



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

I Timothy 4:15

Journal of Theology

Church of the Lutheran Confession

VOLUME 10

MAY 1970

NUMBER 2

ESSAYS AND ARTICLES ,

SOURCES AND DATE OF ST. MARK'S GOSPEL.

There is not, and never has been, any scientifically documented doubt raised against the genuineness of St. Mark's Gospel. By the earliest records we possess, including Scripture itself, this book is shown to have been unanimously regarded in the churches as a part of the divine message. There is nothing in the preserved writings of church fathers, from Papias, a man who sat as a student at the feet of the Apostle John, through Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian and Origen or in the works of the historian Eusebius, which suggests anything other than that the Gospel of Mark is an infallible word of God to His Church. It is in part for this reason that, of all the Gospels, this one has been least challenged by that radical, destructive criticism which during the past century and a half has sought to discredit the integrity of the record God has left us concerning the earthly sojourn and labors of His eternal Son.

Some would possibly wish to explain the comparative immunity from attack of Mark's Gospel by saying that Mark contains relatively little material - perhaps a total of about two average chapters - which is not also reported by Matthew and Luke, and that any challenge mounted against these Synoptists would thus apply equally to Mark. But this Gospel is unique in so many respects that it must be entitled to separate consideration and evaluation. Nor have knowledgeable people ever argued otherwise. The individuality and distinctiveness of the Evangelists, and of each Gospel in its origin, arrangement and purpose, have never been questioned by responsible scholars, even by such who are motivated by rationalistic unbelief or agnosticism.

Other issues have been raised, however, that meet with no such accord among the scholars. Questions concerning the chronological order in which the synoptic Gospels were presented to the Church, and the existence or degree of interdependence among them in regard to the materials they contain, have given birth to a vast bulk of literature dealing with these and other related topics, all of which may be subsumed under what is called the "Synoptic Problem."

It cannot be the purpose of this brief article to address itself effectively to that involved problem as such, least of all to deal with the variant positions taken by professional students of the subject. But a few general observations will serve to isolate our present area of interest.

Let it be said, first of all, that beyond the very limited but wholly reliable details supplied by the Evangelists and Apostles themselves, the testimony of history and the speculative judgments based upon them are at best hypothetical and at their worst openly tendential rather than objective. Barring future discovery of technically reliable sources of information, the Synoptic problem cannot be positively resolved. Moreover, we repudiate the suggestion advanced by many theologians, even by such who profess respect for the New Testament as a divinely inspired record, that Matthew, Mark and Luke derived portions of their reports from each other's books. This allegation is supposed to explain the many similarities, indeed the almost verbal identity appearing in several accounts of events and preachments as communicated through the holy writers for the instruction of the Church. Details of the theory of interdependence vary according to the judgment of each scholar as to the order in which the Gospels were written -- namely, whether Matthew used portions of Mark without quotation marks, or whether Luke cribbed from Matthew or Matthew from Luke. But any decision based on such a premise must be summarily rejected; for it is incompatible with the respect that is due these human authors. The accusation of plagiarism involved is gratuitous and intolerable. It not only impugns the character of the Evangel-

ists but offends against the majesty of the Word. Moreover, it is critically untenable, as Henry Alford and others have demonstrated. We agree with Kerr who wrote:

"This theory degrades one or two Synoptists to the position of slavish and yet arbitrary compilers, not to say plagiarists; it assumes a strange mixture of dependence and affected originality; it weakens the independent value of their history; and it does not account for the omissions of most important matter, and for many differences in common matters."

Similarly we cannot honor the widely accepted notion that some particular document, not preserved and unidentifiable but known among the critics as Q, supplied the Synoptists verbatim with much of their material. This fashion of establishing isagogical doctrine originated as long ago as the 18th century, with Johann Gottfried Eichhorn, and has been adopted for the Synoptic problem even by conservative scholars like A. T. Robertson. But it not only solves nothing; it has all the substantial qualities of a mirage, so that even an expert like B. H. Streeter, the noted associate of Kirsopp Lake, has called for renunciation of "this phantom."

While we thus reaffirm the integrity and individual unity of each of the Gospels, we find certain legitimate topics which remain eligible for consideration in this connection. In rejecting the Q-theory as well as the unworthy allegation of literary theft leveled against the Evangelists, we have not necessarily surrendered the right of inquiry into the possibility that pre-existent written sources were known to them - sources in the sense that contemporary records which consisted of their own or other apostolic notes, perhaps quite substantial in extent, existed.

The Biblical evidence that such documentation, distinct from the Gospels themselves, was available and of early origin is clear and firm. St. Luke is our witness for this. In the dedication of his Gospel he declares that "many had put their hands to the task of drawing up an orderly narrative concerning the things which have been fulfilled in

our midst, just as those who from the start were eye-witnesses and servants of the message committed (them) to us'' Luke's meaning is clear, the conclusion inescapable. Written accounts of what the Apostles had told others concerning their experiences with the Son of God during his earthly life existed. Luke knew of them. It is not beyond the bounds of reasonable supposition to assume that he had seen and read at least some of them. Who wrote these accounts we do not know. They were obviously not intended for us. But we accept the truth of their existence in the period before Luke undertook to write his Gospel. We might feel moved to ask to what extent we dare suppose such documents to have been helpful to Luke in his task; but the only proper answer would be the rebuke of a hand placed over our mouths. If our Savior-God had regarded such technical information as needful for sinners, He would have provided it.

The same reply, of course, would be in order if we extended such an inquiry to the work of Mark and the topic in our heading. A careful study of what is known of Mark's life as a servant of the Gospel would reveal that in the latter days of Paul's ministry he and Luke were together at least periodically (cf. for example 2 Tim. 4:11), and thus had mutual personal interests during the very years in which both probably wrote their Gospels. There is, then, good reason to suppose that what Luke knew about written historical material did not remain unknown to Mark. Yet we have no evidence, and thus simply do not enjoy the right to assume that we can refer to such documentation as constituting a source for Mark's work.

