



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

I Timothy 4:15

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# ESSAYS AND ARTICLES

## 1521-1971: IN COMMEMORATION OF LUTHER'S STAND AT WORMS.

### I.

Four years ago it was the privilege of the present writer to prepare an essay for the general Pastoral Conference of the Church of the Lutheran Confession in commemoration of the 450th anniversary of the Reformation, using the posting of the Ninety-five Theses on the door of the Schlosskirche at Wittenberg as the accepted turning-point, October 31, 1517. This essay, published in the December, 1967, issue of the Journal of Theology, provided a study of one of Luther's writings of 1520, his "Treatise on Good Works." The selection was made because of its immediacy and the direct application of the contents of the treatise to current problems of our own times, presenting as it does the doctrinal foundation of a Christian's concern for society.

Now, during 1971, we are celebrating another 450th anniversary. On April 18, 1521, Martin Luther took his historic stand at the Diet of Worms. He had been asked, on the previous day, to acknowledge certain of his writings and to state clearly and unequivocally whether or not he would retract them. Luther's well-known reply, after he had been granted a day to consider the question, has been long remembered as a treasured part of our Reformation heritage: "Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason (for I do not trust either in the pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted, and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go

against conscience. I cannot do otherwise; here I stand, may God help me. Amen." (LW, Vol. 32, p. 112f.)\*

Luther's theology had taken rapid strides during the four years since he had voiced his willingness to question through disputation the validity of Rome's doctrine of indulgences. Actually, one would have to go farther back to understand just how rapid those strides were. At the time when Luther received his doctoral degree in theology at Wittenberg in 1512, he had very little knowledge of either Hebrew or Greek. As a matter of fact, he probably did not seriously undertake the study of Greek until 1514, a scant three years before he published his Ninety-five Theses. Schwiebert points out: "In 1516, when Luther began to use Erasmus' Greek New Testament, he was still a novice; but as he matured through 1517 and 1518, his mastery of Greek and Hebrew became more apparent and with it, also, his understanding of the Bible." (Schwiebert, p. 281)\* This is not to say that God demands a knowledge of the original languages of the Bible on the part of one to whom the Holy Spirit reveals truth. After all, Luther caught his first glimpse of the glorious doctrine of *Justitia Dei*, which he described as having opened for him the gates of Paradise, through his studies in the Vulgate sometime between 1513 and 1515.

Luther's advancement was phenomenal also in other areas of theology during this period. In preparing for the Leipzig debate with Eck, in 1519, he wrote a treatise entitled Resolutio Lutheriana super propositione sua decima tertia de potestate papae, (defending the thirteenth and last thesis in his earlier reply to Eck, "The Disputation and Excusation of Brother Martin Luther against the Accusations of Dr. John Eck," May 16, 1519). It is said that this treatise demonstrates the reformer's "amazing capacity to digest materials in a few months, which would have required years for the average scholar." (Schwiebert, page 390). In this bit of writing Luther demonstrated that he was

\* "Luther's Works," American Edition; 55 volumes.

\* "Luther and his Times," by E. G. Schwiebert.

completely familiar, not only with all documentation of the Roman Church of his day in support of papal primacy, but also with the pertinent passages of Scripture, presenting their true meaning in a truly exegetical-grammatical sense, being faithful to their context, and then also delineating how these passages had been traditionally interpreted from the Church Fathers down to the sixteenth-century Roman propagandists.

One indication of the rapid advancement in the development of Luther's theology is found in the fact that, although almost lost in the confusion of the University of Erfurt's refusal to judge the Leipzig Debate and the Sarbonne's supercilious and bombastic judgment of it, the issue of indulgences, which had originated the conflict, had been decided in Luther's favor by default. Eck spoke in such a conciliatory fashion regarding the abuses of indulgences that Luther later wrote to Spalatin: "On the subject of indulgences we were almost in agreement. If this doctrine had been preached by the indulgence sellers, the name of Martin would today have been unknown and the indulgence commissaries would have died of hunger if the people had been taught not to rely on this wretched system." (Schwiebert, p. 412)

The Leipzig Debate, although announced as a contest between Eck and Carlstadt on the subject of the freedom of the will and grace, was revealed by Eck's advance publication, "Twelve Theses," as being, in reality, a disputation between Eck and Luther on penance, indulgence, good works, purgatory, and papal power. The real struggle in the debate was concerned with the last of these. Eck took the part of the Roman traditionalists and cited the Church fathers to support the view that the papacy was truly the successor of Peter and thus the Vicar of Christ. Luther, on the other hand, had by this time come to realize from his thorough-going studies of church history that councils and popes can and do err, and that the concept of the primacy of the pope was principally the product of the last 400 years. He repeatedly stated that the only safe guide in matters of doctrine is Scripture, and in a masterful way he

demonstrated that the petra of Matthew 16:18 is Peter's confession and not Peter, thus giving Eck and all hearers an opportunity to hear Scripture interpreted in the light of Scripture and of the entire Gospel. It became increasingly evident that here was the real arena in which the struggle between Wittenberg and Rome would take place: papal decrees and tradition opposed by Scripture.

From the time of the Leipzig Debate until Luther was summoned to Worms, his pen was never idle. An extremely facile writer, Luther wrote sixteen treatises, more than 400 pages of printed material, in the first six months following the debate, in addition to preparing his lectures for the classroom and preaching on Sundays and festival days in the Town Church and every afternoon in the Augustinian chapel at the cloister in Wittenberg. Consequently, in order to accomplish all this, he was obliged to write very fast and was seldom able to correct his manuscripts or to rewrite them. In spite of these limitations, some of Luther's most important writing was done during this period; for example, his first Commentary on Galatians, his second series of lectures on the Psalms, his short and long Sermons on Usury, sermons on the Ban and on the Eucharist. The above-mentioned Treatise on Good Works was published in 1520, and was thought by many to be superior to the three major works of the summer of that same year: the Address to the German Nobility, The Babylonian Captivity of the Church, and The Freedom of the Christian. In late 1520 and early 1521 Luther produced the last of his writings prior to the Diet of Worms, entitled Defense and Explanation of All the Articles of Dr. Martin Luther which were Unjustly Condemned by the Roman Bull. These major works, in addition to a few others, comprised the stack of books piled onto a bench in the upper room of the Pfalz in Worms where Luther was to take his stand.

It is, then, a highly significant anniversary which we are now observing 450 years later. We are celebrating the "conscience captive to the Word of God" which will not permit a man of God to retract the truth, even in the face of

extreme personal danger. All thanks and praise be to our merciful God! It is our intention to commemorate Luther's stand at Worms from time to time during this anniversary year, by a consideration of certain of his works written and published in that year, 1521.

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The papal bull, Exsurge Domine, published on June 15, 1520, did not yet proclaim Luther's excommunication. Rather, its purpose was to expose and condemn forty-one of Luther's propositions which had been presented to the church by that date. Consequently the bull had nothing to say concerning the most recent of Luther's works, those published in the latter half of 1520. As a matter of fact, most of the papal objections are leveled against writings of 1518 and 1519, with only two of the forty-one specific charges referring to earlier writings of 1520, namely article 24, condemning a statement from Luther's sermon on the Ban, and article 41, condemning a portion of his longer sermon on Usury.

