



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

I Timothy 4:15

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THE BOOK OF CONCORD AND THE DOCTRINE OF CHURCH
AND MINISTRY — HISTORICAL OVERVIEW*

After so brief a survey of so vast a subject, a pause for meditation is now in order. Familiar doctrinal ground has been covered, not only in this article, but also in the entire series of which it is the conclusion. Does it become difficult at times to grasp the magnitude of the contribution made, the ground broken, by our spiritual forefathers at the time of the Reformation? Does our thorough doctrinal training almost serve as an obstacle to deep-seated appreciation of the confessions, where points that seem so obvious are made again and again and explained at such great length? As a possible corrective to this, we venture into some historical observations. Besides, the subject will not permit us to make the end of the confessions any kind of resting point. It urges us forward.

Three items show how prominent the doctrines of Church and Ministry and the priesthood of all believers have been at key points in the history of Lutheranism, beginning with the rebirth at the time of the Reformation and continuing into our own century on this continent: 1. Luther writes *The Freedom of a Christian*. 2. Walther produces his works on Church and Ministry. 3. August Pieper elaborates on this doctrine in the *Quartalschrift*. Let's elaborate a bit.

1. We have noted earlier how Luther passed from justification to the priesthood, and thence to irreconcilable conflict with Rome. The confessional writings called forth in this conflict have, as we have seen, occupied themselves to a great extent with this area of doctrine and its various corollaries and consequences.

2. The Romanizing tendency re-emerged amongst Lutherans. God led the Saxons to Perry County, Missouri.

* Editor's Note: This is the concluding part of an essay begun in the March, 1980, issue, pp. 2-22.

Stephan was exposed. What now? Back to Scripture in order to re-possess the doctrines of the priesthood of all believers and Church and Ministry, and to relearn the art of putting them into practice. The eruption of extensive and wide-ranging discussions on these points coincided with the emergence of the synodical body which for nearly one hundred years stood as a bulwark of orthodoxy and perhaps the chief preserver and herald of the unconditioned Gospel with its bestowal of full and abundant spiritual rights and gifts. The development of events showed how widespread and pervasive had become the Romanizing tendency toward elevation of the clergy to a special status and denial of the spiritual rights of Christians. God granted to Walther and his followers the grace to free themselves from this. Surely it is part of our spiritual homework to remain in close and affectionate touch also with this portion of our heritage.¹

3. Wisconsin Synod leaders, in the early years of this century, were granted the grace to uphold the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers as it relates to the twin questions of the relationship of congregation to synod and the nature of the pastoral office. Early issues of the *Theologische Quartalschrift*, which began to be published in 1904, deal to a great extent with the election controversy, special emphasis being given to proper hermeneutical method and the meaning of "analogy of faith" in Rom. 12:6. Beginning especially in 1911, and continuing into 1913, the issues center on the Church and Ministry question, which had gradually been forced to the surface as a result of a case of synodical suspension some years before.² The writers were duly appreciative of the privilege they were being granted and aware of the importance of the contribution they were making. The manner in which an evangelical spirit so thoroughly permeates this effort in doctrinal elaboration can only bring deep joy to any whose relationship with Jesus has taught him the blessedness of walking under grace.

Somehow, the spiritual effort involved in addressing and making advances in these issues under the guidance of the Holy Spirit is more easily understood and appreciated when the participants are less distant from us and the immediate specific issues are still under discus-

sion in circles which are close to us. The fruits of the revolutionary labors of the reformers, so nicely laid out for us, seem perhaps to have been easily won and easy to retain. But to study through the material of Pieper, clarifying areas of the doctrine of Church and Ministry and shedding beautiful Gospel light on a newly-surfaced problem which has vexed and still is vexing some conservative Lutherans — that is an experience which draws one much more intimately into the feeling of wrestling with problems, overcoming misconceptions and preconceptions, and breaking new ground. That is bracing air to breathe. Sympathy for the elements in one area or period of controversy leads to increased sympathy elsewhere. Even studies which might seem diverse have a way of mutually shedding light upon each other. Appreciation of the confessions is thus much enhanced through study of controversies which lie closer to us.³

And now the question arises: Do the confessions shed light on these recently discussed questions of Church and Ministry? Indirectly, yes. They lay the groundwork. They have the essence. They oppose Roman legalism and externalism. They glorify the freedom we have in Christ. They decry the establishment and enforcement of man-made ceremonies and forms. They teach that Christians possess the Keys. And though they do not directly address problems that have later become topics of discussion, they certainly do nothing to support the idea that a congregation, as opposed to a synod, is divinely ordained, or that some specific form of the public ministry alone enjoys the distinction of special divine institution. It is true that in the section which comes closest to these matters, Melancthon's "Of the Power and Jurisdiction of Bishops," one finds it stated that "by divine authority the grades of bishop and pastor are not diverse" (p. 523). But this is part of the anti-hierarchical argument of this portion of the treatise on the power and primacy of the Pope, and is meant to serve as premise for the conclusion "that ordination administered by a pastor in his own church is valid by divine law" (p. 523). One might, on the other hand, point to Melancthon's use of the Ephesians 4 passage: "Furthermore, the ministry of the New Testament is not bound to places and persons as the Levitical ministry, but it is dispers-

ed throughout the whole world, and is there where God gives His gifts, apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers" (p. 511). "And this authority is a gift which in reality is given to the Church, which no human power can wrest from the Church, as Paul also testifies to the Ephesians, 4:8, when he says: He ascended, He gave gifts to men. And he enumerates among the gifts specially belonging to the Church pastors and teachers, and adds that such are given for the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (p. 523). To the key passage in Matthew 18, there is this reference on p. 511: "Likewise Christ gives supreme and final jurisdiction to the Church, when He says: Tell it unto the Church." There is no specification as to form.⁴

But there is no point in straining after arguments. We rest content with this, that the confessions point the way as they move about in the essence of Gospel freedom and privileges. And we rejoice that others took their cue from them, and above all from the Scriptures, and have resisted and exposed the newer and subtler forms of incipient Romanism which emerged in the area of Church and Ministry, undermining and eroding the spiritual rights of Christians, as though they virtually lost their priesthood when they went from congregation to synod, or had their hands tied as to form when calling someone publicly to administer the Gospel on their behalf.

Lutheranism, Missouri Synod, Wisconsin Synod ... At the tail end, as it were, we of the CLC have also been granted a piece of the action. The work we have done is small indeed, compared with that done at former periods. And on the particular issues involved, the key work lies in those articles of the *Quartalschrift*. Yet it would be inexcusable ungratefulness were we to overlook the remarkable favor of God in permitting us to produce a document on these issues, "Concerning Church and Ministry," setting forth our testimony on a subject so dear to us. Circumstances, both of history and of practical congregational and synodical church life, are such that of our two documents, the one on "Church Fellowship" tends to get the most attention. It is with the other, however, that we find ourselves occupied with the glory of the Gospel as exhibited in a practical way in the various as-

pects of the doctrine of Church and Ministry. It is the preservation of the pure Gospel, and nothing else, that is being served by our Scriptural practice of church fellowship.

* * * * *

May the truths of Church and Ministry be living truths in our hearts. May we appreciate and employ the privileges purchased for us with the blood of Christ. May we give unceasing thanks and praise for our salvation. May we approach the throne of grace with utmost confidence. May we diligently and untiringly plead, pray, intercede. May we learn ever more fully to act trustingly upon the promise that all spiritual things are accomplished through the Word. May we intently make that Word the object of our study. And may the salvation of souls and the glory of Jesus' name be abundantly served thereby.

R. E. Wehrwein

FOOTNOTES

1. A splendid historical-theological overview is given by August Pieper in his article, "*Die Stimme unserer Kirche in der Frage von Kirche und Amt (Zugleich ein Beitrag zu der verflommenen Waltherfeier)*," *Theologische Quartalschrift*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (January, 1912), pp. 21-40.