The notorious "Two-Document Theory", of which the hypothetical Q above mentioned is one ingredient, presupposes in at least one of its variations the chronological priority of Mark's Gospel. The supposition is that Mark wrote first, using Q as a source; but that he thus produced an early version of his Gospel, which the scholars label the "Ur-Markus". From this first attempt the final form of Mark's Gospel, as we have it, derived. This whole theory is a hypothetical structure built of spider-webbing spun_

from the impure vents of rationalistic minds. We need not operate with such mythology in order to pursue the question of whether Mark's Gospel might have been the first.

No assured data can be offered in support of such a supposition. But by the same token, the possibility of its correctness cannot be ruled out. The traditional order maintained in our Bibles -- Matthew, Mark, Luke, John -- claims strong arguments in its favor. We are told that none of the ancient manuscripts or church fathers list Mark in the first position among the Gospels, although he is sometimes assigned third or even fourth place (this latter apparently by Irenaeus). Yet the listings of the ancient records are not always intended as indicating chronological order. The oldest formal list of the books of the New Testament, found in the Muratorian fragment (from the 2nd century) is too incomplete to offer a clue in the matter.

Historically the argument for the primacy of Matthew's Gospel seems to rely almost wholly upon a vague tradition that Matthew left Palestine about fifteen years after Pentecost and that, before proceeding to missionary work in other lands, he left behind for Jewish believers a written account which we know as his Gospel. If true, this would almost certainly assure this work of first place in the order, since no reasonable view of the known facts could ascribe to Mark and Luke an earlier date. But so slender a thread of hear-say evidence would not support a firm decision in this or any other matter.

Each of the synoptic Gospels must have been written before the year 70 A.D., since each records in some manner the Savior's prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem while none makes any mention of fulfillment - to the mind of Bible believers a wholly improbable silence if any of the synoptists had written after that event. It seems fair to assume that St. Luke did not write his Gospel after 63 A.D. because he himself tells us that he wrote the book of Acts after the Gospel (Acts 1:1f), and Acts includes the entire period of Paul's first imprisonment at Rome, which ended at about that time. If the Gospel had been prepared after 63 A.D., and the Acts still later, it would be very difficult

to understand why the book of Acts closes as it does.

We have considerable Scriptural knowledge of the life and activities of John Mark. His early and subsequent associations with the Apostle Paul are well known to Bible readers (Acts 12:25; 13:5,13; 15-36-39; Col. 4:10; 2 Tim. 4:11). For our present concerns, however, it is chiefly his relationship with the Apostle Peter which is most significant. In 1 Peter. 5:13 the apostle calls Mark "his son," much after the manner of Paul when speaking of Timothy as his "own son in the faith" (1 Tim. 1:2). Peter thus lays claim to Mark as his protege in the Gospel, pointing to a very intimate relationship as of teacher to pupil, master to disciple. In the same connection Peter affirms that Mark is with him in the church "at Babylon," a reference usually and correctly understood as indicating the city of Rome, which through the great fire of July 64 and the subsequent persecution had indeed become like another city of captivity and death for God's people. Peter had come to Rome at some time between 63 and 65 A.D.; and there Mark was at his side. But Mark had been closely, even intimately associated with Peter long before the events in Rome which led to the apostle's martyrdom. One need only read Acts 12:11-17, and also reflect upon what Mark must have experienced at Antioch in connection with the events of Gal. 2:9-21 to understand that his ties to Peter were strong and vital in more than one way. For this reason especially, the testimony of Papias as quoted by Eusebius has a ring of genuineness. Papias was presumably quoting his sainted teacher, the apostle John, when he wrote:

"And this the Elder said: 'Mark, having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately as many things as he remembered of the things said or done by Christ without, however, (recording it) in order. For he neither heard the Lord nor did he follow along with Him, but afterward with Peter, who used to adapt his teaching to need - but not as if he were making a full account of the Lord's sermons. So therefore Mark made no mistake in writing things as he recalled them; for he concerned himself with not omitting anything of what he heard or making

any false statements therein."

Less reliable but very interesting is a report by Origen who, in discussing the Gospels, observes that "the second is that of Mark who prepared it as Peter led him, who therefore, in his catholic epistle, acknowledged the evangelist as his son."

The conclusion sometimes drawn from the information thus assembled is that the writing of Luke's Gospel preceded that of Mark. Indeed, if we are bound to lend credence to a casual remark by Irenaeus, preserved by Eusebius, that Mark wrote "after the exodus" of Peter and Paul, and if we understand the "exodus" to mean their death, the above conclusion is inevitable. But once again it must be said that compelling decisions ought not be made to rest wholly upon passing and second-hand sources or uncertain terminology.

We have every reason to accept the cumulative evidence pointing to the fact that Mark's Gospel is, in a very real sense, Peter's Gospel. Separately and jointly they were the agents of the Holy Spirit in this production. Mark wrote the evangel as he heard and recorded it from the apostolic preaching of Peter, and the Holy Spirit preserved Mark from error in this blessed task. Thus the question concerning the sources of Mark's Gospel is also adequately answered. Even from the standpoint of the radical critics there is no need of inventing a mysterious Q-document. The record we have is wholly sufficient to account for whatever personal knowledge of the Gospel history Mark brought to his task.

The issues we have discussed, however, have a further bearing. Peter was Mark's apostolic source. But during what time period? Usually scholars limit the productive contact between Mark and Peter to the brief months of Peter's visit to Rome, at the close of which tradition claims that he suffered a martyr's death. Yet it seems such an unlikely time - during that short and without doubt dangerous mission to a city in turmoil - for calm, organized preaching and for the preparation of a written record. The persecution of the Christian congregation was in full swing.

Horrible things were happening daily to brave confessors of the Gospel. Life was an hourly emergency.

