



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

I Timothy 4:15

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CONTENTS

THE BOOK OF CONCORD AND GOSPEL REDUCTIONISM .....	2
John Lau	
GOD'S WILL AND COMMAND .....	16
John Schaller	
GLEANINGS FROM THE OPENING ADDRESS AT IMMANUEL LUTHERAN COLLEGE .....	40
R. Gurgel	
PANORAMA: Oscar Naumann — Remembrances .....	43
C. M. Gullerud	

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## THE BOOK OF CONCORD AND GOSPEL REDUCTIONISM

It is safe to say that Gospel reductionism (or Gospelism) would probably never have become an issue of concern for us, if the teaching had not arisen within the Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod, with which many of us were formally in fellowship in the Lutheran Synodical Conference. And, as far as the present writer can recall, it did not actually rear its head (*i.e.*, become apparent to all) within the Missouri Synod until some years after the break-up of the Synodical Conference. Of course, there were many students, graduates, and concerned persons who were aware that there had existed "a different spirit" among the professors of Concordia Seminary at St. Louis, Missouri, in regard to a number of confessional principles formerly held by the LCMS. After a "fact-finding committee" was appointed by Pres. J.A.O. Preus in 1970, what had privately been suspected was now made public, chiefly through the reactions of a majority of the seminary faculty to the very fact of their being examined. Their feelings were expressed through a statement issued by Dr. John Tietjen, president of Concordia Seminary: "I regret that Dr. Preus has chosen to dignify the accusations against our Seminary by conducting an investigation ... it is not Lutheran to expect uniformity in interpretation of Scripture passages or agreement on the nature and authority of Biblical texts. ... Many of our critics are quite frankly more fundamentalistic than Lutheran in their approach to the Bible."<sup>1</sup>

There was some question as to the precise meaning of Tietjen's accusation that his opponents were not "Lutheran" in their approach to the Bible. He was answered as to the matter of whether or not it was "Lutheran" to demand uniformity in hermeneutics by a response which very correctly declared that the Lutheran Confessions (surely the hall-mark of what is "Lutheran") indeed require uniformity in exegetical conclusions when doctrine is involved.<sup>2</sup> The attempt was made by Pres. J.A.O. Preus to pinpoint the area of controversy in his March 3, 1972, "Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles." It pointed out the relationship of the formal principle (*sola scriptura*) and the material principle (*sola fide*):

"The Gospel which is the center of our theology is the Gospel to which the Scriptures bear witness, while the Scriptures from which we derive our theology direct us steadfastly to the Gospel of Jesus Christ." When we, then, speak of the formal principle of theology, we are concerned with the Scriptures, recognizing them as the source and foundation of everything we know and believe about God and His works; when, on the other hand, we speak of the material principle of theology, we are concerned with what Scripture teaches us about the saving work of Christ, the Gospel, and about our salvation through faith in that Gospel.

In September of that same year, 1972, Pres. Preus issued his official report ("Blue Book") to the LCMS concerning the findings of the Fact Finding Committee: "... a distressing amount of diversity in the theological positions of various members of the faculty ..." One week later Tietjen issued to the entire synod a document entitled "Fact Finding or Fault Finding" ("Brown Book"), which declared, among other things:

The views of Scripture interpretation which lie behind the investigation and shapes its result are less than scriptural.

The theology which lies behind the inquiry and the Report, by whose standard the theology of the faculty was measured, is unLutheran.

The theology underlying the Report of the president's Committee accounts for many of the distortions and misrepresentations of the position of our faculty in the Report. That theology threatens our Synod with grave danger.

The faculty's position on the Gospel, which is the position of the Lutheran Confessions, is so foreign to the President of Synod and his Committee that they have not even understood what the position of the faculty is and therefore have presented a basic distortion and misrepresentation of it in the Report. It is hardly appropriate for a Lutheran faculty to be interrogated and analyzed by means of a

theology whose basic thrust is unLutheran.

Thus far Tietjen's presentation had been a purely negative reaction to the statements by Preus and others of the historical position of the LCMS on the doctrine of Scripture. The views of his opponents were less than Scriptural, Tietjen averred; in addition, their theology was unLutheran, he asserted. In January, 1973, however, Tietjen and his Concordia faculty associates promulgated among all the pastors and congregations of the LCMS a two-part document entitled "Faithful To Our Calling - Faithful To Our Lord." The authors stated the following: "It is our conviction that any effort, however subtle, to supplement the Gospel so that it is no longer the sole ground of our faith or the governing principle for our theology is to be rejected as un-Lutheran, contrary to our confession, and injurious to the mission of the Church." Pres. Preus had put his finger on the controversy, then, when he had pointed out that Gospel reductionism is an approach toward the study of Scripture which makes the Gospel "virtually exclusively normative in such a way as to detract from the normative authority of the whole Scripture."<sup>3</sup> Dr. Robert Preus, writing in the August, 1972, issue of *AFFIRM*, analyzed the controversy as follows:

It is not easy to define this new Gospel Fundamentalism, because its advocates, who often do not even identify themselves, have not done so themselves with any precision. But it appears to be an attempt to use the Gospel as a hermeneutical and interpretive instrument. Thus, the Gospel is viewed as the fundamental, chief and central article of all Scripture. All of Scripture accordingly is to be brought under the scrutiny of the Gospel. All articles of faith are to be related to it. And the Gospel serves as a point of pre-understanding for the pious and effective reading and applying of the Scriptures.

And so far I would hope that every reader would respond with a sincere Yea and Amen. But Gospel Fundamentalism goes further. The Gospel is used authoritatively and cognitively to assess what Scrip-

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ture asserts, not only in terms of what Scripture is important, but of what is authoritative and true and historical. In fact, if you can't relate some incident recorded in Scripture (like the Fall or the Virgin Birth) to the Gospel, then the very question of the historicity and reality of these events becomes a pseudo-question and a sure sign of unevangelical literalism, according to the Gospel Fundamentalist."

And so the issue is joined. The Gospel reductionist declares that it is sound Lutheran theology to say: "What is binding doctrine is narrowed or reduced to that which touches the Gospel." At the same time, he has declared it to be unLutheran to answer affirmatively the question: "Is the Bible God's inspired and authoritative Word on all matters concerning which it speaks?" — and to answer negatively the question: "Can we permit ourselves freedom on those matters that are not explicitly part of the Gospel?"

It would seem evident that the best possible way to respond to the Gospel reductionist's challenge is to consider what, if anything, the Lutheran Confessions as contained in the Book of Concord have to say in this matter. After all, the Lutheran Confessions must certainly be the only proper criterion for determining what is Lutheran and what is unLutheran!

In Article V of the Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord we find a presentation of the reformers' statement of the Law/Gospel controversy among some theologians of the time. It is said that whereas one party claimed that the Gospel not only was a proclamation of God's grace in Christ, but was also a proclamation of repentance which rebukes unbelief, the other party maintained that in its strict sense the Gospel is only a proclamation of the grace and mercy of God for Christ's sake. The article goes on to declare:

When we rightly reflect on this controversy, we find that it was chiefly occasioned by the fact that the little word "Gospel" does not always have one and the same meaning but is used in a twofold

way, both in the Holy Scripture of God and by ancient and modern theologians. In the one case the word is used in such a way that we understand by it the entire teaching of Christ, our Lord, which in his public ministry on earth and in the New Testament he ordered to be observed. Here the term includes both the exposition of the law and the proclamation of the mercy and grace of God, his heavenly Father, as it is written in Mark 1:1, "The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." Shortly thereafter the chief parts are announced, namely, repentance and forgiveness of sins (Mark 1:4). Similarly when Christ after his resurrection commands his apostles to preach the Gospel in all the world (Mark 16:15), he summarizes his doctrine in a few words, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sin should be preached in his name to all nations (Luke 24:46-47). Likewise, Paul calls his entire teaching the "Gospel" (Acts 20:24) and summarizes it under these heads: repentance to God and faith in Christ. And when the word "Gospel" is used in its broad sense and apart from the strict distinction of law and Gospel, it is correct to define the word as the proclamation of both repentance and the forgiveness of sins. For John, Christ, and the apostles began in their preaching with repentance and expounded and urged not only the gracious promise of the forgiveness of sins but also the divine law. In addition, however, the word "Gospel" is also used in another (that is, in a strict) sense. Here it does not include the proclamation of repentance but solely the preaching of God's grace. So it appears shortly afterward in the first chapter of St. Mark, where Christ said, "Repent and believe in the Gospel" (Mark 1:15).<sup>4</sup>

Although it is evident that the reformers were making this careful distinction in the uses of the term "Gospel" because it was vital in a proper separation of Law and Gospel, yet it does present an aspect of our current problem with Gospel reductionism. It seems apparent that the modern Gospel reductionist is limiting his

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understanding of "Gospel" to the strict sense. He does not intend to say, for example, that all the doctrines of the New Testament are to be judged in the light of the Gospel understood in the broad sense. He would no doubt consider that nonsense, because it would amount to judging a thing by itself! The Gospel reductionist does not even wish to have the term "Gospel" include merely the historical account of the life of Christ, that which is included in the four gospels. Rather, it is his intention, evidently, to restrict his use of the term to its very narrowest degree. He wants "Gospel" to identify only the proclamation of God's forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ, without including in that proclamation definitive statements as to the factuality of the events of Christ's conception, birth, life, death, and resurrection. In this connection the reformers are in no sense indicating that the doctrinal content of Scripture is in any way subservient to, or to be judged by, its "Gospel" content, as though it were not necessary to accept and believe all of it. Rather, they describe both the broad and narrow sense of "Gospel," and stress the term in its narrow sense only to present a clear distinction between Law and Gospel, certainly not to distinguish between true doctrines and less-than-true doctrines!

