



“Meditate
upon these things;
give thyself
wholly to them;
that thy profiting
may appear unto all”

I Timothy 4:15

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Temptations that Especially Confront the Orthodox

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On July 28, 1938, I said this in a pastoral conference devotional:

"Is there not a danger that we have become quite satisfied with the definitive and the scholastic to the exclusion of the meditative and the mystical (I had been reading Luther on the unio mystica at the time) -- I mean the 'love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, (and) temperance' of Galatians 5, and the 'I in them' of the Sacerdotal Prayer, John 17, 26. Is there not danger that we may become satisfied with clear mental processes and principles (doctrines), with an attendant carelessness as to the bringing of their fruits to the surface in our lives? Thomas Carlyle once said, 'It is a sad but sure truth that every time you speak of a fine purpose, especially with eloquence and to the admiration of bystanders, there is less chance of your ever making a fact of it in your poor life.' Let us tremble at the danger that lies in that deep psychological truth. In an unconscious way we are tempted to let our mental processes climb over the boundary line into the field of memory of things we imagine we have performed; there they find a comfortable seat, and remain there, much to our admiration of their excellence; but we forget that they are sneak thieves who stole in there without going the round-about way through our words and deeds.

"...We with our orthodox Christianity are in danger of becoming like a cup of good coffee in which the sugar remains lying at the bottom. It needs to be stirred up; not in the way of the holiness preacher, but in the way of Jesus, of Paul, and of Luther and Walther, yes of every practical Christian

of whom it can be said as it was said of Abraham of old, he is a 'friend of God.' It can be seen and tasted. His Christianity flavors his daily life."

In his recent book on heresies and the travails of religious liberty, Roland H. Bainton says, "We tremble for ourselves lest we too be engulfed, and even more lest in the effort to extricate ourselves we succumb to the very methods that we abhor." The Travail of Religious Liberty, p. 14. Toward the end of his book the same author writes: "The noblest achievement of the Western world has been the conduct of controversy without acrimony, of strife without bitterness, of criticism without loss of respect. But when men do not operate within the same framework, this becomes impossible. Only those who believe in universal right, in integrity, law, and humanity, if not in the Christian God, are in a position to clash on higher levels and retain personal friendship as did Roger Williams with most of his opponents. But if one side makes the will of a party into an absolute, and for it will lie and assassinate, then for the other side to fight according to the rules is very difficult. The more the contestants are locked, the greater becomes the danger that the rules will be scrapped on both sides.... The very effort to control the unscrupulous foe leads to unscrupulousness." (Idem P.255.)

"We must realize that when we defend the cause of conservatism, when we resist the trend toward liberalism, we are in constant danger of a reaction in the opposite direction, of falling into a state of rigorism and legalism that is just as wrong as the errors we oppose. Let us not close our minds against this possibility. For such a false attitude can exist only at the expense of the true spirit of the Gospel. Let us have eyes for the dangers that lie in the one extreme as well as the other." (E.Reim in Opening Address, Theological Seminary, Thiensville, Sept. 14, 1954; Quartalschrift, Oct., 1954, p .235)

Our temptation is to lose our balance. We are tempted to forget that "every solution, however wise and necessary, carries within itself the possibility of some new abuse." Bainton, p.254. "Even that

which is imperative in any given situation opens the way to abuses of another sort." Idem. He that standeth must take heed lest he fall. Believing that good works are not necessary to salvation, it is easy to think they are not necessary. Believing that they are necessary, it is easy to rely on them for salvation. Having humility, it is so easy to be proud of it. It would be easy to preach a sermon on the dangers of being a Christian; we are to work it out with fear and trembling, are we not? An English divine once remarked about a preacher who lived so ill that it was a pity he ever entered the pulpit, but once in the pulpit, he preached so well that it was a pity he ever got out. Every shade of liberalism has its own extremes to which it runs; but our concern is not with that. Our concern is with avoiding the perversions that especially beset us.

The first requirement is an alertness to the fact that perversions lie in wait to corrupt every situation or position. Aristotle pointed this out when he showed that tyranny is the perversion of monarchy and that oligarchy is the perversion of aristocracy. Too much courage leads to foolhardiness, and too little leads to cowardice. Better than either is the happy meeden agan, the golden mean. Moses was meek above all men; therefore he was strong. Being strong, he only gained strength by being meek. When we are weak, we are strong; but there is a weakness that runs into despair even as there is a strength that leads us to tempt God and lose His protection. Take an analogy from politics, to show that every situation is open to abuse. Both in Britain and in America steps were taken by liberals to protect the people against too much power of sovereigns, presidents, governments. Now true liberals are those who must protect the people against too much paternal government of their own making. So also Luther fought the tyranny of the pope, but the fanaticism of the peasant revolts grieved him fully as much. St. Paul fought valiantly for our liberty in Christ, but he has just as many words against the perversion of this liberty.

Historically the Church has run into perversions from time to time. The "orthodox" at times committed

sin to make heretics good. The story of persecution is the story of the actions of those who belonged to the established Church. There is no more terrible thing than an entrenched ecclesiasticism. And it is a sad but sure fact that defection from a commonly accepted course or practice or profession is generally more intolerable than is a failure to live up to it. Partisan belonging is more tangible and more easily made important than is religious rectitude. "Place and nation" is an easier rallying ground than is the plain of truth.

Look at the temptations to which we are put. See how we are tempted to sacrifice the truth in order to maintain the party. How anxious we are to be leaders rather than prophets! The leader changes the nuances to win followers; he will choke down something he ought to say lest he discourage someone who is almost persuaded to follow him. The prophet will be forthright, for he knows in advance that he will be cut down for it. The leader is tempted to be sticky with the honey of sweetness and light -- diplomacy and tact fairly ooze from him until you could wish that he would apply his oversocialized activity to salesmanship. The prophet is tempted to be clipped and sharp, -- let the chips fall where they may. One man is silent on lodgery and can't resist the invitation to be baccalaureate speaker -- but what a missionary! -- he knows every person in church by name and he makes them feel welcome after the services! The other is a great theologian and pulls no punches in the pulpit -- but he doesn't get out to see the people, is not a missionary, and confesses to the congregation that he just can't make calls. Oh, for the sweet reasonableness of God's Christian gentleman, who can do the one and not neglect the other!

Right now our great temptation, perhaps, is that we do not follow through our confessions and professions. The temptation is to talk boldly until the crisis is at hand, then fail to follow through. Experience has shown that it is risky to predict performance on the basis of past words. "The day will declare it." "A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work today in my vine-

yard. He answered and said, I will not; but afterward he repented and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir; and went not" (Matthew 21:28-30).

If someone catch us at this failure to act according to our word, we are quick to point to the "utter purity" of our mental attitude. The study of the "utter" is interesting; it turns out not always to be purity -- yet very "utter." The devil started it by changing "Thou shalt not eat" to "Thou shalt not touch." Note the psychological gymnastics in this! The Pharisees scrupulously tithed their mint and anise and cummin. Jesus made their doing of it look foolish when it was done to cover up the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith. Matt. 23:23. "The Talmud tells of the ass of a Rabbi which had been so well trained as to refuse corn of which the tithes had not been taken." Vincent, in Robertson, Word Pictures, in loco cit. There is strong indication that in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus was contrasting the Word of God with "what hath been said by them of old time" -- not with what God had said, but with what had been said by the rabbis to cover up their own defection -- and did they ever talk big! The Talmud is the record of the additions men have made to the Law by an age-long set of men who departed from justice, from mercy, and from walking humbly with God. Micah 6,8. Isn't this like the behavior of the little boy who was scolded by his mother for pilfering a piece of cake just before dinner; "Then you'll never let me have anything to eat!" The temptation is to sharpen the Law's demands to make excuse for not keeping it. The "utter" can go pretty far.

The extreme should warn us lest we be tempted to move even a little in that direction. If the opponents of orthodoxy have pointed out this tendency in what they call "splinter groups," is there perhaps not enough truth in it to alert us to the danger? Have the requirements of orthodoxy in a parish sometimes been made so great that it has seemed almost useless to try to win others to it? Have not unnecessary inhibitions at times taken all heart and spirit out of people?

Bars should not be let down, but they should be upheld with dignity. The world will hate us, but let us make sure that it is for Christ's sake. Let it not be for our failure to walk among men as did Abraham of old, as friends of God. Let them not call us self-satisfied, cold, aloof, supercilious, and worse. Can't we compel them to say, "These men have done nothing amiss"? The sacred Proverb stands: "When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him" (Prov.16:7). Whence is the high correlation between being "orthodox" and having insensitive personalities? We prefer people who are orthodox because they have to be -- are bound by the Word.

One wonders wherein lies the quirk by which one who disagrees, so easily becomes disagreeable; and by which one who speaks the Law so readily conveys the impression that he, of course, would never be guilty! Is it lack of insight that makes people sometimes think that it is the loud crash of the hammer which cracks the shell of the erring sinner? It is not the tornado or lightning that breaks the rocks into sand and soil; it is oftener the quiet expansion of frost which is not so much as heard on a cold quiet night.