Must we assume that the Gospel was written during this critical period? Was there not perhaps a time in the association between Mark and Peter, already begun years earlier at Jerusalem (Acts 12:12), during which these two may have been laboring together in more normal surroundings? What does the record reveal? In Acts 15:39 we see a matured young Mark sailing off with Barnabas to Cyprus. It is about the year 52 A.D. At this point Mark disappears from our sight, and his whereabouts, his labors, are hidden from us for approximately ten years. He surfaces again only in the time of Paul's first imprisonment at Rome early in the sixties. What was he doing in the meantime? There is no answer. But on the same ground we have no reason for rejecting the possibility that at some point during those silent years Mark visited his Jerusalem home, and that thus or by some other route his feet found again the footprints of his beloved father in God. Peter's whereabouts in this period are also wholly unknown to us.

Any conclusions must then rest entirely upon speculations which, in turn, grow out of probabilities inherent in available data. There is certainly no evidence to preclude the thought that, before ever Peter and Mark met again in Rome, their joint labors may have had a written Gospel as one of its fruits. Whether it was made public or became available to the church at large at that earlier date is another matter. But one may without fear of just censure entertain the opinion that Mark's Gospel was the first of its kind among the inspired books of the New Testament.

In clearing the way for such a view it must be stipulated that the notion of a Q-Mark, or an "Ur-Markus," that is, a supposed preliminary or early version of our canonical Gospel, is not involved. The Holy Spirit did not need a trial run to get what He wanted. It is further recognized that some scholars at nearly every level of competence will regard any argument for the primacy of Mark as deplorably unscientific. They may, for example, point to the wide consensus in favor of a very early Hebrew version of

Matthew's Gospel; and they would perhaps say that even if the existence of such a document proved to be a pipe dream, few scholars doubt that Matthew wrote at a very early date. To this one can reply that anyone who thus considers the matter closed may avoid irritation by reading no further. Let him go his way in peace. It is, incidentally, unfortunate that few experts have the candor to say, as does Dr. R. Lenski, that "the date of Matthew is entirely a matter of conjecture," and may lie anywhere between 65 A.D. and twenty years earlier. Into this wide-open field we tip-toe with the suggestion that Mark may after all have been the first Synoptist.

There is a seeming rightness about the thought that this lovely Gospel should have been inspired to lead the series of divine records recounting the story of fulfillment, and specifically to form the first permanent record for Gentile readers. To Mark may have been given the initial privilege of formally reporting for all mankind the essential historical details of the divine works wrought in the fulness of the time, works which resulted in man's deliverance from sin and death. Mark tells this story as it had been seen and preached by Peter, with accuracy assured through the guidance of the Holy Ghost. It is significant that this Gospel contains a minimum of reporting of the things that Jesus said. While Matthew and Luke supply extensive segments of our Lord's discourses, carefully selected and arranged, the plan of Mark's Gospel is obviously different. It concentrates on the excitement and glory of the mighty deeds of God as our Redeemer. These deeds constitute the primary message of the Kingdom. If it pleased the Holy Spirit to begin the permanent written preachment of the saving Gospel with an objective historical recounting of the redemptive work, including only essential illustrative portions of discourse, then Mark's Gospel perfectly answered that purpose and belongs first in line. The fleshing-out of the historical record as well as the extensive details of the teachings and additional activities of the ministering Christ would be supplied by Matthew, Luke and John.

It is certainly of no vital importance for us whether

the Gospels appear in our Bibles in the order of their writing. It is most unlikely that all the churches of the apostolic age received and read the Gospels in the same chronological sequence. An inquiry into the order of their appearance admittedly has limited value. But if indeed an early date for Mark's Gospel is a justifiable assumption, the student proceeding from such an assumption will find some different and interesting patterns emerging from comparisons made in the texts of the Synoptists. It becomes more simple to relate Mark's structure and content to those of a later Matthew and Luke. If Luke, for example, wrote before Mark, and did so in Italy, it is not so readily understandable that a second and less comprehensive Gospel should have appeared in the same area and so soon. Moreover, some of the presuppositions upon which at least a segment of destructive negative criticism has rested its arguments in discussions of the Synoptic problem would be exposed as arbitrary if an earlier appearance of Mark's Gospel could be advanced as a logically sound and historically viable option.

E. Schaller

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NOTES ON I. JOHN 1:3-7.

Perhaps it was Dr. R. C. H. Lenski who, by means of his vivid graph at the close of the introduction to his Interpretation of the First Epistle of St. John, did most to make many of us thoroughly familiar with the peculiar cyclical structure of this New Testament book. Its style is not that of most other Epistles. It lacks the customary address, signature and greeting. It is not organized in the usual manner and does not lend itself readily to standard topical outlining. It seems like a rambling discourse until one sees the spiraling loops of thought development that rise, one beyond the other, to an abrupt climax.

The opening verses, 1:1-4, contain in summary the content and purpose of the entire Epistle. Beginning with v. 5, and continuing through 2:29, we have the first cycle of thought, that of Fellowship with its qualification and tests.

It is in the interest of true fellowship that John is writing. This is made plain in v. 3. For our purposes, therefore, this verse has been included in the section to be discussed here, though strictly it belongs to the base of the letter and not to the following verses, which introduce the first thought cycle.

As may be seen from the plural verbs and pronouns used in the first five verses of the Epistle, John is not

restricting his references to the writing of this particular Epistle when he says: "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you" (v. 3). As the last of their number he is speaking in behalf of himself and all the eye-witnesses who were commissioned as apostles (messengers) of the Lord Jesus Christ, including the one late arrival who wrote of Jesus: "And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time" (I Cor. 15:8). John is announcing the nature and purpose of the entire apostolic message, the inspired Word of the New Testament. Having themselves received this communication of life, having indeed touched and handled it in the Person of Jesus Christ, having learned to know and believe its content through the words which He spoke to them and by which He taught them, the apostles entered into that glorious fellowship, the "koinonia" or sharing, with the Triune God. To impart this supreme blessing to others, the apostles preached and wrote in human terms the Word of Life.

Now John begins to inscribe the first cycle of thought by asserting that the apostolic message centers in the great truth, exhibited by the Savior Himself, that "GOD IS LIGHT, and in Him is no darkness at all."