"The doctrines of Church and Ministry are only the practical side of the doctrine of justification or Christian freedom directed to the congregational life of Christians. At bottom, Luther had only one thing against the Pope: 'Because he will not permit Christians to be saved without his power, which, nevertheless, is nothing, and is neither ordained nor commanded by God' (Sm. Art., p. 308 [*Triglotta*, p. 475]). 'The Pope, however, prohibits this faith, saying that to be saved a person must obey him' (*ibid.*). That was the doctrine of justification and of Church and Ministry together. Rightly understood, Luther battled for nothing else than the doctrine of Church and Ministry. The question was whether the sinner, desiring to be saved, was to be bound to the grace of Christ and to the means of grace alone, or, be-

sides these, also to an institution, called church, allegedly founded by Christ, and to a monopolistic office standing next to the Gospel. Luther really, at bottom, taught nothing else than the free spiritual kingship and priesthood of all those justified through faith, a kingship or priesthood which is subject to nobody but Christ, which with the Gospel inherits as its own most intimate personal possession all spiritual powers and offices, which stands infinitely higher and constitutes far more than all offices of the apostles, prophets, shepherds, teachers, rulers, and miracle-workers. Walther taught nothing different. In these things he only let Luther, the confessions, and the orthodox fathers of our church speak to us" (pp. 32-33).

"That is Luther's doctrine and the doctrine of our confessions. It is the doctrine of Scripture, inseparably bound with the doctrine of justification through faith alone. One cannot preserve in its purity the one without the other. The chief work of Walther is that he 'reprisinated,' or better, 'reproduced' both doctrines in their purity from Luther and the confessions, and in large measure brought them to the recognition of the Lutheran Church in America. That ensures him his place among the truly great ones of the Church, and gives him claim to the thanks of all who love Zion" (p. 36).

On the need to keep the historical setting in mind to avoid misunderstanding Walther, confer *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 77, No. 1 (January, 1980), p. 59.

2. A. Pieper did most of the writing, and we can see justification for his phrase, "*meine Amtslehre*." The issue was never out of sight for long. John Schaller finds it natural to refer to it in a January, 1915, article. Cf. *Journal of Theology*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (September, 1979), pp. 34-37. We find A. Pieper addressing the subject again in the April, 1921, issue. His 1929 article, referred to in the first part of the present article, gives a survey of the development of the controversy, followed by another thorough theological treatment. A survey of the controversy, together with references, appears on pp. 215-218 of Im. P. Frey's "Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, 1863-1963," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 60, No. 3 (July, 1963). Not to be overlooked are: "Theses on the Church and Ministry," *WLQ*, Vol. 67, No. 2 (April, 1970);

"Is the Pastorate in the Congregation the Only God-ordained Office in the Church?", Harold E. Wicke, WLQ, Vol. 68, No. 2 (April, 1971); and "Synod and Congregation," J. P. Meyer, WLQ, Vol. 61, No. 4 (October, 1964).

3. In this connection, there is a revitalizing way to relive those spiritual thrills which we experienced upon first being introduced to the life of Luther: meet Charles Chiniquy. His *Fifty Years in the Church of Rome* and *Forty Years in the Church of Christ* are enthralling reading. Unfortunately, they are not easy to obtain. The April, May, June, and September, 1976, issues of *Christian Heritage* have articles on this French Canadian priest who finally broke from Rome in 1858 and eventually turned Presbyterian. May we offer you a sample of his writing?

"However absurd and impious this belief may be, yet it was mine, and it is also the belief of every true member of the Church of Rome today. The glorious light and grace of God could not possibly flow directly from Him to me; they had to pass through the Pope and his Church, which were my only mountain of strength and only ocean of light. It was, then, my firm belief that there was an impassable abyss between myself and God, and that the Pope and his Church were the only bridge by which I could have communication with him. That stupendously high and most sublime mountain, the Pope, was between myself and God: and all that was allowed my poor soul was to raise itself and travel with great difficulty till it attained the foot of that holy mountain, the Pope, and prostrating itself there in the dust, ask him to let me know what my yet distant God would have me to do. The promises of mercy, truth, light, and life were all vested in this great mountain, the Pope, from whom alone they could descend upon my poor lost soul!

"Darkness, ignorance, uncertainty, and eternal loss were my lot, the very moment I ceased worshipping at the feet of the Pope! The God of Heaven was not MY God; He was only the God of the Pope! The Saviour of the world was not my Saviour; He was only the Pope's. Therefore it was through the Pope only that I could receive Christ as my Saviour, and to the Pope alone had I to go to know the way, the truth, and the life of my soul!

"God alone knows what a dark and terrible night I

passed after this meeting! I had again to smother my conscience, dismantle my reason, and bring them all under the turpitudes of the theologies of Rome, which are so well calculated to keep the world fettered in ignorance and superstition.

"But God saw the tears with which I bedewed my pillow that night. He heard the cry of my agonizing soul, and in His infinite love and mercy determined to come to my rescue, and save me. If He saw fit to leave me many years more in the slavery of Egypt, it was that I might better know the plagues of that land of darkness, and the iron chains which are there prepared for poor lost souls.

"When the hour of my deliverance came, the Lord took me by the hand and helped me to cross the Red Sea. He brought me to the Land of Promise — a land of peace, life, and joy which passeth all understanding." (*Fifty Years in the Church of Rome*; Baker Book House: reprinted, 1958, from the 1886 edition; pp. 98-99.)

4. The same point is also noted by A. Pieper, "*Was lehren wir im Artikel von der Kirche und ihrem Amt?*", *Theologische Quartalschrift*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (April, 1921), pp. 105-106. See also p. 103: "The second proposition of the opponents advances an erroneous teaching concerning the marks of the Church. It makes the presence of an already definitely organized local congregation into a mark of the Church, whereas Scripture and the confessions make only the preaching of the Gospel and the right use of the Sacraments into marks of the Communion of Saints, Matthew 18:20; Melancthon's Tract, #24, p. 333 [p. 511]." The entire article will richly repay close study.

The reader may also consult the discussion of Fagerberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 237ff. "Any attempts to justify a specific episcopal constitution on the basis of the Lutheran Confessions must be looked upon as futile" (p. 237, footnote 39). Cf. also certain comments by the translator in Hunnius-Press, *op. cit.*: "These men [Hunnus and Luther] understood 'Doctor' as part of the ministry of which Article five of the Augsburg Confession speaks. It is not proper to try to restrict this ministry to the parish ministry only" (p. 176). "Nothing could be plainer than Hunnius' understanding of the term *Ecclesia particularis*. It could be a local congregation or a larger church body" (p. 181).

THE HOLY SPIRIT — THE PROMISED PARACLETE

In His valedictory to His disciples Jesus ministered to a very pressing need of those who had cast their lot with Him. Although the vast majority had rejected Him because He had not fulfilled their expectations and their ambitions for world leadership and social impact, the little flock of believers known as His disciples remained at His side. However, they were not entirely free from an earth-bound interpretation of His mission and theirs. As long as they had the Messiah as a visible presence, they had the constant corrective for their mistaken views of the kingdom as to the glories of the past, the significance of the present, and the prospects for the future. Take, for example, the request of the sons of Zebedee. When they asked to be seated, one on the Savior's right hand and the other on His left in His glory, Jesus said to James and John and to the other ten as well: "Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you; but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: and whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:42-45). Their affairs would not be ordered according to secular rules of the nations but in consonance and in harmony with the objectives of a spiritual ministry with eternal goals. It was not a question of who would occupy positions of authority according to human standards of judgment, but it was a question of service and self-denial with the eternal salvation of lost sinners in view.

Greatness, as the Savior outlined it, would rest in a faithful presentation of the Gospel message of forgiveness through the redeeming blood of Christ. This is the greatness so often lost sight of in the present day emphasis on social action, ecumenism, chiliasm, pentecostalism, and charismaticism (if we may coin a word for the movement which is sweeping across denominational lines throughout the land). Temptations to fall into these

traps of secularism and worldliness (for this is what they are) were not entirely unknown to the disciples nor were they completely free from entertaining some thoughts along those lines. However, if such thoughts would remain to color and characterize their ministry, then Jesus' death would bring to them the shock of their lives and the seeming end to their recently chosen vocation. It would mean for them a return to the fishing boats and a looking for another Messiah yet to come. Out of His divine knowledge of these threatening dangers and in loving concern for the true welfare of His followers, Christ addressed His valedictory to His disciples as it is recorded in the Gospel according to St. John, chapters 14, 15, and 16. And it is in this connection that He promises to send the Holy Spirit as the PARACLETE.