Did Nathan storm and threaten when he most effectively spoke the Word to David after the affair with Bathsheba? He told a little story about an imaginary neighbor; and I often wondered if it was more than barely audible when Nathan managed to say "Thou art the man." A challenging tone of speech might have led to speedy liquidation of Nathan, for the mighty David was a bloody man when he was riled, but he was touched by the quiet truth. Jesus melted Peter into salty tears of repentance with a look. We could do well with a tear in our eye when we must reprove a brother. I myself witnessed once the most embarrassing discomfiture of a defender of the Common Confession when he heard the irenic secretary of our union committee quietly testify to the truth. The official was so taken aback that he could hardly find the threads of his arguments -- he was so upset by this quiet speaker that he gasped how good it was to see this Wisconsin committee member speak as a very

"man of God." tears and pleadings are the tones of the Gospel; the woes of Matthew 23 and the sharp denunciations of the prophets are words of judgment.

Now we turn over the coin. Where once the orthodox spoke boldly, and perhaps too boldly -- as when the Gospel has been preached with a clenched fist -- there comes the time when they are tempted not to say the final word with firmness when it ought to be spoken. It is a temptation to us, is it not? Have we fallen for the temptation to speak boldly when the consequences are not imminent, perhaps not even apparent; and then turn dumb when we must and ought to speak? It is easy to fall under the condemnation of the Homeric line, "Thou dog in forehead, but in heart a deer." Is it easier to be firm and final when the crisis is upon us, if we have not talked too much before? We are only asking.

Is it not tempting to use religion as a tool of punishment, as a sadistic outlet for something within, against which people are helpless; to use it somewhat as the unhappy maladjusted teacher does who dominates his little sphere some six-seven hours per day; or like the preacher who from time to time mercilessly manhandles his automobile, driving like Jehu? Well, it isn't so funny to see someone emphasize pure doctrine with a curl of the lip, and close sermons with a whining amen and slamming the Bible upon the pulpit! Likewise, is not communion sometimes used as a club? What is this but a persecuting attitude? It is easy to sit back and denounce; twice as hard to go and win someone with meekness and fear as Nathan. Do we sometimes desire to score a point more than to win a soul?

Roland Bainton once more: "Nor is persecuting religion to be regarded as insincere. Dostoevsky misrepresented the Spanish Inquisitor when he portrayed him as cynically ready to burn even Christ should He return. The Torquemadas were not cynics, but passionately sincere fanatics. All of which should make abundantly plain that virtues are not without their vices. A concern for truth can end in inhumanity, and love itself can be perverted to cruelty.

This, too, is obvious: that Christianity as such cannot be regarded as the panacea for all the ills of the world. It all depends on what kind of Christianity. And whatever else may be added, this certainly is an appalling reflection: that the barbarities practiced in modern times to ensure conformity to the program of a party are but refinements of the methods employed by those who invoked the name of Christ." The Travail of Religious Liberty, p.52f.

"Nothing, it would appear, more induces cruelty than a sense of righteousness. Cruel acts performed for a noble cause -- such as the salvation of humanity -- permit the perpetrators to have it both ways: to satisfy their unconscious sadistic natures and salve their consciences.

"No wars are so brutal as religious wars, such as the Thirty Years war of the 16th century, or the last two world wars to make the world safe for democracy, or the four freedoms, or end the exploitation of man by man, and thus one way or another usher in the millenium." (Dorothy Thompson, in syndicated newspaper column.)

Latourette writes this of C.F.W. Walther in his new A History of Christianity: "Characterized by an extraordinary combination of organizing ability, a genius for friendship, magnetic charm with audiences, large and small, generous hospitality...a skill in vigorous polemics, and a self denial which was content with frugal living...he exerted a continuous and pervasive influence." P.1245.

Our plea is for watchfulness that we do not get in the way of our own testimony, that our manner and tone do not justify anyone's not listening. We need not sound desperate nor make as though we are on the defensive. Our words shall judge the world! Somewhere I read that a contemporary called Luther's voice sweet, melodious, and winning. He could also thunder at the right time! We are not probing orthodoxy, but its perversions.

Who said that our vices often stem from our

virtues? "Men fired with what they believe to be devotion to the will of God as seen in Christ have been nerved to prolonged and mortal combat, not only with non-Christians, but also with one another." Latourette, 881. It was as much the great warmth of Peter's heart that got him into that jamb Thursday night as it was his weakness. Those who stand must take heed lest they fall. If they are not afraid of falling, they are neither good theologians nor good Christians. Every position and situation has a way open to abuse. The grace of God itself suggests a way to abuse it. Every good thing can be misused. Men can readily become proud of their humility. A new car is a good thing, but don't drive it so fast you kill yourself. Live in a glass house, but don't throw stones. Paradise was a grand place, but there was one thing not to do. We do have orthodox Christian faith; a great danger is not to be aware that we have special temptations therewith.

One of the greatest temptations is to become passive and to neglect the activism that is Scriptural. Sometimes our opponents must call our attention to this perversion. "Kierkegard insisted that true Christianity demands decision and action, a commitment which abandons the role of the spectator." Latourette, p. 1141. Perversion of Kierkegard's point, in turn, is found in the Arminian movement, the Reformed and the holiness sects -- also in Lutheranism that trims doctrinal definitude so that its much activity might be seen of men.

Can we not have the blessed balance of doing the one and not neglecting the other? The Bible speaks encouragingly on this point. We need not go to the Reformed Fundamentalists or to Unitarian great men like Horace Mann for inspiration. The Gospels with their Jesus "who went about doing good" (Acts 10, 38) and the apostles with their many directives (as I Corinthians 13) are our source of power. There is no better summary than Micah 6, 8: "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

Lutheran imbalance in this matter is pointed out in someone's remark that Lutherans are the best fed and the least exercised of all Christians on earth. F. Pieper was once quoted as musing, "Why is it that so many others have too much of that of which we have too little?" The answer can hardly be that we have too much of that of which they don't have enough!

Our own thinking has suggested one possible explanation and solution. Both lie in the area of method. Has our habit of dealing in abstractions dulled the stimulating facts of the naked Word of God? Generalizations do not have the flavor and appeal of the facts from which they are made. The objection might be that bread and cakes are better than the ingredients from which they are made, but our rejoinder is that bread and cakes are not the abstraction of their elements but the happy eating of things well put together.

Just so, Christian living is the happy working out of a blessed eternal living made of the bread of life broken unto us in the revelation of God to us, in the Word. Unless we go through the process of finding its ingredients ourselves, of digging for the treasures, of thrilling to their discovery, of being edified and inspired by their direct action upon us, of being enlightened by the sometimes electrifying contacts made in studying the Scriptures first-hand -- unless we have gone through the process ourselves there is something second-hand about our profession. Think here of the people in our parishes and in our schools. It is so easy for them to say as did the Roman Catholic who did not know what he believed, but he emphatically believed what the Church believes! Pastors have been known to be at a loss to explain the errors of the Boy Scout religion, but they have defended their stand by saying that the Synod is against it. The parent who keeps his boy out of Scouts only because the pastor doesn't like it is really practicing Boy Scout religion by that very act -- he is doing a good turn. Neither has gone through the process of coming to personal conviction. And what merit is there to any other sort of confession or conviction?

But to preach and teach the findings, the generalizations, the abstractions of earlier Christians is the temptation to which we fear that we of the orthodox persuasion are put. To succumb to it is fatal in the end. "Let it be our one concern to make sure that our loyalty is not to human tradition, but to God Himself and to what He would teach us. Here we need not cast about in uncertainty and doubt...." Quartalschrift, Oct. 1954, p.235. Is it possible to have vigorous, informed, and committed Christianity that is not born of knowledge of the naked Word, of struggle, of prayer, yes, of agony and perhaps even of near despair at times -- of decision, of surrender (those are good words!), of having come to grips individually with the facts as they stand in the revealed Word?

We have an analogy in education. Students may memorize what the books say and what the teacher tells them in chemistry, biology, English, or whatever -- but they do not really become learners unless they dig for themselves and do for themselves. How do we manage to kill the curiosity and the zeal-to-know which children have from home before they come to school?! Are we not tempted to give them the generalizations, the conclusions, the confessions, the creeds, the intellectualizations of others also in the Church? A few hardy souls dig for themselves and they keep the teacher up front jittery with their questions and understanding and answers. Is it not with your parishioners who ask questions that you feel that there is really Christianity astir? When active minds whet one upon the other, there is learning going on, also strengthening, establishing, and settling. I got much of my most useful theology from two brilliant women in a parish one time who sent me home every time I called with more questions to study than I picked up anywhere else. One of them used to read Luther when she had to stay home alone evenings; she felt so safe then, she said.

It will hardly do just to sit back and wish for more Aquilas and Priscillas in the churches. It were better to ask if we have fallen into some practices that are common to those who have inherited a good

confession. Have we fallen into satisfaction that we have Abrahams as our fathers, forgetting that people have to wrestle as did Jacob on the banks of the Jabbok to keep the faith and to grow in it? Joseph didn't coast into the kingdom, and it wasn't exactly a picnic for Paul. Wasn't Luther so excited about the faith because he had to dig it out for himself? The way to heaven isn't by the comforts of a pullman coach; Billy Sunday used to say that if you think so, you had better not be surprised if you find yourself in the dead of night on a siding with a hot-box! But it isn't so funny! We wonder whence we can get back the Spirit. The best way I have found to get people interested and sparked into committed devotion to our cause is by original study of the bare Bible; and if testimonies are in order, I want to say that I have tried it and found it to work.