It ought not surprise us to find that the whole revelation of the gracious and merciful God, the manifestation of Himself to the world, should be summed up in that divine biographical truth. We recall that when the earth was without form and void, lying in stygian darkness, the Creator began His fashioning of the shapeless mass, suspended in a death of inertia, by endowing it with a creature whose character linked it with its Maker. "Let there be light," He said; and there it was, the cosmic reflection of the invisible God who Himself dwells in the light which no man can approach unto (I Tim. 6:16), and the most indispensable element of a creation in which all things must be good (Gen. 1:31).

Over and over again in Scripture we are reminded that, where God is revealed, radiance is His identifying mark. The burning bush at Horeb, the shining pillar of cloud and fire that hovered over Israel, the frequent ap-

pearances of what is called the glory of the Lord in both Testaments - all are constant reminders that God is light, and that what proceeds from Him must therefore have the same quality.

John does not, however, dwell on the mystery of the essence of God. For he is writing of what the apostles have seen and are declaring, and of the purpose of such revelation. That God is light, then, has something to do with His revelation. How frequently in Scripture do we not find the symbol of light used as a description of the medium by which the true God has made Himself known to us and wherewith He "enlightens" us, namely His holy Word. Without making a search for passages, some come immediately to mind. "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path," the Psalmist taught us to pray (Ps. 119:105); and again: "The entrance of thy word giveth light" (v. 130). David praises the Lord, saying: ".... in thy light shall we see light" (Ps. 36:9); and we hear him plead: "O send out thy light and thy truth: let them lead me" (Ps. 43:3).

In the New Testament this symbolism takes another turn. Here the Savior Himself is described as the brilliant refulgence of God's glory (Heb. 1:3); and the promise of Isaiah (49:6) is declared confirmed in Jesus as the "light of the Gentiles and the glory of thy people Israel" (Luke 2:32; see also 1:79). This imagery is then carried by the holy writers from the Word made flesh to the inspired and inscribed Word. Peter refers to the "prophetic word" as being like "a lamp shining in a dark place until the day dawn" (2 Pet. 1:19), the day in which for God's people "there shall no longer be night, and they have no need of lamplight or sunlight because God the Lord will shine upon them" (Rev. 22:5).

It is in this frame of reference that we should read what John here says. He speaks of a communicating God, a God manifested by Himself, both through His Son in person and by the Word of His Son, which the apostles were required to witness and proclaim. God is light; and as it is the property of light to dispel darkness, to penetrate wherever it shines, and to reveal, so the true God is

essentially self-revealing. In Him, John says, there is no darkness; and insofar as He chooses to make Himself known, He does so without shadow or distortion. This light of revelation may shine in the darkness and remain uncomprehended by the darkness (John 1:4. 5. 9. 10); but to those who receive it "He giveth power to become the sons of God" (v. 12). Thus it was for the apostles when they saw the light in the Word made flesh; and thus it is for all who by their word, which is God's, come to Him. "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6).

The Word is the place, the only place, where God and man can meet and be joined in wondrous koinonia, a concept which we translate with the expression "fellowship." Apart from such revelation man is darkness, and in darkness. It is only because of this revelation that Paul can jubilantly exhort the Ephesians: "For ye were once darkness; but (are) now a light in connection with the Lord. Walk as children of light" (Eph. 5:8).

Into this fellowship John invites his readers. Yet he adds a stern warning; and in the following he explains what such fellowship entails. "If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth." Light suffers no competition. It either rules or it withdraws. Paul asks: "What communion (koinonia) hath light with darkness?" (2 Cor. 6:14). True fellowship with the Father and the Son, as John subsequently explains in this cycle of the Epistle, involved:

- A. Living in the knowledge and penitent confession of sin (1:8 to 2:2).
- B. Living in obedience to Christ's commandments. John uses the word (entolee, 2:3) which our Lord employed as synonymous with "my Word" (see John 12:48-50; 14:21-24). The apostle is speaking of faithfulness to the word and doctrine, to the revelation. All error is to be repudiated. (2:3-6).
- C. Walking in the love of God, not in love of the

world. This is the fruit of the Truth, of Light. (2:6-17).

- D. Making confession which repudiates every lie. Lies are antichristian, whether they be small or great. Walking in the light is abiding in the Truth. In this context the Word is regarded as indivisible. (2:18-29).

Such are the qualities and requisites for "having fellowship with the Father and the Son." That is "walking in the light." Far indeed it is beyond our human powers to attain to such a state. But we know that the Holy Spirit can and does achieve it in us. Our koinonia with God is His product by means of that very Word of revelation. And the Holy Ghost creates such fellowship without asking us to identify, to point it out in others. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is everyone that is born of the Spirit" (John 3:8). Therefore in the words before us John also reminds us of the glorious circumstance that, as each one walks in the light and thus has koinonia with God, so all who walk in the light "have fellowship one with another," and are kept in this spiritual union through the constant forgiveness of their sins (v. 7). So exists the wondrous Church of Christ, the koinonia of saints, which we confess and believe.

If our thoughts then also extend to the external fellowshiping of confessing Christians, and to the conditions under which this may properly take place, we cannot dismiss what John has taught us: "... If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another..." That this refers to the spiritual fellowship in the Una Sancta we have already stated. The revealed truth of inspired Scripture is the projection of His light which the Lord has caused to shine among us, that we may have our being in it. Darkness represents the opposite - every contradiction of God's truth. Believers walk in the light by faith. None of them walk in darkness. If they err, it is from weakness of the flesh and ignorance, and is in them an object of daily repentance; and the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses them

from sin. They are God's children still.

In this area, however, God is the Judge, and the individual believer will be constantly and critically reviewing his own walk to see that it be in the light. We cannot discern the state of the hearts of others. We are left with the information supplied by John, namely that if a true believer errs, he does so in weakness, and that he who walks in darkness is not a believer, no matter how much he may pretend to be.

