



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

I Timothy 4:15

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LUTHER'S TREATISE ON GOOD WORKS

The Doctrinal Foundation of a Christian's Concern for Society

If one wants to examine the current religious scene in America, with a view toward determining whether or not one has a place in this arena, he can perhaps do no better than to consider the contents of well-read religious periodicals. For example, one might examine an issue dated December 14, 1966. On that particular date, only eleven days before Christmas, one might expect the main burden of a Christian religious magazine to be concerned with the Advent season and the birth of Christ. A look at the table of contents, however, discloses that the two lead articles were: "A Theology of Nonresistance," describing Christian pacifism; and "The Moral Basis of the War on Poverty." In addition, topics covered were, among others, Roman Catholics and Politics; a film smear of the Civil Rights Cause; "Can Abortion be Justified?"; and Politics in Japan. There were fourteen "Letters to the Editor," on such subjects as "the strident anticommunism of the American churches," the right of churches to tax privileges, conservation of natural resources, the population explosion, and escalation of the war in Vietnam, and others of similar nature.

Another periodical using the name Christian in its masthead had, as its lead article in its issue of January 24, 1967, "The Task of the Church in Society." It also contained an article on the situation in Vietnam, the United States State Department, and a discussion of a proposed "Red Guard," for America, among others.

Neither of the above-mentioned periodicals claims to be Lutheran. So, perhaps a next step would properly be to examine a Lutheran religious periodical, to see if the pattern developed in the non-Lutheran magazines might be found there, too. The first one that came to hand devoted

its entire contents to an examination of "The Church on the Right Wing," with the explanation, in Editorial Comment, "Lutherans are flexing muscles on the American scene, hoping to make their weight felt in ecumenical and public circles." This is termed a "coming-of-age," and will "provide a strenuous test of the maturity of American Lutheranism."

Finally, another Lutheran publication, the Concordia Theological Monthly, was examined, in its issue of December, 1966. It was not surprising, after the preparation provided by the other periodicals, to discover that one of the two main articles contained in this publication was entitled, "The Christian and Social Responsibility," a summarization of the studies of a graduate seminar on "The Responsible Christian," held on the campus of Concordia Theological Seminary, St. Louis, in the Spring of 1966.

Such a random selection of material does not, of course, provide a completely definitive conclusion. However, it does appear that a great deal (perhaps the most) of emphasis is being placed, in the American religious arena, also among Lutherans, on the question of the Christian's involvement with society and his responsibility over against it. I do not believe that it can be said that this is just a current, passing interest. Certainly the events in the past several years, particularly involving such issues as civil rights, war on poverty, the new morality, have shown that the church's interest in all these matters is deep and pervading.

We know that among the Reformed Churches, in general, the Social Gospel has for many years replaced the Gospel of Salvation alone through faith in Christ as their chief interest. After all, have they not admitted as much in their evident desire to place organizational merger above doctrinal and confessional concerns? In their admitted greater stress upon deeds, rather than creeds? Confessional Lutherans have since long ago felt far apart from the concerns of such denominations, primarily, of course, because they have long been separated from them on the basis of doctrinal disagreement since the days following the Reformation. Lutherans have been content, in

the past, at least, to have turned social concerns over to the Church of Rome and to the Reformed Churches; not having true doctrine to proclaim, and being more interested in doing than teaching, as they have demonstrated, they have been more suited to enter the struggle against the social ills and evils of this world. Lutherans have traditionally been concerned with a desire to preserve the true doctrine, to maintain orthodoxy. Their role, then, has been to emphasize Biblical studies, to build institutions principally for the training of pastors and other church workers, to establish missions principally for the purpose of teaching the Gospel, and only in a very subordinate sense to improve the physical well-being of the people they reach.

In this sense, our Church of the Lutheran Confession is truly traditional. An examination of our theological publication during 1966 reveals that exegetical studies of the Scripture have been our chief concern. This has been accompanied by sermonic studies, applications of Scripture to principles of instruction, chapel addresses delivered at Immanuel Lutheran College, and reports and comments on Vatican II and the Lutheran Free Conference. Entirely lacking has been an interest, expressed or implied, in that very matter that appears to be of such great concern on the modern religious scene in America. As reported in the Proceedings of our 1966 convention, only one conference paper delivered throughout the CLC from July, 1965, to July, 1966, concerned itself with the social responsibility of the Church.

One is not unduly concerned over standing alone, if he is convinced that he is right. That, too, is clearly "Lutheran." However, in light of the fact that also modern Lutherans are revealing an ever-increasing concern for and involvement in society, and, thus far at least, it appears that the CLC is standing apart in this, the question arises as to whether or not our stance in this matter can be defended. We are setting forth that our calling is to preach, teach, and make disciples; that it is of greater importance for us to be members of Christ's kingdom than

to be citizens of this world; that to this end we are mainly concerned with the ways in which we carry out our particular calling, namely, through our institutions and missions. Does this, or should this particular interest make it impossible for us to have a concern for society, or to become involved in social responsibilities? If we are to examine THE ROLE THAT THE CLC PLAYS IN AMERICAN LUTHERANISM, it behooves us to examine ourselves in this regard.

"So, then, this epistle again teaches us two things: believing and loving, or receiving benefactions from God and conferring benefactions on our neighbor. The entire Scripture teaches these two things, and it is impossible for the one to exist without the other. . . . Moreover, the firmer one believes, the more diligent and willing one is to help one's neighbor. All Christian doctrines, works, and life are briefly, clearly, and more than satisfactorily comprehended in these two principles: faith and love. By them man is placed between God and his neighbor, as a medium which receives from above and distributes below and becomes a sort of vessel or channel through which the fountain of divine blessings will flow incessantly into other people." (What Luther Says, Vol. I, page 503)

These words of Luther bring the Christian into the arena, for how can one demonstrate love toward his neighbor without being involved in society? Luther had a deep concern for society, as a brief glance at some of his treatises soon demonstrates. The jacket of Volume 44 of Luther's Words in the American Edition contains the following brief commentary on Luther's interest in these matters: "In these six documents (A Sermon on the Estate of Marriage, 1519; Treatise on Good Works, 1520; To the

Christian Nobility of the German Nation concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate, 1520; An Instruction to Penitents Concerning the Forbidden Books of Dr. M. Luther, 1521; A Sermon on the Three Kinds of Good Life for the Instruction of Consciences, 1521; and The Judgment of Martin Luther on Monastic Vows, 1521.), Luther defends, expounds and clarifies his views on what the Christian life is at rock bottom. As he treats the problems of marriage and parenthood, works and faith, the responsibilities of Church and State, vows and monasticism, confession and conscience and the kind of life that is really good, the same fundamental theme emerges: the Christian life is a life of service, love and involvement, not of isolation and withdrawal."

Luther's concept of man's whole life being wrapped up in the two principles of faith and love (enabling him to stand between God and his neighbor), as stated above in the quotation from his commentary on Titus 3, is perhaps nowhere better treated than in his TREATISE ON GOOD WORKS. Here is set forth in full detail THE DOCTRINAL BASIS OF A CHRISTIAN'S CONCERN FOR SOCIETY.

The Treatise on Good Works, completed in 1520, was an essentially pastoral writing. In its beginning, at least, it was intended to be a sermon addressed by Luther to the congregation at Wittenberg. Spalatin, in particular, had been urging Luther to redeem a promise he had made some time earlier, namely, to expound the Scriptural doctrine of good works. The discussion was vital, and most necessary for the times. Luther's continued stress on justification by faith alone had made it possible for his enemies to accuse him of teaching, by his emphasis on justification, that good works are unnecessary. Consequently they were pointing to Luther as bearing the chief responsibility for the rise in lawlessness and immorality they detected in Germany. The interest in the general subject on the part of certain nobility is also of note, as attested to by Luther's dedication of the treatise to Duke John of Saxony.

"Nor was this concern simply theoretical. The possibility of misunderstanding and distorting Luther's emphasis upon justification by faith alone was very real. When medieval man thought of faith he did so in terms of fides informis (unfashioned, raw faith) and fides formata (complete faith). The fides informis was held to be bare knowledge or assent, which needed to be completed by the fides formata, faith adorned by good works by which men make themselves acceptable in the sight of God and win his favor. That many, both learned and unlearned, misunderstood Luther's teaching is forcefully illustrated in the personal tragedy of Karlstadt and the calamity of the libertine community in Münster." (Introduction: Treatise on Good Works, Volume 44, Luther's Works, American Edition, page 18.)