It was Luther's opponent at Leipzig, John Eck, who was to a great extent responsible for the pope's objections to Luther's doctrines. He had gone to Rome for the purpose of serving as a Luther expert in the papal attempt to discredit Luther and to carry out steps necessary to put the machinery of excommunication into action. In his methods of debate, Eck had been accused by some as having a vast amount of quotable knowledge in his memory, but as lacking the ability to organize and distill it and to apply it properly. This appears to be a fair criticism of the papal bull as well, for it lists the forty-one statements of Luther in a haphazard fashion, having apparently selected them without regard to context and application. Luther was granted sixty days in which to retract the theses which the bull condemned and was forbidden to write and publish any additional works. The first of Luther's 1521 writings which we shall consider, Defense and Explanation of All the Articles, was the reformer's answer to the charges of false doctrine presented by the papal bull. We are using the translation by Dr. Charles

M. Jacobs in the Philadelphia edition of Luther, as revised and published in the American edition of Luther's Works, Volume 32.

In his introduction Luther minces no words as he compares the present state of affairs in the papacy with the situation depicted in Isaiah 19:14; that is, God has given over these "tyrants of Christendom" to their blindness and confusion to such a degree, because of their resistance to His Truth, that they no longer are able to see their error. Indeed, they have gone so far as to neglect even the outward appearance of fairness. For this reason the papal bull has been received with contempt and derision by many.

There are certain introductory charges against Luther that must be dealt with before he can take up the forty-one major statements of his which the papacy had condemned. First, he replied to the charge that he was caustic and impatient, by admitting this to be the case only when led into controversies, "silly arguments about the papacy, indulgences, and similar foolishness;" whereas he maintained that this was not the case in books where he was treating Christian doctrine. He continued to declare that, contrary to his opponents' charge, he had never claimed to have more knowledge than others, nor had he ever sought notoriety in his work. Rather, his enemies had forced him to leave the seclusion of his study. Now that his writings have gained adherents, they charge him with seeking to be a prophet over others. However, even if that were the case, God may have raised him up in their midst, and they were running the risk that they were opposing God in him. For was it not true that God usually raised up prophets from low and humble persons, rather than from among those of high degree? After using the examples from both the Old and New Testaments as evidence of the above assertion, and also to demonstrate that God generally raised only one prophet at a time (and therefore Luther was not disturbed to find himself alone in leadership at his time), he presented the examples of St. Ambrose, St. Jerome and St. Augustine for the same purpose. The real point, however, is that whether or not he is a prophet, he is sure

that the Word of God is with him. "For I have the Scriptures on my side and they have only their own doctrine. This gives me courage, so that the more they despise and persecute me, the less I fear them."

The authors of the bull have adduced the argument that Luther's doctrines are new, and that it should not be thought that so many church authorities can have been wrong for so long a time. Luther demolished this reasoning very easily by remarking that "if length of time were sufficient proof, the Jews would have had the strongest kind of case against Christ on that ground. His doctrine was different from any they had heard for a thousand years. The Gentiles, too, would have been justified in regarding the apostles with contempt, since their ancestors for more than three thousand years held to a different faith." Luther asserted that he was preaching nothing new, but that, rather, the things of Christ had been allowed to perish by the very people who ought to have preserved them, namely the bishops and scholars. Nevertheless, by God's grace, Luther had no doubt that the truth had still been retained in some hearts to this day, even if those hearts were in infants in the cradle. Again, the real point is not: how long one has held to what he believes; rather, the point is: on what is that faith based? The Christians' real treasure is found in Christ and His Word. As Christ allowed His hands, feet and side to be touched so that the disciples might be strengthened in faith, so then Christians are to touch and examine the Scripture for the very same reason. "All other writings are treacherous; they may be spirits in the air (cf. Eph. 2:2) which have no flesh or bone, as Christ had." Luther quoted with approval Augustine's statement in his letter to Jerome: "I have learned to do only those books that are called the holy Scriptures the honor of believing firmly that none of the writers has ever erred. All others I so read as not to hold what they say to be the truth unless they prove it to me by holy Scripture or clear reason." It is in this manner, with Scripture alone as his evidence, that Luther will give answer to the pope's forty-one charges of doctrinal error.



The papal bull's charges of error referred to forty-one statements of Luther in fifteen separate documents. These articles are listed in the decree in helter-skelter fashion, and consequently Luther's response in the book under discussion follows them in the order presented in the decree. After some consideration of whether or not it would be easier to attempt to analyze these articles according to the chronology or, perhaps, according to their source, the present writer has decided to leave them in the order they have. It is reasoned that in this manner, the reader who wishes to refer to the work itself may more readily do so.

The source of the forty-one articles is as follows: From the Ninety-five Theses (1517), numbers 4 and 17; from the Explanation of the Ninety-five Theses (1518), numbers 1, 3, 10, 20, 21, 22, 26, 28, 32, 33, 34, 35, 39 and 40; from the Heidelberg Disputation (1518), number 36; from the Sermon on Indulgence and Grace (1518), number 5; from the Sermon on Repentance (1518), numbers 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12 and 14; from the Sermon on the Worthy Preparation of the Heart to Receive the Sacrament of the Eucharist (1518), number 15; from the Sermon on Excommunication (1518), number 23; from Thesis 2 in the Leipzig Debate (1519), number 2; from the Sermon on the Sacrament of Penance (1519), number 13; from the Treatise on the Blessed Sacrament (1519), number 16; from the Disputation of Johann Eck and Martin Luther (1519), numbers 18, 19, 30, 37 and 38; from the Explanation of the Articles Debated at Leipzig (1519), numbers 27, 29 and 31; from the Defense against the Malignant Judgment of Johann Eck (1519), number 25; from the Treatise concerning the Ban (1520), number 24; and, finally, from the Longer Treatise on Usury (1520), number 41.

It is neither necessary or desirable to include here a summary discussion of all of the forty-one articles in this work of Luther. What follows is a representative sampling of those articles regarded as being of more general importance and/or interest. The reader is urged to read the entire treatise.

Article 1: "It is heresy to hold that the sacraments

give grace to all who do not put an obstacle in the way." This statement of Luther, which brought upon him the ire of the Curia, had been made in opposition to the Roman teaching that the holy sacraments give grace to anyone, even if he does not repent his sin and has no intention to do good, and that it is enough that he not place any obstacle in the way, that is, that the individual be without wanton desire to sin. In the face of this teaching, Luther maintained that the worthy reception of the sacrament has two basic requirements, namely, genuine repentance for sin and firm faith within the heart. Without faith, the putting away of the "obstacle" is lost labor.

Article 2: "He who denies that after baptism sin remains in every child tramples upon Christ and St. Paul." On the basis of Rom. 7:7. 18 25; Gal. 5:17; and other passages, Luther contended that "by condemning this article, the bull calls God a liar and blasphemes Him" (I John 1:8). In the covenant of Baptism a beginning is made in us, but because our flesh still clings to us, so long as we live here on earth, believing in His Word, "we are a work that God has begun, but not yet completed; but after death we shall be perfect, a divine work without sin or fault." The Romans do not like to call the evil which remains after Baptism sin; they argue that it is a defect or weakness, rather than sin. Such playing with words cannot be supported by Scripture, particularly in passages such as I John 1:10. The Romans claim that the imperfection or weakness which remains after Baptism can remain a matter under their authority. Luther, however, preferred to conclude his defense with the words of St. Augustine: "Sin is forgiven in baptism; not that it is no longer present, but it is not imputed."

Article 3: "The tinder of original sin, even without actual sin, bars the entrance to the kingdom of heaven." By tinder Luther means the sin which is committed after Baptism. It is called "tinder" because like tinder it is easily set ablaze and can readily destroy. Let no one think that this sin cannot condemn the individual who possesses it just as readily as the inherited sins and guilt

washed away in Baptism. For no one will enter heaven who has not had his sins removed. Luther sarcastically comments that he cannot imagine what other kind of "heaven" the pope may have, where sin does not bar the entrance. "It may be that the pope and his papists want to build themselves a heaven of their own, like those the jugglers build themselves out of linen cloth at the Shrove Tuesday carnival," referring to the cloth canopy over the stage, which was termed "heaven."