What bearing, if any, can this have upon the questions involved in external Christian fellowshiping? Since we are called upon to reflect the pureness of the sweet koinonia in the one holy Church in our dealings with one another, as we are admonished in Eph. 4:1-6, I Cor. 1:10 and other passages, we must surely apply to our outward fellowship practices the principles laid down by St. John. If there is no koinonia between light and darkness; if we cannot share in true fellowship with God and yet walk in darkness; if in the Church of the Saints we are united only because we walk in the light: then it would seem self-evident that in our visible expressions of unity we cannot include anyone overtly walking in darkness, that is, one who by profession endorses and supports error. We cannot embrace with tokens of fellowship even those who say they have accepted Christ while they are still openly walking in the darkness of a denial of truth.

God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. Could He look with approval upon any effort on our part to involve Him in a visible fellowship demonstration with heterodox churches or their adherents? Unscriptural manifestations of fellowship are, after all, not indicative of a "walking in the light." This touches an area of sanctified Christian living in which we need to think and proceed most circumspectly in the face of the strong demands of false ecumenism so prevalent and tempting in our day.

E. Schaller

==PREACHING THE WORD==

I.

Something About Priorities

THE TEXT: Mark 8:1-9.

There are few sayings of Jesus that awaken more concerns and palpitations in the hearts of His people than does His command and promise: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33). This means that if we devote prime time and energies to the increase of Christ's rule of grace, and of the righteousness He causes to prevail, in our life and in the lives of others, all these other things, namely the temporal needs of the body, our living, will be added by the Lord and we shall have no cause for worrying about them at all.

That is NOT the way men normally want to live. If they seek the kingdom at all, they want to seek it second, not first. First they want to seek "all these things." In their wisdom they assume that you can't do much of anything about the kingdom of God unless you first have enough of "all these things." In other words: First we must have a living, and then we can help the kingdom of God live and thrive. But our Lord turns it around: Let the kingdom of God live and prosper, and then you will also have a living.

As to the pursuit of the kingdom's righteousness, it is similarly assumed that one cannot engage in it on an empty stomach, and that if we seek that righteousness first, we will have empty stomachs. So it comes to pass that Christian people -- merchants, farmers, laborers, members of every profession -- are tempted to table the

demands of true Christian righteousness because to practice it might prove too expensive.

In the Gospel lection before us our Lord is shown as demonstrating by a miracle that He indeed meant what he said about "all these things;" and so He strengthens us to believe the promise:

ALL THESE THINGS SHALL BE ADDED UNTO YOU.

1.

The Son of God, who had humbled Himself for our redemption and left His throne of power on high, undertook to provide for the bodily needs of four thousand people who lacked food. So our text reports. Will He do the same for us? Will He do so, now that He has ascended into His glory and has received power over all things from the Father? Perhaps we shall look up to Him with more confidence if we inquire about His reasons for feeding the four thousand. This was not the first time He had done such a thing. Somewhat earlier in His ministry He had nourished five thousand people in much the same way (Mark 6:34-44). Our text shows that He did not repeat this power-work just for the sake of doing a miracle or to confound His enemies.

We are told that He was moved by sympathy (v. 2). His heart went out to this large multitude, whom He did not see just as a crowd, but as individuals. Here were many people in need, and in a predicament. They had been with Jesus some three days and had outstayed their supplies of food. There was no place for them to secure food in the region. All of them faced a long journey home on empty stomachs, and there would be suffering. The rich God cannot look with indifference upon the needs of His creatures. How full are His storehouses; how plentiful His resources! That some places on earth are barren, that supply and demand do not always properly coincide - that is a result of the ruin that man causes on earth by his wickedness, and not because the Creator runs out of resources or because He cannot cope with ecological problems and "population

explosions." He is not one who would look upon men in dire need of life's necessities and not wish to stretch out a helping hand of pity.

Surely we have found such compassion in Him. "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him" (Ps. 103:13). So it was that David could say: "I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread" (Ps. 37:25). It is beyond question certain that since the Lord Jesus Christ came down from heaven to bring us righteousness and lead us in its ways, He will surely not abandon us when we hold out hands of need seeking daily bread.

It appears further that Jesus fed the four thousand because nobody else could do so. What we have before us represents a significant example of a universal truth. Whatever notions men may have about providing for themselves, nobody was talking about that, there in the wilderness! Four thousand men, and twelve disciples, and nobody knew how to stave off hunger. Nobody made a move. The disciples shrugged their shoulders and said: "From whence can a man satisfy these men with bread here in the wilderness." Clearly enough it was beyond the reach of human power. The Lord fed these people because no one else could.

If we did not wish to believe the divine promise that "all these things will be added" unto us, where would we go for them? Where would we get them? Contrary to popular legend, God never told sinful man that he would have to make or earn his daily bread. Rather, He told him: "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread ..." But earning and eating are two different things. Even when God through St. Paul proclaims the principle that ".... if any would not work, neither should he eat" (II Thess. 3:10), this must not be construed to mean that human labor of itself produces bread. Without the providing and giving hand of the Lord we would each day be as helpless against the demon of malnutrition and starvation as was the multitude in the day of their need. Without the Lord there would be nothing except

thorns and thistles. Men are like children prattling wisely about supply and demand and quotas and overproduction; their economics are too often words full of sound and fury, signifying nothing. The simple truth is that we and all men had best hold to our hearts the promise: "All these things shall be added unto you," because that is the only way and the only reason we have a supply for our bodily needs: the Lord adds it! No one else EVER feeds us, least of all we ourselves.

And finally, Jesus makes it clear that He had one further reason for a special, providential feeding of the four thousand. They had been with Him for three days -- with HIM; and He felt a particular responsibility for them. Why were all these people far from their homes? And why had they waited so long before returning to their homes? Because they had left all to come and hear the Savior preach and teach. They were seeking the kingdom of God and its righteousness; and they had found them in Jesus their Savior, who held out to them the promise of the gift of eternal life and peace. Was this not a singularly appropriate time to demonstrate the validity of His gracious promise? He did not offer to fill the human spirit and leave the body to starve. He came to save body, soul and spirit; and when He has fed the souls, He does not turn away from other wants. Surely, if we honor His priorities, if we put first things first, we have placed ourselves wholly upon His mighty hand; and He cannot look away from us, or fail to open the door of His storehouse. Let us count on it!