As Luther developed his thoughts on the subject, what he had begun as a sermon grew into a much larger discussion than he had intended. He became quite enthusiastic about it and even spoke of it as one of his finest writings. His opinion has been shared by many others, according to Schwiebert, who states, "Many modern Luther scholars regard this work as superior to the three major tracts which Luther wrote shortly thereafter during the summer of 1520, the Address to the German Nobility, the Babylonian Captivity of the Church, and the Freedom of the Christian. Both in spirit and in style Luther reached a lofty height in the Sermon on Good Works unsurpassed in his whole literary career." (Schwiebert, p. 445.)

Coming as it did at that particular time in his career, the Treatise takes issue at great length with the understanding of good works so commonly held. He found it necessary to point to the church's advice to make pilgrimages, fast, donate to specific institutions, etc., and to show these to be only empty, vain attempts to secure God's love, mercy, and favor. Yet, he did not point the finger of scorn at the poor unfortunates who thus vainly sought the divine benediction. "Rather," he writes, "we must blame their ignorant blind teachers who have never taught them what faith is, and have led them so deeply into a doctrine of works." (Volume 44, p. 36.) For Luther's

very first, and therefore primary, point in this Treatise is this: "The first thing to know is that there are no good works except those works God has commanded, just as there is no sin except that which God has forbidden."

Let popes, church councils, avantgarde theologians declare what they will, then, concerning what activities would be engaged in by Christians (whether or not such activity is followed in order to gain God's favor), if God has not commanded it to be done, then one cannot declare it to be a work that pleases Him!

And then, of equal importance with his first thesis, Luther sets forth an incontrovertible fact: "The first, highest, and most precious of all good works is faith in Christ, and as it says in John 6 (:28-29), when the Jews asked him, 'What must we do, to be doing the good work of God?', Jesus answered, 'This is the good work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.'"

With these two basic premises, then, Luther shows with blinding clarity that all the works which men do must either be done from faith or without faith. What is done in faith pleases God; what is done outside of faith does not please Him. There is no middle ground. He sadly points to those who try with might and main to accomplish great things, who pray, fast, establish endowments, make pilgrimages (would we add: make freedom marches, lie down in the street as an act of civil disobedience, use the nightclub stage as a pulpit?), and, when asked if they are quite certain that what they are doing is well pleasing to God, they have to say that they are not sure. He points to them with grief because, so long as such men do not have the confidence that their deeds please God, "these works go on apart from faith; therefore they amount to nothing and are absolutely dead. For as their conscience stands in relation to God and as it believes, so also are their works which issue from it. Now that is not faith, nor is it a good conscience toward God; therefore, their works are pointless and their life and goodness all amount to nothing. This is the reason that when I exalt faith and reject such works done without faith they accuse me of forbidding good works. The fact of the matter is that I want

very much to teach the real good works which spring from faith." (p. 24.)

The trouble is, as Luther declares, that people do not set faith above, but on the same plane with other virtues. They think of faith as being a work of just another type, separated from other Christian works only as to kind. As a result, they would not wish to condemn an individual who has a strong concern for pure doctrine as his special work, so long as he did not set his concerns above their own, which might be such things as the outward, external acts previously mentioned. At the same time, however, they insist that no one dare declare that their deeds are not as high in the scale of Christian activity as those matters which pertain particularly to faith and the building up of faith.

When a Christian has faith in God, Luther adds, then he has no need for someone to instruct him as to what works or activities he should undertake in the service of God. "For such a man there is no distinction in works. He does the great and the important as gladly as the small and unimportant, and vice versa." (p. 27.) The real reason that a Christian needs no one to instruct him in these matters is that he already has full and complete instruction in the way to please God. He has this instruction in God's own Word, particularly in the Decalogue. In the First Commandment, Luther points out, God's declaration, "Thou shalt have no other gods," means: "Since I alone am God, thou shalt place all thy confidence, trust, and faith in me alone and in no one else. . . . And this faith, this trust, this confidence from the heart's core is the true fulfilling of the first commandment. Without such faith no work at all can satisfy this command. And because this commandment is the very first of all commandments and the highest and the best, (the one) from which all others proceed, in which they exist and by which they are judged and assessed, so its work (that is, the faith or confidence that God is gracious at all times) is the very first, highest, and best from which all others must proceed, in which they must exist and abide, and by which they must be judged and assessed. Compared with this work the other good works

are like the other commandments would be if they were without the first and as if there were no God."

When individuals attempt to seek God's favor without this essential basis, they are actually practising idolatry, even if they fulfilled all the rest of the commandments, and in addition performed every activist work it is possible to imagine. Without the chief work, faith, all the others are nothing but "mere sham, show and pretense with nothing behind them." And, further, even though one may have a sincere desire to serve no other gods, but attempts to limit his service of God to outward works, he, too, only follows a wretched idolatry. Ignorantly or not, they become "the most pernicious hypocrites on earth, who with their great show of righteousness lead countless folks into their way, yet they leave them without faith." What must we say, then, of the current primary interest shown by the modern churches in the social and moral problems of our age? If such interest is established without the primary motivation of faith, it must be called what it is: a hypocrisy that cannot but mislead people away from the truth. It becomes then nothing more than another desperate attempt to please a God whom they have not truly come to know. One must regard the freedom marches, the welfare activities, the birth control policies, and all such endeavors, if carried on without the primary motivation of founding and establishing faith first, through preaching the Gospel and leading people to worship the one true God, as being as worthy of our repudiation as were those things in his day that Luther mentioned: "the ostentatious display of bulls, seals, flags, and indulgences, by which the poor people are led to build churches, to give, endow, and pray."

It seems clear, then, that the God-given role of the CLC in this time and age must continue to be one of the watchman on the tower. We cannot and dare not blindly and ignorantly be forced into activist policies simply because not to enter them is to remain outside the "main stream" of American religious activity, or because we may be accused of pride, lovelessness, or separatism.

The temptation to enter is great, because we are not so blind nor unconcerned about the world around us that we do not see its evils. In addition we, too, have been brought up in the traditions and myths of Americanism (we are no longer Germans or Scandinavians, but Americans). We, too, are filled with indignation at injustice done toward citizens of minority races and nationalities; at the alarming swiftness of the deterioration of moral standards; at the excesses of big government; at the spectre of hunger and cold causing suffering anywhere in our land of plenty. We may be especially tempted to want to enter the struggle, as a church, because of our fears that the world is becoming communistic by default (poor people throughout the world are more kindly inclined toward the hand that feeds them than toward the hand that closes itself into a fist and keeps its goods to itself). Finally, who among us would declare that there is no need for improvement in the world; that there is no need for more truly Christian influence in it? Nevertheless, we must encourage one another in a determination not to become an activist church along the lines established in our American society by the churches of today; that is to say, not as church or corporate group. Our chief desire as the children of God is to serve Him; our primary calling as the flock whom He has left behind on earth is to do that work that He has set only for His children to do, namely, to preach, teach, and baptize, making disciples, for in this we are His tools to use those means of grace whereby faith is both given and established.

In a world where the churches, by and large, no longer have this primary urge and motivation, we must, in particular, strengthen one another to maintain this chief calling. In so doing, by the grace of God, we may be privileged to provide a leaven which may, by His blessing, still spread farther than our wildest dreams can envision. If the church of Luther's day needed reformation, surely it needs reformation today -- and that for much the same reason: men are still being misled into the hope of serving God satisfactorily (whoever He may be!) through works, whether those works stem from faith or not. That justification is by faith alone is a principle that needs enunciating today

more plainly and clearly than ever, and increasingly will this be the case as the end approaches. We desire that the church may live and grow, that many more may daily be added to its numbers, and so we need to pronounce it as clearly and loudly as we can that "Justus ex fide sua vivit," the just lives by his faith, yes, lives!

Hence, stressing faith, and the teaching of the Gospel which alone engenders it, we are not forgetting the life that is desired by our Lord. In the Treatise under discussion, Luther faces those who have denounced him for so stressing justification by faith that works are not only neglected but despised. In his answer, he remained with the discussion at hand, namely, that in the First Commandment we are told basically everything that is needed to please God, and that it really still boils down to faith as its basis.

"Now where are those who ask what works are good, what they shall do, how shall they be good? Yes, and where, too, are those who say that when we preach about faith we do not teach works or say they should be done? Does not this single first commandment give us more work to do than any one man can do?" -- When we finally understand that faith in itself is really the only good work that pleases God, then we can also see that everything that stems from faith is pleasing to God. If we doubt that all the simple acts of the believer can be called good works, to be regarded by the Lord as being just as good as building churches, making pilgrimages and the like, then we reveal that we are still regarding faith as a work among other works, and are not setting it rightly above all works. What a wonderful knowledge we have, then, when we know that this great work is God's work, that it comes from Jesus Christ alone. Luther puts it beautifully: "Faith, therefore, does not originate in works; neither do works create faith, but faith must spring up and flow from the blood and wounds and death of Christ. . . . We never read that the Holy Spirit was given to anybody because he had performed some works, but always when men have heard the gospel of Christ and the mercy of God. Faith must arise at all times from this same word and from no other

source -- and in our own day, too. For Christ is the rock from which men suck oil and honey, as Moses in Deuteronomy 32:13."