Article 4: "A dying man's imperfect love for God brings with it, beyond doubt, great fear. This of itself might be a purgatory and bar the entrance to heaven." This statement is a simple recasting of I John 4:18: "Where fear is, love is not perfect, for perfect love drives out fear." For this reason Luther was at a loss as to the reasons for the papal disapproval of the article, unless it might be that he is leaving the question of purgatory unresolved. Luther at this time believed, for his own part, in the doctrine of a purgatory; but he was careful to state, particularly in his discussion of articles 37 through 40, that Scripture has no proof for the existence of purgatory. Luther preferred to discuss such questions as "scholarly problems," rather than as articles of faith.

Articles 5 through 14 have to do with Luther's statements condemning the false teachings of Rome regarding penance. Most of the articles are from his Sermon on Repentance.

Article 15: "They are greatly in error who, when communing, rely on the fact that they have confessed, or that they are not aware of any mortal sin, and have said their prayers. Such people eat and drink judgment to themselves. But if they believe and trust that in the sacrament they receive grace; this faith alone makes them pure and worthy."

Article 16: "It would be advisable that the church, in a general council, should decree that both kinds be given in the sacrament to the laity; and the Bohemians (adherents of John Huss), who receive both kinds, are neither heretics nor schismatics." In regard to article 15, Luther does not

condemn preparation for communion such as confession and prayers, or the examining of oneself as to sin. But these acts do not provide the one thing needful for an efficacious reception of the sacrament, which only faith can supply. He complains that the papists are always trying to drive man away from faith and into works; "I wish we would be driven away from works and into faith, for the works will surely follow faith, but faith never follows works."

Luther's defense of Article 16 is a masterful presentation of his conviction that Scripture alone provides the basis for doctrine. Luther had come a long way from the Augustinian cloister by this time; he was free of papal decrees in matters of establishing faith. The reader is asked to read the full text of Article 27, in which Luther clearly and unmistakably points out his unshakeable conviction that the pope has no authority to establish articles of faith or even commandments regarding morals and good works.

Articles 17 through 22 concern indulgences. The most significant statement Luther has to make about them here is, perhaps, his confession: "I am most heartily sorry for every good word that I have ever said about them" (indulgences).

Articles 23 and 24 speak of the pope's arrogation to himself of the authority to damn souls by means of the ban, which is really no more his rightful power than is his claimed power to save souls by means of indulgences.

Article 25: "The Roman bishop, the successor of St. Peter, is not by Christ's appointment vicar of Christ over all the churches of the world." Is it not amazing, Luther asked, that since his opponents consider the papacy the most important and most necessary feature in the church, nothing is said openly in the whole Bible about it? The only passages that the papists adduce are Matt. 16:18 ("Thou art Peter . . .") and John 21:15-19 ("Feed my sheep . . ."). Yet these passages, understood and interpreted in the only true and correct way, that is, in the light of their context and of other clear passages, do not support the doctrine of the papacy at all; rather, they contradict it.

Matthew 16:18 declares that the gates of hell shall not prevail against the rock. If the rock is papal power and the building upon it represents submission to papal authority, how can it be explained that much of Christendom (the Greeks, the Bohemians, Africa and the entire Orient) has fallen away from the pope? No, the rock is Peter's confession and therefore Christ Himself! John 21:15-19 clearly shows that Peter is to feed, that is, to tend the sheep of God. The evil spirit has taught the pope that to "tend" means to "preside" or rule over. This tending is to be done in love, as the passage quite evidently reveals that the basis of tending is love for Christ. If the pope claims to be Peter's successor, then let him learn from Peter's example. Scripture shows that the other apostles in Jerusalem sent Peter and John to Samaria to strengthen the Christians there. "If, then, St. Peter was a messenger, subject to the others, why does his successor, or rather his oppressor, the pope, claim to be subject to no one?"

Article 28: "If the pope, together with a large portion of the church, professed a certain opinion, and even though he were not in error, it would nevertheless be neither sin nor heresy to hold a different opinion, especially in matters not necessary to salvation, until such time as a general council approves one opinion and condemns the other." This article is presented in preferment to others which have been omitted from the present discussion, because of two things. First, in his argument Luther uses the difference of opinion on the Immaculate Conception of Mary, held at that time by the Dominicans on one side and the Franciscans on the other, to illustrate that he is speaking only "of things not necessary to salvation" and held so by the pope himself. Luther stated that in his opinion Article 28 only repeated what the papists had declared. However, since it has been made a matter of controversy, Luther now wished to retract the article. "I have said in this article, very foolishly, that we need not believe the pope in regard to unnecessary matters. I should have said, if the pope and his papists assembled in a council are so frivolous and irresponsible as to waste time and money

on unnecessary questions, when it is the business of a council to deal only with the important and necessary affairs of the church, we should not only refuse to obey them, but consider them insane or criminals." And, sarcastically, "But the bull is right when it turns over to the papists and their councils the decision of useless questions. For these mockers of the church ought to be given over by the wrath of God to such a perverse mind that they do not take the necessary things to heart and deal only with unnecessary matters. They deserve no better fate."

Article 36: "Since the fall of Adam, or after actual sin, free will exists only in name, and when it does what it can it commits sin." (We are told in a footnote in the American edition of Luther's Works that the expression "Wenn er thut das seine" -- Latin: "dum facit, quod in se est" -- is a scholastic phrase implying that a Christian can do meritorious works agreeable to God). Luther quotes Moses in Gen. 6:5 and 8:21: "Everything that the heart of man craves and desires is evil at all times." It is, therefore, a profound error to teach that the will is by nature free and can, without grace, perform acts and deeds pleasing to God. Whatever good may stem from man's will is performed in him only through grace; the sophists who teach that after Baptism man is able to perform meritorious works are wrong. "Scripture says of man that he is altogether flesh, and the flesh is most directly opposed to the spirit according to Gal. 5:17. And yet they confuse everything and say that the free will, which is utter flesh, seeks after the spirit." St. Paul declares in Rom. 14:23: "Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin." Luther quotes Augustine: "The free will, without God's grace, can do nothing but sin."

It is of particular interest to us that in this response Luther boldly links the papacy with the Antichrist. He was becoming, during these years, more and more convinced that the Scriptural prophecies regarding the Antichrist found fulfillment in the papacy. He declared: "We ought, therefore, avoid the sophists, and speak clearly and plainly as does Scripture, especially when we speak of God's most

profound design. This error about 'free will' is a special doctrine of Antichrist. Small wonder that it has spread all over the world, for it is written of this Antichrist that he will seduce the whole world. Only few Christians will be saved (II Thess. 2:10). Woe unto him!"

Article 41: "The prelates of the church and the secular princes would do no wrong if they wiped out all the mendicant orders." By his use of the term "wipe out," as Luther went to some length to explain, is not to imply destruction but, rather, removal or surrender of them. Plainly he declared that he wished that there were no mendicant orders, feeling that it is sin and shame to have begging going on in Christendom. "We ought to be ashamed in the sight of God and man that a Christian man goes publicly begging among us. We ought to anticipate men's wants and help the poor so that there would be no need for begging. But this too is one of the Antichrist's tricks. He has established the mendicant orders, for otherwise he would be short of apostles, be too weak against the bishops and pastors, and would not be able to raise his throne above heaven and earth."

We will have more to say on the general subject of orders, when at a later time, D. v., we will discuss another writing of 1521: "The Judgment of Martin Luther on Monastic Vows."

