

## Admonition and Romans 16

What part does admonition play in regard to the application of Romans 16: 17-18 to a sister synod that has fallen into error?

There are at least two reasons why this topic should be discussed in our JOURNAL, discussed with particular reference to the way in which it is pointed up in the sub-title. The first is the appearance in the Lutheran Synod Quarterly (June, 1962) of an article reviewing our CLC statement "Concerning Church Fellowship." The article was written by the Rev. Theodore Aaberg, who has since then been elected to the presidency of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS). The article expresses a deep concern for the position taken by our body, a position which it describes as not allowing for admonition in a case "of separation from those with whom one has been in fellowship." This is a charge that we shall certainly not brush aside lightly, as being of no consequence. If it is true, we shall indeed have to review and revise our position.

The other reason for our taking up this question is that in a recent meeting with a committee representing the Wisconsin Synod this matter was indeed treated at length, without agreement being reached, however, on how long such admonition may properly continue before decisive action can be taken. Or to put it differently, just how much is to be included in the debt of love that one owes one's erring brethren.

Much has been written these last few years about Romans 16, particularly about verse 17 (Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them) and to some extent also on the following verse (For they which are such

serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple). Almost every word of the first of these verses has been thoroughly explored: what is meant by "causing;" what constitutes "divisions and offenses;" what is implied by "contrary to the doctrine that ye have learned," and just where this phrase belongs; what is the force of "mark" and "avoid;" and when those actions are to be carried out, etc., etc. In the following verse the description of "those who are such" has been fought over (that they "serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly"), with some going so far as to contend that this would automatically forbid the application of this passage to any church body bearing the name "Lutheran." But little, too little by far, has been said about the purpose of this entire disciplinary procedure as it is indicated in the closing words, that "by good words and fair speeches they deceive the hearts of the simple."

What is this purpose? We must bear in mind that Paul is writing to a congregation that he has as yet not even met face to face, the Christians in far-off Rome. Nevertheless, there was a church there, a congregation of believers. In the absence of any scriptural indication of an apostolic founding we may well conclude that it had come into being through the witness of individual Christians who had come to know the Gospel elsewhere, people like Aquila and Priscilla and the others to whom Paul sends greetings in the preceding verses of this closing chapter of his letter. Perhaps this accounts for the exceptional detail with which the Apostle sets forth his doctrine in this weighty epistle. Filled with concern at the thought that someone might cause them to stumble in their faith, pry them away from the body of believers, deceive them as to their simple following of Christ, Paul is moved to the earnest and heartfelt plea ("I beseech you, brethren") to mark and avoid such causers of divisions and offenses. Paul appears here as a faithful shepherd, filled with deep and constant concern for the welfare and safety of the flock. We find this also elsewhere in his writings, even in that most joyful letter to the Philippians, where two esteemed women had to be helped to overcome their differences lest thereby a rift be caused that would divide the flock. As the Apostle writes to the Corinthians and

Thessalonians, as he addresses Timothy and Titus, he voices that same concern, though varying in degree according to the circumstances of each case — with Galatians representing a climax of intensity and indignation because of the way in which works were being substituted for grace and faith in the article of justification, and these Galatians, many of whom must have belonged to the first-fruits of Paul's missionary activity, were being deceived by "another Gospel," a counterfeit — with their soul's salvation at stake!

We hold that Paul's purpose with regard to the Romans lies on the same plane. The procedure which he describes in our passage is plainly a protective one: to halt the destructive spread of error, to shield the simple believing Christians against anything that might corrupt the purity of that Gospel which is the sole power unto salvation. One may therefore illustrate the point by comparing the situation with one that occurs again and again in man's endless battle against disease, for in doing so we are simply following the example of the Apostle himself who warned his young helper against the word of certain teachers "who have erred from the truth, saying the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some," in which connection he then uses the simile of a spreading malignant disease: "their word will eat as doth a canker." (II Tim. 2:17-18)

Paul's language is drastic, and his meaning is clear. The governing consideration in his handling of such cases of spreading error was the protection of the rank and file of believers. And let us not forget that he spoke by divine inspiration! Let no one think that Paul lacked pity for weak brethren. He wrote Romans 14! Let no one think that he did not know what it means to be overtaken with a fault. He wrote Galatians 6:1! Let no one think that Paul lacked humility. He wrote Romans 7! But when he spoke so sternly and incisively as he does in our passage he was instructing his readers in what they should do when they would find themselves confronted with a similar situation, where error is being promoted and defended and where the potential spread of error is endangering precious souls. His counsel is simple and direct. Mark and avoid. Make your identification, and then take the necessary protective action. Or to revert to the medical parallel: make your diagnosis and then

apply the indicated treatment, whether it be isolation or major surgery. That is the purpose of this passage.

Does this show a lack of evangelical spirit? Is this legalistic? Consider that the detection and isolation (quarantine) of a person who is a carrier of some communicable disease, while indeed not a pleasant experience for him, may yet prove to be the means of saving even his own life. Nor will any conscientious physician ever lose sight also of this particular objective. But he will not let his natural pity and concern for the one patient keep him from applying the stern isolation measures needed for the protection of the many, the other members of his community.

Now let us retrace our steps through our passage and check the procedure. Here we beg the indulgence of our readers and particularly our critics if we seem to oversimplify. Perhaps the entire matter is not so complicated as it has been made. We begin with the simplest question: What is to be done when one church body in its relations with another, specifically with a "sister synod," is confronted with the situation for which Romans 16 was written? Here Wisconsin, and more recently ELS, hold that "avoid them" implies a definite breaking off of fellowship relations. And we agree with them. Attempts have indeed been made to let this "avoid" mean simply the beginning of a gradual process of withdrawal, a "leaning away" from those who have become manifest as "causers of divisions and offenses." But these attempts, which would defeat the very purpose of the passage, have fortunately not met with general acceptance.

A second question is, "When is this to take place?" Here even Wisconsin and ELS go apart. For Wisconsin grants that after the positive identification has been made, when the "marking" is complete, then the "avoid" is to follow without further delay. But in the Synod Quarterly, in the article under discussion, the author puts it this way: "The ELS position of long standing has been this, very briefly, that when a person or church body with whom we are in fellowship causes divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which we have learned, we mark them immediately, then admonish (our emphasis — Ed.), and if this proves fruitless, avoid them." (Lutheran Synod Quarterly, June, 1962, p.21)

Now we contend that when the "marking" represents the identification, as Wisconsin holds and the text implies, then to inject the process of admonition after this point and to postpone the "avoiding" until "this proves fruitless" is nothing less than to defeat the purpose of the Apostle's plea for the protection "of the simple." For the error is in the meantime still being spread. The "good words and fair speeches" continue to work their havoc. The diagnosis has been made, and yet the means for halting the spread of the infection or contagion are not being applied.