Where a Christian is likely to make a mistake (once he has come to this understanding of good works, namely, that they all stem from his faith, and that they please God only because they have been thus motivated), is that he will stop looking about him to see what needs to be done. After all, he may say, since everything I do in faith pleases God, what difference does it make what I do?

Luther declares simply that this is one reason why we have the Ten Commandments. Here, in a very short and easily understood way, the Lord has told us how He is to be pleased. In just this way, then, we may evaluate our CLC in the matter of its works. For, as we reexamine the Ten Commandments, it becomes apparent, as it did to Luther, that not every work is of equal importance, even though all stem from faith. In his discussion of the Second Commandment he points out: "There is a difference between works when they are compared with one another, and one work is greater than another. It is just as in the body one member needs to be healthy just as much as any other member, yet the works of the members are different, and one is higher, nobler, more useful than the other. So it is in this instance, too -- to praise God's glory and name is better than the works of the other commandments which follow. And yet this work must be done in the same faith as inwardly motivates all the others." (p. 39.)

Since there are so many good works for the Christian to do, he must begin somewhere. It seems obvious, therefore, that he should begin with those things that are most important. The Second Commandment instructs us to honor God's name and use it aright; the Third, to sanctify the Holy Day. These things we are to do through preaching His Word, through prayer, through joyful praise and worship of God. Now, we have been told by some, particularly those who today are so wrapped up in religious activism,

that the church's function of worship is hopelessly out of date, that it is doing nothing for man, that it is causing the youth to turn away empty. We are told that worship is a cold, lifeless thing, and that the God seen in such empty forms of worship as we maintain is dead and will never again be a real force in the life of mankind.

Their error, of course, is that they are no longer aware (if they ever were) of the eternal value of God's Word, also this word of command in the Second and Third Commandments. We do not need to be on the defensive in this matter. We have a sure Word of guidance, while our opponents are floundering about in the never-never-land of doubt and confusion. At the same time, we should not blind ourselves to the possibility that perhaps there is a certain amount of truth in the accusation that ritual can rob the individual of the joy of worship. For example, while we do not advocate experimentalism in the forms of worship (such as folk music or jazz liturgies) as a *modus operandi*, we must not let forms govern us. One might ask, as an illustration, whether or not our pastors routinely use the same Gospel and Epistle readings year after year, not using this glorious opportunity to expose their hearers to other portions of Scripture that can be equally well arranged to bring forth the whole counsel of God. Do we use the prayers in the Agenda, especially the general prayers and the special occasion prayers (particularly where only one choice is offered, for example, a prayer of thanksgiving after the birth of a child), instead of thoughtfully, lovingly preparing prayers that could much better, since we know our members, express what is on their hearts and minds?

The command to use God's name aright is so vital and important for us that we dare not let it become mere ritual. Nor dare we become so frightened that our forms of worship are ritualistic and lifeless that we give them up for an activist experimentalism. Yet we want to involve our people in the worship, so that it does not become for them an act which sets their ministers apart from them.

However, we dare not forget that even this is not the

greatest opportunity we have for doing a God-pleasing work. In connection with the Second Commandment Luther says: "But the greatest and most difficult work of this commandment is to protect the holy name of God against all who misuse it in a spiritual manner, as well as to proclaim it far and wide to all men. For it is not enough that I for myself and in myself praise God's name and call upon him in prosperity and in adversity. I must step forth and for the sake of God's honor and name bring upon myself the enmity of all men, as Christ said to his disciples, 'You will be hated by all for my name's sake.' (Matt. 10:22)." And Luther becomes most eloquent when he cries out encouragement for all Christians to dare all when it comes to the matter of struggling against false doctrine in the world.

As followers of Luther, then, we are his true heirs when, at this point 450 years later, we find our chief emphasis resting upon a defense of the true doctrines of Scripture, upon preaching, teaching, and administering the sacraments; upon public worship in all its forms. The question must be raised, however: Do we stop here, at this point? Are we satisfied that we are doing all that is expected by our Lord? Having stressed the first table of the Law, have we forgotten the second? Here, it seems to me, we need to make a distinction between our chief function as a corporate group of believers, as Church, and our resultant functions as individual believers who are in society for a purpose. What follows has the primary aim of appealing to our rightful calling as individual Christians.

In his Treatise on Good Works Luther painstakingly lets each of the remaining commandments speak out regarding the good work which it recommends. It well behooves us to make a similar examination of the concern for society to which the commandments urge us, in our day.

Luther begins his discussion of the Fourth Command-

ment, "From this commandment we teach that after the excellent works of the first three commandments there are no better works than to obey and serve all those who are set in authority over us." We well know that such obedience and service is due as unto the Lord. The impact of this is not lost even through Luther's doctrine of the two kingdoms, for, as we know, he gave both temporal and spiritual authority (two kingdoms) to the government, seeing it as the commonwealth of God, similar to the Old Testament government of the Hebrew nation.

Primarily, then, both spiritual and temporal authority are to be obeyed, because they both come from God. Luther points this out to temporal rulers and does not mince words in telling them of their responsibilities under God. For example, he adduces the evils of lack of education, gluttony and drunkenness, the excessive cost of basic necessities (clothing and food), usury, the knavery of high church officials in putting the ban on poor people to get their money, brothels, misuse and ill-treatment of the servant class, etc. Of course, with his understanding of the two kingdoms, Luther gives both spiritual and temporal authority to the rulers, as he did to the church. But he made rulers understand that they held their authority as a trust from God, and that they should, therefore, use it for the good of the people they ruled. At the same time, he made it plain to the governed that obedience is owed by them to the rulers, both spiritual and temporal.

Of particular note is the distinction that Luther makes in connection with obedience to the spiritual authority in comparison with the temporal authority. The spiritual authority has nothing else to order and command other than what God has specifically commanded; therefore obedience is owed to the spiritual authority in all matters that God has commanded, but not in what God has not commanded, or forbidden. In temporal matters, on the other hand, God has not given specific instructions, but has left affairs to human choice. "Therefore," Luther declared, "we must resist the spiritual power when it does not do right, and not resist the temporal power even when it does wrong.

For the poor people believe and behave just as they see their spiritual overlords believing and behaving. If they see and hear nothing, then they believe and do nothing, since this spiritual power is instituted for no other purpose than to lead the people in faith to God. This is not so with the temporal power. The temporal power may do or not do what it wants. My faith in God still pursues its own course and does its job, for I do not have to believe what the temporal power believes. For this reason then the temporal power is but a very small matter in the sight of God, and too slightly regarded by him for us to resist, disobey, or become quarrelsome on its account, no matter whether the state does right or wrong. But on the other hand the spiritual power is an exceedingly great blessing and much too precious in his sight for the very least of Christian men to suffer silently when it deviates one hairsbreadth from its proper function. This is to say nothing of when it goes absolutely contrary to its real function, as we see for ourselves every day." (pp. 92-93.)

What is our proper role, then, in respect to government? It seems apparent that we dare not allow ourselves to be tempted into any type of civil disobedience, unless it can be exactly and specifically pointed out where the government has entered into the sphere and has either commanded us to do what God has forbidden, or forbidden us to do what God has commanded. Civil disobedience as a method of persuading government to improve or change some regulation in respect to its temporal authority can never be justified, on the basis of the Fourth Commandment. In this respect the CLC has done nothing, as a church, for which it could be faulted, it seems to me. But one wonders whether we have not, in our attempts to stand aside from a disobedience to the temporal authority, gone too far. For example, if we would emulate Luther's example, we would speak out to temporal authority, not in disobedience, but in giving admonition and advice. It is not wrong to speak out against government chaplaincies, or to make recommendations in other matters that pertain to us as a church such as using public monies to buy books for our schools, pro-

viding bus transportation for our children in our Christian day schools, etc. We have no right to condemn a blind government acting in ignorance, if we have made no effort to instruct it as to its rightful duties and obligations.