We firmly believe that talking about these things can be a catharsis for ourselves. We would like to add the suggestion that in our orthodox Church we are tempted to make certain wrong reactions. We should be glad that we are required at times to restate our faith in meekness and in fear. There are seven remarkable confessions of faith in Christ recorded in the New Testament, and more. Peter, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God" (Mk 16,16). Nathaniel, "Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the king of Israel" (John 1,49). The woman of Samaria: "A man, which told me all things that ever I did; is not this the Christ?" (John 4,29). Peter: "We believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God" (John 6,69). Martha: "Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world" (John 11, 27). Thomas: "My Lord and my God" (John 20,28). The Ethiopian eunuch: "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God" (Acts 8,37). Suppose each congregation had to declare its faith from time to time! Suppose it had to write its own creed, say, every ten years! There would be more merit to that than in having one delegate represent some twenty churches and vote on the Common Confession. Do we react with our own confession when questions of faith are asked? That would

make us sweat, but there might be some merit in that method of making known what we believe.

Perhaps it is not an idle dream. For it is a temptation of the orthodox to think that orthodoxy is accepted by a vote. We ought to do more work at the grass-roots. We are tempted to look upon the Church as a Church of the clergy, to find our faith confessed by "utter purity" there. The orthodox faith must dwell in the hearts of Christians; they should require that the message of their shepherds be the true voice.

Writing of the decadent period in Germany, Hurst says in his History of Rationalism, p. 84: "It was very evident that the Lutheran Church would require a long period of self-purification, if indeed she could achieve it at all. The shorter and more effectual way would be to operate individually upon the popular mind. And does not the entire history of the Church prove that reform has originated from no concerted action of the body needing reformation, but from the solemn conviction and persevering efforts of some single mind, which, working first alone, has afterward won to its assistance many others?" Then he quotes the opponents: "But we would rather see the whole matter done in a perfectly systematic and legitimate way." Idem, p. 85 Make your own application to our times.

The matter of method is well put in Brubacher's A History of the Problems of Education, p. 213f. "Ever since the social culture had been reduced to written symbols and ever since education had taken the social shortcut of vicarious learning through the written or printed word rather than through direct experience, one of the most persistent aberrations of education had been that the oncoming generation had often memorized the literary form of their social culture without always comprehending its actual meaning. Of this difficulty reformers of nearly every century had been aware. Yet, though many had urged that comprehension and memorization go hand in hand, little or nothing had been done to mark out the steps in facilitating understanding. Few teachers realized,

as Pestalozzi so clearly did, that 'When a third person, to whom the matter is clear, puts words into my mouth with which he makes it clear to people in his own condition, it is not on that account clear to me, but it is and will remain his clear thing, not mine, inasmuch as the words of another cannot be for me what they are to him -- the exact expression of his own idea, which is to him perfectly clear.'

"The only way to correct this misunderstanding between teacher and pupil, according to Pestalozzi, was for the teacher to commence with sense impressions of the object of the lesson. Only after time for these impressions to take effect had elapsed should the teacher proceed to the naming of the object. Once named, the object could be studied as to its form, that is, its various qualities could be discussed and compared....In this way language and observation or experience are always so closely linked that education should henceforth be well on its way to eliminating forever memoriter without comprehension.

"Obviously, from the foregoing, activity of the pupil is an essential part of learning. Without activity he can hardly get lively sense impressions. It will behoove the teacher, therefore, not to develop the lesson in the spirit of dogmatic exposition. On the contrary, he will rather conduct the lesson so as to encourage the pupil to exert his own powers. Teaching, instead of creating vicarious experience for pupils, will have to create opportunities for first-hand experience itself. For this same reason Pestalozzi early abandoned emulation as a way of motivating learning. He held that the child should learn to feel pleasure in exercising his own powers for the discovery of truth rather than in comparing himself with others.

"Pestalozzi's lay public did not always see eye to eye with him on his activity program. While he was trying to develop children's potentialities by an exercise of their capacities, the public was anxious about how well the children knew their ABC's. While he was interested in how children were learning to think, feel, and act, they were inquisitive about

what the children knew of their catechism."

It is a temptation of the orthodox, who have well-defined and well-stated truth in their hands, to transport people to their intellectual destination; we would do better to help them arrive on their own. We make it easy for them to assent to the truth which we point out; thereafter it is easy for them to go to sleep as they hear us repeat it -- every day the clock makes you not hear its ticking, but it is ticking off the time truthfully all the while; you don't even pay attention to its efforts until something goes wrong. But religion that doesn't stir us until something goes wrong with its even hum and working is pretty insipid stuff. Only let us grant that in the orthodox communions we have over the centuries been tempted to go to sleep. We will be thankful, then, for anything that stirs us to see how we are doing.

The mistake is to regret that we are being stirred. Now the Lord is not commiserating when His Apostle Paul together with Barnabas assure us that "we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts 14,22). His apostles are there stating a principle by which the Church grows. Wheat simply is not produced in a field that is not plowed and where the grain is not cut down from time to time. "There must be also heresies among you; that they which are approved may be made manifest among you" (I Cor. 11,19). We are sad when sickness and a fever agitates the body; but let us be glad that there is life enough left to make a fight for life. Without Arius, who knows how soon the Church would have spoken clearly about the deity of Christ? Renan's Vie de Jesus and Strauss's Leben Jesu were nasty things, worse even than the more recent "quests of the historical Jesus," but if they have reminded us not to neglect Jesus as our Brother, they have done the Church a service. Grisar brought out a scandalous life of Luther, with the result that Koestlin and many others produced their monumental studies, several of them definitive. Exercise is the growth of a muscle, and heresy brings forth the truth, even as Toynbee insists that challenge brings forth a civilization. Let us not be tempted to whimper when a stir

in the Church sends us back to our books. Recently I was told that a certain preacher didn't know that there is a doctrine of election. And a young minister came to me once for assurance that he did right in not praying with a Presbyterian woman in the hospital because his synod was against unionism, wasn't it. Anything that stirs us to stick with the right tools is a blessing in disguise. The pastor who recommended starting adult classes with Genesis 1 was on the right track. Genesis goes right down the groove of realities.

We will avoid the dangers that beset the orthodox if, when we cross the sure bridge of salvation over the chasm of death, we still cling to it firmly with a fear of falling. The bridge is firm, but we dare not wax fat and careless, kicking up our heels as Jeshurun of old. Deut. 32, 15. If any is afraid, let him be assured; if any is assured, let him be afraid that he fall. If we are tempted too much to lean on the formulations of our heads, let us be reminded of the place the Word puts upon the heart; if the heart leads us astray, as it surely can, let it learn to take correction from the head. The temptation to breathe controversy needs to be corrected; the tendency to gush "sweetness and light" needs correction likewise. Being battered from pillar to post is not bad when those obstacles are passages of the Word. Even as the act of walking is a continued prevention of falling, so our walk unto the land of eternal day is by constant watchfulness against the errors that beset us.

M.G.

Matthew 18:17 and Excommunication

A fruit of the conflicts within the Synodical Conference during the past decade, insofar as these affected the present membership of the CLC and continue to engage our interest, may be observed in a renewed inquiry among us in regard to the meaning and application of our Savior's words as recorded in Matthew 18:15-17. This, we dare say, is not the least of the beneficial by-products of our sad and painful experiences. The agitations and dislocations caused by the hard need of contending for the faith are many; but in the fact that Christians thus aroused to the need of proving the spirits and reproving the gainsayers are driven back to the Scriptures for reassurance through earnest research we find a blessing accruing to the obedient and faithful.

The Wisconsin Synod specifically went on record in support of the assertion that Romans 16:17 requires the avoidance of a church body which is causing divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine only when and after "we have reached the conviction that admonition is of no further avail and that the erring church body demands recognition for their error." (cf. Proceedings 1959, P.211, Resolution I). In the thinking that fathered this astounding disregard for the ipsissima verba of the text, the overtones of Matthew 18:15-17 are discernible. Some proponents and defenders of that doctrinal formula would perhaps protest that they are not conscious of interpreting Romans 16:17 in the light of Matthew 18:15-17. We are bound nevertheless to point out that any effort to determine a proper state of relations with an erring church body by the strength of expectations regarding the effectiveness of admonition rather than by the actual conduct of that church body superimposes upon Romans 16:17 the concepts that pertain to the prescribed dealing with an impenitent sinner.

This confusion of genera has, in fact, frequently revealed itself in extemporaneous debate on the floor

of Wisconsin Synod conventions in the past, as well as in private or semi-private exchanges in corridors and stairways and dining-halls. Repeatedly the point has been urged that we certainly do not terminate fellowship with a presumed brother until we are sure that we have done all we can to turn him from his false way. This was maintained in defense of a failure to sever relations with a church body that had already been publicly denounced as a causer of divisions and offenses. Thus it became, and is, manifest, all protestations to the contrary notwithstanding, that with the question of the termination of church fellowship the principles that govern the approved ministry to a soul held in the thralldom of impenitence are mingled and applied in re, despite the fact that impenitence is not mentioned as a factor in Romans 16:17 and would indeed be impossible to establish in the case of an entire church body.