This writer is inclined to grant the good intentions of those who plead for admonition at this point. Yet those who insist on making it a part of the procedure outlined by Paul and demand that also this stage must be carried out before one may take the decisive (and protective!) step of avoiding those causers of divisions and offenses make it the occasion for an unwarranted and perhaps fatal delay. The urgency of the situation admits of no temporizing. Nor does the text itself speak of admonition, either at this or any other point in our passage which we consider the vital *sedes doctrinae*. It simply does not use the word. This, and nothing more, is what we mean by the much criticized passage in our Statement Concerning Church Fellowship: "that the admonishing per se and by itself is not an absolute must, a conditio sine qua non, for the application of 'avoid them'." (CCF, # 65 — emphasis by Ed.) But that there is a situation where admonition is indeed a must will be pointed out presently.

We have stated that Wisconsin and ELS differ on this point of admonition after the marking. Wisconsin holds that when the causers of divisions and offenses have been marked as such, the "avoid them" is then to be applied without further delay. It appears that this is a difference in form rather than in substance. In effect Wisconsin's argument allows for the same delay that we have noted in the ELS position. Hence we ask a third question: Just what is to be included in the "marking"? On the one hand the ELS uses the term with commendable precision ("when a person or church body . . . causes divisions and offenses . . . we mark them immediately"), though erroneously bringing in

the admonition afterward, Wisconsin on the other hand includes not only the careful and conscientious scrutiny which is called for by the process of identification and diagnosis (to use our familiar terms once more), but it has also carried the continuation of fraternal admonition into the "marking" as something that must be done "until the full debt of love has been discharged." Then, and not until then, will it apply the "avoid".

This position is not easy to analyze. Any discussion that may still be necessary at this stage of the "marking" (and experience has taught how difficult it is to make a clean break where there once has been fellowship) will of necessity still have the character of admonition, even as it will still have the purpose of winning them from those erring ways in which they are persisting. Yet making such admonition an essential part of the "marking," a determinative part that fixes the time when the "marking" must cease and the "avoiding" begin — this is again something that obviously defeats the plain purpose of the procedure. It offers talk where Paul calls for energetic action. It prolongs the period of inactivity and indecision while the error continues to do its destructive work, and while men battle over the question whether the final point of admonition has actually been reached, whether the "debt of love" has been fully paid. And it leaves men hopelessly divided in their opinions because the factor of human judgment has been invoked where Scriptura Sola — Scripture alone — should reign. So, at the risk of seeming once more to be "anti-admonition," we venture to say that it is a mistake to include admonition as a determinative part of the process of "marking," a mistake because it goes beyond the clear words of the text which, after all, has not a word to say about admonition, which does not even mention the word.

So we come to our fourth question: If what has been said so far is correct, and if, as we have insisted, we are not "anti-admonition," where then does admonition belong? It is a fair question. All we ask of our critics is a fair look at our answer.

It will be seen that the question which we have here stated in its simplest form is in substance the same that we have put into the heading of this article. We have restricted our



discussion to one specific situation, the application of our passage to "a sister synod that has fallen into error." Much might be said about other bodies with which one is not in fellowship, about individuals with whom one has been in fellowship or others with whom one has not. But that would only complicate our study. The one situation about which we are all equally concerned is the one stated above. We are speaking of a church body with which one has been in fellowship for many years, and which by a tragic chain of events has fallen into error. What shall be done in such a case?

In answering this question one must keep in mind that synods do not change overnight from a position of unquestioned orthodoxy to one of false doctrine and practice. That will be a gradual process beginning with individuals in the body. There will perhaps be disturbing incidents of deviation from principles and practice on which there had once been agreement. There may be occasional pronouncements by this or that person, pronouncements that fill one with increasing concern. Yet one trusts that the sister synod will be capable of dealing with these individual deviations and willing to do so, that it will speedily fulfill its obligation of brotherly admonition toward its members. But if and when it becomes obvious that there has been a breakdown of such doctrinal discipline, then it becomes the duty of brethren in the other synod to inquire and eventually to admonish the synod itself. Even then it will not be easy to determine whether these incidents really reflect a change of position on the part of the sister synod. But if that should be the case, this change will begin to appear also in its official pronouncements, in certain resolutions, in the actions taken on some particular committee reports, in the official decisions on various appeals, etc. So again there will be inquiry whether those resolutions, those pronouncements, those decisions really mean what they seem to say. And in connection with this inquiry there will of course be admonition, a wholehearted, singleminded, sincere effort, having but one goal — that the Truth may be served. That effort must be made, else all previous expressions of fellowship would be sheer hypocrisy. Yet it must be a patient, prayerful effort. There dare be no thought of "When do we get to Romans 16?" The admonition must be thoroughly Scripture-based, and offered

in the spirit of meekness. It must be relevant to the issue, it must be directed to the responsible persons, those whom the body has chosen as the ones by which it wants to be represented in such matters.

When such efforts at brotherly admonition have been made and have nevertheless been rejected — whether in so many words or by deliberate adherence to the error — then one must come to the reluctant conclusion that this is indeed the very situation which the Apostle had in mind, that one is dealing with causers of divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine that we have learned.

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It is this rejection of admonition that has made the identification not only possible but positive. Now one can "mark" with certainty. Now nothing is to be gained by further delay, by a process of marking. To call for further admonition now would be like a surgeon calling for further tests after he knows that he is dealing with a ruptured appendix, like postponing isolation measures when the plague spots have plainly erupted. With such evidence before us, we know with what we are faced. We know what to do. We know why it should be done: for the prevention of error's spread, for the sake of the simple, and yes, even for the sake of those who are the causers of the offense. So let us mark, let us avoid. To demand still more evidence, still further admonition can only make a mockery of the entire procedure. It makes a threat of Romans 16, albeit a weak one, a sort of an ultimatum that is nevertheless constantly being postponed. It raises the inevitable question, "Do they mean it this time?" And in the meantime the real purpose of the procedure is being defeated.