The designation of the Holy Spirit as Paraclete (ὁ παράκλητος) appears in the New Testament only four times, all of them in Jesus' valedictory. In each instance it occurs in connection with a sending of the Holy Spirit. The term itself is found in only one other passage (I John 2:1), and there it is used by John in referring to Jesus' activity in behalf of sinners: "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." It is safe to say that the term Paraclete, a transliteration of the Greek, is seldom used, although the Catholic Douay version (following the Vulgate *paracletus*) leaves the word in its untranslated form. An examination of other versions reveals a variety of renditions: "Counselor" - NIV, RSV; "Helper" - NASB, Moffatt, Good News Bible, Goodspeed; "Advocate" - NEB; "Another to befriend you" - Knox; "Someone to stand by you" - Phillips; "*Der Troester*" - Luther; "Comforter" - KJV, AAT; "*Talsmand*" ("Spokesman") - Norwegian Bible, *Nye Utgave*. If one is to take the term in its strictly literal sense rather than choosing an interpretive rendition, one will come up with the meaning, "a person called to one's side." While this may seem to be a bit clumsy, since it does not give us a one word translation of ὁ παράκλητος, it certainly gives a depth of meaning to the Savior's message to His frightened and bewildered disciples at this time which was very critical for them. That the term involves and includes the thought of one who will be a comforter, helper, spokesman, no one will deny.

But this was certainly true also of the sending of the Holy Spirit in all periods of the history of God's children from the beginning. The sending of the Holy Spirit was not restricted to any particular occurrence, as may be seen from the variety of expressions setting forth a transmission of the Spirit of God: Ex. 31:3; I Sam. 16:13; I Kings 18:12; Is. 59:19; Ezek. 39:29. It is well to note that the Savior on the occasion of His farewell address to His disciples used a very special term in connection with His promise to send the Holy Spirit. He used the term Paraclete, carrying to them a very special message tailored to their specific need at the time.

From the use of the term Paraclete in this connection, Christians of all ages in the New Testament era may find much comfort and sustaining power and strength. The Old Testament believers were preserved in their faith in the coming Messiah, and the Holy Spirit upheld them and ministered to their every need. At the time of Christ's visible public ministry the believers had the privilege of seeing and hearing the Savior as He performed His works of wonder and spoke the words of truth. They would be witnesses of His crucifixion, His resurrection, and His ascension either by their very presence at these events or by the testimony of eye-witnesses of the same. But now would come a time when these would be past events. These things would be behind them, as they are for us. What message did Jesus have for them and for us?

Jesus gave the promise to send the divine person of the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, called to stand alongside them. These are His words: "I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. ... The Comforter which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. ... When the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me; and ye also shall bear witness,

because ye have been with me from the beginning. ... Nevertheless I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment; of sin, because they believe not on me; of righteousness, because the prince of this world is judged. I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth; for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come" (John 14:16-18.26; 15:26.27; 16:7-13). It should be obvious that the term Paraclete was used for a very special reason and to fulfill a very special need.

The first indication of a fulfillment of the promise would be the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Of this the Savior reminded the disciples immediately before His ascension: "And being assembled together with them, (Jesus) commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:4-8).

It is clear from the words of Scripture that the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit took place for the purpose of energizing their testimony to the Gospel and making it possible to bring the message in words that all could understand. The results were phenomenal, for three thousand were on that day baptized and received the gift of the Holy Spirit. Peter had said to them: "The promise is unto you, and to your children and to all that are

afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts 2:39). Furthermore, many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. Surely the promise of the Paraclete was being fulfilled.

A further fulfillment of Jesus' words to the apostles is evidenced in Paul's words to the Corinthians: "Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual" (I Cor. 2:13; cf. I Cor. 14:37). Here the apostle was speaking for himself and the other apostles who brought their witness in their writings as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. Therefore it could be rightfully said of the Church that it is "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord; in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit" (Eph. 2:20-22). Through the writings of the apostles we are today experiencing the blessings of the Holy Spirit's activity as Paraclete. The pity of it is that many misguided souls are looking for the blessings of the Holy Spirit outside of the Scriptures and are thus led to place their confidence in emotional experiences which cause them to be turned hither and yon and to be tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine. In this context there are no standards except subjective feelings about what is right and wrong. This is not the way of the Lord Jesus, who said: "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31-32). If we would have a solid basis for judgment as the Lord promised in His words concerning the Paraclete, then we must seek Him where He is to be found, namely, in the Word which He has inspired and through which He works. Jesus said: "Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you" (John 15:3). And if we are to be workmen that need not to be ashamed, then we must speak as the oracles of God.

The Lord did not overlook the need of the early Christians who lived at a time before the New Testament Scriptures were written. For their benefit His promise

of the Paraclete was fulfilled in a special way when He gave to His witnesses during that period the power to perform miracles. This was not given with the intention of drawing big crowds for the purpose of experiencing the results of a spectacular healing ministry, but this gift of the Holy Spirit was given that it might serve as a witness to the legitimacy and the authenticity of the Word proclaimed (cf. Acts 8:5ff.). It was given in an inauspicious manner, entirely lacking the fanfare of present day charismatics. Indeed, the Gospel ministry pursues its course with the sounding of the still, small voice (cf. I Kings 19:11ff.). Those who could have received wide acclaim by people who were ready to call them Jupiter and Mercury because of the miracles they performed, turned aside the garlands and the oxen that were brought in their honor and said: "Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein: who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness" (Acts 14:15-17). Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, did great wonders and miracles among the people. But the thing that is remembered of him is the wisdom and the spirit by which he spoke. "They were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake" (Acts 6:10). Beside him he had the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, who gave him the courage and the strength to testify to the truth of God in the face of death. And when it came time for him to give his life for the Lord's sake, we are told: "And he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God. Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, and cast him out of the city, and stoned him" (Acts 7:55-58a).

Faithful witnesses to the truth have faced the opposition of evil spirits in the work of their calling down through the years. What has sustained them and carried them up as on the wings of an eagle? It is the

truth that the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, has sent them and separated them for the work. Thus of Barnabas and Saul we are told: "As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus" (Acts 13:2-4).

This was not a unique and one time occurrence. For later Paul said of the elders of Ephesus: "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood" (Acts 20:28). And so all pastors and teachers and evangelists and witnesses should take heart, for "there is one body and one Spirit even as ye are called in one hope of your calling" (Eph. 4:4). The Holy Spirit stands alongside with all His gifts, blessings, and power in the face of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is the Paraclete.

C. M. Gullerud



MEDITATION ON PSALM XIX

Our God has provided all mankind with two textbooks in which He reveals His nature, His character, and His gracious plans for man. They are nature and Scripture. David speaks of the book of nature in the first part of the Psalm, verses 1-6. In this section David used the name EL for God, which designates God as the almighty Creator. In the second part, when he speaks of the book of Scripture, David used the covenant name for God, JEHOVAH, the Redeemer. Whereas the name, EL, appears only once in the first section, the name, JEHOVAH, appears seven times in the second section, the last time in a threefold manner, "Lord, my Strength, and my Redeemer." It is obvious that the glory of God as Redeemer outshines the glory of God as Creator.

V. 1 - The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handywork.

Notice the synonymous parallelism of the verse, the second line restating in varied terms the thought of the first. The heavens are in the plural, indicating the infinite variety of God's celestial creation, the cloud-covered heavens sending down the gentle showers, the cloudless heaven sending warmth and fruitfulness to the earth, the ever changing starry heavens, the endless expanse of the universe which is now believed to be expanding at a speed that defies human comprehension. The parallel expression is the firmament, the same word that is used by Moses to name what God created the second day. Firmament is a word coming from the Latin, indicating something firm or strong, for the heavens were thought to be of some strong material to hold up the clouds with their tremendous weight of water. The word means hammered thin as gold leaf or stretched out. Isaiah speaks of the Creator God as He that "stretched out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in" (Is. 40:22).