J. Lau



### ANNOUNCEMENT

Immanuel Lutheran College, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, will sponsor a Summer Seminar for pastors and teachers, July 5 through 9, 1971. Interested pastors, teachers and others may obtain particulars on course offerings by consulting the Lutheran Spokesman or by corresponding with the Seminar Committee, Immanuel Lutheran College, Eau Claire, Wis. 54701.

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# PREACHING THE WORD

## LENTEN MESSAGES IN HEBREWS

### I.

THE TEXT: Hebrews 2:6-10.

Once again Christians have been assembling in their churches, far and wide, to observe in special worship the season of Lent. It is hardly necessary to remind them of the purpose of this observance. We make the Lenten journey annually because it takes us through the scenes of the suffering and death of our Lord Jesus Christ. But let us be clear as to the reason for this regular journey.

Surely it is not made out of ignorance or curiosity, as though we had never been this way before; for the Passion story is familiar ground to most of us since childhood. Perhaps we could explain that we are just following a pious custom of our church; or that we observe Lent because this practice fills our souls with strength and gives us spiritual exercise. But the real reason lies in that inner hunger, the craving which we find so hard to put into words and yet so necessary to satisfy. And we believe that it can be satisfied only with the Lenten message.

There is in the human soul a deep desire for better things than those we now enjoy. It is like the yearning of a slave who knows that he was born to be free, yet must spend his days in bondage. Man looks about at the world in which he lives, where everything that he touches turns out badly for him, where he finds that he is not the master, but a helpless instrument of forces that he cannot control, including his own lusts and desires; and he asks himself: Is this sorry kind of life really what I was intended for? His heart answers: No! So he dreams of better things, and often fills his thoughts with deceitful promises to quiet his



longing. He says: Be patient; in time you will rise to great heights. It will not always be as it now is. Man started as a brute, but he has made great progress. Some day he will be master of a perfect world.

We know how false such hopes are. We cannot accept them. We too have the firm conviction that better things await us; but we know that we shall find and see them in their fulness only along that way which once led to Calvary and beyond. As we come to understand this more fully, we shall also discern from the words of our text

What it is that makes the Lenten journey so inviting;  
namely:

- I. The promise which God's Grace holds out to us.
- II. The fact that in the Passion story we have the divine pledge of this promise.

1.

Our text begins with a testimony glorifying the Grace of God toward mankind. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews brings forth a notable quotation from the 8th Psalm, a song of David written in praise of the mercy bestowed by God upon the human race. The words of the song as quoted are these:

"What is man, that thou art mindful of him?  
or the son of man, that thou visitest him?  
Thou madest him a little lower than the angels;  
thou crownedst him with glory and honor, and  
didst set him over the works of thy hands:  
Thou hast put all things in subjection under  
his feet."

When we lift up our eyes from this hymn of praise and look at ourselves and the world in which we are living, suffering and dying, we can hardly believe that such a thing could ever have been as David here describes it. And the writer of Hebrews echoes our thoughts; for he says: "But now we see not yet all things put under him." When have we ever known it to be so on earth, that man was only a little lower than the angels? That he was a creature of

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glory and honor, in supreme command of all the works of God, great and small except for the angels, who would be held to obey the voice of God alone? When have we seen the human race to be anything other than a creature of vain thoughts and terrible deeds, whom even the beasts fear and who has true control of nothing, not even himself? As long as humanly recorded history goes back, man has been a sorry victim of hate, of war, yes, even of his own brilliant inventions.

But David had a divine record that went much further back than human memory. And we, too, know of what he wrote. It was not always so as we see it today. Lest we forget whence we came, God left us His great report of the days when the world was young and when He placed the father of all people, together with his wife, into the garden of paradise. There the handful of earth which was Adam became the ruler of creation. There God made him glorious and placed into his hands the dominion over all that moves upon the earth. He gave him power to be fruitful and multiply, replenish the earth and subdue it. There was no curse, and sin was not known.

Did David not know, then, that this high and noble station bestowed upon us in our first parents was lost to us? Indeed, of course he knew. The terrible record of man's fall, his inexcusable failure to keep his glorious freedom and happiness, is just as plainly written as the story of his blessings. And it survives in the hearts and minds of all men, living as they must in fear and dread of death, in weakness, suffering and frustration. Cast out from paradise, all was lost to mankind; and in its place a life of slavery to Satan in a ruined world. But David sings of the Grace of God as though it were still with us all. His words are not written as a story of long ago, but of the present and of the future. He speaks of a promise that God is holding out--a promise of paradise regained. "What is man, that Thou ART mindful of him? . . . . Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet." Does this not sound like the Garden of Eden all over again?

Yes, and is not this the great secret yearning that

man carries in his bosom? Is not this why, in their ignorance, men so gladly and blindly believe the scientists who tell them that man is on his way to perfection, even though they can see that the world is on its way to destruction? Ah, the human heart has not entirely forgotten what it once had, what God intended for mankind: Not this miserable existence in woe and heartache and ugly wickedness, but as ruler over all things. Can we hope to be presented again with what Adam and Eve lost? Yes indeed, says our text. Believe it, ye sinners all, despite what you see and feel. God's Grace is not a thing of the past; it is very much with us. The writer to the Hebrews rightly confesses: "But now we see not yet all things put under him." No, there is no sign in this world of paradise returning to man. Certainly we are far from it today, and no amount of boasting of the world can deceive us in this.

Truly, if we look at ourselves, and see what is going on in our own hearts and lives, we can see no possibility of ever coming back to the sinless and perfect peace of the first creation. Where is the promise of a glorious future for us? Nowhere on earth--except right here on the way that takes us through the night in Gethsemane, along the crooked streets of an ancient city and out to a hill called Golgatha. To longing hearts, hearing the strange and wonderful promise of our text, it is indeed an inviting journey; for it is here that we find the divine pledge, the earnest of the promise of God's Grace.

## 2.

"But now we see not yet all things put under him."

No; but:

"We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man. For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their

salvation perfect through sufferings."

We see Jesus here, along the way of the cross. And as we follow Him, we become conscious of a very strange resemblance. This Jesus bears in Himself a curious likeness, both to the Adam who once was, and to us. We mark Him as He goes His way, with head uplifted and with a great majesty. Here, for the first time since the gate of paradise was closed, is a man who was made a little lower than the angels. He is a perfect man, a man of sinlessness and power, in whose mouth no deceit was ever found and whom no one could convict of sin. We watch Him being tried as an evil-doer and come forth with a spotless record. Here is no sinner; upon Him no curse of Adam rests.

And so He is crowned with glory and honor. How very strange; for now He looks as we do. His glory and honor is a crown of thorns at the moment; it is shame and disgrace and at last the cruelest of cruel deaths. He was a second Adam, and is become like Adam's children. Our beginning we see in Him, the beginning that we forfeited and lost; and our end we see in Him, the end which was all that was left to us--the horror of death and God-forsakenness.

It is a view to make one shudder and turn away. But the voice of God calls us, saying: Look unto Him, and be ye SAVED, O ye ends of the earth. Here is the Captain of your salvation, the mighty Savior who leads you back to the glory that you once had. Certainly He looks like we; for He has taken upon Himself all the shame that was ours, the whole miserable failure and the punishment; to take it away from God's sight, to wipe it out forever in His own body on the Tree, and to put an utter end to it in the glory of His triumphant resurrection. So did He restore the peace of the early creation, bringing man and his God together again.

