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Preachings from Daniel*

Paul F. Nolting

[* These sermons were first preached in 1984 when the author was serving at Gift of God Lutheran Church in the Washington D. C. area.. – Ed.]

Chapter 4

In Christ Jesus, who resists the proud but gives grace to the humble, Fellow Redeemed:

One sin stands out in this chapter—pride! During the Middle Ages a list of the seven deadly sins was established. On the top of the list was pride! It was pride that caused the revolt of Satan, for he could not stand being inferior to the Creator. It was pride that led to the fall of Eve, for she wanted to be like God.

How does, how must God react to pride? Both the Apostle Peter (1 Pet. 5:5) and the Apostle James (Jas. 4:6) quote the words of Solomon in Proverbs 3:34: “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” When Solomon lists seven things that the Lord hates (Prov. 6:16-19), “a proud look” tops the list. Again he says (Prov. 21:4): “A haughty look, a proud heart . . . are sin.” This reaction of the Lord God to pride became part and parcel of the ethical consciousness of believers, as is evident from the “Magnificat” of Mary when she exclaimed: “He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He has put down the mighty from their thrones” (Luke 1:51-52).

The Lord Jesus expressed this same divine reaction against and rejection of human pride in His observation, repeated on various occasions: “The first shall be last.” His parable of the Pharisee and the publican praying in the temple was a special condemnation of pride. The Pharisee stood there—so proud of his spiritual superiority over the publican sinner and so proud of his enumerated righteousnesses. He was first in his own mind, completely justified in his opinion, but he did not go down to his house justified in the sight of the Lord. God resists the proud, always and to the last end. But more—He humbles the proud: The first shall be last.

Remember that King Nebuchadnezzar represented the Babylonian Empire which at that stage of history was the dominant anti-KINGDOM OF GOD kingdom on the earth. Pride was an essential ingredient of its political and national existence. Something had to give, for God resists the proud—always. So we see that

THE LORD GOD MUST AND DOES HUMBLE THE PRIDE OF THE ANTI-KINGDOM OF GOD KINGDOMS OF THIS WORLD.

We observe, first of all, that

I. PRIDE manifests itself in attempts by kingdoms of this world to bridge the gap between man and God or to establish heaven on earth.

King Nebuchadnezzar dreamed another dream. Once again all his wise men were unable to interpret his dream. Once again Daniel was called upon to give the interpretation. In his first dream Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian Empire had been represented as the golden head of a huge human figure. In this dream Nebuchadnezzar and his empire were represented by a huge tree that stood alone in the midst of the earth. Its height was great. It grew and became strong so that its height reached to the heavens. It was visible to the very ends of the earth. The leaves were lovely, its fruit abundant—so abundant that it provided food for all. The birds of the heavens dwelt in its branches and the beasts of the field found shade under it.

The great tree, as Daniel interpreted the dream “is you, O king, who have grown and become strong; for your greatness has grown and reaches to the heavens, and your dominion to the end of the earth.” As the head of gold symbolized Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian Empire, so the great tree also symbolized him and his empire with this added emphasis: that His kingdom brought blessings to many throughout the earth. Yet the dream revealed that the great tree would be cut down. Daniel urged the king to break off his sins of ruthlessness and injustice by ruling righteously and with compassion for the poor and needy. Perchance the judgment might be postponed or suspended.

A year passed. Nebuchadnezzar was strolling about in his royal palace, possibly looking at the world famous hanging gardens as well as the many temples and civic buildings that he had built. He verbalized his feelings thus: “Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal

dwelling by my mighty power and for the honor of my majesty?" What do those words express? In a word: pride! Pride coupled with self-righteousness! Nebuchadnezzar was more of a builder than a warrior. He prided himself more upon his building programs than upon his conquests. He had created mighty Babylon as the representative of the gods. He had established a universal kingdom that would bring the blessings of the gods to men and would extend the kingdom of men to the gods. Remember that the tree in the dream "reached to the heavens." Recall also that the ziggurats, or Babylonian temples, were built in terrace form, step after step heavenward. Man would scale the heavens and bring paradise from heaven to earth.

From Genesis through Revelation Holy Scriptures trace the corporate pride of man as it manifests itself in the kingdoms of this earth. After Cain had been driven from the presence of the Lord, he built a city. That was the beginning. After the destruction of the first world by the flood, the Lord instructed Noah and his sons to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. But they didn't want to scatter. They determined to build a city and a "tower whose top is in the heavens" (Gen. 11:4). They were determined to make a name for themselves! You know how the Lord God punctured that explosion of pride—by confusing their language and thus scattering them over the face of the earth. In this way Babel or Babylon has become the symbol of man in his corporate pride establishing the counter kingdom of man on earth.

The Prophet Isaiah put a speech in the mouth of the representative king of Babylon. Note the "I's" of the egomaniacal king of Babylon: "I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High." There's the pride that caused the fall of Satan and of Eve. There is the pride of sinful man in rebellion against the Lord God.

That pride has characterized the kingdoms of this world down through the ages. The Roman emperors demanded to be worshiped as gods, and the Roman Senate conferred deity upon them—debased, dehumanized creatures though they were! We need but think of a Napoleon with his determination to conquer all of Europe. In more modern times we had Hitler who was determined to erect a Teutonic "Babylon," "*Das tausend jährige Reich*"—the thousand year kingdom—that in reality lasted from 1933 to 1945. Recall the contemporaneous strutting Mussolini. In the more modern times we had Khrushchev taking off his shoe and pounding it on a table at the United Nations. In our own political campaign we find the incumbents claiming to be the source of all blessings for the nation and looking for scapegoats for the failures. On the other side it is those seeking to regain power promising that they are the saviors of the nation. At the same time the UN sits on the banks of the East River quite confident that it is the ultimate Tower of Babel reaching to heaven and bringing down peace and prosperity for the nations so that everyone can sit under his own fig tree in peace and prosperity.