That is our position on admonition. We maintain indeed that it does not belong into the procedure that Paul here outlines for a very specific kind of situation. For this we offer no defense beyond the plain fact that Paul is simply not speaking of admonition in this text. Yet we insist that we believe in admonition, practice admonition, demand admonition — but in its proper place. For we are speaking of brethren who have fallen into error. We have no right to consider them anything else than weak brethren, brethren overtaken in a fault. That is where we owe them an obligation, a debt of love, if you please, and where admonition is a



"must." We pray and labor that it may succeed. But when it does not, when it has been rejected — then the admonition that has been practiced, or rather the rejection of such admonition furnishes firm and valid reason for now applying Romans 16. This act supplies an objectively recognizable basis for identification, for proper diagnosis. It is unthinkable that Scripture would ask us to apply so stern a measure and then leave us in doubt and uncertainty as to when it is to be applied. The recognizable symptom is there, waiting to be seen and acted on.

Yet it is an undeniable fact that not all men see it, not even all who are united by a common and genuine fellowship. And among those who do see it, not all do so at the same time. But when we make this admission, let us recognize where the fault lies — not with the clarity of the Word that gives us the directive, not with any lack of clarity of the evidence, but simply with our own reluctance to see, our hesitance to draw the indicated conclusions, in short, with our flesh. That is true of all of us who have had to wrestle with the problem in that specific form which has now sundered the Synodical Conference. It would be regrettable if any reader would draw the conclusion that we of the CLC claim to have timed our action exactly right. It is the firm conviction of this writer that if we look back over the course of events that have now come to such a painful climax, none of us will have any cause to reproach the other, none may assume the mantle of superior wisdom and righteousness. For the symptoms were clear long ago, the evidence of what was happening in Missouri was conclusive, and so long ago that we have almost forgotten. Nothing is to be gained now by raking over the ashes of the past in order to pinpoint the precise moment when all of us should have acted in unison. Something will be gained for the future, however, if we can but re-establish a clear set of principles, jointly held on a sound Scriptural basis. To this end this effort is herewith dedicated.

Our final question deals neither with the Romans text nor the position we have taken on admonition, but rather with our Statement Concerning Church Fellowship which is under fire. Are we trying to cover up for our statement? Are we trying to provide a new face for our CLC? We believe that the following quotations from our statement will show that

the points we have stressed above have all been expressed before, even though in other words. We quote without comment except for the emphasis we have added to bring out the salient points.

"Now let us state at the outset that we fully believe in dealing patiently and lovingly with weak brethren. In every congregation there are Christians who are strong and others who are weak. Each individual Christian is at times strong and at times weak. Certainly this is a prime reason why our Lord does not leave us alone, but setteth the solitary into families, that we may serve one another in humility and love. There are members of congregations who are also weak in doctrine. This may be due to immaturity, since they may be novices and need more instruction, or it may be due to ignorance. It may be that some leader has sown confusion in the ranks of a group. Thus the Church is ever busy at this task of strengthening the weak in its midst, the "teaching them to observe." There are many, many Bible passages and Scriptural examples of this constant activity of the teaching, strengthening, edifying Church. But we most assuredly object to this that this teaching and admonishing function be of necessity carried into the process of separating from errorists." (CCF, # 63)

"Then there is also the weakness of language. A person may not express himself as he intended the meaning, or others may read something into his words which is not there. We do therefore teach that any Christian ought to be very sure before he will raise the cry of false teacher. He will make careful inquiry and ascertain exactly what is being taught by the suspected speaker. This may require little or much time. In the case of a person or group with whom one has been in fellowship it will by its nature involve an admonition, or several admonitions. But we emphatically teach that the admonishing per se and by itself is not an absolute

must, a conditio sine qua non, for the application of "avoid them." As we have seen, there may be years of admonition before a person is revealed as causing divisions and offenses by his errors, or it could become clear at one meeting that the basis for fellowship has been removed by adherence to error. The argument that separation must be delayed as long as the errorist will listen to admonition does not take into account that he is not only listening, but he is teaching his error at the same time. The Devil is very happy to have this errorist listen to endless admonition, if this will enable him to continue to fellowship and address the entire Church." (CCF, # 65)

"In the case of one who trespasses against me, my one concern — of which he should be assured — is the sinner and his forgiveness. In the case of false teachers, however, there is first the immediate concern for the honor of God and for the endangered lambs. This does not by any means preclude a sincere concern for the erring man's soul. The separating action taken in obedience to God is for the sake of His glory and the safety of souls entrusted to the Church. Previously, concurrently and subsequently, as the Christian has call and opportunity, he will of course try to correct the erring one." (CCF, # 72)

That is our confession on this matter. We do not claim to have stated these things perfectly. Others could, and undoubtedly would, have said it better. But the things needed to be brought out at this time. So we have said them — in our own simple way.

E. Reim

# **The Functions of a Conference Visitor**

(Essay delivered at a Minnesota Delegate Conference)

A new church body such as ours is in a fortunate position in this respect that it is not tied to traditions which have at times served to misdirect and to hinder. Not least has this been true of the office of Visitor which in some circles has been shaped and fashioned and then remolded to meet the requirements of cases which have seemed to call for special and delicate handling. As more and more stress was laid upon organization and the need for money became more acute through over-ambitious planning, the office of visitor was freighted with an accumulation of assignments which served to obscure the original functions of this office. Little room was left for the carrying out of the purposes for which it was instituted. Through the laziness of its incumbents it also occurred that visitations were only arranged for when dissensions arose and so visitors were often looked upon as "trouble-shooters". As a consequence their visits were looked upon as a sure sign that there was some mischief abroad. Under such circumstances it is small wonder that visitations were not regarded as blessed occasions for edification and inspiration. Because the need for synodical solidarity became such a major consideration the qualifications for this office centered more upon diplomacy and devotion to the organization than upon aptness to teach, the spirit-given ability rightly to divide the Word of truth, and a sanctified concern for the kingdom of God.

It is good for us that we have the opportunity to take a fresh look at this office at the very outset of its establishment in our midst in order that it may function to the glory of God and in behalf of souls purchased and made free by the blood of Jesus Christ. The approach in this study shall be to present such Bible passages as apply to the subject. There will be no attempt to suggest rules and regulations which may so easily become a strait-jacket for the incumbent and which on occasion may even be an encouragement for a legalistic procedure. Far better it is to refer our Visitor to the words of Holy Writ which apply to his work and so to send him on his way with the prayer for the Holy Spirit's guidance and blessing. We have the right to expect of him that he will accept and apply no other rule than the rule of the Word to which we are all with one accord committed.

While there is no passage in Scripture which institutes a separate office in the Church to be known as the office of Visitor or Visiting Elder, there are numerous passages which speak of the functions which we commonly associate with the work of a visitor.