Nor was this just an experiment, a trial. So it suited God, it befitted Him and pleased Him, to bring many sons back to glory. It was in this way that He has fulfilled the ancient purpose of His will, of which David spoke: "Thou crownedst man with glory and honor, and didst set him over the works of thy hands." This is what is happening to us as we watch on the road to Calvary. Now there is a

new heaven and a new earth awaiting us, in which we shall rule and reign with Christ; and in its time it will be brought.

Meanwhile, this is our living hope and assurance. On earth things look bad, and they ARE bad. Our hearts would fail us for fear of what must come, except that we simply leave our work and toil, our failures and sorrows behind, and follow with believing hearts the Captain of our salvation as he restores us to glory.

## II.

THE TEXT: Hebrews 9:27-28.

"Sweet the moments, rich in blessing,  
Which before the Cross we spend,  
Life and health and peace possessing  
From the sinner's dying Friend."

This is indeed true for those who use the moments rightly. Standing before that Cross, man can give himself over to many kinds of feeling, as we may see when we view the various people who watched Jesus Christ die. Some wept with pity for Him; others wept heartbrokenly as His friends. Some got tired of the spectacle and went home. Some got a good deal of entertainment out of it. Some were very uneasy and did not know why. We wonder how many, seeing Jesus' time come, thought of their own end.

There is in one of our beautiful evening hymns a stanza which reads:

"Teach me to live that I may dread  
The grave as little as my bed;  
Teach me to die that so I may  
With joy behold the Judgment Day."

If that prayer is to find fulfillment, it will have to be at the Cross of the Crucified, where our minds and hearts are much present in this season.

"Calvary's mournful mountain climb;  
There, adoring at His feet,

Mark that miracle of time,  
 God's own sacrifice complete.  
 'It is finished, ' hear Him cry:  
 Learn of Jesus Christ to die."

This, God grant, we shall learn. Our text appeals to us not to let the opportunity pass by. Its words ring out through the rustle and patter of our busy lives like the tolling-hammer of a church bell. "It is appointed unto men once to die." We need not look into our appointment books to verify this; and nobody should need to remind us of its seriousness. But shall we learn of Jesus Christ to die? Let us consider

The Savior's Appointment with Death.

- I. How He kept it; and
- II. What it teaches us about our own.

1.

Our text has as its chief topic the death of Christ. It sets up a comparison by saying:

"And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the Judgment:  
 So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many . . . ."

"So Christ . . . !" This simple, harsh phrase means nothing less than that He went the way of all flesh, of which it is written: "All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away" . . . . "Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble. He cometh forth like a flower and is cut down: he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not." This is what the people on Calvary saw, and they were not surprised. This Man had been full of trouble all His days. There was weeping in His life, and a fading away. The forces of evil that are in this world, which had begun to gather from afar at His manger-bed, drew ever closer and encircled Him. Soon it was plainly to be seen that He had an appointment with death. One of His most devout disciples, a week before Good

Friday, had taken a jar of precious ointment and anointed Him for His burial, an event of which Jesus Himself had spoken openly. Had He not said to his disciples: "A little while, and ye shall not see me?" Had He not accurately predicted that "the Son of Man shall be betrayed into the hands of men, and they shall kill Him" . . . ?

The day and the hour were set for that appointment; and when it came, there was at first little that marked Him as different from the two others who had their dread and final engagement at the same time. They hung three upon crosses; and you could count on your ten fingers the people that detected even the faintest gleam of the truth with their eyes and ears. To be exact, there was that one malefactor whose heart got caught in the Savior's love; there was the captain who afterward declared: "Surely this was a righteous man;" there were John the Apostle, the mother of the Lord, and a few other women. And to all it seemed to be just what it also was: The death of a man. Overwhelmed by the last enemy, He gave up the ghost. His soul departed; the silver cord was loosed. Here were the soldiers, ready to make certainty more sure. They drove the spear into His side, and found that the heart had ceased to beat.

So much was visible and of public note about Jesus' appointment with death. The world was witness as the dark maw opened and swallowed Him up. But no man saw what followed. Our text says: "It is appointed unto men once to die - - - but after this the judgment." What men so often forget is that there is no great and terrible silence in eternity at the moment after death strikes in time, as there is on earth. The event is followed instantly by God's voice, announcing an eternal verdict upon what has gone before. The great question is answered: What has this life and death been worth? The answer will not at that hour be announced to all the world by God; but the verdict is ready in the instant that death has severed body and soul. We cannot therefore be content to turn away from the Cross now that Jesus is dead. Our hearts will ask: What is now the judgment? Shall the verdict of the Roman court and of evil men be final? Is the sentence confirmed that man has

pronounced? What is God saying about the life and death of Jesus Christ?

When a man has kept his appointment with death, the gates close behind him and the secret is well kept, not to be disclosed to the world until the end of all things is at hand and the nations are gathered before the Throne. But the death on Golgatha was followed by great words being spoken, so loudly and forcefully that the earth shook, rocks were torn apart, and in the house of God at Jerusalem a curtain was rent in two. So mighty is the effect of the divine verdict that graves are opened and the bodies of some of the dead come forth alive. The upheaval is tremendous; and well it might be, for there was never a judgment rendered upon a man as upon this One. Our text reveals it as it issues from heaven itself: He was offered to bear the sins of many, and will return . . . ! So was the truth of this death revealed. It was caused, not by the sins of one, but of many, yes, of countless multitudes. This Jesus kept an appointment made for Him with that grim enemy who would have preferred that He stay away. For this was one human whom he could not swallow with ease. This was the Son of God, who came to surrender to the power of death bringing with Him, not a little load of the sickness of sin, but all of it, the whole ruin of mankind, with only Himself as victim and sacrifice. He said to death: "Take me, and let these go their way." There was one purpose in His having become man, namely to give Himself as a ransom and atonement for all sin. And so He died. His soul went to the Father's hands; and then the Father spoke: It is done. I now declare all sin atoned; and I shall send my Son again to welcome all sinners to His salvation, to eternal life.

## 2.

Such is the manner in which Jesus kept His appointment with death and merited the crown of victory. It may be felt that this was a wondrous event so far removed from our own little death that it would be quite out of place to



speak about this here. And of course it is true that we can never compare our death with that of the great God and Savior who gave Himself for us. But that is not the purpose of our text. We are not to compare, but are to think of our death in the light of Jesus' death. Our text says:

"It is appointed unto men once to die . . . . . and unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation."

What does this teach us about our appointment with death? We have it, of course. The date is set, and we can see it coming very clearly if we but have a mind to do so. If anyone should hesitate to face the fact, here are the words: "It is appointed . . . !" That means you and it means me. And let us well understand the peculiar nature of that appointment.

The poet has called death "the bourn from which no traveller returns." And we may well ponder, for our own sake, the heaviness of that word ONCE in the text. It means: Not twice!

It may be thought unnecessary that we should dwell upon that self-evident fact. But if it were self-evident to the human mind, the Lord would hardly have wasted a word on it. As experience shows, men are much unwilling to accept the fact. They tolerate the thought of death and of judgment; but they do not like to have them mentioned so closely together. They would greatly prefer to imagine a goodly span of time between. What for? So that they may not have to expect death as final. There should, they say, be a second chance for us when we see what it is like over yonder. One hears so many conflicting reports about it in this world. One church says so, another so. Some even hold out hope for a reincarnation on this earth. We are all confused. If we discover the truth after we are dead, we ought to have a chance to revise our life before the judgment, somehow. Perhaps we may not return to this world; but out there God ought to have a place for our souls which is neither heaven nor hell, where we can correct our mistakes.