So man in his corporate pride is determined to climb up to heaven, to become god, and most assuredly establish paradise here on this earth, even if it takes thousands of miles of walls and towers and minefields and guards to keep the citizens in that paradise. The final chapter in this history of man's overweening pride is recorded in Revelation 18, where the cry goes up: "Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and has become a habitation of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird!" (18:2). That is . . . total destruction! Why? Because

II. Such PRIDE defies the KINGDOM OF HEAVEN by which God became man to lead man from earth to heaven.

In interpreting Nebuchadnezzar's dream to him Daniel revealed the judgment that would befall the king until he had learned his lesson. And what was that lesson? "That Heaven rules!" This is the only place in the Old Testament where this expression occurs. Man in his pride and in his success and in his accomplishments would have to learn that Heaven rules. Man, especially the great men of this earth, must learn that the hard way. Think of Pharaoh who defied Moses

when Moses delivered that demand of the Lord God that Pharaoh let His people go. It took ten plagues and finally the destruction of Pharaoh and his elite hosts before he learned that Heaven rules.

At the time Nebuchadnezzar dreamed this dream he was in the driver's seat. How so? Because the Lord God of heaven, Heaven, was using him as His instrument. *That* Nebuchadnezzar did not want to admit. He imagined that he was in charge, for had he not taken treasures from the temple of the Lord and deposited them in his temple? Had he not carried off the best of the young men of the Lord and made them officers in his empire? Had he not or would he not destroy Jerusalem, burn down the temple, put out the eyes of the king and carry him in chains to Babylon to sit at his table? While all of this was transpiring, he tended to forget that Heaven was ruling, for that rule was not so apparent. Yet in the dream of the Great Colossus Nebuchadnezzar had been told that while one empire was succeeding another, the Lord God, Heaven, was preparing His Kingdom—the Stone cut without hands—that would gain the victory. Heaven rules and reigns supreme.

How would Heaven establish its Kingdom? Man tries to establish his kingdoms by climbing from earth to heaven. Heaven established its Kingdom by sending the King from heaven to earth. He appeared not as a King, but as a helpless infant wrapped in swaddling clothes. He walked in lowliness; He didn't ride in a chariot, neither was He carried about. When they tried to make Him another king like unto the kings of this earth, He refused. Though He had almighty power at His command, He permitted Himself to be bound, mistreated, scourged, crowned with thorns, nailed to the cursed tree of the cross, and die. All of this appeared to be most unroyal, as indeed it was from the viewpoint of the kingdoms of this world. Yet He did what no other king has ever done or can do. He arose from His grave. He ascended on high. He promised to come again. He did everything the reverse of the kings of this earth. Instead of attempting to climb to heaven, He came from heaven to earth. Instead of parading power and magnificence on earth, He walked in humility. Instead of working for self and self-glory, He lived and worked and suffered for others. He triumphed in righteousness, not unrighteousness; in weakness, not in power. He created no heaven on earth, but He did reveal Himself as the Way from earth to heaven. He offered no one positions of power and prestige, wealth and honor; He offered pardon and peace, forgiveness and reconciliation, fellowship with God and honor and glory yet to come. Nebuchadnezzar contended against that Kingdom and that King and so was doomed to destruction.

His dream revealed his judgment. A voice from heaven cried out, "Chop down the tree!" That was an ominous cry, but there was a note of hope. The stump and the roots were to be preserved, but a band of iron and bronze was to be placed about the stump. It was to be wet with the dew of heaven and its human heart was to be replaced with the heart of an animal. What all that meant became all too clear to Nebuchadnezzar after his outburst of overweening pride. While the words were still in his mouth, a voice from heaven declared: "King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: the kingdom has departed from you! And they shall drive you from men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. They shall make you eat grass like oxen; and seven times shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses." Immediately Nebuchadnezzar fell victim to the mental disorder known as boanthropy—a human being imagining himself to be an ox. He grazed in the palace yard. His hair grew like eagles' feathers and his nails like birds' claws. So the first became last, the mighty had fallen.

In mercy the Lord restored the sanity of Nebuchadnezzar and his kingdom. Whether he ever became a true believer is an open question. He has now passed off the scene of history some 2500 years ago. Heaven did establish its Kingdom. The King, our Lord Jesus, rules and reigns, leading us from earth to heaven, opening up for us the gates of paradise. Amen.

Chapter 5

In Christ Jesus, who triumphs in the midst of judgment, Fellow Redeemed:

God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. That was the great truth that Nebuchadnezzar had to learn, as recorded in chapter four. He was the great tree that he had seen in his dream. He was the world conqueror, the empire builder, the administrator, the protector and benefactor of mankind. But when he forgot that all that he was and all that he had accomplished had been given unto him by the living God and when he began to exalt and magnify himself, the tree was chopped down. He lost his sanity and became as an ox in the field—until he learned to praise and honor the Most High. As with Nebuchadnezzar, so with the kingdoms of this world, for God always resists the proud.

One sin leads to another! One sin leads to a greater sin. As sin increases, the sinner becomes bolder and bolder. Where sin increases, degeneration increases. This is unfolded before our eyes in the account of Belshazzar's feast and the judgment that fell upon him. What is the sin that follows in the wake of pride, if pride is unchecked? It is insolence. The dictionary defines *insolence* as "contemptuously rude or impertinent behavior or speech." Synonyms for *insolent* are "arrogant, audacious, impudent, contemptuous, overbearing." Insolence is that defiance of the Lord God that is crudely exhibited by thumbing one's nose at God. Perhaps the most familiar scriptural example of insolence is the response of Pharaoh when Moses appeared before him and proclaimed: "Thus says the Lord God of Israel: 'Let my people go!'" The insolent response of Pharaoh was "Who is the Lord, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go?" (Exod. 5:1 -2). God resists the proud, but causes His judgment to fall upon the insolent. When that happens the insolent learn—all too late—that "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb. 10:31). As we review this chapter we find that

JUDGMENT FALLS ON THE ANTI-KINGDOM OF GOD KINGDOMS OF THIS WORLD WHEN PRIDE BECOMES INSOLENT AMIDST A SEA OF DEGENERATION.

I. The insolence of nations glorifies man in his achievements without God and in his sin against God.

There was an interlude of about a quarter of a century between chapters four and five of Daniel. During that time King Nebuchadnezzar had passed off the scene. Nabonidus ruled the empire; his son, Belshazzar, ruled as king of the province of Babylon. Cyrus the Mede was bearing down upon Babylon. He had defeated Nabonidus; Belshazzar had withdrawn behind the walls of Babylon and felt completely secure. According to the Greek historian Herodotus, Babylon was a city of about fourteen miles square. The outer walls of the city were 87 feet thick and 350 feet high. Four chariots could parade abreast on top of the walls. That would mean that the width of the walls was about the width of one of our interstate highways. Hundreds of towers, a hundred feet higher than the walls, were located at intervals. The gates of the city were of bronze. The River Euphrates flowed through the city, guaranteeing a water supply. The city was believed to be able to withstand a siege for decades. This explains how Belshazzar could hold such a great feast when the enemy had defeated the armies of his father and was without the walls. Belshazzar felt completely secure.