Since many, if not all, among us have in one way or another been affected by, or participated in, the non sequiturs of the false position outlined above, we can only welcome the diligence that has evoked among us a renewed and penetrating examination of the Lord's Will as expressed in Matthew 18. The stimulating essay read by Pastor L. Schierenbeck to the delegates at the recessed convention of the CLC at Sleepy Eye, Minnesota, in January, as well as the animated discussion that ensued, bear eloquent witness to a determination to see clearly and act scripturally in all situations involving the duties and privileges of brotherhood.

Due to the press of business the reading of the essay could not be completed at the convention. Therefore also the floor discussion remained inconclusive, in some respects fragmentary. It is not the purpose of the following brief comment to preempt the assignment of the convention essayist by undertaking an exhaustive study of the passage under consideration at Sleepy Eye and scheduled for further treatment at the summer convention of 1961. This rather lengthy introduction, designed to fix the historical perspective by

which our interest has been heightened, will be found disproportionate to the present paper's scope. It is desired herewith only to enlarge somewhat upon issues emphasized by the floor discussion and to crystallize some of the thinking involved. Specifically, the reader's thoughts are to be focused upon this inquiry:

Whether, and in what sense, Matthew 18:17 includes a divine directive for the action known as excommunication.

.....

The directive given by our Lord to His disciples as recorded in Matthew 18:15-17 sounds a deeply personal note. In our traditional, familiar preoccupation with the passage as a formula for admonition that may eventuate in the excommunication of a sinner this significant fact must not be underestimated or minimized.

The case envisioned by the Lord is that of a member of the fellowship who has committed a grievous sin and continues therein. The instruction for dealing with such an offender is spoken to the second person singular, which in grammatical terms occurs thirteen times in the three verses: in seven instances the personal pronoun is used, and in six the same individual is addressed through the verbs. "Thy brother against thee, go(thou), tell (thou)between thee and him aloneIf he hear thee, (thou) hast gained thy brother take (thou) with thee if he shall neglect to hear them, tell (thou) it to the Church do (thou) let him be unto thee"

This intense concentration upon the duty of the individual becomes the more significant and important to the understanding of the passage when we bear in mind that, although the so-called "three steps" of admonition cannot be carried through with propriety or hope of success unless the sin involved is a public one and subject to demonstration,* and while

*"In the biblical passage (Mt.18) you hear that we must deal with certain public sins, committed by persons who are known and with cases where one brother sees another commit sin."(Luther,The Keys, 1530)
(Luther's Works, Vol.40,p.370) - 19 -

in effect every sin of a brother is a sin against the entire body, the Lord places no emphasis upon these considerations in his expressions. He disregards the wider aspects of the situation because His immediate purpose is that of placing before the individual disciple the serious obligations of his spiritual priesthood, as the convention essayist so eloquently explained.

The context (18:6ff) deals with the grievous perils of offense and the urgent need of personal intervention in the problem occasioned by sin-endangered souls. The touching parable of the sheep that has strayed from a flock of one hundred and commands the full attention of the shepherd introduces the affirmation that the individual, young or old, is the object of the utmost concern of the Heavenly Father. By way of ultimate emphasis our Savior adduces Himself as the foremost exponent of such concern, defining the rescue of lost souls as His mission in the world (18:11); and by implication He lays the joyous burden of assisting in this assignment upon the shoulders of each disciple. This indicates that we are to regard personal seeking of the lost as the didactic content of our passage. All else is peripheral.

The primary reference in v.17, then, is not to the activity of the Church, but to that of the individual upon whose person the question of proper procedure here reverts. When it is apparent that the offender will not hear the Church, what are YOU to do at that point in YOUR effort to save the soul of the recalcitrant? Christ advocates a final expedient, a last measure of love: Nothing is left but to "let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican." The Lord does not here touch directly upon any further divine authorization for placing the sinner into that category. Whether the individual is so to regard the impenitent one because the congregation has found it necessary to excommunicate the offender is a question that need not be answered at this point. Enough that the Lord says: "Let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican." Let him no longer be accounted a brother, but as one who is without.

Inquiry has been raised, however, regarding the import of the word "as" in this statement. The Savior says: "Let him be unto thee AS (*ὡς*) a heathen man" Could this adverb make of the Lord's directive a mere counsel for conduct? In other words, can it serve to indicate that no actual judgment upon the spiritual state or destiny of the offender is involved, but that he is merely to be treated "as though he were" a heathen man? A resolution of this question is imperative; for it raises a critical issue. The nature of this final procedure against the obdurate sinner must be determined and understood. Since it is to be the last measure possible in the campaign to deliver him from the bondage of his impenitence, the effort dare not be fumbled as a result of failure in appreciating its divinely intended quality.

The answer lies clearly established in the form of the word "as." It is, as has been pointed out, an adverb. The force of the word, then, is adverbial and not adjectival. It modifies the verb, not the nouns. It defines the manner of treatment, not the quality of the object. Jesus did not say: Let him be unto thee as though he were a heathen ..., but: His being to thee shall be that of a heathen man ... Your relation to him shall be after the manner of treatment accorded a heathen. This in no way suggests that he might actually be something else, namely a Christian still; on the contrary, the Lord's statement peremptorily forbids any relationship with him other than that which is due a heathen.

That such conduct constitutes pronouncement of an actual judgment upon the offender must be obvious. Pretense and sparring before a mirror have no place in soul-saving. To adjudge a man a heathen through action without having a factual foundation for such a verdict would be an ignoble and slanderous thing. All that we know from Scripture of the fellowship enjoined upon us with those whom we must recognize as Christian brethren makes it mandatory that we treat no one as a heathen man without thereby affirming it as a true and sure expression of his actual status. And the rightness of our verdict does not rest upon whether we have sized up the situation correctly, but upon

proper action taken in full accord with the Lord's instructions. "If he will not hear the Church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican" -- because he IS that!

We have seen, then, that Matthew 18:15-17 is indeed, from first to last, a prescription for personal ventures in soul-saving. Verse 17 indicates the part which the congregation plays in such an undertaking. But the first consequence of congregational participation, which is envisioned as a form of assistance to the individual who undertook to call the sinner to repentance, is stated in this way: "Let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican."

Our original question, meanwhile, has not been answered. Does Matthew 18:17, then, include a directive for the action known as excommunication? The fact has been established that, after refusal to hear the Church, the sinner is to be labeled a heathen and treated accordingly. That this treatment is enjoined upon the individual who originated the process of admonition, rather than upon the congregation, is readily explained by the entire context. The discourse of Jesus has never been diverted from its object, the second person singular, and properly finishes the development of thought where it naturally leads. Thou hast undertaken something, and this is the way thou shalt end it under given circumstances.

Although it calls for the application of the same moral pressure and spiritual force attributed by Scripture to excommunication, the action to which the individual is directed in v.17 is not per se to be defined as an act of excommunication. This word, which is an ecclesiastical terminus technicus devised to respond to the scriptural procedure which it defines, is employed by the Church in our times only when we seek to describe the exclusion of an impenitent sinner from the Christian congregation as illustrated by the instance recorded in I Cor. 5. From this example it will appear that the Apostle calls upon the Church, and not upon any individual within a church, to execute this formal function of the Keys. It would be

unscriptural to assert that in Matthew 18:17 the admonishing Christian is instructed, without further reference to the congregation, to "deliver such an one unto Satan." (I Cor. 5:5). Individual Christians cannot "excommunicate" upon their own responsibility. Even the pastor serves only as the voice of the congregation in making the official pronouncement.

At the same time we will recognize and record the fact that the congregation's judgment must coincide with that enjoined upon the individual who brought the case before the Church. The congregation's experience as described by Jesus confirms the original findings of the individual soul-seeker and of the witnesses which at one point in the process were called in. By bringing the case before the congregation in conjunction with these witnesses, the guilty person is declared to be guilty, not merely of the sin charged, but of impenitence as well. For had he heard the witnesses, there would have been no need of resorting to further efforts at admonition. The failure of the sinner at the last to hear the Church compels the instigator of the entire process to regard him as a heathen man; but by the same token it places the congregation before the requirement of pronouncing excommunication. For "quicquid omnes tangit, maxime in re salutari, ob omnibus debet curari." (Whatever concerns all, especially in a matter involving salvation, must be treated by all.) (Walther, Past. Theol., p. 323.) Here the words of Prof. J. Schaller, written almost fifty years ago, will prove helpful.

"....Motivated by their new, spiritual nature, the Christian and the Christian congregation desire only to bring all men to God and the Savior; and toward this end their every effort is also directed in dealing with each fallen brother.

"In a Christian congregation filled with the spirit of the Gospel this motive will then characterize its activity in the so-called third step of fraternal admonition. Upon the brother who is brought before the congregation there now rests, indeed, a far graver charge than that which was brought

to his attention by the first Christian who dealt with him. For not only is it an established fact that he has committed the sin which threatens to destroy him, but his very presence before the congregation indicates that thus far he has refused to accept the divine Word by which the one and the several had ministered to him in the interest of his salvation. Essentially his condition cannot become more serious than it now is. Already the Word applies to him which says: "Whoso despiseth the word shall be destroyed." (Prov.13:13). For the time being, however, the congregation does not come to grips with this fact, considering it merely as the circumstance which has provided the congregation with the occasion for dealing with the person.