## A WORK OF SERVICE

The work of the Visitor is one of service and not of authority and lordship. In speaking of the gifts and operations that were to be found in the Church, the apostle Paul makes this point: "Now there are diversities of gifts but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all." I Cor. 12:4-6. The word for administration in the original Greek is *διακονία* (service). Looking at the various functions which are operative in the Church for the good of all, we see that they are all called *διακονία*, with the same Spirit, the same Lord, the same God working all in all. It is not as though a man strikes out on his own with his own set of rules or with a ready-made set of regulations devised and compounded by the wisdom of man. Whatever the service to which a man is called, it will ever be so that "the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal." That which is not of the Spirit is no service and will be of no profit.

The apostle Paul says: "Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers (ὑπηρέτας — under-rowers) of Christ." I Cor. 4:1. We are not to lift an oar without the direction of Him Who beats out the time for the rhythmic dipping and lifting of the oars in the ship of the Church.

The man who serves will ever bear in mind the truth of the Word which says: "Ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular." Where the substance of these words is observed there will be no room for a hierarchy, a lordship, or a personal rule. "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink of one Spirit." I Cor. 12:13. When we bear this in mind there will be no striving for rank or superior position. The apostle Paul, who upon various occasions performed such work as is usually considered to be that of a Visitor today, ruled out any thought of rank or of superior standing. Writing to the brethren in Corinth he said: "Who then is Paul and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase." I Cor. 3:5-7. "Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are yours: Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's." I Cor. 3:21-23. From first to last the prevailing thought was one of service and not of lordship. When for instance certain functions are assigned to a pastor because of the gifts which the Lord has bestowed there should be no clash between clergy and laity as though the one were seeking to exercise lordship over the other. Speaking to the multitude and to his disciples Jesus said. "But be ye not called Rabbi; for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren. And call no man your father upon the earth; for one is your Father, which is in heaven. Neither be ye called master; for one is your Master, even Christ. But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant." Matt. 23:8-11.

If we bear all these things in mind then many abuses will be avoided. For instance, a Visitor who bears in mind that

his is a work of service will not enter a congregation without a proper invitation nor will he in any way trespass upon the call of a pastor. He will studiously avoid interfering with the flock over which the Holy Ghost has made the pastor an overseer (ἐπίσκοπος). Those who become guilty of this are called ἄλλοτριεπισκοποί, those who take supervision of affairs pertaining to others. The King James Version calls them "busybodies in other men's matters." I Pet. 4:15. Much harm is done when Visitors have such an inflated idea of their office that they believe it gives them the right to over-ride the sovereignty of the congregation in arriving at decisions in its own affairs. Those, however, who arbitrarily and without just cause refuse to avail themselves of the service of the Visitor whom they themselves have called into the service, should not be surprised if they become the object of suspicion and should not be surprised if their fellowship relations with the body become a subject for review. We can well understand that there may be conditions and circumstances which make it inadvisable for a visitation to be held and when such conditions are explained, it would only be a high-handed Visitor who would insist on breaking in.

The fact that a man is designated Visitor does not mean that he is now in possession of an indelible character and can make no mistakes. He may himself become guilty of such breaches as he may find it necessary to reprove in others. In such case it is the duty of brethren and in particular of the president of the body to practise fraternal and Christian admonition toward him. A Visitor's congregation will profit from visitations as much as will the other congregations of the circuit and therefore the Visitor will give the same encouragement for a visitation in his own parish as he expects for the visitations which he will make in congregations of others.

## A SERVICE TO THE CONGREGATIONS

A Visitor will carry on the functions of his office as a (διακονία) service in behalf of the congregations of his circuit. Accordingly congregations will welcome the Visitor and not consider his coming an invasion or look upon it as an



indication of trouble a-brewing. For an indication of how visitations are carried out, take a look at the early Christian Church. Through the faithful preaching of the Word, Paul and Barnabas, during the first missionary journey in South Asia Minor, had experienced the joy of beholding people gather about the means of grace in Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch. Although there had been much opposition to their ministry, the Lord added unto the Church also in these places. Concerning the return of Paul and Barnabas to these cities we read in the Book of Acts: "they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch, confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God. And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed." Acts 14:21-23. Now one might think that when Paul and Barnabas had arranged for the calling of pastors in these congregations then they would have no further work to do in those parts. However, at the opening of his second missionary journey we find Paul saying to Barnabas: "Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord and see how they do." Acts 15:36. From these words we learn the mutual concern which the Christians showed for one another in those days. And when Paul and Barnabas made these visits we are told they confirmed the churches. Encouragement was given and this was much appreciated, for the opposition had not died down. When admonition was called for, this too was extended. We have an example of this in connection with the matters which Paul and Barnabas had encountered and which they brought to the attention of the Church at Jerusalem. Certain men had arisen who taught the brethren saying: "Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses ye cannot be saved." Since dissension and disputations resulted it was mutually agreed that the problem be referred to the apostle and elders at Jerusalem. As a result of this meeting it pleased the apostles and elders and the whole church to send chosen men to deliver their admonition and exhortation to the churches in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia. The result of this visitation is given in these words: "They came to Antioch; and when

they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the epistle; which when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation. And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them. And after they had tarried there a space, they were let go in peace from the brethren unto the apostles." Acts 15:30-33. We may well say that these men carried out the function of Visitors and the whole service was executed in a Christian manner to the learning and edification of all. Further, we read in Acts 16:4-5: "And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem. And so were the churches established in the faith and increased in number daily." Later at the beginning of his third missionary journey we read of the apostle Paul: "And when he had landed at Caesarea and gone up, and saluted the Church, he went down to Antioch. And after he had spent some time there, he departed, and went over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples." This then was the spirit in which the first Visitors in the New Testament Church carried on the functions of their service. And it may well serve as the pattern for our Visitors today. On the one hand there was the overriding purpose of strengthening and confirming the churches and on the other hand there was no hesitancy in bringing admonitions as they were required by the prevailing circumstances and conditions. We find no indication that they operated with any set of rules and regulations designed to cover every conceivable emergency that might arise. Under the guidance of God and His Holy Word they dealt with these matters as they presented themselves.