The heavens and the firmament declare and show the glory and the handywork of the Creator God. These simple

words are the Holy Spirit's answer to more than a century of evolutionary propaganda. What is the message of the heavens by day and night? Simply this: That God is and that He made all things! What is the highest wisdom of scientific man? What is the summary of hundreds and thousands of scientific books written in the last century? That God is not and that the universe came into existence by chance and happenstance. The simplest gadget on a shelf in a hardware store, the most humble lodging for man has to be made by someone; yet man in his highest wisdom concludes that our complicated universe, which man admittedly is just beginning to probe, came into being spontaneously with no creative effort, no planning, no purpose by a Being called EL or God. Small wonder that St. Paul calls the wisdom of man foolishness!

V. 2 - *Day unto day uttereth speech,
and night unto night showeth knowledge.*

Both day and night bring forth their testimony. The Hebrew verb for "uttereth" has the thought of pouring or gushing forth as an artesian well that keeps on flowing without diminishing. Both the day and the night continue the unending testifying.

St. Paul refers to this "speech" and "knowledge" of nature in his letter to the Romans, where he wrote, "That which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath showed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse" (Rom. 1:19-20). Every day, followed by night, and night followed again by day keep on welling forth the same testimony that God is, that God was there before anything was here, that God is almighty, for no known force or power in the universe could have caused the universe to come into existence. Think of what this means: Millions of children in communist countries are being told, "There is no God." Millions more in our own country are being told in thousands of textbooks and by thousands of teachers in schools throughout the land that this glorious universe came into existence all by itself by reason of forces within, and so God is not the Creator.

There is no God! But each morning when the sun rises and each evening when the stars come out, they say: Don't believe that nonsense! God is, and He is the Creator of all! The book of nature and the book of Scripture agree in praising God as Creator.

V. 3 - *There is no speech nor language,
where their voice is not heard. KJV*

*There is no speech, nor are there words;
their voice is not heard. RSV*

*Es ist keine Sprache noch Rede,
da man nicht ihre Stimme hoere. Luther*

The translations indicate the difficulty of grasping the thought that the psalmist is expressing. He is either saying that the message proclaimed by the heavens is not one directed to the ear of man but rather to his eye, or he is emphasizing the extent of that proclamation, namely, that there is no place on the face of the earth where people live and speak their language that the message of the heavens is not heard. Spurgeon expressed the latter thought well: "Sun, moon, and stars are God's traveling preachers; they are apostles upon their journey confirming those who regard the Lord, and judges on circuit condemning those who worship idols."

V. 4 - *Their line is gone out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world.*

Whose "line" and what is the "line"? It is the heaven's line, the heaven's measuring tape. The heavens are declaring the glory of the Lord. How far does that message carry? Throughout all the earth! The parallel then follows: The words of the heavens travel or sound forth or reach to the ends of the world. Again Spurgeon: "By their line is probably meant the *measure* of their domain which, together with their testimony, has gone out to the utmost end of the habitable earth. No man living beneath the copes of heaven dwells beyond the bounds of the diocese of God's Court-preachers."

St. Paul in Romans 10 adapts these words concerning the world-wide range of the message of nature to the

world-wide spread of the Gospel already in his day: "But I say, Have they not heard? Yes verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world" (v. 18). Paul's adaptation of the thought and words of the psalmist have led some, including Luther, to interpret the first part of this Psalm allegorically, as though the heavens were proclaiming the glory of God in the content of the Gospel.

Vv. 4b-6: *In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun,
Which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber,
and rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race,
His going forth is from the end of the heaven,
and his circuit unto the ends of it:
and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof.*

This is imagination-stimulating poetry. The sun is the nomad of the heavens, making his daily journey. After each day of travel he pitches his tent, as it were, and rests for the night. In the morning when the sun reappears in the east, he rises above the horizon as a bridegroom, gloriously clad, merges with beaming joy from the bridal pavilion.

Never, for even a fraction of a second, does the sun falter or hesitate or delay. He is always eager to get on his way — rejoicing as a strong man to run a race. Think of the eagerness of the track stars to break from the starting line in the Olympic Games!

The route of the sun is not a mere 100 meters or a long cross-country course, but his circuit is from one end of the earth to the other. And as he passes by, nothing is hid from his heat. Parts of the earth are hid from his light, but nothing from his necessary, fruitful, life-giving heat.

The heavens unceasingly and to the uttermost ends of the earth declare that God IS and that He is the all-pow-

erful, all-wise CREATOR of all. How is man to react to this testimony? Another psalmist has shown us the way:

When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy
fingers,
the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained;
What is man, that thou art mindful of him?
and the son of man, that thou visitest him?

O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all
the earth. (Psalm 8:3-4,9)

Notice that here EL is called JEHOVAH. The Creator-God is also the Redeemer-God, thus linking both parts of the Psalm.

Vv. 7-9: *The law of the Lord is perfect,
converting the soul:
the testimony of the Lord is sure,
making wise the simple.
The statutes of the Lord are right,
rejoicing the heart:
the commandment of the Lord is pure,
enlightening the eyes,
the fear of the Lord is clean,
enduring for ever:
the judgments of the Lord are true
and righteous altogether.*

What strikes the eye when you see these verses written in this way? Two things: first, the five not synonymous but parallel terms used for the basic term, law or Torah; and second, the sixfold use of YHWH, the sacred, unspoken covenant name for the God of Israel, translated as Lord and known to us also as Jehovah or Yahweh.

The term, Torah or law, is one of the big words of the Old Testament. The verbal form of the word means to point out or to instruct. And so the Torah is the pointing out, the instruction, the doctrine or teaching. The Torah of the Lord is, in its broadest sense, the equivalent of the Word of God. Among the Jews the Old Testament canon was divided into three sections, the Torah or law, the prophets, and the writing or Psalms. Our Lord

recognized this threefold division when He told His disciples shortly before His ascension "that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me" (Luke 24:44).

The content of the Torah contained both law and gospel in the narrow sense of each word. The Torah was the revelation of the eternal, immutable will of God, the revelation of His character or His holiness in words. It was delivered to God's people through Moses on Mount Sinai, as St. John wrote: "The law was given by Moses" (John 1:17). It is a whole, a unit, which for purposes of study has been divided into three sections known in our catechisms as the civil, the ceremonial, and the moral law. The Torah is furthermore history, that is, the working of the Lord God in history according to the norms of His holiness. Thus the flood and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrhah are historical revelations of the seriousness of our God, His jealousy, in respect to His standard for man's behavior. In the two cases cited, that standard was revealed in man by nature. That standard and more was later revealed to Moses through words.

But the Torah also includes the promises of salvation, the New Testament gospel in prophetic form. In the glorious prophecy of the Messianic era, recorded by both Isaiah (2) and Micah (4), the prophecy reads: "for out of Zion shall go forth the law (Torah), and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." That prophecy found its fulfillment when our Lord commissioned His disciples to "go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). Furthermore, the Torah of Moses, made up of all kinds of testimonies, statutes, commandments, and judgments, contained numerous instructions concerning the tabernacle which later became the temple, the priesthood, the sacrifices, the entire cycle of festivals including the Sabbath. All of these rules and regulations concerning ceremonies and institutions were shadows that pointed to and found their spiritual reality in Christ. So they were gospel encased in legal forms.

The careful observer can discern the difference be-

tween the Old and New Covenants in the difference between the Old Testament term, Torah, and the New Testament term, Gospel. The Torah is basically a legal term which encases and includes the gospel of salvation in prophetic and ceremonial form. The Torah covers the time when God's people were in their minority, when historically they lived as believers under the law. When our Lord sent His disciples into all the world, He commissioned them to preach not the law, but the gospel. He used that term in its wider sense. The heart and core of the message was the good news of salvation completed, the radical rescue of fallen mankind from sin, death, and Satan, but included also the preparatory message of the law. The Old Testament dispensation was one of the law with the life-creating gospel encased as a bud waiting to burst into bloom. The New Testament dispensation is one of the gospel in glorious bloom, but with the law still serving as the way-preparer for the gospel.