The Epitome of the Formula of Concord makes the point in a simple and straight-forward way:

The word "Gospel" is not used in a single sense in Holy Scripture, and this was the original occasion of the controversy. Therefore we believe, teach, and confess that when the word "Gospel" means the entire doctrine of Christ which he proclaimed personally in his teaching ministry and which his apostles also set forth (examples of this meaning occur in Mark 1:15 and Acts 20:24), then it is correct to say or write that the Gospel is a proclamation both of repentance and forgiveness of sin. But when law and Gospel are opposed to each other, as when Moses is spoken of as a teacher of the law in contrast to Christ as a preacher of the Gospel, then we believe, teach, and confess that the Gospel is not a proclamation of contrition and reproof but is, strictly speaking, precisely a comforting and joyful message



which does not reprove or terrify but comforts consciences that are frightened by the law, directs them solely to the merit of Christ, and raises them up again by the delightful proclamation of God's grace and favor acquired through the merits of Christ.<sup>5</sup>

We may here adduce some references from the Lutheran Confessions to demonstrate that both the broader and narrower senses of "Gospel" are employed by the reformers. For example, in Article IV of the Apology of the Augsburg Confession (Justification) it is stated: "In the last chapter of Luke (24:47) Christ commands that penitence and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name. The Gospel declares that all men are under sin and are worthy of eternal wrath and death. For Christ's sake it offers forgiveness of sins and justification, which are received by faith."<sup>6</sup> Similarly, Article XII of the Apology (Penitence) declares: "For the sum of the proclamation of the Gospel is to denounce sin, to offer the forgiveness of sins and righteousness for Christ's sake, to grant the Holy Spirit and eternal life, and to lead us as regenerated men to do good. Christ gives this summary of the Gospel in the last chapter of Luke (24:47), 'That penitence and forgiveness of sins should be preached in my name to all nations.'<sup>7</sup> Likewise, in Article XXVII of the Apology (Monastic Vows), we note that the reformers are highly critical of those who live in monasteries: "Meanwhile they neither hear nor preach the Gospel about the free forgiveness of sins for Christ's sake, about the righteousness of faith, about true penitence, about works that have the command of God."<sup>8</sup>

The above-cited references all have this in common: the term "Gospel" is used in its broadest sense. It is said that the Gospel declares all men to be under sin and eternal wrath; that the Gospel denounces sin; that the Gospel speaks of works that have God's command. We look in vain for a declaration that the Gospel should be applied only in its narrowest sense as the touchstone determining whether or not other statements in Scripture, such as denunciation of sin, for example, or "about the righteousness of faith, about true penitence, about works that have the command of God" have validity.

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The narrow sense of "Gospel" is also set forth very clearly in the confessions. We read, for example, that forgiveness is the peculiar function of the Gospel.<sup>9</sup> It is when the reformers wish to distinguish carefully between Law and Gospel that "Gospel" is defined in its narrow sense. We have previously cited the Epitome of the Formula of Concord in its article on Law and Gospel. In the Solid Declaration of the Formula, Luther is quoted in Article V as having stated: "Everything that preaches about our sin and wrath of God, no matter how or when it happens, is the proclamation of the law. On the other hand, the Gospel is a proclamation that shows and gives nothing but grace and forgiveness in Christ."<sup>10</sup> Here, perhaps, the Gospel reductionist may feel that he has some grist for his mill! Yet, if he reads further, he will hear Luther continuing: "At the same time it is true and right that the apostles and preachers of the Gospel, just as Christ himself did, confirm the proclamation of the law and begin with the law in the case of those who as yet neither know their sins nor are terrified by the wrath of God ..." Luther, then, would not limit his message to the Gospel alone, but would recognize that there are times when the Law must be proclaimed first — even when the Law in all its severity is the only proclamation that should be made at a particular time and place. Yet the Formula correctly adds: "And the Apology says: 'The preaching of the Law is not sufficient for genuine and salutary repentance; the Gospel must also be added to it.' Thus both doctrines are always together, and both of them have to be urged side by side, but in proper order and with the correct distinction."<sup>11</sup>

The references quoted from our Lutheran Confessions have given the reformers an opportunity to declare in this connection, if that had been their intention, that a great amount of freedom to preach the Law or not would be theirs. After all, if they had been Gospel reductionists, they would have stubbornly held to the view that freedom of acceptance or non-acceptance of Scriptural assertions is permitted on all matters that are not explicitly part of the Gospel, in the narrow sense of the term. But the reformers do not make such an assertion, in the articles quoted or anywhere else that this writer has

been able to find.

We introduced our present study by showing that the controversy involves the Gospel/Scripture relationship. The Gospel reductionist sets up an unnecessary conflict between the Gospel and Scriptures when he declares that the Gospel is exclusively normative in matters of faith and life to the extent that thereby they detract from the normative authority of the whole Scripture. Perhaps we can observe what the reformers thought of this effort by noting what was written in the Large Catechism, in the discussion of the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed: "Neither you nor I could ever know anything of Christ, or believe in him and take him as our Lord, unless these were first offered to us and bestowed on our hearts through the preaching of the Gospel by the Holy Spirit. The work is finished and completed, Christ has acquired and won the treasure for us by his sufferings, death, and resurrection, etc. But if the work remained hidden and no one knew of it, it would have been all in vain, all lost. In order that this treasure might not be buried but put to use and enjoyed, God has caused the Word to be published and proclaimed, in which he has given the Holy Spirit to offer and apply to us this treasure of salvation."<sup>12</sup>

How clearly is here stated the marvelous relationship of the Gospel to the Scriptures, and the Scriptures to the Gospel! The Gospel is that message from God which tells us that the work of redemption is finished and completed; that Christ through His suffering, death, and resurrection won that redemption for us; that God in His grace has declared the whole world righteous through that suffering, death, and resurrection. That message has the power to convert the sinner, to cause him to be reborn in Christ, to strengthen and increase his faith. In order that the message might not be hidden from man, God proclaimed it — not merely by word of mouth from one witness to another, but by inspiring holy men of God through the Holy Spirit to set down the message in words chosen by God Himself. So, faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God. The believer, then, rejoices in reading all the inspired Word of God, knowing that it is profitable for him, for doctrine, for reproof, for cor-

rection, and for instruction in righteousness. He knows that its essential content for him is the message telling him of his eternal salvation through Christ, but he delights in all of it according to his New Man. He honors the Scriptures, for they tell him, the believer, of God's love in all the ways of God that are revealed to him in Scripture.

It is, very possibly, in Article VII of the Augsburg Confession that the Gospel reductionist may feel that he has some evidence to point to in his allegation that his Gospelism is truly Lutheran and that any opposition to Gospelism is unLutheran. We refer, of course, to the passage which declares: "For the true unity of the church it is enough to agree concerning the teaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments."<sup>13</sup> That is a translation of the Latin text. The German version, which may be regarded as more official, since it was the version actually read before the Diet at Augsburg on June 25, 1530, is slightly different: "For it is sufficient for the true unity of the Christian church that the Gospel be preached in conformity with a pure understanding of it and that the sacraments be administered in accordance with the divine Word."

The Roman Catholic Confutation had this to say concerning Article VII: "The seventh article of the Confession, in which it is affirmed that the church is the assembly of saints, cannot be admitted without prejudice to faith if by this definition the wicked and sinners are separated from the church." They were able to recognize in the article what many a Lutheran has not; namely, that it is faith in the Gospel in Word and Sacrament that brings one into fellowship with Christ and thereby makes one a member of the communion of saints, and that it is this communion of saints of which the article speaks. Where the Gospel is preached, and where the Sacraments are administered, there believers are to be found. The marks of the Church (the communion of saints), then, are the Word and the Sacraments. In opposition to the Papists, the reformers are declaring that the marks of the Church are not to be found in identical traditions, rites, and ceremonies. It is an abuse of language to try to make Article VII provide the basic requirements for the

proper exercise of outward fellowship. It would put the reformers into direct conflict with clear passages of Scripture, such as Romans 16:17-18, to insist that Article VII deals with outward fellowship. The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, in its Articles VII and VIII, goes to some length to clarify the issue. A reading of those articles is not only extremely edifying, but it truly sets the erroneous opinions and statements of many to rest.