It is true, the Savior seems to speak so simply and lightly about adding "all these things," whereas we have always felt that they come very hard, especially in this complex age. But that is our mistake. We are quite easily fed and clothed. This is the least of our many earthly problems. If only we could learn to get our supplies where Jesus gets them.

2.

Where does our Lord find the things He "adds?" The answer, so clear from our text, is two-fold. Jesus fed four thousand men and their dependents with seven small loaves of bread and a few small fish, and had seven picnic baskets of left-overs remaining from a bounteous meal. You need not ask where all this came from, because you know. Whence comes all the supply of the Lord's bounty? Do we produce it? What do WE sow that could grow and multiply of its own spontaneous germination, except our sins and thanklessness? Yet daily and richly the Holy Ghost forgives our sins, and God's mercy is new unto us every morning. Where does it all come from? We never ask that about forgiveness; why should we ask it about bread? All of it comes from the mighty power in the hands that bled for us, and from the love that found us when we sought Him not. As long as this love lasts, those who are gathered about Jesus, those of His kingdom, will not need to take charge of the production end of food and clothing. These things are so easy to furnish, so elementary in their origin. Where does all the air come from which we breathe every day? Is it easier to multiply that than to make loaves? Our thinking is certainly out of joint if we do not know and operate on the self-evident truth that our food and drink and shelter are made in heaven. We are asked only to honor it as a treasure in appreciation and in use.

Yet another matter must not be overlooked, for it is very important in this connection. If we ask where the Lord got the food He "added" to the multitude, our eyes turn also to the disciples; for in a way Jesus got it from them. When everybody else was out of food, the Twelve had no counsel to offer. Their attitude was that they were very sorry but could do nothing. Yet then they did something anyhow, perhaps quite against their fleshly instincts. They themselves, it seems, were not quite out of food; they had provided wisely, and for the journey back to civilization still carried seven loaves of bread in their packs.

Jesus took the bread away from them. He made

their baskets just as empty as were all the rest; but on their contribution he then built a supply which took care of everybody, including the Twelve, in greater abundance than they could have enjoyed had they kept it all for themselves.

If you ask where the Lord gets the things He "adds" unto us, let us not forget this point in divine economic policy. The Lord of heaven and earth expects to feed and clothe the needy through what we have already received from Him. He intends that we share with one another according to need. He says: "... deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thine house that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh ..." (Is. 58:7). Thus we are to be His suppliers; not recklessly, foolishly or impulsively, as poor stewards of His blessings, but as He will clearly indicate to us His wishes and a recognized need.

If we had been there on that memorable day in the wilderness north of Galilee, we might have shouted a protest: Lord, wait just a minute! We have barely enough for ourselves for the hours ahead; you take that away and nobody will be satisfied! Is that not how we so often reason today? We want the Savior to do His best for everybody; but we are reluctant to surrender what is ours, to put it into His hands for His use. That, however, is one way to be poor and to stay poor. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." Giving and sharing belong into the domain of kingdom righteousness, placed there by Him who gave HIMSELF for us. Herein lies the real test of our faith in His promise.

".... prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of Hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it." Mal. 3:10.

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II.

Reflections on a Christian Parochial School

THE TEXT: Revelation 3:2a.

The Savior ordered it written to His churches:
"BE WATCHFUL, AND STRENGTHEN THE THINGS
WHICH REMAIN, THAT ARE READY TO DIE"
About what is He speaking?

The most precious things we have received from Him, to live by, to bless our earthly lives, are not money or pleasure, fame or fortune, but right and truth and Spirit-filled hearts of faith; and the means by which these are enjoyed in home, church and country.

The most beautiful, precious things on earth are usually also the most delicate and tender. You see that in garden and field. No need of protecting thistles; they take care of themselves. But the useful crops, the delightful strawberry, or the gorgeous, exotic flower -- these are always, in a sense, ready to die. A little frost, a mild drought, a strong wind can destroy them; disease and blight are their mortal enemies.

This is a cruel, brutal, evil world of sin, and it kills delicate things. Therefore the Lord is gravely concerned, and wants us to be concerned, about the things that remain for our good and blessing. In some of our parishes, such concern is reflected in the fact and by the manner in which Christian day-schools are being maintained. In this season of the year, these schools are closing for the summer with the graduation of classes of children who have completed their elementary training.

Christian parents perhaps do not always use their schools for the right reason. Sometimes these may be for them just a convenience or a sentimental memory of their own childhood. It would be well if graduation exercises and closing ceremonies be an occasion for reflection upon the fact that a Christian school serves as an excellent response of serious discipleship to the Savior's urgent warning in

our text. Let us think and speak of

**THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOL AS AN INSTRUMENT FOR
STRENGTHENING THE THINGS THAT REMAIN....**

1.

Watchful Christians are people who know what is going on. Especially do they make it their business to keep an eye on what is most important to them as Christians. When Jesus says: "Be watchful," and then speaks about the things which remain but are ready to die, they have no difficulty in making a list of them.

Before our mind appears, first of all, the Christian home. We know how important, how necessary it is. From our Bible Stories we learn what such a home means to every Christian, and what happens to people when their home is not what it should be. Such beautiful examples as the home of Hannah and her husband in Old Testament days, or the earthly home of our Lord Jesus, or that of John the Baptist, show the blessed fruits that can spring from them. On the other hand we hear of homes like that of Eli, or of David, or of the people of Bethel, and the sadness, the tragedy that came to them when they failed. Christian homes in their true state are the foundation of the social order and a cradle of the Church. They remain among us by the grace of God; but they are ready to die!

Who can look with eyes of knowledge and not see the truth that Christian homes are not as they were in the days before the coming of the automobile, radio, television and the socialized State? Our children are not able to see the changes that have taken place; but there are plenty of us left who remember the homes of thirty, forty and fifty years ago. That was a time when they were homes, not hotels; when they, and not the schools, were the centers of training, and set the values; when members of a family lived together, worshipped and prayed together; when children stayed home of an evening, and their minds were developed in the warmth of family love.