## A SERVICE TO THE PASTORS

With due regard for the pastor's call, the Visitor will guard against any action which might tend to subvert or undermine the God-made relationship which exists between shepherd and fold. Rather will his service tend to confirm that bond and to encourage both pastor and congregation in their God-given work. And so we come to the Visitor's service that he will render in behalf of the pastors in his visit-

ation circuit. Here too we have the example of the early New Testament Church which may well serve as a pattern for our Visitors today. At the end of his third missionary journey we read of the apostle Paul that he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the Church to him. After a review of his service in their behalf, he gave them the following exhortations: "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears. And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified. I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. I have showed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, it is more blessed to give than to receive." Acts 20:28-35. After this they all knelt down and prayed together. Paul's epistles to Timothy and Titus are full of encouragements to them to apply themselves to the study of the Word, to preach law and gospel, rightly to divide the Word of Truth, to hold fast the form of sound words, to be instant in season and out of season, to reprove, rebuke and exhort with all longsuffering (when the occasion arose that Peter had given public offense in his ministry, Paul did not hesitate to rebuke him to the face and in the presence of all), to beware of doting about questions and strifes of words, to be content and beware of being greedy of filthy lucre, to follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness; to fight the good fight of faith and be willing to suffer reproach for the Lord's sake, to stop the mouths of those who teach things which they ought not, to show themselves a pattern of good works. All of this on the background of the grace which has been shown us as ex-

pressed by Paul to Titus: "For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior; that being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men." Titus 3:3-8. Paul who issued these admonitions was conscious of his own need as he says: "But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection; lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." I Cor. 9:27. And so also the faithful Visitor will consider himself and will set a good example. He will carry out the functions of his office in such a way that he will retain the respect of those whom he has been called to serve. Great harm has been inflicted upon the church because of the bad example of those called into leadership positions. In fact some of the first signs of deterioration in a church body have come to the surface by the display of weakness and unsoundness of its leaders. Our prayer will be: "Gott, bewahre uns ein frommes Ministerium."

The service which a Visitor renders the pastors of the circuit will indirectly also be a service to the congregations. For it will ever be true that the congregation which enjoys the service of a faithful and consecrated shepherd is indeed blessed beyond measure. Such congregations have every reason to thank God for such a benefit and will pray the Lord of the Church to provide such pastors for the future that lies before.

C. M. G.

# PAIDEIA

## *Working Up Trifles*

When a teacher is told that he is fingering the reins of the future, that his work is both terrifying and exhilarating, and that those who are insensitive to this can quite literally be killers of the dream, he can hardly go on without taking time for some reflection. So surely as he is sensitive, he will find himself wondering whether he is missing the big things or the little things that are so important in his work.

We have a feeling that in striving for the big decisions and outcomes we may be neglecting the little things of which the bigger are made. Instead of pointing to the smaller, of which the larger are made, we hurry so often to teach the larger, hoping that our teaching of these really leads to knowledge of the larger. Instead of showing the little child the harm in pulling the cat's tail, we tell him to be good to the cat. When we should bring a child along to take food and clothing to a family of the poor, we mistake our task and instruct him to show love to his fellow men. We think we are doing our task well when we teach virtue and charity, but we may be missing by the proverbial mile. We may honor a formula ever so highly, but fail to strike home with the facts. We may state the principles ever so clearly, but not be convincing for lack of concreteness in details of daily doing. For this the word is frustration, the feeling of failure and a begging to be excused.

Jesus of Nazareth went about doing good. That is the report, stated just that way in the sacred record itself. In the Gospels we read what He did; it is there that the message strikes home. The doctrine of the Law says that men are sinners; the mirror of Scripture shows the smear on their

faces. The message of the Church says that men have salvation; the report of Christ's dying convinces that the price was paid.

We fear no contradiction in guessing that all who are reading this know the experience of what we are saying. The preacher had a stirring idea for a sermon; after a few sentences it had slid clean away. Lincoln felt it at Gettysburg; he said to his personal guard, "Lamon, that speech won't scour." He regretted not having prepared it with better care. Little did he know that he had plucked the heartstrings of his hearers; he had done what he aimed to do, though unaware he had done so. Teachers get a "great" idea for a unit of study; the whole thing flounders for lack of stuff and things to make it real and living. A traveler asks directions of a friendly native, who responds with fullest explanation; but sensing that he lost his inquirer long ago, he draws a sketch on an old envelope, perhaps, and sends him on his way assured, armed with the amateur map. One may be told how to swim, but he learns best when pushed off into the water. Early books had only words. Books became doubly useful when Comenius made the first one with pictures. He was denounced for trifling with texts, but the children responded with learning. The point of all this need surely be lost upon no one.

The English Addison started a sheet of informal essays that he published three times a week to discuss the multitude of little things that the men of London did not take time for in the busy work of running their world. He chose Pope's embellished translation of Juvenal as a summary of what he would discuss: "Whate'er men do, or say, or think, or dream, Our motley paper seizes for its theme." So richly did he add to the understandings and insights and conversations of the people of London that one of them wrote to thank him and compliment him for his success in working up trifles. This neat phrase describes the doings of teachers. They work up trifles, so to speak, the little things of which real meaning is made. Today this work is a profession, greater in its capital, and more numerous in its personnel than the biggest combines and corporations in the world.

The greatest Truth of all time could be told us in one page, but God worked up the trifles among the patriarchs, prophets,

and apostles until the fulness of time made ready for the central event itself as well as for its ongoing procession down the ages. The flood of detail makes rich the meaning of the central message of salvation. The builder of a beautiful house is a master in his attention to detail. Each nail does its work, each angle gives beauty, and that which eyes do not see makes it stand and withstand through the years.

The seeming trifles of a tree in Eden, the mark upon Cain, and the altars of Seth and his descendants give point to the whole of history. The descents into Egypt enrich our understanding. The brazen serpent, the rainbow, the blood upon the doorposts, and the passover lamb give us more to talk about than we could exhaust in many a day. Some have studied the life of Joseph for years. The details of Joseph in Egypt have inspired novels as long as the Bible. The sermons that work up these trifles hold our interest all the way. The class that is rich in instance, in allusion, in example and cross-reference gives point and meaning and the thrill of discovery to the minds that find use for so much they have learned before.

There are no mere facts, really. If they seem to be so, they are mere because the minds handling them are empty and leave them inert. "In the modern university there is seldom anyone except the other students to talk to. The scholars are elsewhere — in national laboratories making rockets and strategies, in industry, in government, in libraries, in private studies or public thinking rooms, or in endless meetings of large committees. What is left is only a syllabus, taught by those who are not advocates or believers in truths they have created, but entrepreneurs of the curriculum. They tell what is known about given subjects in orderly successions of points. They are not teachers, they are professionals." The chilling breezes of intellectualism can truly cause drafts in the halls of learning when trifles are not worked up. . . .

"The natural affinity of the student for the teacher, the wish to bring gifts to those who will receive them, to turn to the delight of recognition, to come close to a mind fully formed and big in its conceptions, these are the needs of the young. Yet the young find these needs frustrated in the situation of their present lives." Such is the hunger of those who want more than to know.