If the reformers had wanted to maintain, as the Gospel reductionists evidently do, that the Gospel, in its narrow sense, is the sole normative authority to the exclusion of the Scriptures as such, one would expect that to be plainly revealed in the Lutheran Confessions. On the contrary, however, we find such important statements as that found in the Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, in Article XI, on the doctrine of Election. In considering the proper understanding a Christian should have in connection with "the abyss of the hidden foreknowledge of God," the reformers declare: "We must, however, carefully distinguish between what God has expressly revealed in his Word and what he has not revealed. Beyond the matters which have been revealed in Christ and of which we have spoken thus far, there are many points in this mystery about which God has remained silent and which he has not revealed but has kept reserved solely to his own wisdom and knowledge. We are not to pry into these, nor are we to follow our own thoughts in this matter and draw our own conclusions and brood, but we are to adhere exclusively to the revealed Word. This admonition is eminently necessary. In our presumption we take much greater delight in concerning ourselves with matters which we cannot harmonize — in fact, we have no command to do so — than with those aspects of the question which God has revealed to us in his Word."<sup>14</sup>

It is possible, it seems to this writer, that the doctrine of eternal election to grace may be held in little regard by the proponents of Gospel reductionism. After all, how central is it in relation to the Gospel in its narrow sense? Yet the reformers warn strongly against following our own thoughts in the matter of insisting on a correct doctrinal statement and adherence to the same

in connection with this doctrine. Our safety depends on our adhering exclusively to the revealed Word. Farther than this we cannot and dare not go. Many modern theologians approach this doctrine, together with others, with presumptuous hands, twisting and turning them so as to make them conform to some humanly-wrought dogmatic system, or according to faulty presuppositions (that there are contradictions in Scripture, for instance). They would be wise to remember the words of the reformers, warning them to take their delight, rather, in concerning themselves only with those aspects of the question which God has revealed to us in His Word.

We intend now to quote at some length from the Formula of Concord, both the Epitome and the Solid Declaration, to demonstrate quite conclusively that the formulators of the Lutheran Confessions did not at all express themselves in the terminology of the Gospel reductionists when they set forth the norm and standard according to which all true doctrines are established. "We believe, teach, and confess that the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments are the only rule and norm according to which all doctrines and teachers alike must be appraised and judged, as it is written in Ps. 119:105, 'Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.' And St. Paul says in Gal. 1:8, 'Even if an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be accursed.'" "Other writings of ancient and modern teachers, whatever their names, should not be put on a par with Holy Scripture. Every single one of them should be subordinated to the Scriptures and should be received in no other way and no further than as witnesses to the fashion in which the doctrine of the prophets and apostles was preserved in post-apostolic times."<sup>15</sup> "... Holy Scripture remains the only judge, rule, and norm according to which as the only touchstone all doctrines should and must be understood and judged as good or evil, right or wrong." "Other symbols and other writings are not judges like Holy Scripture, but merely witnesses and expositions of the faith, setting forth how at various times the Holy Scriptures were understood by contemporaries in the church of God with reference to controverted articles, and how contrary teachings were rejected and condemned."<sup>16</sup>

The quotations from the Epitome just cited present indisputable evidence as to doctrine commonly held by the reformers in regard to *sola scriptura*. The Scriptures of both the Old and the New Testament are declared to be the only rule and norm on the basis of which doctrines and teachers are to be judged. There is not even the slightest hint that what is meant is solely the Gospel (narrow sense) content of Scripture, although none of them would question the teaching that the Gospel is the essential content of Scripture.

When we now turn to the Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord, we find similar statements. In the Preface, the first paragraph uses the expression, "The Word of God," four times in declaring the basis of the chief articles of Christian faith. One particular sentence in that opening paragraph appears to show the proper relationship of *sola scriptura* to *sola fide*, when, in describing the background of the Augsburg Confession, it states: "At that time a number of Christian electors, princes, and estates who had then accepted the pure doctrine of the holy Gōspel and had allowed their churches to be reformed according to the Word of God, ordered the preparation of a Christian Confession on the basis of God's Word and submitted it to Emperor Charles V at the great Diet of Augsburg in 1530."<sup>17</sup>

The Preface continues, in further testimony, "... the summarized doctrine commonly confessed by the churches of the pure Christian religion is drawn together out of the Word of God."<sup>18</sup> To expand on the principle of faithfulness "to the pure doctrine of the Word of God as Dr. Luther of blessed memory had explained it," the reformers declared: "We pledge ourselves to the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments as the pure and clear fountain of Israel, which is the only true norm according to which all teachers and teachings are to be judged and evaluated ..." "Since in ancient times the true Christian doctrine as it was correctly and soundly understood was drawn together out of God's Word ..." "We therefore declare our adherence to the first, unaltered Augsburg Confession ... not because this confession was prepared by our theologians but because it is taken from the Word of God and solidly and well

grounded therein." "We therefore unanimously pledge our adherence to this Apology (of the Augsburg Confession) also, because in it the cited Augsburg Confession is clearly expounded and defended against errors and also because it is supported with clear and irrefutable testimonies from the Holy Scriptures." "Here he (Luther) expressly asserts by way of distinction that the Word of God is and should remain the sole rule and norm of all doctrine, and that no human being's writings dare be put on a par with it, but that everything must be subjected to it."19

Once again we emphasize that here, if anywhere, the reformers who set forth our Lutheran Confessions would have presented any tendencies toward Gospel reductionism, if they had held them! Their silence is a deafening answer, stating clearly and unequivocally that they did not limit the normative authority of Scripture to its Gospel content, but believed and testified that all Scripture, both in the Old as well as the New Testament, is the norm and rule according to which all teachings and teachers are to be judged. Surely we accept the authority of the Book of Concord as determinative in deciding what is Lutheran and what is unLutheran! On the basis of that authority, we can come to no other conclusion than that Gospel reductionism is an aberration from the *sola scriptura* principle and cannot, therefore, be maintained as a correct hermeneutical methodology.

John Lau

#### FOOTNOTES

1. Concordia Theological Seminary Newsletter, Summer, 1970.
2. *Exodus from Concordia, A Report on the 1974 Walkout*, published by the Concordia Seminary Board of Control, 1977, pp. 24-25.
3. J.A.O. Preus, *Report of the Synodical President to the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House), p. 23.
4. *The Book of Concord*, edited and partly translated by Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: The Fortress



Press, 1959), pp. 558-559. All subsequent references to the Book of Concord are to this edition.

5. Tappert, p. 478.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 115.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 185-186.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 278.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 310.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 560.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 561.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 415.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 625.
15. *Ibid.*, pp. 464-465.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 465.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 501.
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Ibid.*, pp. 503-505.



### GOD'S WILL AND COMMAND\*

In the following dissertation it shall not be our purpose to deal with the will of God as a divine attribute, but rather with the will of God which confronts us human beings in Holy Scripture in the form of commands. We will therefore not permit ourselves to become involved here with the basic error of Calvinism, which seeks and claims to find the solution to all theological difficulties in the sovereign will of God. We also brush

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\* This article is a translation of an essay entitled: "*Gottes Wille und Befehl*" by John Schaller, found in *Theologische Quartalschrift*, Vol. 12, No. 1 — January, 1915. This translation was begun by the sainted Pastor Waldemar Schuetze and given its final editing by Pastor emeritus H. C. Duehlmeier.

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aside all the various distinctions which to the dogmaticians appear so necessary for a clear presentation of the will of God. There is at this time no special need for exploring the differences between the "*voluntas antecedens et consequens, voluntas necessaria et libera, voluntas beneplaciti et signi, voluntas areana et revelata.*" At this time we shall restrict ourselves rather to the discussion of such Scripture passages, in which there is stated the effect which the will of God, expressed or alluded to, has upon the conduct of the creatures. We also eliminate from our discussion not only those statements which treat of the concurrence of the angels with the will of God, but also those expressions which speak of the will of God as a factor in determining the behavior of the soul-less creatures. We are concerned here with that will of God which affects man as a rational creature, the revelation of which immediately calls forth in man a certain direction of his will and the carrying out of which presupposes a certain activity, or at least certain inner conditions in the heart of man. In order to further restrict the range of our discussion, we are not directing our attention to the moral relation between God and men in general, but are limiting ourselves to the will and command of God insofar as a Christian, as a child of God, is brought to an awareness of it, and [insofar as] it is carried out by him and should be carried out by him.

Here we certainly need to consider as pertinent passages all those expressions of Scripture which deal with God-pleasing conduct on the part of Christians, as it should run its course in accordance with the moral Law, which is common to all men. It is certainly proper that we be urged to give serious thought to the question of what the Christian's attitude as a child of God is toward the so-called legal will (*Gesetzeswillen*) of God as contained in the Law. In spite of all the correct expressions in use among us, we are still far from presenting the correct conception of this matter in our public preaching. It must be a matter of special concern among us to understand the nature of commands and commandments of God which stand in direct relation to the Gospel. It is manifestly Jesus' will and command that we celebrate His Holy Supper, that we baptize, and that we carry on

mission work, in which we publicly and privately proclaim His Word or have it proclaimed. We, furthermore, have an abundance of passages in which men are commanded to repent, to believe in Christ, and to be converted; also those are commands of God which are addressed not only to the unregenerate, but can also be addressed to believing Christians. Do divine commands of this kind belong into the same category with the commands which, e.g., are expressed in the Ten Commandments? If not, where does the difference lie? In the course of this discussion it will become ever clearer to what degree the proper answer to these questions depends upon the correct understanding of the Gospel, so that our conclusions regarding this matter will truly contribute to the proper distinction between Law and Gospel — assuming that these conclusions are scriptural.