Luther's continued discussion of this commandment, the fourth, also leads us to consider good works as they pertain to our familial relationships. He spoke out, for example, against the very situation that seems to prevail in our country, where we all appear to be under what Sam Levenson calls a "kindergarchy." It appears that God's natural order of authority in the home has broken down to the point where one wonders whether or not things can ever be set right. It is not necessary here to go into great detail to point out how the youth of our nation are in the most open defiance of parental authority, and how parents only foster further rebellion by their permissive stance in child-rearing. How can we afford not to speak out against such a flagrant disobedience of God's Word? This is an area which deserves the greatest concern on the part of our pastors and members, for the situation can but degenerate, unless we are prepared to work with it in our homes, schools, and churches. Our God-given faith in the Savior, Who alone strengthens us, will inspire us to do this good work also, for His glory and for the future of our church.

"Now if no other work but chastity were commanded we would have our hands full doing it, for unchastity is a serious and rabid vice." Thus Luther begins his discussion of the Sixth Commandment, as it, too, instructs us how to please God. We wonder what Luther would have to say about the so-called "new morality" of our day and age! It is not that his age did not have the self-same temptations and sins. We gather, from his oft-repeated pleas to the German people to watch out for the betrayals into unchastity brought about by "gluttony, drunkenness, lying in bed, loafing, idling about, soft beds and clothes, excessive adornment," etc., that there was also much vice in his day, and the German youth needed to be warned against it.

But today we find that such "morality" is being defended by some, also within the modern church, as being wholesome, honest, genuine, establishing new and free relations between the sexes that can be conducted without shame and guilt. Movies depicting individuals struggling to find the real meaning of life in illicit sexual relations are described in Christian publications as being honest and conveying healing theology. Clergymen are persuaded to enter into debates defending the new freedom from restraint in these matters. Everywhere, those who are shocked by the new morality are being put down as dishonest, hypocritical, and worse.

It can only be said that the world still needs the leaven that alone can change the hearts and minds away from this unabashedly shameless concept of morality to a desire for God-pleasing chastity. Is it possible, I wonder, that the silence which seems to come forth from our pulpits, as well as those of other conservative churches, is being construed as giving assent? Are we really sure that our stance against the new morality is being revealed, even to our own young members?

How far have we been affected by the constant pressure made upon our minds, emotions, and senses by the new morality as shown on television, in movies, and in our current literature? Have things gone so far that we can accept the situation as being "the way things are now"? It seems to me that there is much to be done to combat this shameful disregard of God's holy law, at least in our own midst, if the day is too far spent in the world about us.

In both general and specific ways, Luther makes use of the Fifth, Seventh, Eighth, Ninth and Tenth Commandments to illustrate the ways in which believers are to serve God by "doing good" to their neighbors. "To help and befriend him in every bodily need" gives us a very broad basis upon which to build the life of concern for one's

fellowman to which faith in Christ leads us. And what could all be said regarding the works to which we are encouraged by the command not to steal from our neighbor, or to desire to take what God has given to him, or to speak well of everyone, even our enemy!

Here we do well to let Luther speak: "... It can clearly be seen that all good works must be done in faith and proceed from faith. In this instance everyone most certainly feels that the cause of covetousness is distrust, while on the other hand the cause of generosity is faith. A man is generous because he trusts God and never doubts but that he will always have enough. In contrast, a man is covetous and anxious because he does not trust God. Now faith is the master workman and the motivating force behind the good works of generosity, just as it is in all the other commandments. Without this faith, generosity is of no use at all; it is just a careless squandering of money."

"We are also to know by this commandment that this kind of selflessness should extend even to enemies and opponents. What kind of good deed is it if we are kind only to our friends, as Christ teaches. ... Therefore, a Christian man must rise higher, letting his kindness serve even those who do not deserve it: evildoers, enemies, and the ungrateful, even as his heavenly Father makes his sun to rise on good and evil alike, and his rain to fall on the grateful and the ungrateful. (Matt. 5:45.) ... If your enemy needs you and you do not help him when you can it is the same as if you had stolen what belonged to him, for you owe him your help. St. Ambrose says, 'Feed the hungry; if you do not feed him, then as far as you are concerned, you have killed him.' And in this commandment are included the works of mercy which Christ will require at the last day. (Matt. 25:35-46.)"

We see the same needs all around us that Luther saw in his day. But how do we give a cup of cold water, or visit the sick, or care for the needy, or help those in prison -- those very acts which we do or do not do for Christ? Is it not true that, because Scripture enjoins us not to do joint charitable work with the heterodox as an act of union-

ism and denial of the truth, we do next to nothing in this line except that which we are forced and obliged to do because we are taxed? Government has largely assumed the responsibility for those things which Christ instructs His followers to do, but why is this so? Is it not due to default, as well as to the fact that it is but following the sectarian principle?

The Lutheran church is considered by modern sociologists as a middle-class church. It is not high in the social structure, but then it is not low, either. And, to our great shame, if we examine ourselves, is not that judgment true? Where do we do our so-called home mission work? Do not we aim for the suburbs, where the great middle class is building its homes? Many American churches are concerned about the inner city mission. What about us? Are we not interested in bringing the Gospel to the dregs of society, the thieves, the prostitutes, the dope-addicts? Are we not interested in converting the convicts in prison? Are we not concerned with the mentally ill? With the illegitimate children growing up in squalor?

If we look at the mission reports and proposals we have made in our work of spreading the Gospel, we will need to confess that we have not yet made much of an effort toward that kind of ministry. The low places where the Savior trod have not yet provided an area of interest for us. Perhaps we have a new start in our recently-begun ministry at the Commodore in Madison, Wisconsin. I hope that it is just a beginning and that we will not let false pride, middle-class concepts, or anything else keep us from reaching out in all directions to which we are called. For our calling is not only to preach, but to do good. That which is written of Christ, "He went about doing good," should be written of the CLC. When God has so graciously preserved unto us His pure Word, surely it was not so that we would ignore and bypass the least of these His brethren with our good works! Why leave to secular institutions, by default, what faith in Christ urges us to do?

When we consider the situation of our CLC in our day, 450 years after the Reformation, we are certainly filled with a sense of our own inadequacies. We must surely confess that it is only by God's grace that we are permitted to exist as a church body. Our numbers are small, and of ourselves we have no strength. But our calling is great, and our responsibilities are great. In a world of doctrinal indifference, where activism of all kinds is taking the place of teaching lost men the way of salvation, there is still much need for the leaven which we have. The Gospel is to be proclaimed by us wherever we can, both in word and deed. Let no one wonder how to perform a work that is pleasing to the Lord; the field is limitless, as Luther shows us.

We have not yet begun to see the extent of the world's wickedness and the falling away that continues to take place. And where faith has disappeared, there can be no God-pleasing service. While faith remains with us, then, let us be faithful to our calling. Let us dare much! Let us not count the cost in doing God's works in the slums, as well as the suburbs and farm lands; in the mental institutions and prisons as well as in our own schools and college.

To this end we can be encouraged no better than by the words of the reformer, as he concludes his discussion of the good works which the Eighth Commandment sets forth: "Notice that in this commandment you see, though briefly, that faith must be the foreman behind this work. Without faith no one is able to do this work. In fact, all works are entirely comprised in faith, as I have often said. Therefore, apart from faith all works are dead, no matter how wonderful they look or what splendid names they have. . . . We now see how Almighty God has not only set our Lord Jesus Christ before us that we should believe in him with such confidence, but we also see that in Christ God holds before us an example of the same confidence and of the same good works. God does this so that we believe in him, follow him, and abide in him forever, as he says in John 14 (:6), 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life': the way, in which we follow him; the truth, that we believe in him; the life, that we live in him forever."

"From all this it is now clear that all other works which are not commanded are dangerous and easily recognized. The works which are not commanded are the building of churches, beautifying them, making pilgrimages, and all those things of which so much is written in the ecclesiastical regulations. These things have misled and burdened the world, brought it to ruin, troubled consciences, silenced and weakened faith." (Surely, so have also all the activist deeds of the churches today, when they do all those things not commanded!) "It is also clear that a man has enough to engage all his strength to keep the commandments of God, and even if he neglects everything else, he can never do all the good works he is commanded to do. Why then does he seek other works which are neither necessary nor commanded, and yet neglect those that are necessary and commanded?"

John Lau



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Editor: Prof. E. Schaller, 513 W. Grover Rd., Eau Claire, Wisconsin, 54701.

Editorial Staff: C. M. Gullerud, R. Gurgel, E. Reim.

Contributing Editors: M. Galstad, G. Radtke.

All correspondence, including subscriptions, renewals and changes of address, should be directed to the Editor.

== PREACHING THE WORD ==

PREACHING IN THE CHRISTMAS SEASON

Christmas: The Text: Isaiah 9:2-6.

"Let us go and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us." So did the shepherds, wise in their simplicity, decide to follow the suggestion of the Christmas angel. And what they discovered in Bethlehem has been told and re-told, time without number and in countless ways, though not always truthfully or accurately.