"Thus the congregation does not proceed with the presupposition that the charge which has been levelled is justified, but carefully establishes to its own satisfaction that a case of manifest sin actually exists and that the accused has been dealt with in a truly evangelical manner. But by such investigation the fact is confirmed that the congregation has proper jurisdiction in the matter. It renders a judgment upon the preliminary activities that took place in the case, and not as yet upon the sinner, the approach to whom is one of earnest effort to win him, that is, to bring him to a knowledge of his sin and a penitent return to the Savior, that he might be delivered from the peril of eternal damnation.

"But if the admonition of the congregation does not effect the result desired by the congregation and by the Savior - what then? Human zeal will reply: Then nought remains except excommunication; then the sinner must be excluded, severed from the body of Christ as a dead member, etc. And this zeal can easily assume a legalistic form. It is noteworthy that the Savior does not give expression to the thoughts indicated above. He says nothing about what the congregation is to do with such a sinner, but addresses the person upon whom it became incumbent in the first instance to deal with the offending brother in his sorry affair. To that one Jesus says: Let

him be unto thee exactly as a heathen man and publican. In the language of the people from whom the Savior was descended after the flesh: You must look upon him as one who has ceased to be your brother, as one who has forfeited his place in the kingdom of heaven. It is then, of course, self-evident that the entire congregation, which after all had made the cause of the original exhorter its own - that thus every single Christian in the congregation must adopt the same position toward the former brother. To the congregation the latter can thereafter be nothing other than a heathen and publican. This judgment is pronounced by every Christian in the assembly for his own person; he arrives at a personal decision in the case." (Quartalschrift, 1916, 91f.)

The ultimate outcome of the admonition, then, is determined by the refusal to hear the Church. The attitude of the individual toward the offender is henceforth governed by this refusal. But what was it that the offender refused to hear? What did the Church say? Nothing less, surely, than a preachment of Law and Gospel: the stern application of the Law was made to the Old Adam and the appeal of the Gospel groped for the hand of the faith still being sought in the man. We ask: Could the congregation's testimony be said to be complete until it has proceeded, assuming the necessity, to the final awful verdict that binds the sin? Indeed, this phase of the admonition, for which the Church alone is qualified, is indispensable when other efforts have failed. And when the offender does not quail even before that terrible word, when he stands unmoved by this overwhelming judgment of the Church, he is to be treated by the individual and, of course, by all saints, as a heathen man.

While therefore the text does not expressly include the ecclesiastical terminology of excommunication because it was, as we have shown, given primarily to instruct the individual in his personal efforts, the activity described in verse 17 and the abruptly succeeding words of verse 18 broadly intimate that a true administration of the Keys in this proceeding would leave the congregation with no alternative

other than to bind the sin and its guilt upon the impenitent, and that this explains and validates the conduct required of the individual in verse 17b.

E. S.

A Pastoral Letter Part II

To faithfulness belongs also this that we cling carefully to the Lord's word and command, do not permit any deviation from the truth, and are not afraid to confess it, even if this should bring with it enmity, derision or earthly loss. Neither must we forget that a denial of the truth does not only happen with an outright teaching of false doctrine, but also by passing over it in silence. Such a passing over a crafty selfishness may at times find clever enough, but the awakened and honest conscience will not tolerate it. As surely as our service is for our own and others' salvation, just as surely does faithfulness demand that we are obedient to God's word. Human wisdom does not save, and even an apparently minor deviation will often have great and incalculable consequences. Here is where the word concerning the leaven belongs, which experience in our synod's history sufficiently testifies.

To wisdom belongs also this, that we do not give strong food to those who are but babes in Christ. If Paul had written his first epistle to the Corinthians in the spirit in which many a Boanerges in the later history of the church would have wanted to make use of for such members as were those in Corinth, he would very likely not have gotten to write the second epistle, and it would very likely not have sounded as it now does. If anyone would here interpose that it was the Holy Ghost who gave Paul what and with what words he should write, then that would give this example still greater weight. God's leading of Luther can here teach us much. How would it very likely have gone with the Reformation if Luther in 1517 had

written such as he did in 1545 that "the papacy in Rome has been instituted by the devil," a writing which begins with these words: "The most diabolical father, St. Paul the Third."

To wisdom belongs also that we do not make our obedience to our confession our real objective, neither for ourselves or our hearers, so that they and we in the end could comfort ourselves ex opere operato.* For the word is that means by which God would convert us to Himself and save us; but conversion, faith and salvation through faith, is the objective.

But now since this service demands a laborious and constant attentiveness, since it demands an unbroken busying ourselves with that which we by nature are not inclined to, and since we under self-examination constantly become aware of our mistakes and neglects and failings in the service, it is not to be wondered at that we are tempted to become dejected, discouraged, and not at all happy. This is not a discovery which has been recently made. "I do not believe," says Ambrosius, "that a pastor dies with joy, even if he dies a blessed death."

Yea, even the happy experiences we have made in our study or during our care of souls may make us depressed when we later often find ourselves cold or careless or absent-minded, and are fearful that this perhaps is a proof that we are apostates. There are so many things which would confuse and draw us away from that one thing which should rule our mind: The remembrance of Jesus.

It is one thing (says S. Kierkegaard in a certain place) to grasp the Highest when one sits undisturbed in his quiet chamber, alone with God and His word. But it is quite another thing to sit right in the middle of a big kettle drum while the braziers are hammering at it from all sides - and still have one's mind gathered to grasp the Highest.

*Through the act performed.

The world is that "big kettle drum." We are in the world. Our Saviour says in His highpriestly prayer: "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil." In the world there buzzes about our ears in the busied competition for the world's good things, first and foremost about money, money, money. Everything is reduced to money. The value of time is that it is money. Fractures are made into money. Conflagrations are made into money. The fear of God is made into money. Good works are made into money. "Prayers and tears" are made into money. Death is made into money. Farther you cannot go, except in the church of Rome, where they have made their purgatory into money, and for money get into heaven itself. And why is money the chief thing in this world? Because when they "eat and drink, buy and sell, plant and build, give in marriage and are taken in marriage," when they speculate and practice politics and intrigue, they have all these things in their real life, and the more money you have the better sort of life may be lived.

But to us it is said that we shall "use this world as not abusing it." I Cor. 7,31. It will not be of any use to go into the desert, and just as little to go into a cloister.

In the world we will have to remain. There we have our work to do. But concerning the world the word of God tells us that "the whole world lieth in wickedness," and we believe that Christ is come that He might redeem us from the present evil world. Gal.1,4. But if this be the object of His coming into the world, then it is also the purpose of that service for which He has placed us in the congregations. Their salvation must be our objective, for that was His objective. Those souls to which He sends us are dear to Him, and must therefore be dear to us also. He has Himself said that it is a mark of His disciples that they love one another (John 13, 35), and St. John has repeated this when he says: "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." I John 3, 14. With us it is especially the shepherd's love for his sheep that is called for,

and you know that it is not small demands which God's word makes upon that shepherd love. To be sure, these demands will never create the shepherd love in us. It is alone the love of Christ which can "constrain us." But we will constantly need to hold before us the example of Christ, if we are not to forget to what it is that we have been appointed. If we dare not think that all our hearers will be won, neither must we forget the danger that there might be a soul lost through our carelessness or neglect. How should we in such instances answer Him who has pictured His love such as we have it in John 10 and in the parable of the lost sheep, which He seeks without giving Him rest "until He find it."

It is not so seldom that we hear one or the other among us complain about their congregations. Let us not be too hasty about that. Only then will we have a right to complain when we dare say that we have done for them everything which we could have done. Who is there among us who is not troubled and who will not have to sigh when he is to answer this question? But if this be so, then we stand in all the greater need of such encouragement which can give us zeal for our service and make us cheerful under its pressure and willing to carry the cross of our calling.

When I have pondered what it was that I might do to direct you to this encouragement, then I discover both in our Lord Jesus' words in the Gospel and in the epistles of the apostles, that they want us to strengthen ourselves by looking away from that which is finite, of short duration and passing, and to look to that which is lasting, eternal, unchangeable, which awaits us. True seriousness and sound cheerfulness in our view of life will be arrived at by a clear view of these things, our view of death and what according to God's word awaits us after death. And while I do not doubt that many of you by the Holy Ghost through the word have a better light than have I, it has nevertheless seemed to me that it is the duty of my calling to speak to you about these things, if I might by God's help become for one or the other of you some help or guidance.

Here we go day in and day out, constantly busied, seldom truly happy, at times even oppressed and weary. What is there to cheer us? We need a wider and a truer view than that which is our daily life's monotonous labour gives us. When we dwell in the deep valley our viewpoint is narrow and limited. The mountains block our view. We need to get up and beyond the high mountains. It is rather striking that so many of the most glorious revelations in Scripture are given us from mountains: Sinai, Nebo, Carmel, the Mount of Transfiguration, the Mount of Olives.