For a proper understanding of the commands of God, by means of which He reveals His will to us, it must be borne in mind especially that, when God communicates with us, He clothes His thoughts in human language. If we are to understand Him even only to some degree, He must speak to us as we are accustomed to speak to one another. If already in our associations with other people we find again and again that our words express incompletely what we want to say, and that we dare not expect that men will draw out of our speech the full content of our thoughts in all their ramifications, then it must be *a priori* clear to us that we can never fully comprehend the thoughts of God, as received in the imperfect form of human language. Anyone scrutinizing the commands of God in Scripture, that is, viewing them in the light of the knowledge of God which the Gospel bestows, will soon notice that human language lacks the capability of distinguishing in the external form of presentation between a command which we are to carry out and a command of His which requires nothing of us, but which as an effectual power works in us and on us what God wills. In our human language we have only one form of expression for both types of God's will, and that is the imperative. If God wants to let us know that in conformity with His holiness our heart is to be filled with love even toward our enemies, then He expresses it with an imperative: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." When Jesus willed

to restore to life the young man of Nain and Lazarus in his grave, He expressed His effective will with the imperative: "Young man, arise!" and "Lazarus, come forth!" Both of these imperatives appear linguistically to be perfectly alike; and yet, as expressions of the will of God, they differ completely in their nature. If God says ever so categorically to the sinner: "Love your enemies," we know from Scripture and from experience that the imperative by no means assures the desired result. Whether the person so addressed will actually love his enemy or not depends upon something entirely different from the commandment, the expression of God's will, the command. Such commands do not in themselves produce what is set forth in them as God's will. But in the case of the young man of Nain and Lazarus in his grave, as soon as the command was given to shed the chains of death and to become active as living men, there could be no question that this would occur. The carrying out of these commands was not contingent upon all kinds of other circumstances, least of all upon a decision on the part of the dead, but the will of God through the imperative assured the result. The dead arose because God so willed it. Here, then, the command carries within itself the power to fulfill what has been commanded. Although the young man and Lazarus were actively involved in carrying out the command, although the one discovered in himself the energetic will to arise and to speak, and the other most decidedly wanted to hasten to come forth out of the sepulchre, these decisions were by no means their work, but were produced by the command of God. Here, then, we recognize two kinds of imperatives. The one kind simply expresses what in accordance with God's will is to be brought about, without any guarantee that it will be brought about. The other expresses the creative will of God and is the effective Word of God itself, which possesses the inherent power to establish, make, produce, and create what the imperative designates as the will of God.

It might seem now that the foregoing examples are not really satisfactory for our purpose, since they deal with situations which are on entirely different planes. The command to love one's enemies is directed to the moral side of the human personality, whereas the commands received by Lazarus and the young man pertained to the

physical, material aspect of life. However, the objection overlooks the undeniable fact that the life-producing command of Christ was addressed directly to the personalities of these dead, not only to the material part of them, but according to the wording called for a very special activity of the will. If we could imagine such a thing happening, that both of the dead men came to the decision not to obey the commands, but to remain in the state of death, we would immediately recognize such a refusal to be a sinful affront against the will of the Creator. This thought is not at all without biblical analogy. Elisha's command to Naaman to wash in the river Jordan for the cleansing of his leprosy lies on the same plane with the command of Christ addressed to those dead; and the unwilling refusal of the Syrian to carry out that command was certainly a sin against God, Who wanted to bring about his healing. Furthermore, Scripture pictures to us the spiritual condition of those who are overtaken in their sins by the punitive judgments of God. They in truth have no choice, for the punitive hand of the divine Judge forcibly rests upon them. The fact that they in their hearts resist the righteous judgment and cry out in despair: "Ye mountains, fall on us, etc.," is not morally indifferent behavior on their part; but it is just as much a sin as every kind of resistance against God's will. The validity of the argument respecting the two kinds of imperatives is not in any way changed by the circumstances that the above-mentioned examples apparently lie in different categories of activity. They suffice perfectly to demonstrate that certain expressions of the will of God, which appear as imperatives, remain without effect because of the character of those to whom they are addressed; whereas other expressions of God's will, which in their linguistic form are also imperatives, carry the power within themselves to accomplish what God sets forth as His will.

We will readily see that this distinction also obtains then, when commands of God are placed alongside of one another which actually have human actions of a similar nature as their goal. Let us compare with each other, e.g., the two commands: "Love your enemies" and "Preach the Gospel." These two commands are alike in their nature. They both lie in the moral-religious field.

For although the moral Law in its original form knows nothing of the Gospel, yet God Himself has included His Savior-name Jehovah in the Mosaic draft of the Second Commandment, and thereby has taught that surely also the proclamation of His Savior-love is included in the proper use of His name. The preaching of the Gospel of Christ, therefore, in an especially prominent way also belongs to the moral activities through the carrying out of which the will of God is fulfilled, as that is expressed in the Second Commandment. Accordingly this command of God is essentially not different from the command to love one's enemies; for the difference between the first and the second Table of the Law here does not come into further consideration for us. But now let us mark what Scripture itself says of the commandments. Commands of God, like the command to love one's enemies in the moral Law, which lie directly and in understandable form before all men, do not in themselves have the power to effect what is called for. Paul teaches this very clearly in Romans 7: "The Law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good." Yet this Law, this expressed will of God, does not bring forth life or any expression of life. Rather, it stimulates sin, revives it, and so kills man. Yes, these commands of God, still known to men in part by nature, do not according to God's intention have the purpose of helping man to attain unto life. Since man by nature lies in sinful corruption, God's will and command in the Law are in accordance with God's will only to cast man deeper into destruction. "But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful," (v. 13). On the other hand, the matter is entirely different in the case of the Savior's command: "Preach the Gospel!" This is also a categorical imperative, in its outward form no different from the command: "Love your enemies!" But here from the very outset it is not the intent of God that this command should work death, the very opposite of the expressed purpose; but through this very Word God wants to accomplish and effect precisely what the Word itself asserts. When He says: "Preach the Gospel!", God by this command sets in motion the activity of Gospel preaching. The Gospel resounds into all the world, because God so wills it and carries out His will. By His command God influences the will of

men, so that the activity which He wills is carried out by them as their own; and yet it is His. They will because He wills that they will.

The same holds true in like manner of the commands of God, which are commonly known as the institution or establishment of the Sacraments: "Baptize!" and "This do!" From our youth we have accepted it as a sure and certain fact that the Sacraments are nothing else than a special expression of the Gospel. Since God has attached to both of them the promise of the forgiveness of sins, there is between them and the oral preaching of the Gospel no difference, which could come into consideration in the matter before us. The appended imperative sets forth the will of God — that what is done in both these Sacraments is to serve as a means of grace, and authorizes the continuing use of both Sacraments. But the imperative is not that of the moral Law, but here also we have a creative Word of God, through which He wants to effect what He wills. By means of the fact that He has commanded to baptize and to remember His redemption in the Lord's Supper, He exercises a determining influence upon the will of the people, who come into consideration here, so that they give heed to this institution of God. They treat the Sacraments, then, not mechanically as outward ceremonies, but with the same intent which God has, namely, that the forgiveness of sins be imparted to those who partake of them. So through the command of God the will of such people becomes identical with the will of God. It is the will of the pastor and of the congregation that eternal life, as a gift of God, be vouchsafed unto the person who is being baptized, and that the salvation purchased by Christ be given and sealed to the communicants in the Lord's Supper.

In passing, we might at this point call attention to the fact that through these three commands — to preach the Gospel in general, to baptize, and to celebrate the Lord's Supper — all the activities are carried out in which the Church of Jesus Christ as such has ever been engaged. In the matter of the administration of the Sacraments the will of the congregation is determined by the clear words of institution. She usurps no authority to change the outward form of these sacred acts in any way.

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Such a thing would never enter her mind, because in these matters she has no other will than that which Jesus Himself has expressed in the institution. As far as the preaching of the Gospel is concerned, the Church knows of no prescribed form, no limiting precept. Her one concern, like that of her Lord, is that the Word of grace may sound forth richly. Therefore she sets her standards in complete freedom to meet the needs of the existing circumstances, influenced only by the will of her Lord. She grants no man, no group of men, no creature whatsoever (*ne angelus quidem*, says our confession) the right to impose on her any particular outward form of Gospel-preaching as divinely ordained, because in this matter the Lord has not expressed any particular will.