Our solemn assemblies in these festal days surely have one sacred purpose above all: To see what came to pass in Bethlehem of Judaea, to hear the story again - and of course the true story. So we let our story-teller be one who can be relied upon to give us the facts. Only the facts will do, not finely spun theories or sentimental fiction. The facts have ever been the same since the beginning, though for our understanding they have been illuminated from various angles. We have St. Luke, who told the simple story beautifully; and we have memorized the words of his version. We have St. Matthew. He reported the arrival of the Baby in his fashion, reminding us at the same time that we might take occasion to go back a bit farther to Isaiah the prophet for yet another and unusual view of Christmas. To him we have now come. Here is a reliable witness of the Old Testament who saw Christmas in the light of the Holy Ghost.

Before us lies the Christmas story by Isaiah. It has a curious title that draws our attention and stimulates our interest:

AS IN THE DAY OF MIDIAN

I. The Day of Midian.

Even if this title meant nothing to us at first glance, the reading of Isaiah's words would leave no doubt in our minds that he is reporting to us concerning Christmas; for the heart of the prophet could have been led to no other place than to the manger at Bethlehem when he was moved to write: "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder" However wonderful and mysterious it may seem that the Holy Ghost could reveal it to Isaiah seven hundred years before the time, it is no more amazing than the names he gives to the child The Mighty God, the Everlasting Father -- names which could fit none other than Him whom Matthew calls Emmanuel and Luke calls Christ the Lord; and it would be monstrous - indeed it befits only the madness of the irreverent "higher critic" to make out that the prophet meant another baby. There was never born another like Mary's Son. However great a literary miracle it may be, Isaiah certainly foretold the Christmas story; and to him it was "As in the day of Midian". He knew not how else to compare it. Nothing like it had ever happened before. But he remembered an event with certain similarities. The Day of Midian.

Since Isaiah wrote this Christmas story chiefly for his people the Israelites, he needed not add much historical explanation to his title; for the Day of Midian was as familiar to that nation as to Americans the reference to "the day of Valley Forge," or "the day of Pearl Harbor." If we will turn back to the Book of the Judges, we can read what happened in the day of Midian. Never before in the history of Israel as a free people had there been such a fearful time when all hope was gone. As Isaiah reminds us with his comparison, God had multiplied the nation but had not increased their joy. (Note: We take the Qere, rather than the Kethibh, as the intended and correct version of the Hebrew text). Indeed, he had taken joy from them entirely. The Bible simply records that Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord and the Lord delivered them into the hands of the Midianites. That was the day of Midian. This heathen na-

tion overran Israel and left it nothing. Every green field and every beast was destroyed, from Esdralon in the north to Gaza in the extreme southwest corner of the land. It was almost like Judgment Day. The people hid and lived in caves and holes of the hills. They were utterly broken and awaited only death. The time of Midian was ever remembered; for then the people walked in darkness and in the shadow of death.

But into this darkness came light - a truly incredible light. The crushing burden of the oppressor, the terribly cruel and merciless rod and yoke of the barbaric Midianites were suddenly broken; no one could understand how, even though they had seen it happen. That people which had just been stripped of everything and lay like a corpse under the fist of Midian was suddenly on its feet laughing, dividing the spoils, the booty of victory. It was all like a dream. They came out of their hideaways and found themselves the masters of all the wealth of their enemies. The joy was like the joy in harvest.

What had happened? Gideon had happened. Seemingly from nowhere, out of the humblest corners of a crushed nation, God brought a simple son of a farmer and told him that he would smite the Midianites. Though there were still valiant men in Israel willing to fight for their lives, God wanted not their arms. He asked only for three hundred men who could hold and blow a trumpet while carrying a water pitcher in the other hand. The rest was strictly a miracle directed from heaven. In each pitcher was a lighted lamp. The three hundred men went into battle, but they did not fight. They could not have fought. They were weaponless and impossibly outnumbered. They blew their trumpets and smashed their clay pitchers against the rocks amid the blackness of night, so that fire spurted everywhere and set the darkness ablazing. That light was to grow into freedom for Israel. That light and that sound of shattering pitchers set the Midianites to fighting among themselves in terror and panic. So great was the destruction that the power of the enemy was totally broken.

How strange, how fantastic a deliverance! Yet God had urgent reasons for it, as He told Gideon. Thus did He de-

liver Israel so that the people might never boast of themselves, saying: Our own hand hath saved us. For God has saved these people when their sins would have destroyed them. He saved them when only His love and power could save. He saved them alone, by His divine strength, in their unworthiness, and by means of a lamp in a pitcher.

II. The Day of Christmas.

When Isaiah stood enraptured, gazing in spirit into the manger at Bethlehem, he murmured: Just as in the Day of Midian. For what had the prophet beheld? A people that walked in darkness, that dwelt in the region of the shadow of death; a people greatly increased and yet at the end of its time. Thus was the world in which Bethlehem that night lay beneath the stars.

Far greater than any local, outward calamity such as befell Israel in the day of Midian, yet similar to it was the tragedy of the entire world in the day of Augustus Caesar. The sin of mankind and the curse of God's Law had finally brought men to the rim of eternity. Let us realize that just before the Son of God was born time had run out for the world. Though difficult for us to comprehend now, it is true that if God had not stepped in when He did, we would not be here today, humanly speaking. The world would not be here. Once before, something like this had developed. The measure of wickedness on earth held no more, and the Flood came. But now a greater sorrow awaited. If there had not been a new star suddenly in the sky, the stars would have fallen and the earth melted. There was no room left for improvement. Satan, who fell upon the creatures of God in the Garden of Eden, held the wretched human race in his grasp. He was the oppressor, the Midianite of hell with his yoke of sin and his rod. Death, the wages of sin, stood at the gate of the world. Cyrenius the governor of Syria could not have stopped him, nor could the Caesar of Rome. All mankind was ready and ripe for hell and eternal destruction.

But the world is standing today, and there is light where there was nought but darkness. There is the sound of a breaking pitcher. There is joy where no joy was left nor possibility of it; where men were hiding in the caves of their minds trying to forget, trying to escape in dreams what their sins must bring upon them. Now there is among them joy as in harvest. Sin-lost human beings are counting their spoils. The enemy is crushed, as in the twinkling of an eye, and all his captured booty is for those who will have it. The souls he held captive are lying in heaps. Do thou reach for yours and take it with you. For your soul is delivered, your sins are no longer its burden. The world is bubbling with new life, new hope, freedom!

How? For unto us a Child is born. From out of nowhere, it seemed, came a Baby, a humble child, of humble race, born of a lowly virgin mother. God did not ask for manpower, nor for the arm of man's strength. He asked for nothing save a woman who could carry a child, so that He might show us how utterly helpless we were.

A Child is born - and He is like a chosen Gideon, who shall rule a free people in righteousness and peace. But first He must be like a pitcher, earthy, of flesh and blood, and breakable. He will be broken. They will take Him to the Cross and shatter His life. He is expendable. But once again, Isaiah says, God displays His majesty. For within this human frame, united with this fragile pitcher, is a lamp lit with the light of God. The glory of God lives in Him; indeed, He IS God. And what was coming now had to come, because God so loved the world. When the pitcher was broken, the light flashed and flamed. This Child abolished death in His death. He destroyed forever Satan's power. Today and forever the government is upon His shoulders, and there is a rule of peace upon men.

Just as in the Day of Midian, the Christmas story is of God, teaching us to say: "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy Name give glory, for Thy mercy, and for Thy truth's sake." The Child of Bethlehem is a display of God's majesty of love.

May we all let God do this for us. He has asked us for nothing. He gave us Himself in His Son. He fought the battle with His lamp and set hell on fire. Let us come and pick up our booty; let us take the fruits of this deliverance, throw aside the yoke of the Evil One and trust in the Child of Bethlehem.

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Sylvester Eve: The Text: Genesis 19:21-25.

If we could ascend a mountain high enough to provide a comprehensive view of the behavior of our fellow-men as this year draws to its close, we would surely be impressed by a sight that we could never forget as long as we lived on earth. Behind the glittering and noisy front of music, laughter and drinking with which the world shores up its courage there rolls an ocean of fear. We would see countless people rushing about for advice. Astrologers, soothsayers, fortune-tellers are doing a thriving business in reassuring those who fear the future. Telling men what to expect and what to do is a million-dollar business. Many indeed are the clandestine journeys being taken this night as men seek refuge from their fears.

It might be well for us to consider a little journey also - shall we say, a trip to Zoar, perhaps? The Lord at one time even sent angels to hasten Lot along such a road; we on our part ought need no angels to tell us when it is time to make the trip, although sometimes we lack the sense of fear that would drive us.