The five parallel, but not synonymous, terms of Torah are testimony, statutes, commandments, fear, and judgments. Four of these emphasize the law content of the Torah, as the verbalization of the holy will of God for Israel.

The word, "testimony," is used in the singular in the same sense as the Torah of Moses for the two tables of stone. For example, the construction and furniture of the Ark of the Covenant is described in Exodus 25. Verse 21 records the instruction: "In the ark thou shalt put the testimony," that is, the two tables of the law. In the following verse the ark is called "the ark of the testimony." In Exodus 16:34 the same usage of testimony occurs. In this instance the KJV translators indicated the technical usage of the word by using the capital letter: the Testimony. There is significance in this word. When the Lord God appeared in all His holiness on Mount Sinai, He testified to His people, and He wrote on the two tables of stone the Testimony of His nature and character, which He wanted to be reflected in the lives of His people, solemnly testifying that this is to be the norm for living. Thus the testimony served to curb rebellious behavior and to reveal behavior that was in violation of the standard, while continuously holding forth

the norm for the moral behavior that the Lord had prescribed for His people.

The Hebrew word that is translated as "statutes" appears only in the plural and is used only in the Psalms, according to Gesenius' dictionary. Closely related is the word "commandment," used here in the collective sense. The plural is used, for example, in Deuteronomy 6:1, following the rehearsal of the Ten Commandments and preceding the summary of those commandments: "Now these are the commandments, the statutes, and the judgments, which the Lord your God commanded to teach you ..." Notice that the Torah, the Instruction, or the Testimony is broken down into numerous individual commandments, which in turn are summed up again in the one commandment to "love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might" (Deut. 6:5).

The term "judgment" is used in the singular as a synonym for law and in the plural as a synonym for the many individual statutes and laws.

In contrast to these terms which emphasize the law content of the Torah, the term "fear of the Lord" emphasizes the desired response on the part of those instructed in the Torah. Thus the "fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Ps. 111:10), and "the fear of the Lord is to hate evil" (Prov. 8:13).

"The law of the Lord is perfect." It fits man's spiritual needs to a tee. It has life-giving qualities, "converting the soul." There the emphasis is on the promise enclosed in the Torah, for Scripture consistently teaches that the gospel, in prophecy and fulfillment, is the only life-creating force available for man.

"The testimony of the Lord is sure." Moralists today are trying to topple the Testimony of the Lord concerning the way man should live, desiring to replace that sure testimony with the private judgment of the individual in a given situation or with the voice of the majority. But the simple child of God knows better, for the Testimony of the Lord makes wise the simple, in moral matters, teaching him what is right and wrong.

"The statutes of the Lord are right." Think of how the Supreme Court continually reinterprets the Constitution of the United States. Think of how laws are made, become obsolete, and are repealed. Not so with the law of God! It stands, each law thereof; they are right, and as such they have this effect that they are "rejoicing the heart." St. Paul reechoed this thought of the psalmist when he testified, "I delight in the law of God after the inward man."

"The commandment of the Lord is pure." It is not the product of lobbying by special interests for special privileges. No, it is the reflection of the character of the holy God, and as such is continually "enlightening the eye" of the believer, whose moral sight and vision has been obscured by the effects of sin in his body and soul life.

"The fear of the Lord is clean" — morally clean, for it stands in awe of the Lord, with no hypocrisy, "enduring forever," into all eternity.

"The judgments of the Lord are true," regardless of the criticisms of men, "and righteous altogether." Both the doer and the violator of the law get their due.

V. 10: *More to be desired are they than gold,
yea, than much fine gold:
sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.*

What are to be more desired than fine gold and sweeter than the honeycomb? The judgments of the Lord! We have observed that the singular, judgment, is a synonym for the law, while the plural reflects the many individual statutes and commandments of the law. But even as Torah reflects the instructing activity of the Lord, the Testimony His solemn witness bearing, and fear the desired impact of such instruction and testifying through statutes and commandments upon the recipient, namely, that his spiritual response should be one of awe and reverence which desires to obey the law, so judgments emphasize the judicial decisions of the Lord that are made on the basis of the revelation of His holy character in the law.

When the Lord gave His instruction and so made His testimony concerning His character and nature which would determine all His judicial decisions, He described Himself as "a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments" (Ex. 20:5-6). All of the Lord's judicial decisions affecting the lives and destinies of people on this earth, either visiting iniquity or showing mercy, are His judgments, His responses to the behavior of men on earth according to the norm that He has proclaimed. The psalmist declares that they are more valuable than fine gold and sweeter than the honeycomb.

What does this mean practically in the life of children of God? Leviticus 10 reports that two of the sons of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, "took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and pur incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the Lord, which he commanded them not" (v. 1). In so initiating a form of drawing near unto the Lord, which the Lord had not instituted or ordained, they violated the commandments and statutes that the Lord had just given. When the Lord gives instruction or makes known His testimony, He does not do that conditioned by the will and acceptance of man. No, He gives His law on a "Do it or else!" basis. Nadab and Abihu disobeyed and they experienced the judgment of the Lord, the visiting of their iniquity. In this case it was sudden and final, for "there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord" (v. 2). Was the death of two of his sons to be something more desired than fine gold and sweeter than the honeycomb for Aaron? Yes, indeed — despite his personal grief over the sin of his sons! We read that Aaron "held his peace," and the Lord forbade any show of mourning for the transgressors. "The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether."

David wrote this Psalm, but he had a hard time learning what the Spirit of the Lord moved him to write. Absalom, David's son, rebelled against his father and in so doing rebelled against the Lord and violated the Instruction and Testimony of the law, specifically the

fourth commandment of the Ten Words. He was executed by Joab, contrary to the command of David, who for reasons of natural love and for concern for Absalom's spiritual welfare wanted the boy spared. When David heard of the fate of Absalom, he wept and cried out, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!" (II Sam. 18:33) David had to be corrected by Joab. He had to learn to submit to the judgments of the Lord, even as he had to learn that lesson when his son by his adultery with Bathsheba had to die. He was taught by the Spirit to realize that even when judgments struck him personally or his loved ones, they are nonetheless always righteous altogether and because they are so, they are to be treasured more than fine gold and are to be sweeter to us than the honeycomb.

The final judgment will be irrevocable with no appeals to a higher court possible. Many people whom we know, possibly many whom we love in this life, may be sentenced to eternal torment. How will we react to that judgment? We shall hold our peace except to say "Amen" to the judgment of the Lord. Here in time, our flesh always moves us to rebel against the judgments of the Lord. On the other hand, our Spirit-created spirit agrees with those judgments, even when they hurt, for they are always true and righteous altogether.

V. 11: *Moreover by them is thy servant warned:
and in keeping of them there is great
reward.*

By what is "thy servant warned"? Again, by the judgments which are made on the basis of the Law, the Testimony, expressed in statutes and commandments, and hopefully reflected in the witnesses of those judgments with fear. Every act of judgment that we hear of, read about, or witness is to serve as a warning to us.

The worldwide deluge that destroyed the human race from the face of the earth, with the exception of eight souls, remains a continuing warning. In His Olivet address our Lord used it in precisely that way. When our Lord changed the subject matter from the imminent de-

struction of Jerusalem specifically to the final judgment, speaking of it as "that day and hour," He immediately used the flood as a warning: "But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be" (Matt. 24:36-39). The suddenness and unexpectedness of the judgment of the flood, which destroyed the entire human race that was completely engrossed in everyday, routine activities, is to serve as a warning for all, so that they are not overtaken in the same way by the final judgment.

When our Lord sent out the Twelve for their first witnessing experience, He instructed them to enter into the homes with their message, but if that message was rejected, to depart from that house and city with finality: to "shake off the dust from your feet." Then the Lord continued, "Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrhah in the day of judgment, than for that city" (Matt. 10:14). The terrifying judgment upon Sodom and Gomorrhah is also to serve at all times as a warning to all captives of sin who reject the call to repentance. We need to be warned by the judgment upon Sodom and Gomorrhah especially in our day when forces are at work in our society to gain public approval of the very sins for which Sodom and Gomorrhah were destroyed. By the judgments of the Lord we are to be warned! Every accident, every calamity in nature, such as earthquakes, tornadoes, and hurricanes which destroy thousands of lives and millions of dollars worth of property, every death is a judgment of our God. By these we are continually to be warned!