Yet the words of our text stand against the vain

visions of presumptuous sinners. And the words make the appointment with death of an importance that can hardly be expressed in speech. How then shall we prepare for it? The answer lies in what we have just heard. Must we let a poor thief, yea, a murderer, show us the way? Behold the malefactor on Calvary. He was not waiting for a second chance. His death was upon him, and he said: "We receive the due reward of our deeds!" But he had heard a promise-- the same promise which our text repeats: "Unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation." The malefactor looked, in faith, just in time.

We have more time than he did; not after death, but now. Look at Him; not as did the Jews, with curiosity or pity or contempt, but in expectation. Do we see our sins? Do we trust in the kingdom of a triumphant Savior? Do we desire to live in it? Then look for Him; and even in the moment of death our souls shall see Him appear to claim them and lead them into peace.

E. Schaller



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## PANORAMA

### SIFTING TRUTH FROM MYTH.

Arthur C. Repp, associate editor  
of Concordia Historical Institute  
Quarterly, in an editorial in the Nov.

1970 issue of that periodical, makes a number of observations regarding the role of the historian. Of the historian he says: "He recognizes that the church must constantly reappraise its actions to be able to understand itself. The pseudo-historian accepts the present as justifiable and looks to the past to support his viewpoint; the sound historian returns to the past and carefully searches through the data to sift truth from myth."

In this connection the writer proposes certain questions which he says may need to be asked if the facts are to be established. Among the questions he lists the following: "Is there a direct relationship between the influence of the 'Little Norwegian Synod' which according to Theodore Graebner urged Missouri Synod pastors in Minnesota to act as 'God's Minutemen' for the preservation of orthodoxy after the adoption of the 1938 resolutions, and the appearance of 'A Statement'? And if so, does this relationship still exist to a degree in the continuous opposition to fellowship with the American Lutheran Church on the part of some?" (p. 147)

One wonders if the latter question is asked in view of the fact that two of the men who are raising "troublesome questions" in the Missouri Synod today had roots in the "Little Norwegian Synod", known now as the Evangelical Lutheran Synod. The two men are the brothers Preus, Robert and J.A.O., president of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. Be that as it may, there is a need to sift truth from myth in connection with the allegations of Dr. Theo. Graebner whose paper forms the background for the questions which Prof. Repp has raised regarding so-called "direct relationship."

Dr. Theo. Graebner's paper, entitled "The Cloak of

the Cleric," is printed in the Feb. 1971 issue of the CHIQ pp. 3-12. To our knowledge this paper, taken from its mimeographed form, has never been published before. It is not stated before which forum it was given. On this one can only speculate, and there is no profit in that. We are sorry that it has now been brought to public attention. For it confronts us with the need of challenging the factualness of allegations that were made in an article which is now published posthumously. To sift truth from myth becomes the task of those who were involved and are still alive to perform the task. It is not an enviable work nor one that is carried out with pleasure. It opens up books which would much better have remained closed for any good that it will accomplish. But we owe it to those who have gone before to set the record straight.

It is quite evident that "The Cloak of the Cleric" was written by one who was smarting under the criticisms directed against his writings particularly in the Lutheran Witness during the years following 1938. Anyone who will take the time to check the files of Lutheran Witness will find that the editor wrote voluminously in defense and counter-defense of the 1938 Articles of Union. It is, of course, also a matter of history that the periodicals of the Norwegian Synod and of the Wisconsin Synod kept their readers current with the facts and informed them of the objections which its leaders and representatives were raising against the proposed basis for union between the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church. This caused some sparks to fly as exception was taken to statements appearing, for instance, in the Lutheran Witness during the late thirties and the forties. Truly, there were clashes at conferences, inter-synodical relations committee meetings, and at Synodical Conference meetings. And who is to say that words were not spoken on both sides that were not exactly irenic in tone? Nothing is to be gained now by trying to recapture the atmosphere of meetings attended by men, few of whom are living today to tell the complete story from beginning to end. But when statements are now published which are not factually correct it becomes necessary to do a bit of

sifting especially for the benefit of those who may be tempted to identify allegation with truth.

Regarding the 1938 Union Resolutions of the Missouri Synod, the author of "The Cloak of the Cleric" writes: "These were studied December 1937 by the St. Louis faculty and received its unanimous approval. Session with Thiensville faculty 30 September 1938. Every criticism later urged against the resolutions originated with Wisconsin (records of 30 September meeting). Norwegian Synod men urged Missouri Synod preachers in Minnesota to act as 'God's minute men' for the preservation of orthodoxy. The real faults of the '38 resolutions, the glaring structural defects and the traditionalism of the four points were never referred to." (p. 4.) We categorically deny that every criticism later urged against the '38 resolutions originated with Wisconsin. It is true indeed that the Norwegian Synod and the Wisconsin Synod found themselves in agreement in criticisms that were raised against the union resolutions; but the origin may not be traced to Wisconsin, for each Synod had studied the resolutions independently on the basis of Scripture and came to the same conclusions. The present writer was a member of the South Dakota District of the Missouri Synod in those early days and the criticisms which were there raised could not by any stretch of the imagination be said to have originated with Wisconsin. Later, when Intersynodical Relations Committee meetings were held over a period of a dozen years, the testimony of Wisconsin and Norwegian Synod men was a united one, not because they had consulted together in advance but because they had independently come to the same conclusions. The record will show that the Norwegian Synod already in 1943 passed a resolution pointing not indeed to structural defects nor indeed to traditionalism but to the real faults, the doctrinal defects of the '38 resolutions, and pleaded with the Missouri Synod to rescind its acceptance of them. The Norw. Synod resolution said: "They contain false doctrine, for instance, the statement on justification in the 'Declaration': 'To this end He also purposes to justify those who have come to faith--' (Proceedings p. 222) Cf. II Cor. 5:19; Rom. 5:18;

Rom. 3:28; they do not require full agreement regarding the doctrine of the Church and the Last Things as a prerequisite for Church-fellowship, and thus make room for the false principle that it is not necessary for a church to agree in all matters of doctrine. (Matth. 28:20; I Cor. 1:10)." This did not originate with Wisconsin but received ready acceptance by Wisconsin Synod men.

Dr. Graebner furthermore states in his paper: "That the Wisconsin Synod faculty and editors have supplied the theology for the attacks on our 1935, 1938, 1941, and 1944 resolutions on fellowship, cannot be questioned because the evidence is contained in practically every issue of Quartalschrift since 1938, in the Wisconsin Synod resolutions, and in the Proceedings of the Synodical Conference. Every phrase of the 1938 union resolutions that has been the subject of attack, was stigmatized as doubtful or heterodox by the Thiensville faculty in the fall of 1938 (meeting in St. Louis). On the other hand, the virulence of vocabulary and the use of insinuation was added to the weapons of traditionalism largely by the example of the Norwegian Synod. (Articles in Lutheran Sentinel and Luthersk Tidende and the use of invective against brethren on the floor of Synodical Conference conventions.)" The impartial historian who will delve into the records, church papers, synodical proceeding, minutes of the Intersynodical Relations Committee meetings, etc. will find that this characterization which places the Wisconsin Synod into the role of theological mentor while the Norwegian Synod dishes up the dirt is not only unfair but untrue. We can only say: "Zu behaupten ist nicht zu beweisen." If there were clashes of personality along the way, this is not unusual in controversy. The "ad hominem" reference, however, should never be used to discredit the substance of an argument.