Like the winding of a great clock, at each turn of the year the mainspring of the world grows tighter. The world runs faster, but the spring is nearing its breaking point. This is what many unknowingly fear. Let us fear it wisely, understandingly, and find the example a valuable warning to us as well as an encouragement to do what must not be put off. There is an alarm ringing in our hearts, and a sweet call from God, as we contemplate

LOT'S NIGHT JOURNEY TO ZOAR,

and consider

- I. In what need it was undertaken
- II. And by what promise it was safely completed.

I.

The hour was late indeed. Our text informs us that the sun was rising when at last Lot entered Zoar, where he was safe when the heavens opened and rained down fire upon the cities of Sodom and Gomorrhah. We can still hear the urgent pleading of the angel saying to Lot: "Haste thee, escape thither; for I cannot do anything till thou be come thither!" What a desperate night that had been, what terrible need for escape, what reason for Lot to fear! Even the angel of the Lord can do nothing until Lot reaches the place of safety set aside for him.

That night Lot had been in Sodom. He lived there; it was his home. But there is more to be said. Lot did more than live there. He had settled in Sodom by choice, and in so choosing he was prompted by fleshly-mindedness and greed. It was more than necessity which brought him to Sodom and held him there even though it was a foul place in which to live. Out of selfishness he had selected the best of the land which God had given to Abraham, and in utter disregard of the fact that he and his family would have to dwell in the midst of a city whose wickedness cried to heaven for punishment. Money meant too much to Lot - money and worldly advantage. For that reason, and for no other, he took root in Sodom, remaining there even after he had suffered a tremendous blow during the war of the Kings when he lost flocks and herds as well as his own freedom. Though Abraham had with great courage and in selfless love rescued Lot from this disaster, Lot went right back to Sodom.

We see, therefore, that Lot was involved in Sodom by an attachment of the heart. He loved what Sodom had to

offer as a big city, with its commerce and trade, its shrewdness and its profits. He relished sitting in the gate with the Sodomites and discussing the affairs of the city. He rubbed ecumenical elbows with people who were also given to the most fearful vices, who honored neither God nor the dignity of men.

It should not be supposed, however, that Lot actively participated in the commission of the shameful and ugly crimes to which his fellow-townsmen in large numbers were given. At heart he remained a man of faith, a child of God, as Peter also describes him in his second Epistle, saying: "Lot was vexed with the filthy conversation (life) of the wicked; for that righteous man, dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds." (2 Pet. 2:8).

Yet because Lot so greatly enjoyed the outward advantages of this world; because his heart, though troubled, yet valued in some ways the association with men of wickedness; because he endeavored to be a part of Sodom without allowing Sodom to become a part of him; therefore he existed in gravest peril. His wife became so saturated with the spirit of the world that she could no longer safely be moved out in the last moment of escape. And his daughters - well, you can appreciate their entanglements when you know that they were married to two Sodomite men. Sometimes God calls His children to stand in the midst of such an ungodly generation and testify against sin and evil. But Lot was not in Sodom for God's purposes but for his belly's sake, and his testimony was therefore weak, if not useless. How shall he be able to warn against sins which he has permitted to infect his own family? How can he speak against Sodom and yet be part of Sodom?

The consequence of all this was that Lot, though a child of God, was in imminent peril of being swallowed up by Sodom and acquiring a full partnership in its guilt before God. This did not happen; but when the hour came and heaven's wrath could no longer be contained, Lot had to renounce Sodom wholly and get out, or die. His precious faith will now move him to leave all behind and flee, or he has lost his faith and must perish. But his God is there.

To Zoar, Lot! For "I cannot do anything until thou be come thither." What magnitude of grace appears in those words! God can do nothing - he cannot even proceed with the catastrophe upon Sodom - until His elect, His beloved, redeemed son, has reached Zoar's haven. Had there been as few as ten righteous in the wicked city, Sodom would not have been destroyed at all. There were not that many, alas; but there was at least this one, and until he is safe, the execution is delayed. At the same time, however, the warning rings clear: God can do nothing even for Lot, nor guarantee security, except this endangered man seek the refuge of Zoar.

With this example before us we ought tonight examine our status. The serious question is whether we have in the past year become too intimately involved with the world, in heart and mind. For this peril threatens the child of God, as we have just seen. There is, as Jesus has taught us, a difference between being in the world and being of the world. That we are in the world we cannot help. The Lord has put us here and given us no command to leave until He calls us. But neither did God tell us to be the world's friend. For the friendship of the world is enmity with God.

Though we may be often vexed in our souls, as Lot was, by the evil ways of the world, have we perhaps grown so close to the world in our hearts that we are becoming perilously near actual involvement in the godlessness which is waiting for fire from heaven? Have we been so infected with the customs and fashions and ways of thinking that govern the world that we sometimes allow ourselves to be governed by them? How close can we come to the filth of unbelief and corruption without becoming tarred with the same brush? Does it make any difference to us with whom our children associate? Must we for reasons of business or because of social interests sit in the gate of the city as friends of the wicked?

What was Sodom doing in the night in which Lot escaped? Just what the world is doing this night, and every night; and the prospects are the same. If it seems painful to disassociate ourselves from all of that, if it seems a lonesome road, then it is high time to drop everything and

run; for then we know that we have come to love the world too well. It is needful that we make certain of being at Zoar with Lot. To this end the Lord our God is ever encouraging and urging us; for He cannot do anything until we, too, be come thither.

II.

On Zoar lay a divine promise. The Lord said to Lot: "See, I have accepted thee concerning this thing also, that I will not overthrow this city, for the which thou hast spoken Therefore the name of the city was called Zoar.

The strange thing about Lot's night journey was that it was not far. Although the exact location of Sodom or of Zoar is no longer known to us, it is clear from the divine record that Zoar was a very small village on the plain whose prospects were in themselves hopeless. It would have been doomed to join Sodom and Gomorrah in ashes. It was not even as distant as the mountains which lay about the valley, to which God had first urged Lot to flee. Zoar lay within the circle of destruction, and one can hardly say that Lot outdistanced the fire of death by going there. Indeed, we may say that his journey was not so much a journey for the feet as of the heart. Distance did not save Lot, but faith and promise. Zoar was a refuge prepared by God. It was not in a safety zone; but it was safe when Lot arrived there. For the godly are safe when they have broken with sin and come to God's protecting arms.

There also is our Zoar. Where shall we seek refuge from the dreadful fate that overhangs our world? The heavenly mountains of Beulah-land, the hills of home, are too far for us just now. There is the real safety zone; but for that we must await God's bidding. Meanwhile there is Zoar, where God's people dwell. It is the Church of the Lord. Let us take our place therein this night.

The Church is there on earth where God's Word rules and the Spirit of God anoints men with His holy oil of gladness. It is the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High. It is where Jesus the Savior stands in the midst of

His redeemed and speaks peace to hearts cleansed in His blood. Though it is but a step distant from the halls of evil, this Church is not to be destroyed. A marvellous charm hovers over it. God is in the midst of her: she shall not be moved.

In this Zoar you find yourself in dull company as the world reckons it. There is no earthly glamor here. There is but a Lamb, and His blood, to put out the fire of God's wrath. Here you live with the Lord Jesus Christ and grow in love of Him and His Way. The journey thither may have been a struggle. A wife may have forsaken you in your pilgrimage to this haven, and sons-in-law may have refused to follow. But when the sun is risen upon the earth for the last time, to dissolve in blood while brimstone rains down upon this Sodom, you and I will live to praise God that we have had a profitable night journey behind us.

E. Schaller

PANORAMA

THE DOCUMENTS OF VATICAN II -- AN EXAMINATION.
(Continued)

On the same date, Nov. 21, 1964, three documents were promulgated; "Constitution On the Church", "Decree on Eastern Catholic Churches", and "Decree on Ecumenism." The Journal of Theology has already commented on the distinction between the designations of "Constitution" and "Decree" (Journal of Theology, Vol. 6. No. 2. p. 2.) to which the reader is hereby referred. It may seem strange that the Vatican Council deemed it necessary to issue a separate decree on Eastern Catholic Churches instead of incorporating these pronouncements into the more general document on Ecumenism. A close examination of

the two documents will reveal that there is purpose and design behind this division. On the one hand the Roman Church recognizes a kinship with those whom it calls the separated Eastern Christians which it does not acknowledge as existing between it and the other so-called separated brethren. This difference is not only emphasized by the promulgation of a separate decree but also is apparent in the Decree on Ecumenism where it appears that the Eastern brethren are designated as Churches while other separated brethren are simply called Ecclesial Communities. The recent displays of affection between Pope Paul and the Greek Patriarch Athenagoras serve to underline this point of view. One wonders if this carefully drawn distinction between the Eastern Church and the Protestant Churches has registered on the minds of those who are so eagerly dialoging with Catholic representatives.