"In the keeping of them there is great reward." Here the reference goes back further than the "judgments." It goes back to the statutes and commandments which make up the Torah and the Testimony. God makes and gives all moral instructions for living in the law with both the threat of punishment and the promise of blessing for the keeping of them. Here the psalmist emphasizes just the blessings that shall come with the keeping of the command-

ments of the Lord. A commentary on this line would be Leviticus 26 or Deuteronomy 28, which begins in this way: "And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the Lord thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth: and all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God" (vv. 1-2). Thereafter the blessings are enumerated. Leviticus 26 contains some remarkable blessings in times of a threat to their national existence by an enemy: "And five of you shall chase an hundred, and an hundred of you shall put ten thousand to flight: and your enemies shall fall before you by the sword" (v. 8). We need but think of the victory of Gideon with his three hundred unarmed men against the Midianites (Judges 7) and the exploits of Samson. If, however, the commandments of the Lord were disobeyed, then the curses would come as Moses solemnly lays them before the congregation in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28.

When we read such a line of the psalmist, "In keeping of them there is great reward," we are to realize that even the greatest blessing of eternal life is promised in the law — but only on the condition of perfect obedience, which is beyond the range of achievement by any mortal. That causes us to realize that the blessings received from keeping the commandments are never merited but are always a gift of grace, for the Lord forgives the sins that we commit even when doing what is good, while at the same time graciously rewarding us for the obedience that He Himself works in us through His Spirit.

V. 12: *Who can understand his errors?
Cleanse thou me from secret faults.*

At this point David interrupts his eulogy of the Torah with a strongly emotional rhetorical question: "Who can understand his errors?" He responds in antiphonal fashion with a prayer for cleansing from those selfsame faults.

What caused this rhetorical outburst in the form of a confession and a plea for the grace of forgiveness? Da-

vid had been lauding the Torah and the Testimony with all its statutes and commandments, together with the desired attitude in the sinner over against them and the judicial decisions of the Lord on the basis of them. Then the thought of just what he was praising must have flashed through his mind once again. The Torah was the verbalization of the holy character of his God. The law demanded of the sinner that he be as the Lawgiver is — holy, that is, sinless. The law would settle for nothing less than this that self-centered man live a life of selfless love toward his God and his fellowman. "Ye shall be holy: for I the Lord your God am holy!" "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself!" (Lev. 19:2, 18) These commands are not the expression of a pious wish on the part of the Lord God with the unexpressed implication that He will be satisfied with much less from man since He knows that man cannot comply. No, these are demands from our holy God who threatens damnation if we do not comply: "Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them." No one can justly gainsay God's demands. No one can deny God the right to set a standard for our behavior. No one can fault God for punishing every failure to live up to His set norm. "And — so it is that — all the people shall say, Amen" (Deut. 27:26).

When we pray this rhetorical question of David, "Who can understand his errors?", do we understand those words? Think of the basic human relationship of husband and wife. All friction between spouses, all sinning of one spouse against the other, can be traced back to a violation of the holiness code which demands of each spouse love to the other in the degree of love for self. Think back to the origin of sin within the first human family. Scripture speaks of Eve as being completely deceived. How did that happen? The first step was a violation of love toward Adam. Eve usurped authority over her husband; she made a unilateral decision that affected both of them and the entire human race. Any unilateral decision where two or more are involved is a violation of the law of love when consultation is possible but bypassed. Chances are that Eve never gave the matter a thought; sin had begun to make its inroads.

Scripture contains innumerable seemingly innocuous

exhortations, such as to take no care for the morrow, to seek first the Kingdom of God, to pray without ceasing, to be kind one to another. All such are part of the law. In the face of them, though recognizing them as more to be desired than fine gold and sweeter than the honeycomb, yet they force from our hearts and lips the cry, "Who can understand his errors?" followed by the plea, "Cleanse thou me from secret faults."

The Torah contained elaborate and detailed statutes and commandments regulating the manner in which these cleansings were to be made. There were purification rites by washings and there were sacrifices. The sacrifices that purified always required the shedding of blood. The law forbade the consumption of blood. The reason given is this: "For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul" (Lev. 17:11). It is to this basic provision in the law that the writer to the Hebrews referred when he wrote, "Almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission" (Heb. 9:22).

David was thinking of the prescribed bloody sacrifices for the cleansing from sin when he prayed for cleansing from his secret faults. Yet he knew and understood from the very law that all the provisions for the cleansings from sin reminded the sinner of the imperfection of the means prescribed and the need for a future sacrifice that could and would cleanse the conscience from all guilt. That sacrifice was made by David's greater Son. And so David's faith rested upon Christ in anticipation, even as ours rests upon Christ in fulfillment, as both he and we pray: "Cleanse thou me from secret faults."

V. 13: *Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins;
let them not have dominion over me:
Then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression.*

David was well acquainted with presumptuous sins, the great sins which gain control over a person, dominate

him, and destroy him unless the grace of God intervenes. He had experienced the lust of the flesh that had gained the mastery over him and driven him to adultery, then on to murder. He knew the pride that had led him to take a military census of all Israel. "Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins!"

How does the Lord answer such a prayer? The Spirit used the law as a curb for the sinful flesh. In the words of St. Paul: "The law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine" (I Tim. 1:9-10). Paul makes a list of presumptuous sins; David prays the Lord to check him from falling victim of all such; the Spirit does that with the law as a curb for the flesh.

The Spirit does more with the gospel. Paul prayed for the Ephesians that the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ "would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith ..." (Eph. 3:16-17). The same Father through His Spirit used the Messiah in prophecy to strengthen the inner man of the Old Testament saints to establish them in the faith so that they were enabled to withstand the assaults of the evil one through presumptuous sins.

"Let them not have dominion over me" is the prayer of David. St. Paul exhorts the Romans, "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin" but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace" (Rom. 6:12-14). David prays; Paul exhorts! Both want the same thing: to gain the victory over the flesh and to maintain it: "Let them not have dominion over me!"

"Then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression." David is not anticipating a personal spiritual victory, achieved by some hidden, innate spiritual power. He had prayed. Only when the Lord would hear and grant his petition would he be upright and innocent.

After David had fallen under the tyranny of presumptuous sins, he had prayed: "Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. . . . Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow" (Ps. 51:2,7). Only the Lord could cleanse. Only the Savior-God could remove the stain of sin and liberate from its tyranny. Once the Lord had done that, the prayer changes. It becomes prophylactic. "In the future, Lord, keep me from falling victim to presumptuous sin. Only then can I be upright. By myself I can only fall and fall again and become a helpless slave of sin. Lord, You keep me upright, and then, and only then, shall I be innocent of the great transgression."

This is not the prayer of a novice. This is not the petition of a boy playing soldier. This is the cry of a veteran man of God who had felt in his own body and in his own life the cruel, dehumanizing, God-estranging, soul-damning power of sin. It was the prayer of a humbled and humble man, who realized that he was no match for his own flesh, the allurement of the world, and the devil's snares. He knows of only one source of help, the Lord God of the Covenant, who had given His Word to curb sin and to forgive and free the sinner. To Him the prayer goes forth. From Him comes the answer of strength to walk along life's ways without being trapped and fatally enmeshed in the web of sin. From Him alone comes grace to live uprightly in the presence of the Lord, daily basking in divine forgiveness and daily being strengthened in the inner man to say "no" and "yes" at the right times.

V. 14: *Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer.*

The psalmist had reviewed the glory of the might and wisdom of his God in creation. He had reviewed the glory of the Lord's holiness and grace in the Torah. He had seen himself, as the Lord his God sees him, a helpless sinner, yet a sinner rescued. As one infected in all his parts with the corrupting malady of sin, he prays: "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight!" As a sinner rescued and saved by the Lord who had mercy upon him, he addresses his prayer to that Lord, whom he had learned to know as "my Strength, and my Redeemer."