What is true of these commands which God addresses to an entire fellowship among men applies also to those which He addresses to the individual. John and Jesus introduce the New Testament proclamation with the call: "Repent and believe the Gospel!" Jesus repeatedly declares that men must do the will of God if they would enter the kingdom of heaven, and He had in mind their acceptance of the Gospel in faith. In exactly the same way Peter exhorts his hearers: "Save yourselves from this untoward generation," (Acts 2:40); and Paul: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ," (Acts 16:31); "God commandeth all men everywhere to repent," (Acts 17:30). Whoever looks upon these imperatives as pure moral commands, in which God demands of men certain performances, activities, attitudes of heart, is lapsing irretrievably into a synergism of some form. The conclusion is drawn: If God commands man to repent, then man must also have the power to carry out this act; otherwise the demand would be unjust. Such a conclusion, however, would be just as wrong as if someone were to infer from the commands which Jesus gave to the young man of Nain and to Lazarus, that they of themselves had the power to effect their resurrection. The Holy Ghost frequently avails Himself of this very same analogy when He testifies to the children of God that they have passed from death unto life. All the previously mentioned commands of God, which refer to changing the subjective relationship between man and God, are not imperatives of the kind found in the moral Law; but they express the creative will of God and carry in



themselves the power to effect what they appear to demand of men. There is abundant Scripture testimony to bear out this Truth. The word: "Repent" really means: "Change your mind, your way of thinking"; and this is just another way of telling a person to change radically, to renew his whole personality in its innermost being. "Repent" means as much as to say: "It is my will that you are to have a new heart." God, however, does not mean this in the sense that it were now left to man to bring about this change in himself. On the contrary, He Himself has expressly explained this command in this way: "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh," (Ezekiel 36:26; 11:19). This same requirement Jesus seemingly makes of Nicodemus when He says: "You must be born again." The Pharisee is astounded. This demand does not make sense to him, because it cannot be carried out. But Jesus immediately makes clear to him that here something is involved which man of himself simply cannot carry out, but which God without any assistance on the part of man will effect and bring about through His Spirit. When the jailor received from Paul the answer: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ," he was by no means to be confronted with the alternative either to accept Jesus in faith or to reject Him; but the word of the Apostle was the saving command of the Savior Himself, which carried within itself the power to work faith.

Whoever comes to the knowledge of this truth will have no difficulty either with the statements of Jesus concerning the will of His heavenly Father. Two passages in particular may here be quoted: He will enter the kingdom of heaven who does the will of Jesus' Father in heaven, (Matt. 7:21); and John 7:17: "If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God." It will strike us immediately that these two statements are not the same in scope. In the Matthew passage Jesus declares the entrance into the kingdom of heaven to be contingent upon doing God's will; whereas, according to the passage in John, the doing of the will of God should lead to a better understanding of the doctrine of Jesus. But just as evident it is that the will of God that is referred to is the same in both instances.

What kind of a will of God is this? The answer which is given to this question usually is completely legalistic. It stems from the view that Jesus speaks of various performances that man is to carry out before he can enter into the kingdom of heaven or before he can be favored with a deeper knowledge of Jesus' doctrine. Now Jesus certainly testifies clearly enough that there exists in those persons of whom He is speaking the conscious will to do the will of God. But we also note immediately that in these statements Jesus does not with a single syllable state how man arrives at this point that he has such a will and so does the will of God. Whoever finds here an intended legalistic will of God is falsifying the thought Jesus is expressing. Over against this error one will not even be safeguarded though one has learned that to do the will of God here means to believe on Jesus Christ. A legalistic view becomes evident if a preacher in the pulpit, after he has gloriously pictured the grace of God in Christ and has gladdened the hearts, all of a sudden puts on a very serious mien and takes away all the comfort by continuing thus: But — in order to have all this — you must, of course, believe! Then in the further elaboration he zealously brandishes the scourge of the Law, lest some unworthy person appropriate to himself the grace of God. And because he is continually speaking about faith, he imagines that he has preached in fine evangelical and Lutheran fashion, whereas in reality he has pictured faith as something that man must first render before grace is there for him. Actually, this "But" has this meaning: Forgiveness is, indeed, there; but you must do your part to obtain it — you must believe; for that is the will of God. Whoever thinks and speaks in that vein cannot boast of speaking in the spirit of Christ. The will of God, of which Jesus is speaking, is not a demanding will, not the Law-will, but the giving, the creating will, the will of the Gospel. The form in which this will of God is made known to man may be any one of the above-mentioned imperatives: Repent, be converted, believe on Jesus! Therefore the meaning of John 7:17 manifestly is this: If any man by the power of God has the will to do the will of God. Also in Matthew 7: 21 the thought connection becomes clear with one stroke. The Lord makes it known to the people, who are of the mind that they must perform something in order to enter

heaven, that it does not depend on any performance on their part, but alone on this that God works faith in the heart. It is precisely this meaning and understanding of Christ's word which Paul confirms when he testifies in Ephesians 1:11 that God works all things according to the counsel of His will. For him, as for Christ, it is self-evident, without making additional words, that this saving will of God is not a pious wish, the fulfilment of which is dependent on the decision of man, but the effectual power of God itself. For according to vv. 19ff., precisely this belongs to the true and correct understanding of God, that one knows the greatness of His power to us-ward, who believe according to the working of His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ Jesus, when He raised Him from the dead and glorified Him.

We can now, finally, in the light of what has been said, also properly understand those passages which treat of the fulfilling of God's will in the Law by the believers. Paul writes: "This is the will of God, even your sanctification," (I Thess. 4:3), and exhorts us to "prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God," (Rom. 12:2). Peter bases his exhortation unto sanctification on the ancient word: "Ye shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy," (I Peter 1:16), and shows that the purpose and will of God is carried out by the effect which the good works of believers have on the unbelievers, (I Peter 2:15). Here we may also refer to all the exhortations unto specific good works, as expressed by both Christ and His Apostles, which are all based on the thought that God wills these works. All these passages deal exclusively with persons who have become God's children through the creative will of God, who therefore do not first have to do something in order to be something, but rather who can do something because they are something. When they are to be informed what the will of God is, the use of the imperative cannot be avoided. This is true all the more, because in the very nature of things, directives unto holiness of living are clothed in the words of the divine Law, in which they are originally communicated unto man. But here it is, first of all, necessary to acquire and to apply at every turn that understanding which Paul expresses in the words: "The Law is not made for a righteous man," (I Tim. 1:9).

For the children of God even the Mosaic imperative is no longer Law, but rather an expression of the will of their Lord Jehovah, their Savior and Deliverer, to Whom they belong completely, and Whose they want to be. They need not first resolve to make God's will their own. If they must first take counsel with themselves to determine whether a clear word of God is to be followed or not, there is already something in their thinking that is foreign to God's children. For God's children, inasmuch as they have a newly created nature, have the same will as God; and they have only to be apprised of God's thoughts; and they know at once what their own will is. The Ten Commandments, which embrace everything which God demands of man, need continually to be explained to Christians and need to be called attention to in their application to the various circumstances of human life, but only for the reason that their knowledge is still imperfect and is always dimmed by sin which clings to them, but never because of a "must" that needs to ingrained upon their consciousness. In the kingdom of God there is no "must." One wants to do God's will, and nothing else. But it is also true that there is no enabling power to be found in the applications and explanations of the Law. The will to do the will of God does not flow from the knowledge of God's will in the Law, but is already previously present. The question of Paul, who had just been converted, is typical of regenerate man: "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" (Acts 9:6). The will unto sanctification of life, the will to carry out the will of God, is brought into being exclusively by the life-creating will of God — and that is the Gospel. Therefore whoever approaches Christians with Mosaic imperatives, continually confronting them with duties, scaring them into good works with an incessant "Thou shalt," is not speaking as a representative of Christ. No Apostle operated in that manner.

Paul appends his general description of sanctification in Romans 6 to the preaching of the power of Christ's death and resurrection; and, before entering upon the individual facets of the Christian way of living in Romans 12, he sums up the thoughts of the Gospel, insofar as they come into consideration here, in the words: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God." Thus he makes the motive for sanctification, also in the

individual points, not the threatening righteousness of God, but the grace of God. Peter, indeed, cites a word that could frighten sinners: "Ye shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy," (I Peter 1:16); but not only did every elect stranger, whom Peter addresses, know that God Himself had based this admonition on His Jehovah-glory (I am holy, Jehovah, your God, Lev. 19:2); but the Apostle proceeds to the admonition, after he had in the entire preceding context preached the message of redeeming grace; and he almost immediately attaches to this quotation the well-known, wonderful word concerning the redemption through the blood of Jesus Christ. Yes, this admonition is so wrapped up in the Gospel that it even loses the character of an admonition and becomes pure Gospel instruction. It is therefore not merely a manner of speaking when Paul writes: "There is (in the Church) one God, which worketh all in all," (I Cor. 12:6); nor dare one limit these words to the works which directly serve the edification of the Church of God; but Paul applies the general truth to the specific matter which he is here treating. Actually God works all good works, all holiness and piety in various individual ways in all His children, never, however, through the categorical imperative of the Law, but through His gracious will proclaimed in the Gospel, and which, due to the imperfections of human language, must also be expressed with the imperative.