Looked at from a great height the entire landscape in all its details seems so wondrously small and insignificant when compared with what it seems to us when we are in the midst of them. The houses appear as quite small huts or boxes, the wide acres seem like small four-pointed squares, the mighty rivers like stripes of silver. And how small do not human beings seem to us, if we can get our eyes on them! There they rush about, busied, anxious, zealous, in their race for money, honour, power. But if we but think ourselves far, far higher, what then becomes of our little circle, our country, yea the whole world! We see its shadow at the time of the new moon. Does that seem to us so great? And what is it in His eyes who "hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure?" He, to whom "the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance!"

And yet - if it be of importance to have a broad outlook on space, lest that which is small shall not seem to us too great and important, it is still more important to get a right view of time. Luther has said: "We see time lengthwise, God sees it crosswise, so that Adam and the last person to be born before judgment day, are equally nigh to Him." In another place he says: "We see time even as along a stretched-out measuring rod, but Christ sees time as a wound-up ball of yarn. A thousand years in His eyes are but as yesterday, when it is past, and as a watch in the night." Let us then not stare ourselves near-sighted.

or blind on time or on long days. "Though the day be burdensome and long, yet at last will ring the even-song." How long is it to God since that Good Friday, when our Lord Jesus was hanged on the cross? How long is it ago since the elderly Paul sat in Rome and wrote his last epistle to Timothy, to do his diligence to come before winter? How long is it ago since Luther thundered away from the pulpit in Wittenberg, while Veit Dietrich, George Rörer and the others sat down in the church and wrote "as though life were at stake" to get the mighty words on paper? How long is it since we ourselves by Holy Baptism were dedicated to belong to Christ? To God that is all as though it were today.

And how long is it to the day of our death, and the three shovels of earth which shall be cast upon our casket? The time of our departure is near at hand, for one or the other of us it may perhaps be very near. Yea, how long is it until all to whom I am writing are dead? In about 50-60 years, in 1950 or 60 - if the world stands - there will hardly be anyone left. And then where are we? Under what surroundings? in what company?

Our works do follow us. If we have been true Christians, Christians before God, and we have remained true to the end, then we shall be in that host about which "all heavens with its angel hosts and all the powers shall praise Thy name," the host in which "the glorious apostolic choir and the holy prophets and the white-robed martyrs praising God in all eternity." In that vast throng which St. John was permitted to see, "the great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, which stand before the throne and the Lamb."

We need these great visions. To be sure, they might tempt us to become faint and lose courage. Our circumstances, our work, our battles, our exertions become so small, that it seems to us that they are of no importance at all. But here again the word of God comes to our rescue. Even as nothing is great before God, likewise nothing is little before Him.

The same one who has said that "all nations are as a drop in the bucket," has also told us that He cares for every little child, and that it is not His wish that any of them should perish. He assumes our sorrows. He had compassion on Epaphroditus when he was nigh unto death in Rome, and was very much concerned about the thought that the Philippian congregation had been concerned about him. He took mercy on Paul, so that he was not bereft of his co-worker and fellow soldier, "that he should not have sorrow upon sorrow." He considers also our humble service and our lowly work, if it be done to serve Him. There was once a woman who poured out a costly ointment on the head of Jesus when He sat at meat in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper. It might have appeared that this was not a thing of great importance, and yet we see that God has seen to it that wheresoever His Gospel is being preached in the whole world, that which she had done shall be spoken of in remembrance of her. Andronicus, Junia, Amplius - what do even Christians know about the service of these men? But behold how their names and their service have been esteemed by God and been preserved in His book (Roman 16). Here we have an example of the fulfillment of the words spoken in Hebrew 6, 10: "He is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to his saints and do minister." Has He not said that He will not forget a cup of cold water which has been given by a loving heart to quench the thirst of a weary servant of God? How lovingly has He not come to our side against the temptation to become discouraged or to take an envious view of the lowliness of our service, when He says, that whatsoever we have done to one of the least of His brethren we have done unto Him. And in no other place has He so helped us against the temptation to consider lightly any part of our service, or to consider it unimportant and of no meaning, as when He says: "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much." Luke 16, 10.

N.A.M. Sr.

What's Wrong with Modern Bible Translations

We think of this heading as an expression of impatience and protest voiced by someone who has taken note of the storm of criticism and controversy that was provoked by the publication of the Revised Standard Version which has now lasted almost a decade, and who see unmistakable signs indicating that the process is about to be repeated with reference to the New English Bible (NEB), of which only the New Testament has been published so far. Pointing to the fact that the language of the King James Version is anything but modern, citing the great gains that have been made in knowledge of the Bible languages, particularly the New Testament Greek, one way well ask why this should not be made available to the people of our day in the language of our day. Or as our hypothetical protester puts it: "What's wrong with modern Bible translations?"

It's a good question, and deserves a fair answer. Certainly there is nothing wrong about the activity of translating the Bible. That is the very reason why we spent years in the study of Greek and Hebrew. Every time we consult the original text we translate. As we translate, we move more deeply into the meaning of the words. As we note a good translation of some particular passage, we gain thereby. As we run across some poor translation, we learn to look for the cause. Was it carelessness on the part of the author, was it misinformation, was it perhaps some false doctrinal bias that brought about the mistranslation? Whatever the cause may have been, we are warned, our judgment is exercised, we are strengthened in the process. Certainly we must read such authors critically. But as we do we shall find that our stock of knowledge and understanding is growing. So much for the activity of translation. The more of it, the better.

Nor need we be unduly concerned about the end product of this activity, the resultant translations.

In spite of their imperfections, the Gospel has a strange way of shining through the fogs created by the mistranslations of men. It will not be extinguished. These modern translations are still God's Word, the Word that accomplishes what He pleases and prospers in the thing whereto He sent it. And so also these new versions, RSV and NEB, will serve as instruments of the Holy Spirit, through which He does His blessed work - where and when He pleases. Indeed, the very features to which some object may gain entrance for these new renderings with others whom the older versions would never reach.

And yet there are things wrong with these modern translations, things that should be items of major concern for every Christian, things which should in our estimation disqualify them for general and official acceptance, whereby they would replace the King James Version in our churches and schools. One of these things we have already touched on in an earlier article where we protested against the commercialism which accompanied the launching of the NEB even as was the case also with the RSV some ten years ago. It is a most serious matter when the intricacies of textual criticism and Biblical philology are magnified to a point where the untrained Bible reader is led to wonder whether he has really had the true Word of God before these modern scholars came along with their new discoveries - or whether he can be sure that he has it now. This method of discrediting an older product in order to introduce a new one fits into the savage technique of modern merchandising, but it is an insult to apply it to the Word of God. For it ignores the wonderful fact that the God who first gave the Word is the One who has also watched over it and preserved it with loving care - an assurance, incidentally, that He will so preserve it also in our day. For we have His promise that His Word shall endure forever.

A more serious matter than the commercialism of publishers is the personal attitude of the translator to his task, to the subject matter with which he is dealing. In our case this is particularly important since it is the Holy Scriptures that are involved:

the Word that is Holy because it is God's own Word, written indeed by men, yet by men who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost (II Pt 1:21), and who spoke, as Paul puts it, "not in words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth." (I Cor 2:13) That puts Scripture, all of Scripture, above our reason. To the simple Christian this is cause sufficient for bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ. (II Cor 10:5) We know, however, that such an unqualified acceptance of this Scriptural doctrine of the verbal inspiration of the Bible - all of the Bible - is the exception rather than the rule among modern scholars. The roster of the RSV committee had some "conservative" theologians indeed, but it was heavily weighted in favor of the modern "liberal" type. And that things are no different with the staff of the NEB we conclude from this statement by Dr. Robert Preus in the Lutheran Witness of April 4: "C. H. Dodd, director of the New English Bible translation of the New Testament, says that inspiration does not pertain to the Bible at all but merely to the life of the imperfect and erring authors of the Bible."

Another mark of modern theology is the aversion that these scholars have for the doctrine of the Vicarious Atonement, of a salvation that is ours purely by grace, because of the sacrifice of the body and blood of Christ upon the cross. Forgiveness of sins earned not by our own merit or works, but by the humble obedience of one who died almost twenty centuries ago, granted freely through faith in Him, that is a doctrine that is still foolishness to the proud mind of man.

When we note these facts, we begin to understand why these translators take the liberties they occasionally do with the sacred text. It is not sacred to them in the sense in which it is to us, but rather something over which they set up their reason in judgment. So it is that if reason or scholarship - or call it what you will - suggests a translation that deviates from the clear teaching of the rest of Scripture, this nevertheless is not sufficient warning to restrain them. Nor does it seem to

trouble them if in the process of their revision they undermine some important point of doctrine, even though it pertains to the Atonement itself. Take Isaiah 7:14, this important Old Testament text for the Virgin Birth of the Savior, but one which the RSV turns into ". . . a young woman shall conceive." Could this have happened if the translators had been humble believers in the verbal inspiration and resultant inerrancy of the New Testament rendering of this prophetic word? Accepting this basic principle, they would then have bowed, not merely before the interpretation of an enthusiastic Matthew, but before the final authority of the Holy Spirit who was then and there giving an authentic and utterly reliable translation of the Isaiah passage. Or, if the men of the NEB had but taken to heart the full significance of that word of Jesus that the Scripture cannot be broken (Jn 10:35), could they have given out their watered down version ("Every inspired Scripture has its use for teaching the truth and refuting error, or for reformation of manners and discipline in right living") of those powerful words of Paul in II Tm 3:16? Could they have created this situation which permits the lingering doubt to remain as to whether "Every inspired Scripture" really means all of the Bible, or merely that part of it which men in their judgment consider "inspired"? Doesn't the rest of Scripture answer the question whether "inspired" is a limiting or a descriptive modifier of "Scripture"? And why reduce "inspired of God" (theopneustos) to what in this case becomes a colorless "inspired"? We ask the reader to decide for himself whether or not the "liberal" views of modern theology have influenced this translation.