It was party time in Babylon—despite the fact that the city was under siege. "Belshazzar the king made a great feast for a thousand of his lords, and drank wine in the presence of the thousand." Archeologists have uncovered what may well have been the very hall in which this feast was held. There is an elevated niche about midway on one side of the room. It was probably here that Belshazzar sat and made his toasts. Wine flowed; it washed away all restraints. Daniel reports; "While he tasted the wine, Belshazzar gave the command to bring the gold and silver vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple which had been in Jerusalem, that the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines might drink from them. Then they

brought the gold vessels that had been taken from the temple of the house of God which had been in Jerusalem; and the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines drank from them. They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze and iron, wood and stone.”

What is the significance of the actions and words of Belshazzar? There is no way that Belshazzar did not know the dream of the Great Colossus that King Nebuchadnezzar had seen. In his interpretation Daniel had foretold that the head of gold, which symbolized the Babylonian Empire, would be succeeded by a lesser kingdom that was symbolized by the chest and arms of silver. That kingdom was that very night outside the walls of Babylon. Belshazzar was feasting within the city, protected by its massive walls, that he believed to be impregnable. Just as Nebuchadnezzar had defied the Lord God by stating that He could not possibly deliver Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego from the fury of his wrath in the fiery furnace, so Belshazzar insolently defied the Lord God, confident that He could not give victory to the Medes over walled Babylon.

Belshazzar publicly demonstrated his defiance and contempt for the living God by commanding that the sacred vessels of the temple at Jerusalem be brought into the banquet hall and be used in the ongoing drinking bout. This would be tantamount to Satanists using the communion chalice in their satanic services. It was an act of defiance that shouted: “Who is the Lord God of Israel? Who dares to prophecy destruction to Babylon? The might of Babylon, its massive walls and defenses, will prove how wrong the prophecy of the God of Israel was!” That was one side of the defiance.

The other side came in the form of praise of the gods of gold and silver, bronze and iron, wood and stone. Notice in Daniel’s account the fatal number of man—**the six**—man-made gods of gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone. Man in his upward striving had made gods in his own image. Those man-made gods had overcome the gods of the surrounding nations and had made Babylon the center of the world. Man had conquered the world. Man had built mighty Babylon. Man had created a culture and a civilization that man believed would last forever. Man had created the kingdom of the gods here on earth. All this man had accomplished in the power of the gods he himself had made. Man had no one to thank but himself. All this was a preaching of the “God is dead” and “man is god” philosophy twenty -five centuries before our modern day.

But more! There was a moral degeneration. That banquet hall was but the tip of the iceberg. That great drinking bout revealed the moral degeneration of Babylonian society. The whole city was partying. Nobody was standing guard duty. No one had bothered to close the gates of the walls running along the Euphrates, as we shall see later. It’s safe to say that Babylon was drunk that night. Pride led to insolence, insolence found expression under the influence of wine. Or to put it otherwise: Wine loosened all restraints and led to this unparalleled display of insolence.

What a warning this scene holds before us. The Roman Empire went the same way. In their insolence the Roman emperors had the Senate proclaim them gods. In their debauchery all Rome was debased. Judgment came through the barbarian hordes. Pride degenerates into insolence. Take for example the insolence of the “Ma ster Race” in Nazi Germany. There degeneration took the form of genocide. Judgment followed.

Some two weeks ago Canon David Jenkins was consecrated Bishop of Durhan in the York Minster. In the pride of his theological insolence he denied the virgin birth and the resurrection of our Lord. Less than three days later a lightning bolt struck the thirteenth-century south transept of the cathedral and gutted it. Be not deceived, God is not mocked!

What about our America? While the cry goes up that God has been evicted from the public schools, the fact of the matter is that God and His Word have been cast out of most churches. Civil rights are being demanded for all minorities, but the weakest and most defenseless of all minorities, the unborn child, is permitted by law to be murdered in the womb. Gays boldly and insolently march in the streets as they flex their political muscle, a scene that parallels Sodom and Gomorrah the day before fire and brimstone consumed them. Politicians raise their voices in behalf of food and shelter for the poor and then the delegates leave for conspicuous consumption of food and drink in all night partying. Drunkenness is a number one national problem; the

Babylonians had no monopoly on it. How long before the hour of judgment falls upon our nation as it did that night upon Belshazzar? But there is comfort, for

II. When the judgment of God brings destruction for the kingdoms of the world, it always brings salvation for the KINGDOM and its citizens.

The party was going full blast! The wine was flowing freely! Defiance and insolence were spued forth from drunken lips. Suddenly “the fingers of a man’s hand appeared and wrote opposite the lampstand on the plaster of the wall of the king’s palace.” A hush fell over the banquet hall. Belshazzar’s flushed face lost its color as he paled to a sickly white. His hips became loose; his knees knocked. He was terrified. He called for the wise men to interpret the handwriting on the wall. Once again they failed, as they had failed Nebuchadnezzar twice before. Three strikes and you’re out! What was to be done?

The queen mother, possibly Nebuchadnezzar’s wife, entered the party hall and reminded Belshazzar of Daniel, who had apparently been fired by Belshazzar. Daniel appeared, a dignified and sober old man. He politely refused all gifts. He reminded Belshazzar what had happened to his father, Nebuchadnezzar, when he had exalted himself about the living God. Then he indicted Belshazzar: “You have lifted yourself up against the Lord of heaven” The time for judgment had come! The announcement of that judgment had appeared in the writing on the wall which Daniel read as MENE, MENE, TEKEL UPHARSIN, and which he interpreted as NUMBERED, NUMBERED, WEIGHED, DIVIDED! “God has numbered your kingdom and finished it. You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting. Your kingdom has been divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.”

It all happened that same night. The walls of Babylon were impregnable. The River Euphrates flowed through the city guaranteeing a water supply. The city appeared to be safe, but Cyrus diverted the river into existing reservoirs. Then his troops marched under the wall in the riverbed whose water had been made shallow. There were walls along the riverbank, but so secure and so careless were the Babylonians that party-night that the gates were not secured and the guards were not posted. Cyrus marched in, killed Belshazzar, and took over the city without a battle. So the breast and shoulders of silver replaced the head of gold, even as the Lord had foretold through Daniel.