Now it does not call for a lengthy elaboration to show that this knowledge of the will and command of God has to do with the separation of Law and Gospel. Whoever does not understand the Gospel at all, or understands it improperly, will not be able to cope with these imperatives; because he does not know how to discriminate between the two. It can therefore be plainly asserted that the manner in which a person applies the respective passages of Scripture determines unmistakably whether he is living in the Gospel or not. The total rejection of the Gospel by the Papacy made the distinction between the various Scripture imperatives virtually impossible. This resulted in a total externalization of all appeals unto repentance and faith, so that repentance and faith became outward works that had to be performed if one wanted to enjoy a recognized status in the Church. In the Reform-

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ed Church, where the merits and atonement of Christ are still accorded some standing, the participation of Christians in the fulfilling of the Law has always been placed into the foreground, to the obscuring of the Gospel. Therefore we find here, alongside the denial that the Sacraments are means of grace, the conception that they must nevertheless be observed as outward institutions of the Lord — a reverting to the "*opus operatum*," only in a finer form. Furthermore, we find there quite generally, the conscious effort to engender Christianity among them through legalistic precepts of unconcealed character or to promote their Christianity. Here Christian conduct is not so much a product of the Gospel, but rather a condition to be met for attaining the grace of God. Therefore throughout Reformed literature one finds in more or less striking form the pelagianizing thought that in every man there is to be found some good, which through commands can successfully be steered in the right direction. In the pietistic circles of the Reformed, as among the Methodists, one finds only one method of conversion — that one approaches the sinner with the command (as one that is justified) to repent and to be converted and that one belabor him with this purported demand of God until he finally submits and carries it out. But even having the pure, clear doctrine of the Gospel impressed upon the memory in carefully constructed statements is no safeguard against misunderstanding divine imperatives. If the Gospel has not truly gained complete control in the entire soul-life of the Christian, constantly controlling all thoughts of every kind, the result will be that even among Lutherans the evangelical imperative will be applied in papistical and legalistic fashion. Symptomatically, the fear exists here of making entrance into the kingdom of heaven too easy for the sinner. There is the attempt to frighten the impenitent with threats at the close of the sermon to keep them from appropriating grace to themselves. There is the variety of legalistic ways in which coming to the Lord's Supper is made as difficult and dangerous as possible for communicants. There is the never-ending effort to bring about observance of God's commandments, and especially participation in the work of the congregation, by sharply emphasizing the duties of Christians.

All these strange facts can easily be explained. Man by nature stands under the Law, as Paul states it in Gal. 4:3 in so many words. With that he does not only want to express the fact that all men are under the curse, which the Law lays upon all sinners, but precisely this, that men in their natural state are controlled by the Law. They are sold under the Law like slaves, so that the Son of God had to come and to buy them free. As the further expositions of the Epistle to the Galatians show, this slavery goes so far that man's whole thinking centers in the forms of the Law whenever his relationship toward God and his neighbor comes into consideration. No matter how much he inwardly curses the inexorable earnestness of the divine Law and rises up against it, the fact still remains that he seeks the answers to all moral and religious questions in the Law; and whatever he finds, or presumes to find, there, he immediately regards as a categorical imperative with which he must come to terms. Because he can by nature only think "*in terminis legis*," therefore the language of the Law is also his natural equipment; and the thoughts of the Gentiles, who accuse and excuse one another among themselves (Romans 2:15) — their thoughts, which are so thoroughly a part of their character (*physei*) — are throughout language of the Law. That is the only language which man understands by nature. He cannot even imagine that God could speak a different language with men; and when he hears this other language, it remains altogether incomprehensible to him, as the language of the Tibetans would be to a German driven off course to that land. "The wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom," which the Gospel proclaims, must of necessity be clothed in those forms of speech which are familiar to man. But because the things of which God speaks are of the kind which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart — therefore all this appears unintelligible to natural man. He perceives the words, but he cannot grasp the meaning of the Spirit; he cannot comprehend it; he cannot grasp it with his spirit (I Cor. 2:14). His experience with this language of the gracious God is similar to that of an unlearned person, who hears some human language unfamiliar to him. Most of it he does not understand at all, but here and there he hears a word that sounds like a word in his mother tongue. He thinks then

that he has at least understood this word; but as soon as he attempts to follow through on the basis of this so-called knowledge, he finds that he has arrived at the very opposite of what the speaker intended to say. So it is with natural man in his relation to the whole language of the Gospel. The real things of the Spirit, upon which everything depends, he cannot comprehend at all. The word of the cross immediately becomes to him a stumbling-block and foolishness. But then he hears also things which he thinks he understands. Imperatives strike his ears, and with imperatives he has had to come to terms throughout his life. He hears God's will and command that he should repent, be converted, and believe in Christ. He becomes aware of commands to be baptized, to receive the Lord's Supper, and to preach the Gospel. All this he presumes to understand, because what is said appears as imperatives. But not only does the true thought-content of God's commands remain incomprehensible to him, but he also does not notice that here is an imperative which in its nature is entirely unfamiliar to him. Therefore the imperative form evokes from him only wrong notions and thoughts. He regards these commands as new demands made upon him, of the kind that have always plagued and made him unhappy. And because he seems to have the freedom of choice, he sets himself against these demands and formulates with more or less clarity the reason for his refusal to obey.

What, however, is true of the nature and character of the unregenerate, that also still clings to the regenerate, because he carries the old nature with him alongside the new man. While his ears and eyes have been opened so that he sees the wonders of grace and understands the Word of the cross for his salvation, and he also rests his faith on this Word, he nevertheless has learned all this as a new language, which he appropriates completely only gradually; and his thoughts move about in this new environment or sphere of understanding with more or less helplessness. This is just another way of expressing the generally familiar thought that no man ever masters the full riches of the Gospel and fully appropriates to himself the fulness of its thoughts. Add to this the fact that the regenerate may have made great progress in appropriating to himself through memorization the ev-



angelical message of the Word, and may have acquired a fluent use of the language forms of the new wisdom, and yet this wisdom may still not have thoroughly illuminated and penetrated his sphere of thinking, so that it actually controls him. In every Christian there remains a rather large remnant of legalistic thinking. Because this new way of thinking has not yet taken complete hold of the Christian's flesh and blood, it will happen that in his thinking he will, without being aware of it, enter upon and follow legalistic paths, which should long ago have been done away with, until it dawns upon him with consternation that he has gone astray. So it becomes understandable to us why not only in the Reformed Church, but also among Lutherans much legalistic thinking and application of God's Word has from time to time come to light. Here again the misunderstood imperatives are seen in action. Instead of understanding them as addressed to the new man, who has been freed from the Law, one falls back into the way of thinking of the old man and converts the evangelical, creative commands of God into moral precepts, the fulfilling of which God's righteousness requires. So it happens, e.g., that one is far more concerned that no unworthy guest approach the Lord's Table than that the incomparable comfort of the Sacrament be really imparted to all lost sinners. Great emphasis is placed on the duty of the Christian to receive the Sacrament often according to the command of Christ rather than to aim primarily at engendering in the hearts of the penitent a desire for and a realization of the preciousness of the gift imparted through this means of grace. And this appears so self-evident to us that we charge him, who has a freer view, with a lack of Christian earnestness; and we harbor misgivings as to whether he is to be counted among the true disciples of Christ.

It would take us too far afield if we were to make an attempt to furnish complete historical evidence of all the legalistic aberrations which are traceable, or may be attributed to, a misunderstanding of the evangelical commands of God. The thoughts of Scripture on this matter to which we have made reference above, can also readily serve as a touchstone for each individual case, so that a separate presentation of each instance is not absolutely necessary. The circumstances of our time do urge it

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upon us, however, to make special mention of a certain legalistic doctrinal aberration in this connection. The origin of the so-called election controversy, which even today has not yet been laid to rest, can be traced back to a lack of understanding regarding the will and command of God. It soon became evident here that the real difference did not lie in the specific point of the doctrine of election as such, but rather in the doctrine of the conversion of the sinner to God. That our opponents fail to recognize our doctrine of election as Scriptural is attributable to the fact that, although the Gospel has certainly become a matter of the heart with them, it still does not control their way of thinking to that degree, which the correct understanding of the doctrine of conversion calls for. The teaching that man can make his own decision for or against grace, that in conversion not only the grace of God but also man's conduct is a deciding factor, could not have arisen as an issue in Lutheran circles, and certainly not have gained a foothold, if with all the theoretical emphasis on the "*sola gratia*" the thought would not also at the same time have been retained that, since God has commanded conversion, since here He approaches man with an imperative, therefore man must necessarily also make the decision. The explanation given that this takes place through powers of grace imparted to man is nothing but a trimming with which one obscures the proper association of thought for oneself and others. If one understood the Gospel as the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16), and that to its fullest extent as a complete salvation from the first moment to the last, if one in full seriousness let the sentence stand that the salvation of the sinner proceeds entirely from God and rests upon the power of God's will of grace — the question could not even arise whether man renders the really essential thing and makes the decision, whether in conversion it depends upon his conduct and behavior. Instead there would be unanimous acknowledgement that the decision to accept the Gospel is altogether God's doing. If God so wills it, a man will be converted; and this, indeed, through the power of His gracious will which works the change. To be sure, we also say with Scripture that man turns to God; but that is only the way of designating the self-evident fact that the moment God makes the decision for a man, the will of

that man through the deciding power of the divine will of grace makes the same decision. The misunderstood imperative has also given birth to the assumption that the mystery of "*cur alii prae aliis*" is a psychological one, inasmuch as it remains unexplainable why the identical command is effective in the one case but not in the other though the presuppositions (*Voraussetzungen*) of God are the same in both cases. The imperative here used, correctly understood, does not permit such an explanation. Scripture does, indeed, set forth the possibility that a person who is spiritually dead can refuse to respond to the quickening call of the Savior; but, on the other hand, it does call conversion a resurrection from death, to affirm that the life, wherever it does come into being, is brought into existence only through the power of God's gracious command, without any participation at all on the part of the dead. Frankly, we must modestly and humbly admit that we, as little as Paul, are able to offer a solution to the "*cur alii prae aliis*." The Apostle had placed that mystery in God: "Therefore hath He mercy on whom He will have mercy, and whom He will He hardeneth," (Romans 9:18). But that is another chapter which does not belong here.