Our purpose, however, is not to draw up a lengthy list of indictments against these modern versions. That has been done with regard to the RSV, and we do not want to rake over these items again. The process is beginning with the NEB, and will probably go on for some time to come. We are willing to await the outcome. But we do believe that now is the time to point out - as we have tried above - that one of the first things to be considered about a translation is

the attitude of the translator to his subject, particularly if this subject is that great and wonderful Word of God. Does he bow in holy reverence before the majesty of that Word, or does he see it as something that must be made to conform to the pattern of his thought and reason? This involves no judging of hearts. This is rather something that can be known and is known from other writings and utterances of these men. Those are the spirits that we should try. For we believe that the areas touched on in our discussion, namely of inspiration and of the vicarious atonement, are particularly sensitive in the sense that aberrations here will inevitably create blind spots, obscuring some of the most precious truths of Scripture. They cannot but affect adversely the translations of the respective passages.

It would on the other hand be a mistake to put the King James Version on a pedestal, to invest it with the mantle of infallibility. It has its faults. But its translators were - again only in so far as indicated by their public declarations - at least not critics in the modern sense. As far as one can judge they did accept the inspiration of Scripture. And they did accept the doctrine of the Vicarious Atonement. They did approach their task with holy reverence. Until a new type of translators appears, more closely in tune with their subject than our present day "Modernists," it would be folly to yield what we have for the sake of what is being offered. For what is being offered is the fruit of a sick tree.

E.R.

* * * * *

P A N O R A M A

THE NUB OF THE MATTER

It is not an exaggeration to say that hundreds of pages have been written and that the mail service has been busy in delivering correspondence regarding the so-called "Scharlemann case." It would seem to require a sabbatical leave for one to plow through the volume of material that has accumulated in this whole matter. However, the controversy is not as involved and complex as much of the "learned" writings on this subject has made it appear to be. At the risk of being accused of over-simplification, we propose, in a very brief way, to get at the nub of the matter. Since the Lutheran Witness has brought this entire case into the public view, there should be no fear of becoming involved in extensive arguments regarding protocol and red tape which often make procedure so intricate that men easily become exhausted in the process.

To get to the nub of the matter it will be necessary to make it clear that the following propositions are not properly involved in the present controversy: 1. That Jesus is the center of the Bible. 2. That the Holy Ghost caused the writers of Holy Scripture, on occasion, to make use of oral reports and documents at hand. 3. That there have been copyists' errors (which have, however, in no case effected the doctrine.) 4. That there is no such thing as a special language of the Holy Ghost nor is there a process whereby the Holy Ghost reduced the writers to robot-like stenographers, but the Holy Ghost made use of the style and, on occasion, the information that the writers had. 5. That truth is transmitted also in symbolic language. 6. That the mighty acts of God show His power and His grace in reference to the lives of men. --- These points we freely admit.

Having cleared away these matters which have sometimes served to divert attention from the main issue, we are ready to get at the nub of the matter. In a Lutheran Witness interview Dr. Scharlemann said regarding the writers of Holy Scripture: "He used them where they were. He spoke through them in terms of the knowledge of their particular time." (Lutheran Witness, April 4, 1961. p. 159.) On the surface this seems quite harmless, but from the background of what the Doctor has written in connection with the whole question of the INERRANCY of Scripture, we draw the conclusion that he here implies that the writers on occasion used terms, particularly in matters of history and science, which modern research has found to be false. Particularly the Doctor is not ready to accept individual items of the creation story as being factually correct. He shies away from what he calls a "literalistic" approach to the accounts of creation and the fall. It is rather looked upon as an epic which, for instance, cannot be used to prove that God created the heaven and the earth and the hosts of them in six calendar days. In this matter the writer of the account would be represented as presenting material "in terms of the knowledge of his particular time" (which was limited and even erroneous). In Dr. Scharlemann's view the inerrancy of Holy Scripture does not extend to such an item. However, we unhesitatingly say that to deny inerrancy to any item in Genesis One is to deny the INERRANCY OF HOLY SCRIPTURE and all protestations to the contrary notwithstanding, it is a denial of the VERBAL INSPIRATION of the Bible. We can well understand why Dr. Scharlemann will not accept the sentence in the first paragraph of the Brief Statement which reads: "Since the Holy Scriptures are the Word of God, it goes without saying that they contain no errors or contradictions, but that they are in all their parts and words the infallible truth, also in those parts which treat of historic, geographical, and other secular matters, John 10:35." For our part we are satisfied to rest our case with I Cor. 2:13; II Tim. 3:16; and II Pet. 1:21.

The Lutheran Witness' Special Report on this

whole matter shows that Dr. Scharlemann's position on the INERRANCY OF SCRIPTURE is considered to be non-divisive of Church-fellowship and no hindrance to his continuing as professor at Concordia Seminary at St. Louis. In fact he is in a very cautious way being exonerated of any charge of false doctrine.

In evaluating this whole sad story, it can well be cited as a result of the breakdown of doctrinal discipline which first came to public attention particularly in the dealings with the signers of the "Chicago Statement" of 1945. Regarding the present breakdown in the doctrine of VERBAL INSPIRATION and INERRANCY of the Scriptures we see the footprints of the Pittsburgh Agreement which was the A.L.C.'s capitulation to the U.L.C. liberalistic view of Holy Scripture. Those who hailed the Synodical Conference Article on "Holy Scripture" as a victory can well back up and take a fresh look. Did it accomplish what the authors had expected?

C.M.G.

A ROMAN DEFINITION OF JOINT PRAYER

The readers of the Journal are quite familiar with all the sophistry which has characterized much of the argumentation regarding JOINT PRAYER within the Synodical Conference circles. For the record the following item from America (Roman Catholic periodical) is here given: "A prayer in common with our separated brethren is particularly significant. The directive of 1949, Ecclesia Catholica, approves the reciting together of the Our Father or any other prayer approved by the Church. Thus, for example, Compline (Evening Prayer) could be recited together. What is forbidden, of course, is liturgical worship together: Mass, Holy Communion, etc. Also Catholics cannot ordinarily participate in non-Catholic services." This distinction between Joint Prayer and Liturgical Worship has a familiar ring to it.

C.M.G.

BY-PASSING THE IMPASSE

In 1955 the Norwegian Synod suspended relations with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod on the basis of

Romans 16:17. As a part of the suspension resolution the Norwegian Synod declared: "We feel, therefore, that, as matters now stand, further negotiations by committees will be fruitless; that an impasse has been reached in our fraternal relations with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod; and that further negotiations will result in indifferentism and in compromise of Scriptural doctrine and practice. At this point we can only say that we have testified to the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod as best we know how and have tried in many ways for many years to preserve the unity in confession and practice which we enjoyed with it for so many years." However, it was not long before committee meetings were resumed while at the same time the declaration of the impasse remained. Ostensibly, the meetings were to be held for the purpose of ascertaining if the Missouri Synod had changed its position. It was not long before it became apparent that the meetings were being broadened to include, among other things, the preparation of a confessional document. It was argued that this was a much better approach than had been employed by the Intersynodical Relations Committee which had been in the habit of addressing itself to Church-Fellowship problems. Now another impasse has been declared and still another solution has been proposed by the Synodical Conference. The issues are to be re-studied and re-evaluated. If the same logic is used in the Norwegian Synod as prevailed in the years following 1956, then one can only conclude that there will be another by-passing of the impasse. And we can well understand that the same arguments could be used. For where was it that the present meetings encountered a snag? It was on the question of "Church-Fellowship," the very question which had brought on the first impasse. We can only hope that the logic of 1956 and following will not raise its head to lead to another breakdown of a well-considered action. And at the same time we are wondering if the Wisconsin Synod will be strong enough to recognize that there is no rightful way of by-passing an impasse. It will take much humility and a true spirit of repentance for the Norwegian and Wisconsin Synods to make the necessary and proper decisions in their August Conventions.

C.M.G.

TO SET THE
RECORD STRAIGHT.

Recent personal communications have brought to our attention the fact that leaders of the Wisconsin Synod continue to refer their constituency to the allegedly irreconcilable and intractable attitude of the signers of the Memorial: "A Call for Decision," addressed to the 1959 convention of the Synod. This memorial took exception to a basic statement found in a document disseminated by the Protest Committee of the Synod. The statement related to the matter of termination of church fellowship. The memorial declared it to be false and unscriptural, and asked the convention to disavow it.

