke-mates with the love of the Lord. As God gives me of His grace, I shall correspond with you, I shall visit you when I can, and I shall keep you in my prayers.

I have been brought to this with grieving and much anguish. But now that it is done, let it be done with resolution and firmness. And let us rejoice together in all pureness of heart that God has helped us not to defile the order of His house by our sitting down with unevenness of mind. I pray that from this moment on, our fellowship in the Gospel will burn the more brightly because we know one another the more fully in the kinship of the Lord. Pray for me and have pity for me, as I for you.

Your poor fellow-sinner, saved by Grace if saved at all.

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