"What mean ye by this service?" ask the children in our generation. (Cf. Ex. 12:26) Our young seem ready to receive more than many may be ready to give. Perhaps this has always been more or less true. If so, it is time to take thought. College teaching is now under attack. The first salvo has been fired by the professor from Utah in his The Profane Comedy (Kenneth E. Eble; Macmillan). The lower schools have been under the barrage ever since Sputnik I. Current writing is reminding American churches in general that they are not responding to the needs of men — a charge that we can as easily read right as wrong.

We can work up the trifles and give the sense. We can be men who are alive and who care. Given world enough and time we can do something; given eternity and an infinite God, there is no end. "Which things the angels desire to look into"! In such things we, too, find our fulfillment.

Martin Galstad

# PREACHING THE WORD

## *Cause For Thanksgiving*

EPHESIANS 1: 15-18

God has given us something very precious here at Mankato, something for which we had neither asked nor labored. He knew our need better than we and supplied our need before we were even aware of it. He has given us a Christian school which carries our young people through the fateful high school years, through three years of college, and those who desire to make themselves available for the preaching ministry through three years of seminary training.

God gave us this school through the strong faith of a few individuals who — by faith — saw what He would have them do and — by faith — went about doing it, trusting implicitly in His promise to supply every need. And how wonderfully the Lord has supplied every need. He gave us Christian boys and girls, men and women who desired to grow in Christian knowledge so as to be the better equipped for whatever work the Lord would have them do in their later years. He gave us able and dedicated instructors as we needed them. When more were needed, He saw to it that they were ready to heed His call. When our esteemed president felt constrained for reasons of health to request that he be relieved of the multiplicity of tasks connected with that office, the Lord immediately supplied another, fully qualified, and made him happy to follow the call when it came to him. As far as physical facilities are concerned, He gave us nothing pretentious in the way of campus and buildings. But He gave us what we needed. What He gave us is very humble because He wanted to keep us humble, lest we trust in our own strength and lose our trust in Him.

So that we might use and cherish and develop this precious gift, He gave us — whom He has so closely united in the Church of the Lutheran Confession — a strong faith and a deep mutual love and concern. For this we should at all times be deeply grateful, as St. Paul so clearly teaches us by his example. We should

- I. Thank God with all our hearts for the faith and love which He has given us and
- II. Strive and pray for an ever greater measure of both.

Our text is a portion of that grand epistle which St. Paul wrote to the Ephesians. Ephesus was a great and important city, deeply religious, but altogether sinful. Is it possible to be deeply religious and yet altogether sinful? It all depends on the religion one embraces. That of the people of Ephesus consisted chiefly in the worship of the goddess Diana, a worship that was mainly a matter of gratifying the sinful lusts of the worshippers. A city with such a religion could hardly be expected to be anything but wicked, steeped in all the vice and immorality of which natural man is capable.

To this city Paul came on one of his missionary journeys and preached the Gospel there for more than two years and a half. His preaching was eminently successful. A large congregation came into being. The Gospel wrought a complete change in the hearts and minds of those who believed. We hear that these Ephesian Christians brought the books of magic arts that they had formerly used and which were valued at more than \$35,000 and burned them in the market place. What a wonderful confession that was of their faith.

As at every other place so also at Ephesus the Devil soon filled the hearts of the ungodly and unregenerate with such enmity and hatred against Paul that his life was no longer safe and he had to flee to another place. But the Christians at Ephesus stood firm and continued to grow in faith and in sanctification.

When Paul heard of the steadfast faith of the Ephesians he wrote them a delightful letter. It is one of the richest of all the epistles of Paul. It was written during the closing days of his life, while he was a prisoner awaiting the ex-

ecutioner's ax. In this letter Paul said to them: I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and of your love unto all the saints. This good report brought great joy to the aged apostle. Paul rejoiced to hear that the gracious will of God was being done, that precious immortal souls were being blessed with a strong faith, with the forgiveness of their sins, and with the sure hope of eternal life.

Paul was not only happy over what he had heard but also deeply grateful for it. That is why he wrote: I cease not to give thanks for you. He thanked God for their faith and for their love unto all the saints, that is for their sincere love and concern for all who were sanctified together with them by faith in Christ.

It is proper for us also to take note of the strong faith which God has given to those with whom He has united us in our Church of the Lutheran Confession, — a faith that did not shrink though pressed by many a foe, that did not tremble on the brink of poverty or woe; a faith that did not murmur nor complain beneath the chastening rod, but in the hour of grief and pain could lean upon its God.

It is proper for us also to take note of the mutual love and concern which God has created in our hearts, a mutual love and concern which is a fruit of faith, a mutual love and concern without which our lot might have become too difficult for us. Let us not only take note of the strong faith and love of those with whom the Lord has united us, but let us thank God for it with our whole hearts.

After his prayer of thanksgiving for the faith and love of the Ephesian Christians, Paul brought a number of petitions before the throne of grace.

Paul knew that these Ephesians had not yet finished their course, that they were still in an evil world, and that there was still room for improvement, for spiritual growth, for growth in Christian knowledge and sanctification. That is why Paul prayed: that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him: the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.

It would take us much too far at this time to even try to expound this grand prayer of Paul. Let me sum it up for

you very briefly. Paul asked two things for the Ephesians: that they might acquire (1) an ever better and more thorough knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, and (2) an ever more lively appreciation of the glory prepared for them in heaven.

It is sad but true that so many Christians advance little or not at all in Christian knowledge after the day of their confirmation. They graduate on that day and henceforth learn nothing new. That is dangerous. That is not as it should be. We ought to grow in Christian knowledge as long as we live. He who does not grow spiritually becomes a spiritual cripple. The one great aim and purpose of Immanuel Lutheran College is to provide opportunity for spiritual growth, growth in faith and sanctification, growth in Christian knowledge and every Christian virtue. That student who does not grow spiritually while he is here is an utter failure as far as this school is concerned. That instructor who does not keep on growing spiritually soon becomes a well that has gone dry. Both students and instructors can grow spiritually only as they hear the everlasting Word and ponder it in their hearts.

Beside growth in spiritual knowledge and faith and sanctification Paul besought for the Ephesian Christians an ever better and livelier understanding and appreciation of the glory prepared for them in heaven. Eternal life and glory were to be to them a certainty to which they were to look forward with joy and gladness.

It is God's will that we too should have an ever clearer and more lively understanding and appreciation of the life and glory that awaits us in heaven, that we become ever more firmly convinced that it is there and will some day become ours because God who has become our dear Father in Christ has promised it.

May God fill the hearts of all of us with deepest gratitude for the faith and mutual love and concern with which He has so richly blessed us; and may He also give us grace to grow, as long as we live, in Christian knowledge and in the sure hope of the glory prepared for us in heaven. Amen.