What happened to Daniel? Belshazzar put on a good show that night. He had Daniel clothed with purple and put a chain of gold about his neck and proclaimed him third ruler in the kingdom. That was his last official act. The Medes executed him that same night. But what of Daniel? He continued to serve under the Medes and Persians. And what happened to the KINGDOM that Daniel had said the Lord was preparing while one kingdom of this world replaced another? The next step was taken, for it was Cyrus the Mede who made the proclamation that any Jew who so desired was permitted to return and rebuild Jerusalem and the temple—the first time that a captive people were so treated.

Kingdoms come and go. God’s judgment falls upon them and destroys them, but the KINGDOM OF GOD marches on. Its citizens find salvation in the midst of judgment. Think of this! Noah and his family were saved from the judgment of the flood. Lot and his daughters were saved from the judgment upon Sodom and Gomorrah. When the unbelieving nation of Israel was destroyed, the godly remnant was preserved. Daniel and his friends were sent on ahead, for example. When the Romans put an end to the nation of Israel, the Christians were spared. When the final judgment comes, all believers will be saved eternally. Always mercy in the midst of judgments! That’s the divine plan.

The greatest example is that of the greatest judgment this world has ever seen—the judgment upon God’s Son on Calvary’s cross. All the sins of all mankind, including the sins of Belshazzar were atoned for. The Lord bore the punishment for us and for all mankind. The sun hid its face when the judgment fell upon God’s own Son; the earth quaked. What a terrifying judgment! But that judgment meant and means salvation for us—forgiveness, pardon, peace. The cross has been

converted from a symbol of judgment to a symbol of salvation. In the midst of judgment our God was merciful. In the midst of judgment He established His KINGDOM. We are its citizens, safe and secure through judgment upon HIM for us. Amen.

Chapter 6

In Christ Jesus, our very present Help in the day of trouble, Fellow Redeemed:

Perhaps the three most well-known Bible stories of the Old Testament are ‘David and Goliath,’ ‘The Three Men in the Fiery Furnace,’ and ‘Daniel in the Lions’ Den.’ All of them teach in a dramatic way the truth that our God is able to deliver His own no matter how perilous their situation may be. The chief function of a government or a kingdom is to protect its citizens. Human governments or kingdoms can protect their citizens only in a limited manner and to a limited degree. But the King of the Kingdom can protect His own, the citizens of His Kingdom, unto the uttermost.

Daniel was condemned by an unjust law. Regardless of the fact that the law was unjust, it was unalterable, as the enemies of Daniel reminded King Darius. Reluctant as he was, the king nonetheless had to enforce the law. So Daniel was cast into the lions’ den, and the king sealed the stone that closed the mouth of the den with his own signet. Daniel was condemned to this cruel and inhuman death by the mightiest kingdom on the face of the earth at that time. The highest authority in the world at that time, King Darius, had sealed his fate. Escape was impossible; death seemed absolutely certain.

After a miserable sleepless night, King Darius rushed down to the den of lions early in the morning. With a lamenting voice he called out to Daniel: ‘Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?’

How pleasantly surprised the king must have been when the voice of Daniel sounded forth from the lions’ den: ‘O king, live forever. My God sent His angel and shut the lions’ mouths, so that they have not hurt me, because I was found innocent before Him; and also, O king, I have done no wrong before you.’ God had sent His angel. All night the fierce and hungry lions had lain there as pussy cats. But when the accusers of Daniel were thrown into the den, the lions tore them to pieces before they as much as hit the floor of the den. As the angel of the Lord had delivered Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego from the fiery furnace, so the angel delivered Daniel from the lions. The King, our Savior-God, is able to save His own, His citizens, no matter how death threatens them.

What is peculiar, however, to the story of our text is the cause of the death threat to Daniel. It was caused by persecution. This is the factor that we would examine, as we reemphasize this truth:

THE KING OF THE KINGDOM IS ABLE TO PROTECT HIS CITIZENS WHEN THEY ARE PERSECUTED BY THE KINGDOMS OF THIS WORLD.

We observe, first of all -

I. Persecution is inevitable, for the kings of this earth cannot tolerate the KING as Mediator of THE KINGDOM.

Belshazzar had been killed. Darius the Mede had replaced him. He had reorganized the government by creating 120 satraps over the entire kingdom. Then he established three governors over the 120 satraps. Daniel was one of these three, the most distinguished of the three. The purpose of this pyramid construction of the government was to make certain that the king would suffer no loss of revenue. Daniel was at this time the senior statesman in the government. He had been in high position in the government for some sixty years. His God-given talents and abilities were recognized by the king, who had it in mind to set Daniel over the whole realm, thus making him second highest in the kingdom.

As in all governments, so in the government of Darius the evil root of envy and jealousy was

at work. After all, Daniel was a foreigner! Even worse, he was one of those captive Jews! Why should he have such power and might in the ancient city of Babylon, now ruled by the Medes and Persians? The problem was to get something on Daniel. Putting one's hand into the government till is a time-honored, ancient abuse. Corruption is inevitable, for all men, including government employees and political personages, are by nature corrupt. The governors and satraps knew where to look for corruption, for they probably practiced the same themselves, as much as opportunity afforded it to them. But they were unable to turn up even the slightest hint of a scandal, no matter how thoroughly they studied the books of Daniel, "because he was faithful; nor was there any error or fault found in him."

But they had observed that Daniel had an "Achilles heel," his faithfulness to his God. How could they get at him? Remember that religious freedom or freedom of worship was practiced among the heathen. It was necessarily so in a polytheistic state and society in which each nation and people had their own gods and manner of worship. But there was one concept recognized in such a polytheistic society, and that was that the king was divine and the divine mediator of the gods. It was through the king that the gods established a kingdom on earth and dispensed all blessings for mankind. The king was the mediator of the gods.

With this understanding of the religious scene we can better understand the plot of Daniel's enemies. They approached King Darius in their fawning manner, suggesting that Darius "establish a royal statute and make a firm decree, that whoever petitions any god or man for thirty days, except you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions." The king was flattered. But how could the king be taken in by such a, from our viewpoint, ridiculous proposition? Because he believed himself to be divine, the son of the gods, the mediator of all blessings for his people from the gods. So Darius went along. Immediately the law became a loyalty test, even as bowing to the Great Colossus of Nebuchadnezzar had been a loyalty test. Here was state persecution against anyone who refused to make a petition through the king or who made a petition to any god or man other than the king. No other mediator than the king was to be recognized.