Reflecting over the whole, one finds in this psalm an epitome of the message of the holy, yet gracious Lord God to man. God is holy; He demands holiness of the creatures that He originally created in such a way that they could reflect that holiness here on earth. But fallen man is incapable of discovering the nature and extent of God's holiness. He retains a natural knowledge of God, but his own sinful nature, his resultant habit of sinning in thought, word, and deed, and his fallen social environment prevent man from perceiving clearly the nature of divine holiness, which is the unpolluted atmosphere and follow-through of love towards God, towards self, towards fellowman, and towards nature. Even regenerate man cannot clearly perceive the divine norm because he is saddled with the sin of Adam as long as he lives.

For these reasons God instructs man in His holiness, thereby also reveals to man his fallen nature and his way of sin in the light of His holiness, and curbs the revolt of man against God's holiness. The Law and the Testimony, revealed in statutes and commandments, and resulting in judicial decisions by God in history, instruct the child of God in the nature of God's holiness in a practical way by establishing a standard for man's behavior. This is no merely academic or impersonal instruction. It is directed to a moral creature who had been endowed by his Creator with a conscience and a fear of judgment to come. The cry of the psalmist, "Who can understand his error?", is the cry of a sinner from whose soul the mask of hypocrisy has been torn. He sees himself as his God sees him. He feels threatened in the searching light of his God's holiness. He acknowledges his helplessness and

inability to justify himself with the cry: "Cleanse thou me from secret faults." At the same time the sinner/saint realizes that sin is as a beast within, crouching and ready to spring into action, plunging him into shame and disgrace, judgment and death. And so the cry arises from his soul: "Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sin." The law instructs, reveals, curbs — always and ever.

The gospel renews, cleanses, strengthens, redeems. "The Law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul." It is never God's telling man how to be, what to do and not to do, and how to live that changes or converts man. When God demands, man fights back — doomed to failure though that struggle is. But when God does for man, then man is changed! For the greater part of Jacob's lifetime God worked on him to change him. How did He accomplish that? He did not make demands; He made promises. Through promises of what He intended to do for sinners and through the history of the fulfillment of those promises God effects a change in man.

The Torah of the gospel reminded the Old Testament saints of promises made and kept and promises of greater blessings to come. These had the spiritual power that alone could convert the soul. Those promises could not prevent the man of God from sinning and so staining his soul, but they could cleanse: "Cleanse thou me from secret faults!" The Old Testament believers thought in terms of all the ceremonial washings and all the sacrifices that had been set forth in such detail in the Torah. They all pointed to the Lord God as the source of cleansing, Who would one day do and achieve what all the rites typified. The Torah presented the Lord God not only as the holy, demanding One, but also as Strength and Redeemer.

Paul F. Nolting

TWO TEXTS FROM THE BOOK OF ACTS ON CONVERSION

ACTS 8:26-38.

When we think back to the early days of the New Testament church, we cannot help being amazed at the marvelous speed at which it grew, especially after Pentecost. After one sermon by Peter, three thousand souls were added to them that believed. And the days following brought astonishing results also, as large numbers were added every day.

This phenomenal growth was due to the work of the Holy Spirit, Who thus manifested His power to encourage the little band of believers who had gathered around Jesus during the years of His public ministry. Being filled with the Holy Spirit, those early believers demonstrated a zeal for mission work that stands as an example to all Christians of all time. We must also not overlook the fact that all their work was based firmly on the Holy Scriptures. They won souls for the church, not through their social standing, political influence, or motivational techniques (gimmicks), but solely through the proclamation of the everlasting gospel of Christ.

Today it sometimes seems as though so-called Christians not only discount the gospel as the one way to salvation, but also as the one efficacious means of winning souls. And yet what was true in those apostolic days is true to this day. The method and the means used by those early Christians is still applicable today. The key question of the text in relation to conversion through the proclamation of the gospel is:

DO YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU ARE READING?

God certainly gave the Scriptures to be understood. God wanted the Ethiopian whom Philip was to encounter on the road from Jerusalem to Gaza to understand the Scriptures. How else could one account for the instructions God gave to Philip to bring this event about? Philip was busy preaching the gospel in Samaria with great success.

We may be certain that he had no personal desire to leave such a promising field of mission work. Yet, when the angel brought God's command to go to the desert region south of Jerusalem, Philip put aside whatever hesitation he might naturally have felt and obeyed. And there in the desert, led by the Spirit, Philip met a man of Ethiopia, an important eunuch who had charge of all the treasure of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. This man had come to Jerusalem to worship and was now returning. As he rode along in his chariot, he was improving the time by reading the writings of the prophet Isaiah. Here was a man, then, who was a Jewish proselyte of the gate, who while in Jerusalem had likely obtained a copy of a prophetic scroll and was reading it.

In obedience to the command of the Holy Spirit, Philip ran to the Ethiopian's chariot, and when he heard the man reading, he asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" Can there be any doubt that God was very much interested in this Ethiopian, and that He wanted him to understand the Scriptures? The whole account certainly makes it evident that this was God's intention. He wanted this Ethiopian at this particular time to understand and know the Scriptures. And surely we believe that in a similar way to this day He directs the affairs of men that they may know the Scriptures.

We may see this also from Psalm 119: "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (v. 105). We know what a lamp and a light are used for. The Word of God is to serve as a lamp and a light, but it could not do so if it is not understood. The Bible is not a dark, obscure, and unintelligible book, as some would have us believe.

It is true that we must indeed search for the meaning of some Bible passages, and Scripture itself is the best guide in such a search. Of course, in seeking to understand the Scriptures, we must not become dependent upon our reason. St. Peter warns us, "No prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation" (II Pet. 1:20), which means that human reason dare not be admitted as a guide for Scripture interpretation. On the other hand, we are to accept the simple words of the Bible

even if they surpass our reason. Jesus refers to this: "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes" (Matt. 11:25). How this is possible Scripture does not tell us, nor is it necessary for us to know, declares Luther. What the minds of the greatest philosophers cannot grasp, little children may know and believe. We thank God that He has given us a Scripture which can be thus understood.

Only faith in Christ gives the proper understanding of Scripture. The portion of the prophet Isaiah which the Ethiopian was reading was the wonderful 53rd chapter, the gospel of the Old Testament, a prophecy of the suffering and dying Redeemer. Yet the meaning of this chapter escaped the mind of the Ethiopian, for he said, in answer to Philip's question as to whether he understood what he was reading, "How can I, except some man should guide?" His difficulty was, as he went on to ask, "I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? Of himself, or of some other man?" As long as this man did not know of Jesus, the meaning of the prophecy was unclear.

Using the chariot as his pulpit, Philip began with Isaiah 53 and presented the Ethiopian with the good news concerning Christ. Then the Scriptures became intelligible to the Ethiopian, especially the verse which had caused him difficulty: "He was led as a sheep to slaughter; and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he does not open his mouth. In humiliation his judgment was taken away; who shall relate his generation? For his life is removed from the earth" (NASB). The Ethiopian now knew that here Isaiah was speaking of Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

There is still much misunderstanding in regard to the meaning of the Old Testament. There are those who see in it nothing but history and law. But Luther was absolutely correct when he said, "*Die ganze Schrift treibt Jesum.*" The entire Old Testament contains nothing less than Christ just as does the New Testament. Jesus Himself knew this very well: "And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them (the Emmaus disciples) in all the scriptures concerning himself" (Luke 24:27). Therefore

the central figure and theme of the Scriptures is Christ. Where this doctrine is overlooked or rejected, all Scriptures become meaningless and useless. Jesus Christ is the sun from which all else in Scripture receives light.

Christ not only opens Scripture, but by opening Scripture He opens heaven itself. As the disciples after the first Easter were glad when they saw the Lord, so is joy ours when we see Christ in the Scriptures. The knowledge of Christ removed all doubt from the heart of the Ethiopian, and so it is with all who come to faith on the basis of God's Word.