(Sermon preached by President Paul G. Albrecht, September 4, 1962, for the opening service at Immanuel Lutheran College, the occasion being also the installation of Professor C.M. Gullerud as President of the College.)

# P A N O R A M A

NORMAN A. MADSON: There is a special thunder in the  
IN MEMORIAM forest when, either by some violent  
storm or by the more gradual pro-  
cesses of nature, an old, mighty, rugged oak is brought to  
the ground. That was the effect when news reached us of the  
death on December 9th, at the age of 76, of Dr. Norman A.  
Madson. Of pure Norwegian stock, there flowed in his veins  
an undiluted portion of the old Norman blood, even as his  
character was molded in the rugged tradition of Viking vigor  
and boldness.

As we shall presently see, Madson left his mark in many  
a field. But he was pre-eminently a preacher. When in our  
October issue we printed his sermon for the Ninety-fifth An-  
niversary of Immanuel Lutheran Church (less than three  
months before his death), we thought it might be his last —  
and so it proved to be. Yet it had the old Madson ring. It  
proclaimed the same Gospel with the same richness that will  
be found in all of his published sermons. His first book, en-  
titled "Ved Bethlehems-krybben", consisted of a collection of  
Norwegian Christmas sermons centering around the Manger  
at Bethlehem. His two volumes of "Evening Bells at Bethany"  
present a selection of chapel addresses preached to the stu-  
dents of Bethany College. They must have been a powerful  
influence in molding the minds and hearts of those young peo-  
ple who were fortunate enough to hear them. But the climax  
of his power is reached in his "Preaching to Preachers,"  
sermons addressed either to prospective preachers and their  
teachers, for instance at the graduating exercises of various  
synodical schools, or to other preachers and teachers as they  
were gathered for their various conferences. Most approp-  
riately, the last of this collection is the memorable sermon  
preached for the Seventy-fifth Anniversary of the Synodical  
Conference, a powerful call to repentance ("ask for the old

paths, where is the good way . . ." — Jer. 6:16) that few who heard it will ever be able to forget, whether they accepted it or not.

But for all his power he could be equally tender and compassionate. For he was above all a preacher of the Gospel, the Word of Reconciliation! At such times his sermons would abound in appropriate quotations from the hymnals of the Church, quotations of which he had such a rich store in his amazing memory. For he was himself a poet at heart. We know of at least one sermon, for the burial of a beloved fellow pastor, which was entirely in blank verse.

As we said before, Madson's gifts were to be used also in other fields. This very love for poetry and particularly for the spiritual songs of the Church made him a valuable member of the Intersynodical Committee on Hymnology and Liturgy, where his influence and contributions were far greater than appears on the surface. It is largely to him that we owe the inclusion in the Lutheran Hymnal of a substantial number of fine old Norwegian hymns, as well as the exclusion of others that did not measure up to his high standards of quality and soundness, regardless of their language.

In the field of education Bethany Theological Seminary is of course a monument to his work. For one need not be unmindful of the help of others to realize that it was he who gave this school its early shape and character, who left his mark on his students of those days. His theology was thoroughly Christ-centered, standing strongly against all religious modernism, liberalism, indifferentism and unionism, determined to yield no part whatever of the truth of Scripture. Such was also his stand in the field of intersynodical relations, particularly in the forum of the intersynodical committees where he served so long and with such distinction. Alert to every impairment of the Truth, he was bold and heroic in its defense. But when the doctrine of justification was under discussion, the universal justification of all the world, of every sinner, a justification that has existed as an accomplished fact ever since God proclaimed it so by the Resurrection of Christ — it was then that he was at his best, rejecting every formulation that would in any way make the faith of man a contributory factor in bringing about this justification. Madson's Gospel was the unconditioned Gospel,



the Gospel of a salvation that is ours by grace alone.

It was the tragedy of a lifetime when devotion to the principles for which he had stood so long and fought so well compelled him to resign from the Seminary and eventually to withdraw from the Synod that he had served with such distinction. He did so because he could not do otherwise. For his was a humble, yet also a single-minded faith, a faith to which he gave such beautiful expression in that simple prayer that we have in his own translation:

I pray thee, dear Lord Jesus,  
My heart to keep and train  
That I Thy holy temple  
From youth to age remain.  
Turn Thou my thoughts forever  
From worldly wisdom's lore;  
If I but learn to know Thee,  
I shall not want for more.

Lutheran Hymnal, No. 655,  
translation by N. A. Madson

E. Reim

IS THIS STILL "THE SYNODICAL CONFERENCE"? Two pictures come to mind as one tries to describe the tragic scene played at

Chicago when the four synods of that body met for what two of them, Wisconsin and the Norwegian ELS, thought of as the last meeting of that once ideal federation, but what the others, Missouri and the Slovak SELC, were firmly determined should not be the last — and where the determination of the latter two prevailed. The first picture is that of a lone man struggling to extricate himself from an area of quicksand into which he has too trustingly strayed, and finding that at least for the time being his efforts only increase the gravity of his situation. The other picture is of the same man, but this time entwined by the tentacles of an octopus. Even though he may break the hold of one or the other of those arms, the others still hold him fast. There are just too many to cope with.

If this seems too dramatic and sensational a description, consider what happened in Chicago. Both ELS and Wisconsin had taken their stand, declaring the suspension of their fellowship with Missouri, the senior member of the Conference: ELS by reaffirming and redefining a former resolution, and Wisconsin by its suspension resolution of 1961. Both had provided their delegates with resolutions calling for the dissolution of the Synodical Conference and for an orderly termination of the work in which the four synods have so far been jointly engaged (Wisconsin going so far as to declare its willingness to accept full responsibility for the work in Nigeria), and basing these proposals on the fact that the premises for such fellowship and joint work, namely unity of doctrine and practice, no longer existed. Together the two protesting synods had made provisions for a separate Opening Service, convinced that in the face of their declarations of non-fellowship a joint communion service with Missouri would constitute nothing less than the very unionism against which their resolutions had been and were a protest. For the same reason they had therefore submitted another proposal, for opening the individual sessions with a moment of silent prayer, adding an urgent request for immediate consideration by the convention. They had indeed not armed their delegates with a declaration of withdrawal, probably because that would have been construed as a threat. Yet both presidents, Aaberg and Naumann, made strong statements to the convention, statements that would have amply justified their withdrawal, had such an action been authorized. But then the features that suggest the simile of the quicksand began to appear.