Dr. Graebner says in his paper: "The Norwegian Synod writers and their speakers at Synodical Conference sessions have by their action and example encouraged the belief that one need not honor one's teachers and that theological leaders may be attacked publicly and virulently with impunity." (p. 10) This is totally untrue. Rather

the point was made that one does not follow his teachers when they are in error. On the other hand when they have taught the truth, they are freely quoted as a witness to the truth, but certainly not as though their writings were proof-texts to be placed on the same level with Scripture itself. It is difficult to understand how Dr. Graebner's plea for an honoring of one's teachers is to be understood in view of his own characterization of Concordia Seminary during the years 1900-1920: "Our Seminary during the years 1900-1920 did not operate efficiently as a theological Seminary, providing an adequate course for those who cared to use it but maintaining no standards to prevent others from graduating and entering the holy office." (pp. 9.10)

We pass by many unsupported generalizations contained in the article which call for rebuttal; but we believe we have touched the main points which needed to be dealt with for the sake of the record.

C. M. Gullerud

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"A STATEMENT"--THE  
TWENTY-FIFTH ANNI VERSARY

indeed, can one say that a statement of conviction is dead, if it has not been retracted? It will be remembered by those who lived through those crucial years of the forties that "A Statement" was disposed of through an "Agreement" made between the Missouri Synod Praesidium and the representatives of the signers. This "Agreement" provided for a withdrawal of "A Statement" as a basis for discussion, while it was at the same time specifically stated that this was not to be interpreted as a retraction. Now "A Statement" has been dusted off by Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly, which set aside its entire November issue for reflections, reminiscences and recollections by seven of the forty-four original signers. While this was done "not for the purpose of controversy but for the sake of history," the editor surely did not expect that these reaffirmations

"A Statement"  
lives on. This was to  
be expected. For how,

could pass without comment.

But what, then, is "A Statement?" For the sake of our record and for the purposes of study by those who would learn from this bit of history, "A Statement" is here reproduced in its entirety.

QUOTE

In Nomine Jesu

\*

A STATEMENT

\*

We, the undersigned, as individuals, members of Synod, conscious of our responsibilities and duties before the Lord of the Church, herewith subscribe to the following statement:

ONE

We affirm our unswerving loyalty to the great evangelical heritage of historic Lutheranism. We believe in its message and mission for this crucial hour in the time of man.

We deplore any and every tendency which would limit the power of our heritage, reduce it to narrow legalism, and confine it by man-made traditions.

TWO

We affirm our faith in the great Lutheran principle of the inerrancy, certainty, and all-sufficiency of Holy Writ.

We therefore deplore a tendency in our Synod to substitute human judgments, synodical resolutions, or other sources of authority for the supreme authority of Scripture.

THREE

We affirm our conviction that the Gospel must be given



free course so that it may be preached in all its truth and power to all the nations of the earth.

We therefore deplore all man-made walls and barriers and all ecclesiastical traditions which would hinder the free course of the Gospel in the world.

#### FOUR

We believe that the ultimate and basic motive for all our life and work must be love--love of God, love of the Word, love of the brethren, love of souls.

We affirm our conviction that the law of love must also find application to our relationship to other Lutheran bodies.

We therefore deplore a loveless attitude which is manifesting itself within Synod.

This unscriptural attitude has been expressed in suspicions of brethren, in the impugning of motives, and in the condemnation of all who express differing opinions concerning some of the problems confronting our Church today.

#### FIVE

We affirm our conviction that sound exegetical procedure is the basis for sound Lutheran Theology.

We therefore deplore the fact that Romans 16:17, 18 has been applied to all Christians who differ from us in certain points of doctrine. It is our conviction, based on sound exegetical and hermeneutical principles, that this text does not apply to the present situation in the Lutheran Church of America. We furthermore deplore the misuse of First Thessalonians 5:22 in the translation 'avoid every appearance of evil.' This text should be used only in its true meaning, 'avoid evil in every form.'

## SIX

We affirm the historic Lutheran position concerning the central importance of the una sancta and the local congregation also in the matter of determining questions of fellowship.

We therefore deplore the new and improper emphasis on the synodical organization as basic in our consideration of the problems of the Church. We believe that no organizational loyalty can take the place of loyalty to Christ and His Church.

## SEVEN

We affirm our abiding faith in the historic Lutheran position concerning the centrality of the Atonement and the Gospel as the revelation of God's redeeming love in Christ.

We therefore deplore any tendency which reduces the warmth and power of the Gospel to a set of intellectual propositions which are to be grasped solely by the mind of man.

## EIGHT

We affirm our conviction that any two or more Christians may pray together to the Triune God in the name of Jesus Christ if the purpose for which they meet and pray is right according to the Word of God. This obviously includes meetings of groups called for the purpose of discussing doctrinal differences.

We therefore deplore the tendency to decide the question of prayer fellowship on any other basis beyond the clear words of Scripture.

## NINE

We believe that the term 'unionism' should be applied only

to acts in which a clear and unmistakable denial of Scriptural truth or approval of error is involved.

We therefore deplore the tendency to apply this non-Biblical term to any and every contact between Christians of different denominations.

TEN

We affirm the historic Lutheran position that no Christian has a right to take offense at anything that God has commanded in His Holy Word. The plea of offence must not be made a cover for the irresponsible expression of prejudices, traditions, customs, and usages.

ELEVEN

We affirm our conviction that in keeping with the historic Lutheran tradition and in harmony with the Synodical resolution adopted in 1938 regarding Church fellowship, such fellowship is possible without complete agreement in details of doctrine and practice which have never been considered divisive in the Lutheran Church.

TWELVE

We affirm our conviction that our Lord has richly, singularly, and unreservedly blessed our beloved Synod during the first century of its existence in America. We pledge the efforts of our hearts and hands to the building of Synod as the second century opens and new opportunities are given us by the Lord of the Church.

\* Soli Deo Gloria \*

In witness whereof, we, the undersigned, affix our signatures this seventh day of September in the year of our Lord 1945 at Chicago, Illinois.

End of Quote

Here follow the names of the original forty-four who signed the document.

"A Statement" was promptly circulated throughout the length and breadth of the Missouri Synod in spite of the protest of the then president of the Missouri Synod, Dr. J. W. Behnken, who asked that no step be taken until opportunity was given to discuss the matter. Now followed a voluminous outpouring of writings both pro and con. Meetings were scheduled and held between Praesidium and the "continuation committee of the Signers", between the Praesidium and the College of Presidents with the signers, and finally between the "Ten and Ten" (a forum composed of ten men appointed by the president and ten representatives of the signers).

The end result? No solution of the matter. The President's Ten had taken serious exception to "A Statement," but the signers remained firm in their adherence to the document. Then came the "Agreement" to withdraw "A Statement" with the understanding that this did not constitute a retraction. The issue was now to be discussed not on the basis of "A Statement" but on the basis of theses prepared under the auspices of the President of the Missouri Synod. Theses were drawn up and discussed, but the issues were not met head on. The consequence was that no retraction was ever obtained; and today, twenty-five years later, the main thesis of the signers has prevailed, as may be seen from the general practice of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod of the seventies. Fellowship relations with the ALC have been officially established, a step which amounts to a capitulation to the theology of that merger-formed body. The Missouri Synod has entered into the Lutheran Council of the U.S.A. as a full partner. Joint services and church work, evangelistic missions and educational programs are carried out in conjunction with the Reformed and even with the Catholics. Indeed, the leaven of the theology represented in "A Statement" has drawn Missouri into one unionistic association after another while protesters within the body express their dissent from one convention to the other without any apparent result except that the situation becomes worse instead of better. The furor at Concordia Seminary during these very days is

a sad commentary on the state of affairs in a church body which was once staunch and united, but now has lost its heritage and its spirit of testimony.