How does that translate into modern times? History has rejected the "divine right of kings" theory. Kings, the few that remain today, are for the most part powerless national symbols, as is the Queen of England. What has happened in our political climate is that the state itself is god, the mediator of all blessings for the people. Why has communism, in all states where it is in control, persecuted the church and religion? The state is looked upon as the highest good and the source or mediator of all good. The Christian cannot accept that. He is willing and ready to give allegiance to the state and to serve the state, even as did Daniel, but the child of God recognizes the Savior-God as the highest good and the King, Jesus, as the Mediator of all blessings. This the state cannot tolerate. Hence the persecution, as we see it in the USSR and in a different form in Iran, and in a still different form in Israel.

What about our own USA? In Page Smith's comprehensive history of our country entitled "The Shaping of America" he takes note of the Puritan dream, so pervasive in our early history, to make America the "New Jerusalem" that would redeem the world. The vision was slowly lost. Yeah, rather it was metamorphosed by the breaking in of the age of reason. Gradually the government itself was considered to be the all-wise and the benevolent mediator of all blessings. The attributes of God were transferred to the state, so the state became the mediator of all blessings. So far we enjoy the protection of religious liberty, as did the people under Darius at the time of Daniel. But the time may well come when some law of the government becomes, under cover of the common good, a religious loyalty test. Then we would find ourselves in the same situation in which Daniel found himself. The natural tendency of government is to persecute those who do not bow to government as the mediator of all blessings. Why is persecution inevitable in such a situation?

II. Persecution is inevitable, because citizens of the KINGDOM choose to obey God rather than man.

Daniel was a law-abiding citizen. His record was beyond reproach. His worst enemies could find no scandal in his life, not even the slightest shady act. Why was Daniel found guilty of a capital offense? Because Daniel recognized a "higher law" than the state and a higher Mediator than the king. Daniel did not violate the law in ignorance, nor in defiance. He simply did what he had been doing since he arrived in Babylon more than sixty years before. He went to his upper room with the windows open towards Jerusalem and knelt down and prayed three times a day. He thanked his God, who had manifested His presence in the temple at Jerusalem. It was a simple matter of obeying God rather than man. Daniel knew the plot of his enemies. He knew the penalty. He knew that the King, no matter how hard he tried, could not deliver him. Yet he prayed, not secretly, but openly as he always had done. He did not seek death, but he had to make his confession. So it is that persecution is inevitable, because citizens of the KINGDOM choose to obey God rather than man.

At this point, however, we must stop and get things clear in our minds. George Bernard Shaw wrote a play entitled "Androcles and the Lion." As I recall the play, it was an attempt to disparage the memory of the thousands of Christians who suffered death in the lions' den at the hands of the Roman emperors. Shaw depicted these martyrs as religious masochists, driven by an irrational herd instinct to self-destruction. There is such a thing in human nature and human history. I believe the hordes of young Moslem fanatics walking through the minefields in the Iran/Iraq war to be such. Daniel was no such religious fanatic! In our own country Mr. Moon is presently serving a prison sentence for violating the income tax laws. He claims to be a religious martyr, but the Apostle Peter would label him as one suffering as an evildoer. Remember that the devil has his martyrs too.

Daniel disobeyed the law and received the death penalty. A short time ago in our own country civil disobedience was a favorite tactic of church-supported racial groups to draw attention to unjust laws. No Christian has the right to break the law because he feels the law is unjust. Injustice is characteristic of human laws. For example, the honest taxpayer is taxed at a higher rate because of the many tax evaders. That is unjust, but it doesn't give the honest taxpayer the right to break the law. Daniel did not break the law of Darius because it was unjust, unjust though it was! He broke the law because the law came into conflict with his Savior-God, whom he acknowledged and worshiped as the Mediator of all blessings by giving thanks unto Him.

Think of what these things mean to us in our present situation. We are all citizens by birth of this great country. None of us would choose citizenship in any other country, certainly not in a communist country. We do enjoy many blessings from our government, chief among them being the freedom to worship our God according to the dictates of our heart. We feel a pride and a loyalty and a devotion to our country. Such feelings are not old-fashioned but a present reality. Yet we must keep all this in its proper context. Our government can make laws about death certificates, burial permits, and related matters. But our government has no power or control over our destiny the moment we die.

It is because of this absolute limitation of all human governments that we find it necessary to seek and maintain citizenship in an entirely different Kingdom. That Kingdom was not talked into existence, as was our country, and preserved by a terrifying civil war. No, that Kingdom was established through the holy life of love of its King and the subsequent innocent death of that King. No Kingdom has ever been thus established. The King died that the Kingdom might be born. But more, the King arose from His grave to assume Kingship over His Kingdom. His term of office is not limited by any constitution. His tenure is not cut short by death. He is responsible to no electorate. He rules as the Mediator of all blessings. He has granted us citizenship by giving us His Spirit to work regeneration in us, so that we have faith in Him. Though we are guilty citizens, yet this King does not punish us. Instead He took our punishment upon Himself and paid the debt of our guilt. He grants us pardon. He covers us with His righteousness. He gives us peace. He gives us what no kingdom on earth can give—life in the midst of death. We don't have to get by his appointment secretary to lay our petitions before Him. We need but lift our hearts

and voices to Him in prayer, and He hears and answers. Governments on this earth fail their citizens time after time in one way or another, but our King has the solution to every problem that we have, be it spiritual or material, temporal or eternal. If the time ever comes that our government imposes persecution upon us, we pray that we may follow the example of Daniel. That means confessing our Lord and King and suffering the consequences whatever they may be, for our King can deliver even from death itself. Amen.

(To be continued)

Clarification

In our last issue we offered an exegetical study of 2 Thessalonians 3:6ff. In the article, this section of the epistle was viewed as the apostle's call for disciplinary action over against brethren in the Thessalonian congregation who were behaving disorderly. The reference to Romans 16:17-18 on page 49 was not intended to suggest that these disorderly ones were actually recognized as false teachers all along, or that the apostle has here an alternate procedure to that in the Romans citation for dealing with false teachers, but simply that if at any time the disorderly should reveal themselves to be false teachers, then it would of course necessitate a separation such as is noted in Romans 16:17-18. – Ed.