Compare that with what we have today. Even the

best of homes are profoundly affected by the vast changes which have set in. Not only do houses now have picture windows; actually they seem to have lost their walls. The world rushes in and out at will, and so do the inhabitants. Go out on the traffic lanes at almost any time of day or evening, and you find yourself in traffic jams. Did you ever ask yourself who is in those thousands of cars? And where did those people or their fathers keep themselves before the cars came? The answer is that the horses were in the barn, and parents and children were in their homes, living and learning to live! But no longer. And the result of this change is difficult to grasp. We see it in the lower quality of most Christian homes today and the staggering problems that parents and police courts face in dealing with youth. Do you not think that the Christian home needs strengthening?

The second near-casualty of our age is Christian morality. By that we mean the Christian way of living, the rule of God's Law in our lives. Christians still know what that is; but to many it does not seem as important as once it was considered. Compare the ethical standards of forty years ago in the Christian community with those that prevail today. How changed is the sense of propriety, the feeling for the fitness of things. When you were young, my middle-aged friend, did Christian husbands and wives call in baby sitters so that they could while away evenings in saloons or night clubs? Did you talk back to your parents without being reminded of your place? Was it customary for fourteen-year-old girls to have steady dates? Did nobody ever say anything to you about good manners and respect for your elders?

The changes that have taken place in these elements of our life-pattern represent far more than a normal evolution of customs and viewpoints. They indicate that paganism has made itself acceptable in the popular mind as a proper modern form of manners and mores for a supposedly Christian society; and most tragically, that many Christians no longer recognize it for what it is. Yet because of the banishment of true Christian morality we see tragic head-

lines in our newspapers every day. Children are being encouraged to believe that anything is right if it pleases them and suits their purpose. The result fills our prisons. The more immediate result is that Christians are losing sensitivity for the divine standard of moral conduct. This too is ready to die. Do you think we ought to strengthen it? Even the world is vaguely alarmed by what is going on, but does not know what is wrong or what to do about it. Do we?

As the third thing which needs strengthening, let us mention the knowledge of Christian doctrine among us. Seldom if ever have there been so many people of Christian profession so uncertain of the Truth, of what to believe. In our own churches it is, of course, still understood and appreciated that the saving truths as taught in God's holy Word are clear, known to us, and not negotiable. We still have our Bible, and our Catechism. Yet the unspeakable confusion which reigns today on every side cannot but have its effect upon the victims of modern social stress and change. Surely the knowledge of the one Way, the path of truth and salvation, needs to be strengthened among us. Nothing is more necessary than that it be preserved; for this knowledge can perish also in our midst. Let us not have any illusions about Satan's growing campaign against the confessional position of our church.

May we, instead, be more ready to appreciate the efforts that are being made to strengthen these and all other precious things remaining to us. In that spirit we would make mention of our Christian parish schools. They must not be for us simply a facility that appeals to some Christians and not to others; that is supported by some and not by others; that means something to parents with children and to congregations that have a school, and means nothing to the rest of us. For the Christian day-school is far more than an instrument that can get children through eight grades, or nine. It is a significant factor in the answer we can give in response to the Lord's command.

2.

Lét us see how a Christian school may serve as a device for strengthening the things which remain. We must, however, first of all be careful to understand that no agency or institution set up by us can give us the precious blessings of a Christian home, Christian morality, or the certainty of Christian truth. These are pure gifts of God. He calls them into being through the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and by the Holy Spirit who mightily creates with the Word of reconciliation and forgiveness of sins through the atonement all men have received. No school ever devised can produce these eternal blessings for us; and it is upon them that we depend for strength toward a godly life and the hope of salvation. The glory is our God's when we can say that our Christian homes, our Christian standards and the Bible doctrine remain to bless us.

But it is to be noted that our Lord has commanded us to strengthen these things. He has laid upon us a work to do, namely to take His gifts in hand and provide for them, guard them, observe where their beneficent influence in our lives is rendered vulnerable by the destructive forces loose in this terrible age, and seek to meet their challenge. One of the most effective instruments for this effort is the Christian school.

It is designed to strengthen the things which remain by reinforcing them in the hearts of the rising generation, training our children in the Christian view of life. A Christian looks out at life and the world with different eyes than the unbeliever. He sees the whole structure of human society in the light of God's purpose for the lost and condemned human race. He sees God's perfect Redemption, wrought in Christ Jesus, as the great event by which all else on earth must be judged and determined. Everything receives its value from what God has done for us when He took our sins away and offered us a place in heaven. Earthly knowledge is nothing unless it somehow serves the one great purpose in our life thus held out to us. The pursuit of this objective, our final deliverance and salvation, is

what a Christian home in its true form will facilitate and promote. It will not and must not be a factory producing materialistic creatures intent upon creating a fleshly heaven on earth, or a hot-bed of protest and rebellion against order and constituted authority, but a haven for those who would quietly cultivate a life of sanctification in the fear of God. Of such homes the Christian school can be a powerful support and protector.

The Christian school also exists to promote true Christian standards of morality. It leads children in the old paths and good ways. In the best sense a Christian school is never "modern." It is not subject to the direction of an erratic, unstable world opinion, but exists to oppose the world when it departs from the Word and Will of God. Surely it will use the best educational methods and tools available; but it will employ them to train children in the way of the Law of God and the principles of the kingdom as our Savior expounded them to his disciples. Outside a godly home there is nothing that can better strengthen Christian behavior than such a school.

And finally, since there is so great a need that the hearts of the young be established in the Truth, the Christian school is an agency of superior value; for by the constant, daily use of God's Word it instills and confirms knowledge of the eternal verities, thus fostering faith and love.

"How shall the young secure their hearts
And guard their lives from sin?
Thy Word the choicest rules imparts
To keep the conscience clean."

Watchful Christians, reading aright the signs of the times, will not fail to give most serious and deliberate consideration to the need of establishing and maintaining in their midst a Christian day school for the lambs of Christ's fold. We live in a state of spiritual emergency. What will YOU do to "strengthen the things that remain?"

E. Schaller

== PANORAMA ==

BOOK REVIEWS

I.