There is, of course, on the other hand, another reason for this separate decree on Eastern Catholic Churches and that is the peculiar position of the Uniate Churches, those scattered groups of Churches which accept the primacy of the Roman Pontiff but under special dispensation are permitted to retain certain traditional beliefs and practices characteristic of the communities in which they are working. Churches operating with this agreement are those of the Chaldean, Syrian, Maronite, Coptic, Armenian and Byzantine rites. One Catholic source estimates that there are one million Catholics of Eastern rites in the United States. These churches are acknowledged in the decree as "the faithful who are organically united in the Holy Spirit through the same faith, the same sacraments, and the same government and who, combining into various groups held together by a hierarchy, form separate Churches or rites." # 2. The variety of rites to be found in these churches is judged to be no hindrance to the Church's unity but rather a manifestation of it. A certain amount of self-rule is granted and it appears that the decree allows more privileges than had been granted heretofore. However, the careful reader will notice the recurrence of such phrases as: "under the guidance of the Roman Pontiff", "Without prejudice to the primacy of the Roman Pontiff" and "with-

out prejudice to the inalienable rights of the Roman Pontiff to intervene in individual cases." Typical is this sentence: "Such individual Churches, whether of the East or of the West, although they differ somewhat among themselves in what are called rites (that is, in liturgy, ecclesiastical discipline, and spiritual heritage) are, nevertheless, equally entrusted to the pastoral guidance of the Roman Pontiff, the divinely appointed successor of St. Peter in supreme government over the universal Church." #3. While members of the Uniate Churches may feel that they have freedom and liberty in their own affairs they are never left in doubt as to who it is that will speak the last word when any important decisions are to be made.

In the final section of this decree the relations with the separated Eastern Christians are briefly considered. It is notable that no specific doctrinal difference is cited and this has been observed by Eastern Orthodox reviewers who are not so ready to pass them over. Furthermore, it is a source of irritation to the Eastern Orthodox that the Uniate Churches (we would call them opposition altars) are permitted to exist side by side with them, and this with papal approval.

It is evident that a milder policy toward the separated Eastern Christians is being sanctioned by this decree than prevailed in the past. The validity of the priesthood of these Eastern churches is recognized (all by virtue of the Apostolic Succession from ancient times, of course), the validity of their sacraments is not questioned, and an interchange of members (under certain circumstances) is granted. Especially interesting is the following sentences on common worship: "Divine Law forbids any common worship which would damage the unity of the Church, or involve formal acceptance of falsehood or the danger of deviation in the faith, of scandal, or of indifferentism. At the same time, pastoral experience clearly shows that with respect to our Eastern brethren there should and can be taken into consideration various circumstances affecting individuals, wherein the unity of the Church is not jeopardized nor are intolerable risks involved, but in which salvation itself and the spiritual profit of souls are urgently at

issue." #26. An Eastern Orthodox reviewer remarks that in this section the Decree shows great tact and caution. Indeed the section resounds in our ears as an echo of statements we have heard in other places and at other times. We have the uneasy feeling that orthodox statements on Church Fellowship are often watered down by a form of situation ethics. And surely this current line of thought is not limited to the Roman Catholic Church.

5. Decree on Ecumenism. (Unitatis Redintegratio.)

The Vatican Council's decree on ecumenism has been scrutinized and accepted with considerable delight and satisfaction by all those who have a special interest in the popular ecumenical movement. For it seems that the Roman Catholic Church has here opened a door which hitherto was closed. It appears that Roman Catholic attitudes toward other churches and toward the possibility of non-Catholic membership in the Church universal have softened and that concessions are now being made which were never before allowed. Conclusions have been drawn (often very quickly and sometimes with considerable naivete) by those who have found in the decree what they wanted to find. The unusual amount of interest in this decree, we dare say, has drawn attention away from other decrees and constitutions which are of equal or even greater importance. That the Roman Pontiff himself regarded this decree of special importance may be gathered from the fact that he made no fewer than nineteen changes in the text. These appear in places where the substitution of a word or the changing of a phrase constitute a substantial alteration and, as we see it, safeguard the traditional position of Rome. Whether the Roman Pontiff himself or he, upon the advice of his curia, made these changes, they do in any case reveal a remarkable sensitivity to the possibility of openings in the dike which would let too many concessions flow through to the detriment of the papacy. These papal changes could serve as a profitable study by themselves. We shall in the course of this examination point to only a few. A Roman Catholic commentator has remarked: "A number of bishops, and non-Catholic observers too, were irritated that the Pope

had proposed changes after it was too late for the Council Fathers to discuss them or vote on them." But in the end the Council dutifully accepted the whole text, papal changes and all.

In the section on the basic principles of Ecumenism, a significant change was made in the wording of the chapter heading. Originally it had been titled "Principles of Catholic Ecumenism". Evidently this was considered too parochial and so the chapter heading was changed to read: "Catholic Principles on Ecumenism", thus implying that the principles here set forth are to be recognized as basic for all churches. This is highly significant since it finally calls upon all to recognize the pope as the visible dispenser of the keys of the kingdom and as the one through whose office the Lord will Perfect the fellowship of the Church in unity. While indeed we find good statements on the work of redemption, on Christ's prayer for unity, and on the work of the Holy Spirit; yet this is spoiled by the distinctively Roman doctrine which no-one dare ignore. We quote: "In order to establish this holy Church of His everywhere in the world until the end of time, Christ entrusted to the College of the Twelve the task of teaching, ruling, and sanctifying (cf. Mt. 28:18-20, in conjunction with Jn. 20: 21-23). Among their number He chose Peter. After Peter's profession of faith, He decreed that on him He would build His Church; to Peter He promised the keys of the kingdom of heaven (cf. Mt. 16:19, in conjunction with Mt. 18:18). After Peter's profession of love, Christ entrusted all His sheep to him to be confirmed in faith (cf. Lk. 22:32) and shepherded in perfect unity (cf. Jn. 21:15-17). Meanwhile Christ Jesus Himself forever remains the chief cornerstone (cf. Eph. 2:20) and shepherd of our souls (cf. I Pet. 2:25). It is through the faithful preaching of the gospel by the apostles and their successors--the bishops with Peter's successor at their head--through their administration of the sacraments and through their loving exercise of authority, that Jesus Christ wishes His people to increase under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Thereby too, He perfects His people's fellowship in unity; in the confession of one faith, in the common celebration of

divine worship, and in the fraternal harmony of the family of God." #2.

While some have found in the decree an admission that there are Christians in other communions outside the papal church, the careful reader of the decree in toto must come to the conclusion that this is so carefully circumscribed that here too there has been no change. The Roman principle that there is no salvation outside the Papal Church still stands and we are sure that if the pope were pressed for a direct answer to a specific question this would be made clear. It is stated that those who believe in Christ and have been properly baptized, even though in other communions, are brought into union with the Catholic Church; but it is immediately stated that this is an imperfect union. While it is granted that the Lord may use separated churches as means of salvation it is immediately stated that they "derive their efficacy from the very fullness of grace and truth entrusted to the Catholic Church." #3 and here it must be noted that the qualifying adjective "catholic" was a papal addition. Furthermore it is clearly stated: "For it is through Christ's Catholic Church alone, which is the all-embracing means of salvation, that the fullness of the means of salvation can be obtained. It was to the apostolic college alone, of which Peter is the head, that we believe our Lord entrusted all the blessings of the New Covenant, in order to establish on earth the one Body of Christ into which all those should be fully incorporated who already belong in any way to God's people. During its pilgrimage on earth, this People, though still in its members ("in its members" a papal addition, thus safeguarding the infallibility of pope and council) liable to sin, is growing in Christ and is being greatly guided by God, according to His hidden designs, until it happily arrives at the fullness of eternal glory in the heavenly Jerusalem." Much has been made of a statement by the Council which seems to indicate an admission of a share in the guilt for the separations which now prevail. In the context which deals with sins against unity, it is stated: "Thus, in humble prayer, we beg pardon of God and of our separated brethren, just as we forgive those who trespass against

us." #7. Before too much is made of this it must be kept in mind that the papal addition in paragraph three just referred to rules out the conclusion that the Roman Church as such is confessing any sin against unity. The pope in his opening address to the second session said: "If we are in any way to blame for that separation we humbly beg God's forgiveness. And we ask pardon too of our brethren who feel themselves to have been injured by us. For our part, we willingly forgive the injuries which the Catholic Church has suffered, and forget the grief during the long series of dissensions and separations. May the heavenly Father deign to hear our prayers and grant us true brotherly peace." (Baum's "The Teachings of the Second Vatican Council" p. 192 footnote.) Here one will note that the confession of blame is conditional when referred to the Roman Catholic's share of guilt while the injuries which the Catholic Church is said to have suffered is unconditional. Pardon is asked of those who "feel themselves to have been injured" by the Catholic Church while it is carefully not said that others have been injured by the Catholic Church.