Proponents of the offensive statement, in reply, protested that they did not wish to insist upon its wording, but would be prepared to amend it. They affirmed that they desired to convey no doctrine other than that formulated in the "Call for Decision." They insisted that the thesis defended by the memorial, and the proposition set up in their document, were identical in substance. It is not on record, incidentally, that they ever offered to withdraw their statement in toto and replace it with the phraseology of the memorial; but that is neither here nor there. In any event, since the signers of the memorial did not entertain the offer to amend the original statement of the Protest Committee, and since many of them withdrew from membership after the Synod had subscribed to it in its objectionable form and sense, they were bitterly attacked as irresponsible separatists and causers of schism. Further "conclusive" evidence for this charge was advanced by the claim that the signers of the memorial had, after all, signified their agreement with the presentation on "Church Fellowship" studied and approved by the same convention (Proceedings, 1959, P. 205ff).

Speaking of the latter allegation first of all, we are bound to declare that it is contrary to fact. The signers of the memorial never at any time subscribed or declared their agreement to the presentation in question. One member of the Synod, who was also a signer, speaking for himself and for no one

else, tentatively commended the document on Fellowship for what it seemed to say. He immediately added, however, that the Synod was not practicing what it appeared to be saying in its formal treatise. To interpret such remarks, extemporaneously made on the convention floor by an individual, as a blanket approval by the speaker and by twenty-nine other signers of the memorial, is a deplorable abuse of what was intended as a charitable approach toward an understanding.

We must deeply regret, moreover, that the vain argument offered to discredit those who for conscience' sake have been compelled to withdraw from membership in the Wisconsin Synod continues to make the rounds. It will impress only the uninformed and the naive; yet if there were but one Christian offended by it, that would be one too many. Let us set the record straight.

It is quite true that at the Saginaw convention in 1959, and doubtless on subsequent occasions, dissident members of the Synod were given the assurance that the original author of the official synodical formula distributed by the Protest Committee in 1958 was quite willing to change its wording. We may well assume that the Protest Committee and, for that matter, the majority of Synod's membership, would have underwritten that effort. It is also true that at Saginaw, and subsequently, proponents of the Synod's position insistently affirmed that they saw no difference between their statement and the principle they found expressed in the memorial.

Both the offer and the affirmation thus made were rejected by those who signed the "Call for Decision." The reason for their intransigence ought to be manifest to any intelligent Christian. To put it into the simplest terms: Of what possible value is a change in the wording of a principle unless it is accompanied by a change in practice? Stated in another way: When you practice what you preach, and insist upon justifying the practice, rearranging the words in the sermon will not alter the intent of the message. We have lived to see the technique of

unionists who are quite willing to agree to any wording as long as they are left free to fill it with the content they seek; and we want no part of such an arrangement. Neither, we pray to God, is that the objective of those whom we are herewith taking to task. But why they should indulge in tactics otherwise repudiated in their midst as well as by us is quite beyond our comprehension. Events have conclusively demonstrated that their offer included no promise of a concomitant reversal of Synod's unionistic practice.

The scriptural requirements for termination of church fellowship are set forth by the "Call for Decision;" and those who have withdrawn from the Synod have by their action left no doubt as to the meaning and import of their thesis. The correct interpretation of the resolutions of the Synod on this subject, on the other hand, is seen in the manner in which the Synod has failed to terminate its fellowship relations with a church body that is and has long since been causing divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine. To continue to maintain, in the face of the record of divergent performance, that there is no difference between the statement of principle of the respective groups, is an affront to ordinary human intelligence, to say nothing of the barriers it raises against the hope for ultimate clarification and reconciliation of the deplorable division between former brethren.

E. S.

"FELLOWSHIP THEN
AND NOW" - II

In the first issue of our Journal we took note of a series of six articles which was then appearing in the Northwestern Lutheran under the general heading of "Fellowship Then and Now." Written in behalf of the Wisconsin Commission on Doctrinal Matters, the purpose was to note (a) the procedure followed by the founding fathers of the Synodical Conference in the situations that confronted them prior to the founding of that body, (b) the procedure in the intersynodical discussions that came in the early part of this century, and (c) the situation that has developed in

recent years. In each case the presentation centered on the manner in which the question of church fellowship was handled in each of these important stages.

This series has now been completed. The hope that we expressed in our earlier article (namely that at some point mention would be made that when faced with the need of withdrawing from the General Council because of its unionistic practices, Wisconsin was able to act decisively in a matter of months) has not been fulfilled. The articles do, however, present a valuable fund of information on certain chapters of the history of the Synodical Conference that is not ordinarily available. And they do show conclusively what they were meant to prove, namely that the present practice of Missouri with regard to joint prayer, and the defense of that practice as set forth in the Missouri committee's statement ("A Theology of Fellowship") is a definite departure from the principles that Missouri once held and practiced jointly with its sister synods. But, although there would seem to be so much reason for doing so, these articles do not go beyond the limits of academic discussion. They do not take up the eminently practical question whether Wisconsin should not follow its own example from earlier days (withdrawal from the General Council) and terminate what has developed into another unionistic entanglement. We hope and pray that it may yet find the strength.

E.R.

FELLOWSHIP

. . . NOW!

The Northwestern Lutheran of June 18 brings a detailed report on the Recessed Convention of the Lutheran Synodical Conference (May 17-19). Such a report deserves a fair hearing, without prejudice. As is to be expected, the important issues are treated in a number of resolutions presented by the Floor Committee on Doctrinal Matters. The most controversial of these was Resolution No. III which proposes the formation of one single Commission (in place of the four representing the individual synods) which in keeping with the proposal of the Overseas Committee (to which a study of the controversy had been committed by the 1960 Synodical Conference Convention) is to begin with a "a restudy of the doctrine of the

Church." The resolution concludes with the recommendation:

"That the Commission be urged to set itself the task of restudying and formulating in precise fashion the doctrine of the Church and that on the basis of this restudy it proceed to the formulation of the theses on Fellowship and that these findings and formulations be submitted immediately upon completion to the respective synods for study and adoption or rejection."

According to the report spokesmen for the Wisconsin Synod "declared that they could not return to their constituents with a resolution calling for the Synod to hold its fellowship theses in abeyance. It was also pointed out that there can be no confidence in further talks unless something is done to end offenses. Others from the Wisconsin Synod argued that the difficulty did not lie in a failure in the past to study the doctrine of the Church, and that we do not need a further study of this doctrine in order to formulate Scriptural fellowship principles." In spite of these strong protests the resolution was adopted.

Resolution IV: "That we request all the synods and their members to avoid all practices, such as joint worship and prayer with church bodies and groups not in fellowship with us, which have become occasion for offense within the Synodical Conference." This resolution was objected to by Missouri delegates on the ground that (to quote the NWL) "omitting prayers and devotions at the opening of meetings with other Lutheran bodies (the National Lutheran Council, for instance) would be as much an offense as engaging in them would be to Wisconsin Synod members." Final action was to refer this to the 1962 Synodical Conference Convention.

Resolution VII concerning the (Norwegian) ELS Memorial need be quoted only in part: "that the Evangelical Lutheran Synod be asked to suspend the action indicated in its unprinted memorial (viz: that its Union Committee decline to participate in further meetings - Ed.) and that The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod be asked to suspend the activities objected to in the Unprinted Memorial." To this the NWL adds the following significant comment:

"It remains only to point out that it was clear what the resolution asks The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod to do: to suspend for the time being further meetings with the National Lutheran Council representatives. The reader will recall that it was unwillingness to do this which, to a considerable extent, accounted for the failure to adopt Resolution IV. Therefore it came as a surprise that the Missouri Synod, through its delegates, professed willingness to entertain this request when it was conveyed by Resolution VII."

We believe, however, that an earlier paragraph in the NWL report shows why there need have been no "surprise": "The Norwegian (ELS) representatives made their willingness to go along with Resolution III dependent largely upon the action that would be taken on their Synod's memorial (our emphasis - Ed.) which lay before the convention." If this observation is correct, this certainly leaves an unpleasant aftertaste.

Finally come the Commission's Conclusions. They report (I) "no change in the position of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod relative to the Doctrine of Church Fellowship." They describe (II) the proposals of the Overseas Delegates and the resultant Resolution III as "the creation of another forum of discussion rather than a practical solution to our problem." The Third Conclusion we quote in full:

"It is our conviction that in the present controversy we have consistently contended for the historical Scriptural position of the Synodical Conference. We consider it a sacred trust from the Lord to 'contend for the faith once delivered to the saints.'

"Such a trust, however, also involves a grave responsibility. It is not only our solemn duty to continue to defend this position, but also to give vigorous testimony to it before the church and the world.

"We, therefore, invite those who share our position to join us in preserving this historical Scriptural position of the Synodical Conference."

There is much in the general report and also in these conclusions over which we sincerely rejoice. Our

sympathies and our prayers are with these our one-time brethren in their desperate struggle. We dare to hope! - It is just this, however, that makes the final paragraph of the Conclusions so sadly disappointing, such a tragic anticlimax, to "invite those who share our position to join us . . ." The great question, "to be (in fellowship) or not to be" - to avoid or not to avoid - is left unanswered. The leadership that is so sorely needed as Wisconsin approaches this crucial convention is not in evidence. Let us pray that the voice of leadership may yet be heard, and that the trumpet may sound a note of certainty. Let there be no mistake. The issue is FELLOWSHIP, and the time is NOW.

E.R.

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