A true understanding of the Scriptures produces joyful and blessed results. The Ethiopian was not satisfied with a mere knowledge of Christ; he also put his trust in Him. "And as they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch said, 'Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?'" No doubt, in his discourse and explanation of the Scriptures, Philip had spoken of the meaning and significance of the sacrament of Holy Baptism as a means of grace. So the eunuch surely desired Baptism for himself, and as soon as water was available he asked Philip to baptize him. He wanted to be reassured in regard to the forgiveness of his sins through Christ. So this distinguished treasurer of the nation of Ethiopia stops at the side of the water and is baptized by someone who was basically a total stranger to him! His Baptism, as we know, implies a confession of sin, a profession of faith, and an expression of love on the part of the Ethiopian. What a joyful and blessed result of his understanding the Scriptures!

Faith founded on the Bible still produces blessed results. Thinking back to the history of the Lutheran Reformation and the Lutheran Confessions, we know that our spiritual fathers based their teachings and practice on the clear Scriptures. They permitted no man to take the place of the Scriptures, as their authority; on the other hand, when the Scriptures had spoken, that settled the issue. They bowed to the Word of God in all sincerity. Under God, that is the only reason and basis for the existence of the Church of the Lutheran Confession in this our day.

ACTS 9:1-20.

In reading and studying Holy Scripture, one cannot help but note the outspokenness of its language. The Bible calls things by their right names. If the Bible were a book written by men, its language in some instances might even be considered somewhat offensive. However, since it is entirely the Word of God, men would do far better to heed it, than to find fault with it, or criticize it for being so outspoken.

Our Lord, for instance, in referring to His opponents, the scribes and Pharisees, speaks of them as hypocrites, as fools, as blind guides, as whited sepulchers, as serpents, and as a generation of vipers. These are indeed harsh and severe terms, and yet they truthfully describe the people Jesus was talking about. Coming as they do from the lips of our Lord, such words should be taken as an earnest warning against living and acting as those people did.

But just as Jesus could be and was severe and harsh in His judgments over against those wicked unbelievers, so He was kind and tenderhearted toward those who lament over their sin and turn to Him for mercy and grace. We find that the Bible frequently gives meaningful names and terms to the believers. They are spoken of as though they were a titled nobility. Peter seemingly cannot find enough gracious words to describe Christians, when he says, "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people" (I Pet. 2:9). Verse 13 of the text under consideration uses the term "saints" when mentioning the Christian believers in Jerusalem at the time. What a blessed term to use! We rejoice at the use of it when we confess in the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed: "I believe in the communion of saints."

Naturally, one is led to ask, "How does one become a saint? How is sainthood achieved?" The conversion of Saul gives the opportunity to consider:

ACHIEVING SAINTHOOD.

Achieving sainthood is not the work of man. The be-

gining verses of the text speak of Saul before he became a saint. One might say of him in this condition that he was nature's child, just as he was born into the world. Saul had heard something about Christ and His word and work, but what a terrible reaction there was in him. "Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest, and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem." The picture of Saul presented here is not a pleasant one!

Already before this Saul had played a leading role at the stoning of Stephen: "Saul was consenting unto his death." And a little later: "As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women, committed them to prison." His ardor and zeal to persecute the disciples did not abate in the least. He delighted in acting as an official of the Jewish Sanhedrin in rooting out all those who followed Jesus.

What was it that caused him to persecute these poor people? His activity was in reality directed against the Savior and His gospel. His boundless energy, which at a later date made him a great missionary, was at this time directed toward the destruction of Jesus and everything He represented. And Saul was not satisfied to carry on his bloodthirsty persecution in Jerusalem. Rather, he sought and obtained the authority to do the same thing in Damascus, which was about 150 miles away from Jerusalem. In his ruthlessness he wanted to break into the very homes of Christ's followers and drag them away in chains and bonds to Jerusalem's prisons. His conduct reminds us of the madness of the Inquisition. We cannot help having feelings of fear, dread, and revulsion over against Saul!

Yet Saul is but an illustration of the natural condition of every man. For it is the natural condition of man that his attitude, his activity, and all his energies are directed in only one way, and that way is in direct conflict with the Word and Will of God. With all his efforts natural man, like Saul, resists the gospel of Jesus Christ. There is no neutrality, but only bitter opposi-

tion. Later, after his conversion, Paul spoke with new awareness: "The carnal mind is enmity against God."

That is still true today. Attacks against Jesus and His Word are being made in our day even as they have been made in the past, and even more vehemently. The church that preaches the simple gospel of Christ is held up to ridicule as old-fashioned and narrowminded. Faithful preachers who still proclaim sin and grace in accordance with the Scriptures are denounced, and there is only a sarcastic sneer for those who are still simple enough to accept and believe in miracles, or in the revelations of God in Scripture.

But we need to recognize that even one who is a disciple of Christ is, by his own nature, an enemy of God and the gospel. After he had become a believer, Paul realized this and stated it very clearly: "For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the wishing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. For the good that I wish, I do not do; but I practice the very evil that I do not wish" (Rom. 7:18-19). We are speaking of man according to the flesh.

And so it is evident that achieving sainthood is not and cannot be the work of men. Achieving sainthood is the work of God alone. There is a remarkable contrast between the plans of Saul and the plans of Christ. We are fully aware of the purpose Saul had in going to Damascus, and there is nothing in the text to indicate that he began, on his own, to change his mind about his feelings toward Jesus and His followers. Strongly to the contrary, Saul did not change himself; the Lord did it all. The Lord appeared to Saul, and not vice versa! In doing His work, it is the Lord who preached the Law to Saul; it is the Lord who told Saul what to do; it is the Lord who sent Ananias to teach and heal and baptize Saul; it is the Lord who set the course of Saul's future life, saying, "He is a chosen vessel to me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel." Throughout, Saul remained strangely passive. What a tremendous contrast between what he had been and what he became! As we hear his quavering plea, "Lord, what wilt thou have me do?"; we ask, Is that the same man who set out

to destroy the Church? Surely, he was an entirely different man, and the Lord alone wrought that change.

Just as Saul could do nothing to achieve sainthood, so it is with all men; just as it was God alone who wrought sainthood in Saul, so it is God alone who works sainthood in all Christians. With Luther we confess: "I believe that I cannot, by my own reason or strength, believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him, but the Holy Ghost has called me by the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith." Sanctification, as well as redemption, must never be thought of as a 50/50 proposition between God and man. Man's rescue from sin and also his being called to be a believer is not man's work, but God's. "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9).

Achieving sainthood has wonderful results. That this is true is plainly evident in the text. The Lord sent a disciple named Ananias to Saul, even though Ananias was at first afraid to go to him because he knew why it was that Saul had originally come to Damascus. However, the Lord persuaded Ananias, as verse 11 points out: "And the Lord said to him, Arise and inquire for one called Saul of Tarsus; for behold, he prayeth." Surely Saul had prayed before this; the Pharisees prayed often, and Saul was a Pharisee. But this was now a new person, and now, for the first time, he was praying in a way that was pleasing to the Lord. In achieving sainthood, through the Lord's call, Saul learned to pray — not any longer in that self-righteous way of the Pharisees, but in the way that Christ taught His disciples. He learned to pray in the name of Jesus and through His merits, not any more in his own name and through his own merits. He learned to humble himself before the Lord and to pray in the right spirit and in faith. That Saul learned to pray is but one of the wonderful results of achieving sainthood.

Saul had come to Damascus to lay waste the Church, to destroy it. He had wanted to kill the Christians, or at least to make them prisoners and persecute them. Instead, however, the text informs us that "now for sever-

al days he was with the disciples who were at Damascus." Imagine, he actually joined those people whom he had come to persecute and kill! He associated with the believers, those individuals whom before he had so hated and despised!

The high priest had sent Saul with letters to the synagogues of Damascus, and Saul went to those synagogues. But his purpose now was entirely different: "And immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, He is the Son of God." And from that moment until the end of his life, Saul was indeed a faithful preacher of the Lord. Instead of hating the gospel, as he formerly had, he now placed his whole life into the service of the gospel. In his letter to the Corinthians he wrote, "I determined to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ and Him crucified." In fact, in every way, Saul was now headed in the very opposite direction from which he had gone before.

Achieving sainthood, if it is genuine, always has results. Faith in Christ is a living, moving force. It completely changes the direction of life and makes it fruitful in that which is good. May we always bear this in mind and thank God, because "we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10).

John Lau



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