The Decree on Ecumenism allows for the practice of common prayer with the separated brethren in asking for the grace of unity, but excepts what it calls indiscriminate practice of common worship. All of this however to be subject "to the prudent decision of the local episcopal authority, unless the Bishops' Conference according to its own statutes, or the Holy See, has determined otherwise." #8.

The latter part of the Decree treats of the Eastern Churches and the Ecclesial communities of the West. Since this runs along the same lines as the Decree on Eastern Catholic Churches it is not necessary to go into any further discussion of this subject. In its concluding statements, the Council carefully committed all those engaged in dialogs to the truth "received from the apostles and the Fathers" and exhorts them to speak "in harmony with the faith which the Catholic Church has always professed." #24. Those who enter upon dialogs with Rome without taking all of this into careful consideration are deluding themselves.

(To be continued.) C. M. Gullerud

THE ETHIC OF
CONTROVERSY

By its very name our PANORAMA section takes on the function of looking over the

current scene and discussing whatever seems to call for comment, to the extent that the limited facilities of our JOURNAL allow. -- Anyone who has traveled our transcontinental highways, enjoying the mountain scenery as it unfolds before him, may perhaps remember stopping at some convenient wayside, looking back from his higher elevation, and discovering in the area he had just come through a greater beauty than he had noticed before. The same experience may come to a senior citizen when he looks back over the span of his years.

Well over fifty years ago our class of students at Wauwatosia Seminary was working through its course of New Testament Exegesis. The teacher was Professor John P. Koehler; the subject, Paul's Epistle to the Galatians. Most of us knew we were getting something good. But just how good it was did not dawn on at least one member of this class until he began to teach the same course in our ILC Seminary. Using the current English translation of the commentary written by our old Professor in our student days, the quality of that teaching began to come into focus as it never had before. One short portion of this book, particularly relevant in these days of controversy, is reproduced here by permission of the copyright owner, Northwestern Publishing House.

We knew little of controversy in those sheltered student days -- only what was recorded in the textbooks. But we did learn that when Paul, hearing of divisions and even heresies among the Corinthians, said that it must be so, he was not directing anyone to go out and create divisions, invent heresies. Rather, human nature being what it is, he was teaching us what would inevitably happen. His 'must' was a must of necessity. He comforts one by showing that God knows how to bring good even out of this evil: "that they which are approved may be made manifest among you." (I Cor. 11:18-19)

The pages from Koehler which we intend to quote deal with Galatians 2:4, the passage where Paul describes the

situation he and his companions faced when they came to Jerusalem to discuss a most sensitive question: should circumcision be required of the Gentile Christians or not? It was a point in which Paul did not yield, not even for a moment (v. 5). In fact, he could not, for "the truth of the Gospel" was at stake. But in the preceding verse, speaking of those who had challenged his practice, he calls them "false brethren," causing some commentators to ask how he could pronounce so severe a judgment against his opponents. This question is discussed at some length by Koehler, and is the reason why we have given this article the heading which appears above, "The Ethic of Controversy." For controversy there will be, as long as we live in this sinful world. Often it simply cannot be avoided if "the truth of the Gospel" is to continue among us. What we must learn is where the danger lies -- and how to conduct ourselves if controversy there must be. The better we learn this, the wider this knowledge is spread, the less will there be of resulting harm and danger.

One thing more must be said before we quote. The translator is confronted with a real problem when one comes to Koehler's use of the word 'Unlauterkeit,' a term which occurs very often in connection with this particular question. When we find it as 'insincerity' in the translation before us, this is an accurate rendering, but one which calls for an understanding of the real impact of this word. Not the superficial meaning it has acquired in modern use, where for lack of any better thing that can be said someone may still be eulogized by saying he was sincere -- where in fact he may have simply been rude and ill-mannered. But when Koehler says 'Unlauterkeit,' he is describing a condition which is the opposite of being 'lauter,' that is; pure, wholesome. 'Unlauterkeit' implies the opposite, the addition of some foreign element or substance. Such a foreign substance need not be harmful in itself. Yet, if a merchant would sell pure milk which has, however, been stretched by an addition of H₂O, he could not defend himself by proving that what he had added was pure water. It was water, and the milk has been adulterated. Matters get worse, of course, when the additive is harmful in itself.

That is what Koehler means when he charges Paul's opponents with manifest insincerity. *

With due apologies to our readers for such a lengthy introduction we now give you Koehler, without further interruption, and with original emphasis only. Speaking of "false brethren," he says:

Q U O T E

They are not stamped as false brethren because they think differently from Paul; no, insincerity plays a part in the battle for doctrine. With external means they try to gain the favor of their hearers; in this battle they seek their own honor; in their argumentation they are not always truthful, etc. Such tactics bring Paul to pronounce this judgment. It is not at all necessary to assume that the opponents were conscious of these acts of insincerity. On the contrary, it probably was as it always has been in the past and still is today.

Among the defenders of a wrong matter, most men act with so-called good intentions as far as we human beings can see. They are convinced of their case. But their conviction was not born of a careful consideration in accordance with God's Word and with a clear conscience; but many small, external causes determined the direction of their mind: things like personal dislikes or mutual friendships or other interests which at times are not at all directly of a selfish nature. Without knowing it or without rendering an account of it to themselves, many people allow themselves to be influenced by such things. Soon they are enmeshed in the false doctrine and usually also defend it with all manner of insincerity. Of this they then, just because they think they are in the right, do not become conscious, either. They are acts of insincerity, nevertheless, and it is entirely natural that they creep in, for a wrong case simply cannot be defended with the right means. Therefore

*) This is confirmed by the definition of "sincere" in Webster's Unabridged: "free from adulteration; not mixed; . . . not containing any foreign element: pure; . . . marked by truth, genuine."

we must be on guard against the attitude which is readily satisfied with its own good intention, instead of examining again and again according to God's Word whether we are on the right path.

The insincerity showed itself in this point which Paul relates: The false brethren had been brought in secretly and had crept in. We cannot ascertain in what manner this was done and whether it was accomplished by external means or whether this expression merely is to describe their unevangelical attitude which energetically opposes the Gospel. The remark which Paul adds is really sufficient to explain the expression. They had come to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus in order to bring us into bondage. It is not easy to follow Paul's expression because he is dealing with things that take place in the soul. Paul's words say of these false brethren that they had a purpose which is at variance with a good intention. They wanted to spy out the Christian liberty on the basis of which we are no longer bound to the Law, for Christ's sake. Hence, they did not come to learn from God's Word, to be taught by it and by the teaching of the Apostles, but they wanted to put an end to the other doctrine. But was not this Paul's position too, that he wanted, under all circumstances, to make his teaching prevail? Would it not have revealed a doubt if he, e. g., had been willing to receive instruction from the pillars? The opponents were likewise convinced that their position was right.

The difference between the two is first of all that between true and false doctrine, especially here where the central point of doctrine is involved. Then there is another factor: A sincere person can harbor false doctrine and be thoroughly convinced of its correctness, but deep down in his heart, nevertheless, the thought prevails that he is willing to deal honestly with the other person and to be instructed through God's Word. Again, a sincere person who defends the correct doctrine is indeed firmly convinced of it and therefore exerts all his energies to make it prevail. But his sincerity presupposes that he will always remain truthful in this controversy. Pure doctrine does not find it

necessary to gain an outward victory with sophistical arguments or with political means. Therefore the sincere teacher of correct doctrine is always inwardly free for discussion so that he actually has the same stand as the other sincere, but tempted Christian: he is ready to be instructed by God's Word, although he stands by his teaching with a divine sureness.

The insincere person, however, without being aware of it, is guided probably in most cases by personal motives and not by God's Word. Therefore his conduct is wrong in the whole controversy. An untruthful trait creeps in. His firmness becomes stubbornness, and not so much God's truth as his own evil will actually rules. Even when such people in their blindness think they are acting uprightly, we must say that their action is insincere. Through such mental conditions their outward actions are influenced in such a way that Paul can call the entrance of these people "a creeping in." It did not happen in good faith.

END OF QUOTE

(From THE EPISTLE OF PAUL TO THE GALATIANS, translated from the German by E. E. Sauer, pages 48 - 50. Northwestern Publishing House, Milwaukee, Wisconsin)

E. Reim

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