The request for silent prayer in place of the usual devotions were quietly ignored until the very closing moments of the convention, in spite of the fact that this had obviously become a matter of conscience to many. At the close of the convention it was referred to the praesidium of the Conference for action during the next biennium. In the meantime the resolutions for orderly dissolution of the Conference had been referred to two committees, one on Constitution, the other on Matters of Doctrine. Quite naturally the former was the first to reach the floor of the Convention, where it offered the following resolution:

"WHEREAS, The Lutheran Synodical Conference is the best-suited organization to foster, promote, and maintain true Scriptural unity among the member synods, be it therefore

"RESOLVED, That the resolutions for dissolution of the Synodical Conference presented by the Evangelical Lutheran Synod and the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod be respectfully declined."

It must have been a frustrating experience for the representatives of the two protesting synods to argue their case on constitutional grounds where in fact the issues were those of doctrine and practice, particularly with reference to the doctrine and practice of fellowship. Add to this the fact that the "true Scriptural unity" that was to be "maintained" was something that simply no longer existed. Nevertheless the debate went on at great length, and when the vote was finally taken, it was "simply along synodical lines," 177 to 53. The proposal for orderly dissolution had been defeated. After an exhausting struggle the protesting synods were exactly where they had been before. The quicksand held them fast. — But there was more to come.

When the Committee on Doctrinal Matters finally reported it was not slow to signal its intentions, describing the doctrinal issues as mere "disagreements . . . largely in the application of doctrines." Disregarding the effect that these internal divisions must, unless quickly removed, inevitably have on the testimony of the Conference, the Committee argued for continuation of the outward organization on the ground that "dissolution . . . would weaken the voice of conservative theologians within Christendom and the Lutheran Church." Then, in a detailed plan of thirteen points (one less than Wilson's famous Fourteen) they laid down a program which simply repeated many things that had been prescribed before, though quite in vain: better communications, more careful supervision of teaching, strict discipline, willingness of all to study, frequent joint meetings of theological faculties, etc. It asked some other things that were simply impossible to accept without violating the very principles for which Wisconsin and ELS were contending. For by this time the Committee was recommending an exchange of professorships, publication of a joint theological journal

as well as a joint publication for the laity. But two points had some particularly interesting features which were, however, soon changed by action of the convention:

"that no unilateral action in doctrinal discussions be undertaken by the constituent synods except by common consent of the member synods:" (changed to "without consultation with the member synods" — our emphasis).

"that the constituent member of the Lutheran Synodical Conference return to the historic position on church fellowship and reaffirm the same;" (changed to "maintain the historic position" — again our emphasis).

The significance of these changes appears when one remembers where the voting strength of the Synodical Conference lies.

This was the report of the Committee on Doctrinal Matters. The resolution provided "that the Lutheran Synodical Conference be continued and strengthened to function as an agency to express and practice the purpose for which it was formed . . ." Thus the protesting synods are held fast in a captive "fellowship." — As for Wisconsin's offer to take over full responsibility for the mission work in Nigeria, the convention simply decided that this work should be continued as a joint work, at least for the time being.

So the Synodical Conference goes marching on. Organized originally with high idealism as a means for giving expression to the doctrinal unity of the constituent synods, making provisions for joint work on the basis of full doctrinal agreement, upholding the principles of true Scriptural fellowship for so many years, this body has now become an instrument for holding two unwilling synods that have publicly declared their non-fellowship and their doctrinal dissent in a relentless embrace. In spite of their desperate efforts Wisconsin and ELS are still, before the world, members of the Synodical Conference. In spite of all their protests they are still yoked together with Missouri in that most spiritual work of bringing the Gospel to heathen nations — a spectacle that makes a sorry mockery of the principles that both sides so strongly profess.

This is the situation that provoked the other simile, that of the octopus, one that some of our readers may have considered unnecessarily severe. But one wonders what a Walther would say of the organization he had founded with such high hopes. What would he say to his own synod on seeing them in the role they are now playing? We are rather sure that his words would be far more severe than ours have been.

But be that as it may, the Synodical Conference will undoubtedly live on as a functioning organization. It may even become larger and more influential than ever before. It may still bear the same name. But it will no longer be what all of American Lutheranism came to know with respect, namely: "The Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America."

E. Reim

MISSOURI'S NEW IMAGE      Dr. Theodore F. Nickel is obviously a man of many parts. As chairman of the Floor Committee on Doctrinal Matters at the recent Cleveland Convention of Missouri he knew how to soothe the apprehensions of those who feared that Missouri might be embarking on a new and dangerous course. Having in the meantime been elevated to the Second Vice-Presidency of his synod, he was soon sent to the Milwaukee Convention of The American Lutheran Church, to present Missouri's new image to that body. The Lutheran Standard, official publication of The American Lutheran Church, reports his address as follows:

Dr. Nickel told the convention, "We realize full well that a 'complete' or a 'perfect' or an 'absolute' unity in doctrine and practice is not attainable this side of heaven. In fact an insistence upon such an agreement in doctrine for fellowship or even as possible in this life has its roots in heresy."

The Missouri Synod official told the convention that a "God-pleasing, Gospel-centered, and Bible-based unity in doctrine and practice cannot be attained except by confrontation of one another in frank, open, and brotherly discussion."

"Hence we urge upon you," he continued, "to join us in such fraternal dialogue with hope. Many of our old fears are gone today. Legalistic restraints of past years are on the wane. And the new and genuine concern for a faithfulness to Christ and His Gospel, to Scripture and its teachings is in evidence all about us. Herein is hope." (The Lutheran Standard, Nov. 20, 1962, p.7)

Noting how this truth, that perfect unity is not attainable in this life, suggests the thought that it is therefore not necessary, and may even be harmful to strive for it, and noting also the emphasis on the assurance that "the old fears are gone" and "legalistic restraints of past years . . . on the wane," we are led to certain conclusions: that Missouri's "Turning Point" (see our last issue, p.44) has indeed furnished Missouri with a new direction; that this direction is to the left; and that the speed is increasing — for the simple reason that the new course is down-hill.

E. Reim

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THE JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY (Church of the Lutheran Confession) is published at New Ulm, Minnesota, by authorization of the Church of the Lutheran Confession. Subscriptions are payable in advance at the CLC BOOK HOUSE, Box 145, New Ulm, Minnesota. The rate is \$3.00 per year for five issues: February, April, June, October, December. All correspondence other than subscriptions or changes of address should be addressed to Prof. E. Reim, Editor, 436 James Ave., Mankato, Minnesota. The Editorial Committee: E. Reim, Chairman; C. M. Gullerud; E. Schaller, M. Galstad.



return to D. Lau

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

I Timothy 4:15

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# Journal of Theology

**Church of the Lutheran Confession**

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VOLUME II

December, 1962

NUMBER 5