A Study of the Controversies that Arose After Luther's Death and Their Roots in Today's Denominations

Michael Schierenbeck

“That which has been is what will be, that which is done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun,” (Eccles. 1:9). This Scriptural truth is even known by those in the world. You may have heard a statement to the effect of, “Those who don't know history are bound to repeat it.” As we look back more than 400 years to the doctrinal controversies that came about after Luther's death, we'll find that the same disputed points are still around today in one form or another.

The Lutheran Symbols were not crafted in a vacuum. The universal creeds were necessary to combat heresies, and to give a clear profession of the Christian faith. *The Augsburg Confession* was written to crystalize the positions of the Lutherans over against the Roman Catholic Church. The *Formula of Concord* came about to settle several controversies that had arisen within Lutheranism. In response to more recent questions we find in our own circles such documents as *Concerning Church Fellowship* and *Concerning Church and Ministry*. These were not written simply because it was time for a study, but because the issues were under contention in the late 1950's. Similarly, in our church body, we have studied the Scriptures on various issues as the need arose, and statements forged in the fires of controversy help to clarify where we stand. “The church is strengthened in controversy and forced in times of tension to confess her faith boldly and articulately, as can be seen in the case of the Lutheran Confessions. ... Polemical circumstances may cause the doctrine of Scripture to be unfolded in a certain direction and with a certain terminology, but they will not contribute to the content of the church's doctrine.”¹

“There is nothing new under the sun.” The Old Adam still wants some credit for man's salvation. The devil still uses variations on the same theme of his (temporary) triumph in Eden as he continues to spread the leaven of false doctrine. The *Formula of Concord* gives us a fine

example of how to wage war against such error. Go to the truth of God's Word. Define what is under debate, and clearly state in the affirmative and the negative what God has to say on the matter. In an age where "deeds not creeds" is the general rule, our Lutheran heritage is even more rare and precious.

First we will briefly summarize the controversies after Luther's death as they are found in F. Bente's *Historical Introduction to the Symbolical Books*. What then will follow is a discussion of how the same errors in those controversies have resurfaced in the last four centuries, particularly in the last one hundred and fifty years. The scope will be narrowed to Lutheranism because the Reformed already had these errors before Luther's death, and I believe their heresies may be traced back to Calvin and Zwingli. Since the days of Luther, the Reformed have influenced Lutheranism far more than Lutherans have influenced the Reformed.

I. The events following Luther's death

It was not by coincidence that there was an unleashing of doctrinal controversies after Martin Luther's death. Luther was not only a man whom God had blessed with great gifts as a theologian, but the Lord had also given him such a formidable personality that it appears many were restrained merely by his presence. When Luther died in 1546, the dam that had held much in check disintegrated, and enemies from inside and outside of the Lutheran camp quickly rose to power. Even Luther himself foresaw that there would be dissensions after he and his contemporaries were gone. We may even have witnessed similar situations in congregations and synods of today when an influential leader is no longer present. Thankfully our faith is not based on man. The Lord was still in control and used the controversies that arose to strengthen the church, and even provided a second Martin and a host of others to feed His flock and to leave a legacy for generations to come.

Four months after Luther's death the Pope and Emperor Charles V joined forces in an attempt to crush Lutheranism, and to bring the Protestants back into the Roman Catholic fold by force. At this time also the Council of Trent (1545-1563) further entrenched Rome in its false beliefs, and gave the clear signal that there would be no moving from the position that the Lutherans condemned in *The Augsburg Confession*. The Emperor defeated the Smalcald League, and deposed Luther's protector, John Frederick. What followed was called the "Augsburg Interim." "Its object was to regulate the church affairs until the religious controversy would be finally settled by the Council of Trent."²

The Augsburg Interim was papal in its flavor and content, and John Frederick (among others) refused to sign it. Melancthon, however, in a character of compromise, did not openly dispute it, and authored as an alternative the Leipzig Interim. "The plan of Melancthon therefore was to yield in things which he regarded as unnecessary in order to maintain the truth and avoid persecution. . . . It was a unionistic document sacrificing Lutheranism doctrinally as well as practically."³ The Leipzig Interim allowed for Roman Interpretation on the doctrine of justification and Semi-Pelagian teaching on original sin and free will. It also recognized the supremacy of the Pope. Romish festivals and ceremonies were re-introduced as well. The Leipzig Interim became null and void in 1555 after the army of Charles was defeated, and a treaty was established stating that whoever ruled a territory would establish the religion (*Cuius regio, eius religio*). This gave religious liberty to the Protestants in certain areas. Politically the Interim was dead, but religiously it was a spark that ignited fires that would not be put out until the *Formula of Concord*. Melancthon's wavering and compromising attitude with the Leipzig Interim would set a pattern of things to come and would cause a division within Lutheranism.

II. A Summary of Doctrinal Controversies Following Luther's Death

When the dust settled after the Leipzig Interim, three parties emerged. Melancthon was seen as the logical successor to Luther. Many followed his lead, but in his love for superficial peace and human reason he led many down the road of unionism. There were those who opposed

the followers of Melancthon. Some went too far in their defense of Scripture and established their own error. Through it all the Lord preserved a remnant who remained in the truth. The three groups are noted as follows:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Object/Stance</u>	<u>Chief figures</u>
1. Phillippists (Melancthonians) contained: Interimists, Synergists, Crypto-Calvinists	to supplant Luther with unionistic and liberal views of Melancthon	Caspar Cruciger, Jr., George Major, Paul Eber
2. Gnesio-Lutherans (genuine Lutherans)	opponents of Philippists, for simple Biblical truth	Nicholas Amsdorf, Matthias Flacius
3. Loyal Lutherans	did not fall into extreme positions as some of the Gnesio-Lutherans; key in framing <i>Formula of Concord</i>	Jacob Andrae, Martin Chemnitz, Nikolaus Selnecker, David Chytraeus

A. The Adiaphoristic Controversy (1548-1555)

The first controversy we'll look at came about during the Interim period. Part of the agreement was that Romish ceremonies would be re-introduced in the worship service. Melancthon and the Interimists saw such a re-introduction as harmless, but Flacius, among others, believed it was a beginning that would lead to the rest of Romish error and abuses. Luther did not abolish all the Romish ceremonies during the early Reformation period, but what made this different were the circumstances surrounding it. It was the goal of the Pope and the Emperor to re-establish Catholicism. The common people would infer by the re-introduction of such ceremonies that the Papacy was approved.