But let the Signers speak for themselves as they have spoken in the Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly of recent issue (Vol. XLIII--No. 4.):

"In the long plan of God, however, its (i. e. A Statement's) principles and discussion served the tortuous progress of the church from its frontiers." Richard R. Caemmerer Sr. (p. 158). "Actually, it is my considered opinion that 'A Statement' marked a turning point in the history of the Missouri Synod. Since September 1945 the Synod has never been the same. 'A Statement' set in motion evangelical forces within the Synod which had long been latent and which waited only to find a voice. . . . What do I think of 'A Statement' today? Well, I have often said to friends, only half in jest, that when I die, I would desire no nobler epitaph on my tombstone than this: 'Here lies a signer of the Chicago Statement.'" Thomas Coates (p. 164). "The meeting at which 'A Statement' was formulated was the most significant, memorable, Spirit-filled meeting I have ever attended. I have never been as sure of anything as of putting my name to that document. This signature has never been withdrawn, nor, to my knowledge, has any other, including the several hundred which were subscribed after 'A Statement' had been published." Herbert Lindemann (p. 166). "With the years, the things contained in 'A Statement' have become part and parcel of the synodical scene. While a few still quarrel with it, and even blame most of the synodical ills upon its issuance, it has served as a powerful leaven for good in our midst." Harold H. Engelbrecht (p. 170). "It proved to be a call for the evangelical spirit to express itself in the life of the Church. The movement was a turning point in the Synod. This statement was welcomed twenty-five years ago because it advocated 'that the Gospel must be given free course so that it may be preached in all its truth and power.'" L. H. Deffner (p. 178). An L. C. A. Pastor in Philadelphia says, "The document expressed concern over the rigidity and loveless-

ness that the signers felt was pervading the Synod. It called for a reinterpretation of Romans 16, 17 and for a more flexible view of other church bodies" (p. 181).

Finally the Quarterly presents the writing of one well known Missouri Synod professor, E. W. A. Koehler (1875-1951), who spoke forthrightly against "A Statement". Here is the final paragraph of the paper, dated 14 Feb. 1947: "As long as the 'Statement' stands, it will continue to be a barrier between the Signers and the rest of us. And its iniquitous leaven will work and continue to work; it will pass from professors to students, from preachers to hearers. Also this leaven must be purged out. If the 'Statement' is not retracted by the Signers, it should be rejected by Synod" (p. 187). History has borne out the truth of this sainted professor's prophetic words. While supporters of the document will say that the leaven is one of progress as the church has emerged from its frontiers, those on the other hand who have taken a stand against "A Statement" will say that its leaven has carried the Missouri Synod into the unionistic mainstream of our day, and thus it has also become the home for many divergent doctrinal positions.

It is freely granted that "A Statement" contains affirmations which, taken by themselves, merit the support of every child of God committed to the Sola Scriptura principle. Attitudes and tendencies which move men to substitute anything man-made for the supreme authority of Scripture, or which find expressions in lovelessness and unevangelical practice, are certainly to be deplored. However, one cannot disregard the fact that these affirmations and their corresponding antitheses appear in a contextual framework which patently has as its purpose a reinterpretation of Rom. 16:17, 18 and the adoption of a more flexible practice over against other church bodies with which there is no complete agreement in doctrine. In passing let it be said that in thesis eleven the signers of "A Statement" become guilty of the very traditionalism which they claim to censure and deplore.

On these and similar questions the CLC has pre-

sented its Scripture-grounded convictions in its "Concerning Church Fellowship" and in its "Statement of Faith and Purpose". Anyone wishing to know the position of the CLC on these matters is referred to these documents. They may be obtained from: CLC Book House, Box 145, New Ulm, Minn. 56073.

C.M. Gullerud

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A NEW  
SYNODICAL  
CONFERENCE?

Public proposals have of late been made, and efforts have been initiated, looking toward the possibility of uniting conservative Lutheran groups in a federation resembling the former Lutheran Synodical Conference.

In principle one can only applaud the idea of working toward such an objective. For many decades the old Synodical Conference of North America stood as a bulwark of sound Scriptural doctrine and practice against a swelling wave of heresy and modernism in other church bodies, and its constituent synods benefited from mutual watchfulness and the sharing of their spiritual gifts. The dissolution of that wholesome union was due, in large measure, to the doctrinal defection of its largest constituent body. But this tragic development offers no ground for an assumption that the concept of a federation of orthodox churches is dangerous or doomed to failure. Unity and union, in any dimension, are natural twins and, when properly matched, may expect God's blessing.

But one must wonder whether the present spiritual climate among conservative Lutherans is conducive to a safe growth of the synodical conference idea. It is true, of course, that in a time of radical change and serious confessional upheavals one cannot expect to find ideal conditions for progress toward true confessional unity. The road to union, even among the most conservative bodies, is obstructed by unresolved doctrinal conflicts. This fact in itself, however, should only serve to encourage true-hearted seekers of unity to confront the differences and

remove them under the probing and healing light of God's infallible Word.

It is when men who advocate union by a new alignment of conservative churches indicate a willingness to ignore differences, to work around rather than through the doctrinal road-blocks, that their blueprint for union becomes murky and blurred. We find this a real and present danger. Christian News, for example, which presumably speaks the mind of an assortment of conservative Lutheran individuals and groups, has recently suggested that "minor differences" ought not be cause for deferring the establishment of a union. When a pastor, in a letter to the periodical, referred to one such existing difference (issue of Feb. 13, 1971), it drew the following editorial response:

"We have been asked a number of times to publish articles on various controversies between confessional Lutherans. There are some minor disagreements among confessional Lutherans but we don't believe these differences should prevent them from being in fellowship with one another. It appears to us that far too much time and energy has already been spent on the church and ministry controversy. While we agree with 'old Missouri's' doctrine of the church and ministry, we pray that the members of the Lutheran Churches of the Reformation will again enter into fellowship with the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. Loyal Lutherans in all Lutheran bodies throughout the world should form some sort of synodical conference."

This forthright declaration gives us pause. In the context, "minor differences" must be understood as referring to doctrinal, not procedural or liturgical or administrative differences. Here, then, we have a distinct echo of the initial overt aberration of the Missouri Synod which, in 1938, formally subscribed to the listing of four "non-fundamental doctrines" in which a difference among



churches "need not be divisive of church fellowship," and in which a deviation from Scripture "need not be regarded as a cause for division." Christian News appears to be advocating the same brand of unionism. Building bridges over "minor" doctrinal differences is a fundamentalist, not a Lutheran approach.

If theologians gather about the table to seek a basis for a new synodical conference, and find in one another one or more unscriptural positions which the pressure of a desire for union would move them to evaluate as "non-divisive," the entire undertaking will be abortive. And we have reason to fear that the unionistic approach is not limited to some who are associated with Christian News. Thus we are moved to sound a warning. Before well-intentioned men commit themselves to formal discussions that look toward a federating of their confessional groups, let them make sure that the correct premises underlie such a venture. The old Synodical Conference held to the principle that full agreement in doctrine and practice is necessary for a God-pleasing union. If anyone were to advance the cynical claim that this principle was more honored in the breach than in the observance, he would be falsifying history. Whether practice always, at all times and in all places, conformed to the principle is another matter. Fallible men do not attain to perfect sanctification in this life, and neither do churches of fallible men. (We are well aware of the fact that the Church and Ministry issue was a problem under which unity suffered strain for a long time. But that is a story which cannot be told in a few words. It never became quite clear whether a doctrine was at stake or whether the disputes lay in the area of emphasis and semantics). But it is certain that the principle was never disputed or disavowed by any constituent synod of the Synodical Conference until 1938. It was then that the wind was sown, and we reaped the whirlwind (Hos. 8:7). May God preserve us from repeating the experience. Let us seek a true union, and not produce a further scattering.

E. Schaller

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