In the elaboration thus far we have spoken of God's will, as it comes to man in the form of a command. Aside from the moral precepts, which are the same for all men in all ages, we have called attention to three New Testament institutions as evangelical commands, namely: "Preach the Gospel!" – "Baptize!" – "This do in remembrance of me!" – in the carrying out of which the other commands come into consideration: "Repent!" – "Be converted!" – "Believe!" The last two groups belong most closely together, as such which have to do with the rescuing of the sinner from perdition. They are specific evangelical commands, through which God accomplishes everything good upon earth. It should also be noted well here that these are the only commands of God to His Christians. If, therefore, from the presentation of Scripture we recognize other things occurring on the basis of God's will and through the same, we dare not make the mistake of changing the recognizable will of God into a special command given to Christians. Operating in this fashion can only spawn a legalistic tendency, which

can only lead to and has led to this, that one has worked out a formal legal codex, which is supposed to be intended specifically for the Church of the New Testament. So it is without a doubt the will of God that the children of God should not go their separate ways, but should rather outwardly be gathered together and form visible fellowships. According to the report of Scripture, the preaching of the Apostles always, first of all, brought about the conversion of individuals, but then also immediately the formation of fellowships; and that is everywhere taken to be something self-evident, which follows as a matter of course. There one clearly recognizes the plan and purpose of God and can say with certainty: This is the will of God. But no matter in which direction we turn our ears, nowhere will we hear that this will of God comes to us in the form of a clear imperative, so that we can say: Here God has established and commanded the Christian congregation as an institution and commanded that His Christians are in this wise to be gathered together. Rather is this the course of events that the establishing of a congregation follows simply as a certain fruit of the Gospel. As soon as someone has come to faith, one need not tell him that he should join himself to other confessors of Christ. It is a part of the manifestations of faith, which correspond to its nature, that believers acknowledge one another confessionally. And this is the essence of the formation of congregations in this sense of the word. Where this takes place, the Christian fellowship as such can immediately be recognized; for the preaching of the Gospel (in whatever form) is the real *nota ecclesiae* (mark of the Church). In that way the will of God becomes evident to every believing heart through the establishment of an outward Christian fellowship. This fellowship comes into being because God establishes it through His will. But now we dare not simply draw the conclusion: Therefore Christians have the command to form congregations. If one would lay anything upon Christians as such a command of God, one must be able to lay his finger on a word in which the command is clearly expressed as an imperative, like the command to preach the Gospel and to administer the Sacraments. For where "*verba institutionis*" (words of institution) are lacking, one should not seek to supply them through logical deductions, which may appear

ever so glowing.

The same holds true, as we have recently frequently pointed out, regarding the public preaching of the Word through certain persons. That such special servants work in the congregations according to the will of God, Scripture teaches plainly enough. That states that they are placed by the Holy Ghost, that the exalted Christ gives them to His Church and places them. Paul in two places expressly demonstrates that God presents these servants with their abilities of various kinds as gifts to the Church. The Apostles therefore regarded this as so self-evident that they not only personally concerned themselves with providing established congregations with such servants, but they also urged it upon their assistants to exercise the greatest care in the choice of the persons who were to serve in such positions at the head of the congregations. But one searches in vain for formal words of institution, in which it is precisely and unmistakably stated that and how this ministry is to be established and arranged by the congregations. Everywhere also this matter is presented to us as something self-evident, because God wills it as a fruit of the Gospel. God creates for the congregation and places into the congregation persons who are equipped for these things. They are always on hand wherever God has His Church, and they are placed into that service for which God has intended them. It is not only those who were expressly called as Apostles, prophets, shepherds, bishops, presbyters, pastors, who edify the congregations with the preaching of the Word and thus participate in the service which God wills. Only because such gifts of God could be used in a disorderly way, in view of the incomplete sanctification of Christians, and therefore be detrimental to the welfare of the congregation, as was the case in Corinth; and because for the same reason some unqualified persons considered themselves as being called to special services, therefore the Holy Ghost through the Apostles had to show which marks men would need to have so that they could be recognized as such, whom God had given for such service to the Church, and how these gifts could be put to practical use in an orderly way for the edification of the Church. But while God in this way clearly shows that His Church at all times is to have true teachers, we nowhere

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find an imperative telling us that every congregation must make provision for the calling and installing of such people. In other words, there are no "*verba institutionis*," not even for the office of bishop and presbyter in the Apostolic time, and certainly not for any additional special forms of congregational service. God through the Gospel creates this ministry at all times and everywhere on earth where He gathers His Church, and He always directs His Church in such a way that it makes use of the persons He gives it in accordance with the circumstances as they exist at that time. Here again God's creative will is in evidence, but He has not expressed it in a formal command.

Now we proceed to another point. When we speak of God's will and command in this discussion, we dare not lose sight of the fact that God here is addressing Himself only to His children as such, to Christians as Christians, to believers as believers. These commands have nothing to do with the Old Adam of the Christians; they are completely foreign to his nature; he has nothing in common with their content. Therefore he cannot understand them, either. As explained above, he knows only of legalistic imperatives; therefore he hears only legalistic imperatives whenever evangelical commands strike his ears. In accord with his evil nature, he now rises up against these commands. He does not want to preach anything that is called Gospel. Neither does he want to do any work that is necessary for carrying out God's gracious will. He himself does not want to hear the Gospel, either. To attend public church services, to use the Word of God privately in the home is an oppressive burden to him. Baptism has no significance for him; and if having a child baptized involves difficulties, he does not care to put up with the inconvenience. Much less even does he care to make use of the Lord's Supper. When Christ's command urging a diligent use of the Lord's Supper is addressed to him, he resists it as compulsion which is therewith laid upon him. Only in that way is it possible to understand it, that among so many of those whom we would still like to call Christians on account of the confession of their lips, there is to be found so much sluggishness and resistance to Christ's command. They are not yet all spirit. And while we may

safely assume that the new man in them acknowledges the commands of Christ as conforming to his own will and wishes, we must also reckon with the fact in our own selves and others that the Old Adam opposes these commands as legalistic imperatives and resists carrying them out. But from this the conclusion dare not be drawn that these commands actually contain a legalistic feature in themselves. According to the testimony of Scripture, the Gospel in every form is bound to meet up with such resistance on the part of natural man and on the part of the Old Adam in Christians. In the world it will always be true that the Gospel will be a savor of life unto life to some and others a savor of death unto death. This is not the fault of the Gospel, whether in one form or another. The Gospel never damns nor kills even though many people derive death and damnation from it. Its nature remains the same for the one person as for the other. The same is true of the relation of the Old Adam to the imperatives of which we are speaking. These do not change their nature over against the Old Adam in Christians; but the old nature in Christians, because it is sinful, uses the Gospel in the interest of sin and so becomes the more sinful. And since Paul plainly declares that the Old Man is to be drowned and die, that the flesh with its lusts and desires is to be crucified, in order that the body of sin may more and more be destroyed, that henceforth we may not serve sin, so we affirm fully in the sense of Scripture that the evangelical commands of the Lord, which as a divine power create and preserve the New Man, at the same time serve the purpose of overcoming and suppressing the Old Man and in those cases where the carrying out of those commands is involved removing him from the scene. It is not true, then, that by applying evangelical commands we can compel the Old Man to follow the evangelical commands — that would mean that the sin in us would become a good work; rather, in the case of Christians is the situation such that through the commands of their Lord the New Man in them receives the power to overcome the Old Man with his resistance and opposition.\*

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\* Editor's Note: We understand this statement as referring to those commands which the author has previous-