The exact issue in the Adiaphoristic Controversy was: May Lutherans, under conditions such as prevailed during the Interim . . . even if the ceremonies in question be truly indifferent in themselves, submit with good conscience, that is to say, without denying the truth and Christian liberty, without sanctioning the errors of Romanism, and without giving offense either to the enemies or to the friends of the Lutheran Church, especially its weak members?⁴

The theological position occupied by the opponents of the Adiaphorists may be summarized as follows: Ceremonies which God has neither commanded nor prohibited are adiaphora . . . and may be observed or omitted, adopted or rejected. However, under circumstances testing one's faith they may become a matter of principle and conscience.⁵

The question was settled in Article X of the *Formula of Concord*.

B. The Majoristic Controversy (1551-1562)

As with most of these controversies, the root of the Majoristic Controversy may be traced back to Melancthon. In 1535 he introduced the phrase, "Good works are necessary to salvation." After he and Luther talked, Melancthon backed off this position. But the damage had been done. In 1548 the error reappeared, this time championed by George Major. He confessed, "Good works are necessary to salvation," and, "Therefore it is impossible for a man to be saved without good works."⁶

He was rightly opposed by Flacius, Amsdorf and others who equated the word "necessary" with cause. In fact, Major was opposed by Lutheran ministers and theologians everywhere. Major tried to explain what he meant in his statement in better sounding words, but he would not retract the statement, or the thought behind it, which was clearly false and Romish. There is a good lesson for us here. A statement which is in constant need of explanation in order to be understood should not be adopted.

The *Formula* rejected Major's statement in Article IV. It was also necessary to denounce a foolish statement by Amsdorf who went too far in the other direction saying that good works

are detrimental and injurious to salvation.

C. Synergistic Controversy (1555-1560)

The Synergistic controversy was closely related to the Majoristic Controversy because in both cases it was taught that salvation does not come from grace alone. The synergists asserted that man must cooperate with the Holy Spirit. Melancthon began drifting toward this position of Erasmus as early as the 1530s, teaching that man's assenting will was a cause of conversion. During Luther's life Melancthon was held pretty well in check, but after Luther's death he became more open in this teaching. He said in 1554, "In conversion these causes concur: the Word of God, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father and the Son send to kindle our hearts, and our will assenting and not resisting the Word of God"⁷ Once again human reason was used in an attempt to answer the question of why some are saved and not others.

The torch of synergism was taken up in 1555 by John Pfeffinger in a publication concerning the human will. Victorin Strigel, a professor at Jena, also entered the debate as a promoter of synergism. At Weimar in 1560 there was a public disputation on free will, the gospel, Majorism, Adiaphorism, and Indifferentism (the toleration of error). It was here that in his defense of the Scripture Flacius made an overstatement that began another error.

Article II of the *Formula* affirmed that original sin leaves no room for goodness. Man is truly spiritually dead, and any cooperation of the will must thus be after conversion.

D. The Flacian Controversy (1560-1575)

As stated above, this controversy spun off from the Synergistic Controversy. Flacius was led into a trap by Strigel at the Weimar Disputation, but would not go back and change what he said. Flacius did not distinguish between the corrupt nature and the corruption that infects it. If there is not a distinction made between man's nature and original sin then God would be responsible for creating evil beings after the Fall, and even Christ Himself would have a corrupted nature. "He went too far, asserting that after man's fall original sin is the very substance or nature of man. ... God is not responsible for sin (1 John 3:8), but God still creates and preserves man on this earth (Acts 17:28). Hence, the *Formula* explicitly avoids identifying original sin with man's nature, as Flacius had insisted on doing."⁸ The Flacian error was condemned in Article I.

E. Osiandrian and Stancarian Controversies (1549-1566)

These controversies centered on justification. Andrew Osiander confused justification and sanctification as do the Roman Catholics. He taught that justification was gradual instead of instantaneous, and that a person's assurance of salvation does not rest on the merits of Christ, but a righteous quality inhering in us. Though Osiander died in 1552, the heresy continued through men like John Funck. The Lutherans (with the exception of Brenz and Vogel) rejected the teachings of Osiander and clarified their position in Article III.

Article III also refuted the error of Francesco Stancar (Stancarus). Stancarus declared that "Christ is our Righteousness only according to His human nature, and not according to His divine nature. . . . Consistently, the Stancarian doctrine destroys both the unity of the person of Christ and the sufficiency of His atonement."⁹

F. Antinomistic Controversy (1527-1556)

John Agricola was the originator of the Antinomistic Controversy which was a co-mingling of law and gospel. The law and gospel need to be distinguished, but both need to be upheld. "Agricola had asserted that the Gospel is not only a preaching of grace but also a preaching of repentance which rebukes the greatest sin, unbelief. He also denied that the law was to serve as a guide to Christians to show them what works were truly pleasing in God's sight."¹⁰ Agricola was a student of Luther, and was apparently corrected by Luther. However, it was again

after Luther's death that Agricola then openly asserted his position. For Agricola and others there was no use for the law. Yet if there is no law, there is no use for the gospel. "The cocoon of antinomianism always bursts into antigospelism."¹¹ Article V addresses this issue.

In the second Antinomistic Controversy the point of contention was the third use of the law. "A dissension has occurred between some few theologians concerning the third use of the law, namely, whether it is to be urged or not upon regenerate Christians. The one side has said, Yea; the other Nay."¹² Article VI answered in the affirmative. Though the law cannot produce fruits of the Spirit, it is a guide for the Christian to know what is pleasing to God and what is not.

G. The Crypto-Calvinistic Controversy (1560-1574)

Articles VII and VIII guard against Reformed doctrine in the areas of the Lord's Supper and the personal union and the two natures of Christ. Calvin and Zwingli were of course the chief proponents of these heresies, but here again Melanchthon played a role. Human reason was placed above Scripture regarding the Real Presence, and also the omnipresence of Christ as true God and true man. In 1540 Melanchthon altered *The Augsburg Confession* so that the Reformed could subscribe to it. Calvin even claimed Melanchthon as his ally in 1557. There were several Philipists who were truly Reformed, but were not open about their beliefs, and in this way received appointments to prominent positions by Elector August. They were in fact teaching Calvinistic doctrines while assuring the genuine Lutherans that they were not. In 1573 their teachings became quite clear and public. The Elector, realizing that he had been deceived by these men that he had put into power, had them incarcerated. One positive outcome of this controversy was that after this time men such as Andrae, Chemnitz, and Selnecker became August's trusted advisors. This paved the way for the movement to settle this and other controversies with the *Formula of Concord*.