"The Building of the Church, "
by Charles E. Jefferson; Reprinted
1969, Baker Book House; paperback,
306 pp. Price: \$2.95.

The reprinting of older religious and theological works, a task to which Baker Book House devotes much of its productive effort, has undoubted merit especially for those who find such writings a welcome antidote for the flood of modernistic and often faith-destroying trash which has invaded the market today. Despite the fact that Baker reprints almost exclusively reflect a Calvinist repristination theology, we value scholarly studies when and insofar as they speak and defend Scriptural truth.

Obviously not all the books thus offered have equal merit. The present reprint, taken from the original edition of 1910, is a book difficult to recommend. It contains the Lyman Beecher lectures of that year at Yale Divinity School.

The author's thesis is that a study of preaching, the chief work of the pastor, should be approached through a knowledge of the Church. He says: "The traditional method has been to reach the church through the preacher. Let us in this course of lectures try to reach the preacher through the church. It has become the fashion to come to the congregation through the sermon. It may prove advantageous to come to the sermon through the congregation."... (p. 5).

In the development of this proposition the author makes many stimulating observations. The weakness in his presentation, however, lies in his interchanging practice of speaking of the "church" on the one hand as the communion of saints, the gathering of the elect, and on the other hand as an outward organization, a corporate con-

gregation. One does not always know what Dr. Jefferson is building!

He makes some strange remarks. For example: "The Bible is not enough to make men strong. Human hands and hearts are needed. The revelation which came through holy men of old must be completed by a revelation coming through men now living." (p. 70). And again: "The wise preacher will waste no time in hurling thunderbolts at rival organizations, but will set to work with both hands to strengthen the church where the church today is weakest." (p. 65). Evidently the author does not share St. Paul's feelings about the need of polemics.

But he also has some excellent points to underscore. Thus he remarks: "There are congregations which have scant sympathy with the outside world, because their members have meager sympathy with one another." (p. 61). Concerning the pastor's task he declares: "It is easy to denounce sins in general and still easier to unfold beautiful ideas, but to induce different classes of church members to live and work together as Christians -- this is the most stupendous and heartbreaking labor to which a minister of the Gospel can set himself." (p. 76).

With such observations we can identify.

E. Schaller

II.

"A Symposium On Creation-II," by
Donald W. Patten and Others;
Baker Book House; paperback, \$1.95.

I would imagine that in the course of most Christians' lives they answer questions concerning evolution with a shrug and: "Oh, that's nonsense; God says" A thorough study of this book and others like it may give a new spirit to discussions with your members or prospective members. You may still say "God says"; but at the same time you may offer a very scientific explanation that concurs with what God says.

This book comes at a time when Darwin's image has become tarnished, Kant's theory is being questioned, and scientists are looking for new hypotheses. This book, along with the others in the series, are meant to be an approach to the problems which Darwin's theories have caused scientists. It is a straightforward approach and a simple answer --- Scripture.

The six contributors to this book write on six different topics concerning Creation, Catastrophism, and Evolution. Many of the problems of evolution are frankly discussed in terms that all can understand. Editor Patten has the lead article entitled: "The Pre-flood Greenhouse Effect." The other titles are just as intriguing. They are: "Carbon-14 Dating of Fossils"; "Dating the Earth and Fossils"; "A Scriptural Groundwork for Historical Geology"; "Genesis Time - A Spiritual Consideration"; "The Mythological Character of Evolution"; and: "Creation: The Only Reasonable Explanation of Natural Phenomena."

Editor Patten explains that this Symposium, like the first, intends to achieve:

1. A Balance between biological subject materials and earth history.
2. A balance between Catastrophism and Creationism, forming a dual framework of thought.
3. A balance between negative assertions and positive conclusions, ideas, and proposals constructive in nature.
4. A balance between the philosophical and the scientific.
5. A balance between practical and theoretical thought.
6. A balance between recognized and defensible assumption, and logical conclusion.

The authors of the various articles seem to carry good qualifications for the work they are doing. We may debate some of the Scriptural references used and the interpretation of these references, but we would hardly doubt the honesty or the quality of the reporting concerning the scientific aspects of the articles.

As close as one may come to a theme for these articles would be that evolution is a myth. It is unscientific in many ways. Since it is only a theory, why not present a theory that is more scientific and also agrees with Scripture? In some cases the ideas may have been suggested by various passages from God's Word.

You will find this fascinating reading if you are reading these ideas for the first time. If you have previously been acquainted with them, you will enjoy and want them in this usable and updated form.

It is of course very hard to find a book on this subject that would say all things just as you or I would. For the most part five of the six essays are of the easy-to-take type. Only one of them gives any serious problems. Dr. R. Clyde McCone in his "Genesis Time - A Spiritual Consideration" leaves us very cold with his assertion that you may not read time into the creation account. This article casts grave doubt upon the Scriptural teaching concerning the length of a creative day. "Evening and morning" mean nothing to the author. Here in simple language God taught man what a day was and then repeated it so we would learn; and yet this author missed it completely. The inclusion of this article by the editor casts a shadow over the whole book. Do not, however, discard the entire book because of this one article. You will find much enjoyment in these articles and, I believe, gain much respect for these scientists who write as concerned, confessing Christians.

R. Roehl

NOTICE

The STATEMENT OF FAITH AND PURPOSE OF THE CHURCH OF THE LUTHERAN CONFESSION, originally published in the May 1969 issue of the Journal of Theology, is now available in revised form as a pamphlet. It may be ordered from: The CLC Book House, Box 145, New Ulm, Minn. 56073. The price is 45¢ per copy, postpaid.

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The JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY is published at Eau Claire, Wisconsin, by authorization of the Church Of The Lutheran Confession.

Subscriptions: \$3.00 per year, \$5.50 for 2 years, payable in advance.

Issues are dated: March, May, July, October, December.

Editor: Prof. E. Schaller, 513 W. Grover Rd.,

Eau Claire, Wisconsin 54701.

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

Contributing Editors: M. Galstad, G. Radtke,
G. Sydow, F. Tiefel.

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