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At this point, for the sake of clarity, it should finally be pointed out once more that God's evangelical will and command has nothing whatsoever of a legalistic character attached to it, neither in its nature nor in respect to God's purpose. And this is not altered by the fact that we acknowledge that the individual fulfilling of these commands by God's children always consists in the very works which correspond to the highest demands of God's Law. God says: "Believe on the Lord Jesus!", and through that creative Word He works faith, which in its essence is nothing other than the confident trust for which God calls in the First Commandment. For He, Who in the Mosaic giving of the Law gave this commandment the wording with which we are familiar, introduced it with the statement that He is Jehovah, the Savior of sinners. God says: "Preach the Gospel!", and through this creative command produces confession — testifying of Jesus in every form. But the preaching of the Gospel is the real and proper use of the name of the Lord God Jehovah, Who calls for the same in the Second Commandment. Paul expresses this clearly when he speaks of the participation of Christians in the Sacrament. Christ says: "This do in remembrance of me!", and brings it about through this creative Word that His believers make use of this Sacrament. Concerning that Paul says, then: "As oft as ye eat this bread ... ye do show forth the Lord's death" — certainly a wonderful fulfilling of the Second Commandment, a true and God-pleasing use of His name, which He has revealed to us in the Sacrament. How far removed from the understanding of the Gospel a person would have to be, if he would draw the conclusion from what has been said: Because these evangelical commands bring forth what the Law demands, therefore they themselves must be legalistic demands. That is the logic of the natural man, who knows only the Law. Paul has said something different. He

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ly called "specific evangelical commands through which God accomplishes everything good upon earth." These are listed as follows: "Repent" — "Be converted" — "Believe." This does not, therefore, stand in opposition to the resolution of our CLC adopted at its last convention, i.e.: "The Law, which instructs us as to what works are God-pleasing, in no way whatever is a power or force for the doing of those works."



teaches that as the result of the corruption of human nature, it was impossible for the Law to bring forth any truly good, God-pleasing impulse and expression of the will of man; but that God through the sending of His Son, the saving power of which works on and on in the Gospel, has brought it to pass that the righteousness which the Law demanded, but could not produce, would be fulfilled in us. The true logic of the Holy Spirit teaches us, rather, to conclude as follows: When someone has true confidence toward God and freely confesses His name, loves the Gospel, cannot get along without it for himself, and helps to bring its saving use to others if, therefore, someone does these greatest and most excellent works which a man can possibly do, he is no longer living under the Law, was not moved to do these works by the Law. Rather, he is living under the life-giving Gospel, which alone can make a man capable of performing such works and of bringing them forth in him.

John Schaller



GLEANINGS FROM THE OPENING ADDRESS  
AT IMMANUEL LUTHERAN COLLEGE

*With the opening service on August 27, 1979, Immanuel Lutheran College moved into the third decade of its existence. We noted the completion of twenty years and the beginning of a new decade by looking back to our beginnings, by viewing the present moment, and by anticipating our future. This was done in the light of Solomon's words as found in I Kings 8:57-58: "The Lord our God be with us, as He was with our fathers: let Him not leave us, nor forsake us: That He may incline our hearts unto Him, to walk in all His ways, and His statutes, and His judgments, which He commanded our fathers."*

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When we look back, it could be quite easy for us to worship our fathers rather than to worship the God Whom our fathers worshipped. The result of such an action might well be dead traditionalism rather than live dedication. In his poem, "Mending Wall," Robert Frost gives us a picture of such dead traditionalism. He presents two farmers rebuilding a stone fence in the spring. The wall no longer serves to keep cattle apart but merely separates apples from pine cones. Yet the wall must be rebuilt, the one insists, because his father had said, "Good fences make for good neighbors." Dead traditionalism!

As we look back to the beginnings of Immanuel Lutheran College, our fathers, spiritual and in many instances also physical fathers, could very easily loom large in our minds. Their dreams and their hopes for this school at the outset seemed in the eyes of men a vain dream and an impossible hope. Few in number were those founding fathers. Their resources seemed woefully inadequate for such a large undertaking, and yet they began Immanuel Lutheran College in the Minnesota River valley at Mankato, Minnesota. Within a period of twenty years that school has prospered in many ways: in the number of students enrolled, in the size and value of its campus and buildings, in the number of courses offered, and in other ways as well. The impossible dream, the vain hope, has become a reality perhaps far beyond what our founding fathers anticipated at the outset. How easily we could magnify and glorify our fathers as we look back over these years! How easily we could look to them as a source of strength and direction for today and for the years to come! Our text, however, points us in another direction. It so clearly directs us not to our fathers, but to the God of our fathers, for guidance and strength in our undertakings.

The words of I Kings 8:57-58 were spoken by Solomon at the dedication of the temple. On that occasion, he also looked back to the days of his fathers, immediate and remote. He was very conscious of the tremendous changes that had been wrought in Israel during the days of David, his father. The boundaries of the kingdom had been stretched from the river of Egypt to the Euphrates,

and the spiritual conditions among the people had been greatly improved from the days of the judges and Saul. Mighty deeds had been performed during David's rule. Looking back to the years before David, Solomon might have gloried in the accomplishments of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and others of the early fathers of Israel, as well as those of David, his immediate father. But he does not! Solomon was well aware of the fact that David and the others were but earthen vessels with no spiritual strength of their own. He had lived in the palace with his father David, and that palace life gave ample proof and evidence of David's sinfulness. It was not David's life that made him a man after God's own heart, but it was the life of the Messiah in Whom David placed his trust that covered David's sins and made him acceptable to God. The many penitential psalms of the great king of Israel made this abundantly clear. From the Scriptures Solomon learned that the same was true of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and the rest of his remote fathers. Fully aware of this, Solomon turned not to his fathers but to the God of his fathers for help in carrying out the work of his day. He prayed, "The Lord our God be with us, as He was with our fathers!" Solomon understood full well the miracle that God had performed in and through the earthen vessels, Solomon's fathers.

What Solomon asked for his day, we pray for here at Immanuel also, as we begin this third decade of our existence. The God Who worked the miracle of our beginnings at Mankato, Minnesota, twenty years ago is the God that we need to make us strong for our present tasks. Those of us who have known the founding fathers realize with Solomon that they, as we, were but earthen vessels without spiritual strength of themselves. The gracious God of salvation made His strength perfect in their weakness. In our weakness we also turn to Him for strength. On this day we pray with Solomon, "The Lord God of our fathers be with us, as He was with our fathers: let Him not leave us, nor forsake us: That He may incline our hearts unto Him, to walk in all His ways, and His statutes, and His judgments, which He commanded our fathers!" Being ever renewed in His gracious Gospel way, we will want to walk the way of His Word in our life here in the present day Immanuel Lutheran College.

As we look at the students gathered here at this opening service, we see the Davids, the Abrahams, the Isaacs, and the Jacobs of tomorrow, God's chosen servants for the years that lie ahead. You will be such only if you worship the God of your fathers and not worship your fathers. You will be such if you know in faith the gracious Savior God as your fathers knew and know Him. Such a knowledge of heart and mind is worked by the Holy Spirit through God's holy Word. As Immanuel Lutheran College prepares you for the future, it does so by day in and day out, year in and year out, holding before your spiritual eyes the God of your fathers, the God Who reveals Himself so well in the pages of the Bible.

At this beginning of the third decade of Immanuel Lutheran College, we do well to pray, "The Lord God of our fathers be with us, as He was with our fathers!"

*R. Gurgel*



## ==== PANORAMA ====

### OSCAR NAUMANN — REMEMBRANCES

Only a few weeks short of having completed 26 years of service as president of the Wisconsin Synod, Oscar Naumann died on June 19, 1979. The record will no doubt show that President Naumann was a hard-working administrator who spent himself for his synod. The many meetings he was called upon to attend, both at home and abroad, drew heavily upon his physical resources. But, as one looking on from the outside, we saw him as one who did not spare himself. He did see his synod grow, in spite of the fact that there were those who said that it would suffer loss by breaking with the Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod in 1961.

We like to remember the solid and sound testimony which Pastor Naumann gave in Synodical Conference meetings and in Intersynodical Relations Committee meetings during the years when we stood together in opposing the infiltration of Scouting, the unionistic chaplaincy arrangements, as well as the unionistic St. Louis Resolutions of 1938 and the Common Confession, which had drawn the Missouri Synod and American Lutheran Church together in espousing a common cause toward the establishment of church fellowship even though all doctrinal differences had not been settled. The trumpet sound of warning which we heard from Oscar Naumann in those meetings was sound and clear. And we profited from it and appreciate it to this day. And when in later years we sat on opposite sides of the table, because we could no longer agree on the fellowship question as it had developed in the Wisconsin Synod, it must be said that Oscar Naumann showed no rancor or bitterness toward us, but conducted himself as a gentleman. He never intimated or suggested that we had taken our position for personal or other ulterior motives. This we must say to his credit. That he still felt a kinship and had a heart of sympathy for his former brethren when stricken by illness or other misfortune, of this we have evidence in a number of instances known to us. He showed us by his example that there was no need for bitter recrimination or back-biting even though we were separated for fellowship reasons. This we appreciated, and it can be a lesson to those who today find themselves on opposite sides of the table because of doctrinal differences.

We do not question President Naumann's sincerity when he expressed the wish that the CLC and WELS might come together in the agreement which they once had before the CLC came into being. He did not live to see his wish fulfilled. And we may not live to see it, either. But when and if it should come to pass, it must be an honest agreement with Scripture as its basis. With this I am sure Oscar Naumann would agree if he were here today.

*C. M. Gullerud*



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