H. Predestination

"The chief purpose for embodying Article XI In the *Formula* was not to settle past or present disputes, but rather . . . to be of service in avoiding future differences and conflicts."¹³ What tremendous insight the Lord gave to the framers of the *Formula*! They saw the influence of synergism. They were aware of the tendencies shown to put reason above faith, and so crafted Article XI as a preventative measure. With the election controversies within 19th and 20th century Lutheranism, their fears were not unfounded.

III. The threads and threats of these controversies in Lutheranism today

Some of the 16th century controversies never came out again in the same form and detail. There are, however, trends from that time which are still present today. Rather than write the book that would be necessary to document in detail the influence of these controversies in today's denominations, I have divided these general trends into four categories: 1) Compromise in order to form outward unity; 2) The influence of the Reformed - reason over faith; 3) Defense becoming offensive; and 4) Getting on the road back to Rome. The first trend was the drive behind much of the action of Melanchthon and his followers, and one that will draw much of our attention.

A. Compromise in order to form outward unity

One of the differences between Melanchthon and Chemnitz was that Melanchthon wanted peace and unity at all costs. He was willing to compromise Scripture in order to achieve that peace. Chemnitz also wanted peace, but sought to achieve it through doctrinal unity. Since 1580 the spirit of Melanchthon has been more prevalent and popular than the spirit of Chemnitz. In following this trend it makes us all the more appreciative of what the Lord accomplished through the *Formula*, and of the blessing of fellowship in the CLC.

There are, of course, great blessings and strength in numbers. Just as an individual would

want to associate with a group of believers, so congregations and synods also seek out a fraternity of like-minded Christians. A synod can be of great assistance to a congregation calling a pastor or graduate to fill a vacancy. There is the opportunity for joint mission work with other congregations, and the possibility of a fledgling congregation receiving mission subsidy. Even something as simple as a pulpit exchange during Lent is appreciated by all involved. We are members of congregations and synods not only for the benefits that we receive, but to edify, encourage and strengthen one another.

To be alone, or to feel alone, can bring about feelings of hopelessness (ask Elijah; cf. I Kings 19). It is very difficult for one person or a family separated from their home congregation by many miles. The blessings of fellowship and regular worship are so great and so desirable that the Tempter may try to use them to push such diaspora off balance. How many are not tempted to leave a distant orthodox fellowship for a closer heterodox congregation, rather than making the long drive, or working to establish preaching stations and mission congregations whose unity is based on agreement in the Word?

The same easier road has been taken in the history of Lutheranism in America. Beginning with the formation of the Pennsylvania Ministerium by Henry Muhlenberg in the 18th century, there was an effort to unite all Lutherans in the United States. To this end the Evangelical Lutheran General Synod of the United States was formed in 1820. Even at this early point in time the Lutheran aspect of this group was being diluted. "Not everyone was pleased with this new General Synod. Tennessee did not join because the constitution failed to include a firm Lutheran confessional position. . . .The lack of a firm Lutheran confessional basis for the General Synod may be traced to Muhlenberg's influence. He had absorbed much of the pietistic theology of Halle which put personal religious experience above unyielding commitment to the Lutheran Confessions. Many saw little difference between Lutheran and Reformed teachings."¹⁴ This was a pattern that would be repeated in mergers to follow. Aside from the Tennessee Synod there was not much Lutheranism without such pietistic influence in America until the emergence of the Missouri Synod in the mid-nineteenth century.

It did not take long for the leaven of false doctrine to overwhelm the General Synod completely. As is so often the case, the liberal elements became stronger, and the confessional elements grew weaker and became all but extinct. Eventually the General Synod brought into fellowship a synod that did not hold the Unaltered Augsburg Confession as part of its constitution. This led to the withdrawal of a large number which formed the General Council in 1867. "They wanted to unite all Lutheran synods that confessed the Unaltered Augsburg Confession. However, the General Council soon became known for its ability to say nothing when questions arose regarding doctrine and practice."¹⁵ The General Council left the lodge, millennialism, altar fellowship, and pulpit fellowship as open questions. These were known as the Four Points. This was a warning flag to confessional Lutherans, who would not join. Confessional Lutherans found their home in the Synodical Conference which was formed in 1872. Despite the split that divided the General Synod in 1867, eventually compromises for unity were made on the authority of Scripture, and the Four Points were completely over-looked (the official stance of the General Council and the practice of the General Synod did not mesh, but it was not enough to prevent the merger). These two bodies re-joined and along with the United Synod South formed the United Lutheran Church in America (ULCA) in 1918. This group became the Lutheran Church In America (LCA) in 1962, and then of course the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) in 1988. The spirit of doctrinal compromise and external unity prevailed throughout.

In the same vein, it was a desire for unity taking precedence over confession that led to the distorting the doctrine of election. In the 1880's the Norwegian Synod (formed In 1853) found itself embroiled in a controversy over election. It began with Prof. Friedrich August Schmidt accusing C.F.W. Walther of false doctrine in 1880. The charge was that Walther was a Calvinist because of his teaching on predestination. Prof. Schmidt and others believed that God elected

individuals “in view of faith.” This is, of course, synergism because it puts faith before election as its cause, rather than after election as the result of it. In 1883 there was a group that withdrew from the Norwegian Synod. They called themselves the Anti-Missourians.

In 1890 they joined with two other groups to form the United Norwegian Lutheran Church. The four Norwegian Synods began working on a common hymnal, which might have seemed harmless enough, but there were also doctrinal discussions which led to “The Settlement,” which was crafted in Madison, WI in 1912. The Settlement stated that both “forms” of election were Scriptural. “In committing themselves ‘without reservation’ to the doctrine of election as presented in the Second Form, they handed over to the ‘Anti-Missourians’ in the United Church what the Synod in the 1880s had steadfastly refused to yield them.”¹⁶ The road was now paved for a merger of all the Norwegian Lutherans. There were those opposed to The Settlement, but when The Austin Settlement in 1916 did not change The Madison Settlement (which was truly a compromise more than a settlement) this group broke off to form what became known as the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS).

Once again, though nothing had changed doctrinally, there was a reunification. In 1917 there was the formation of the Norwegian Lutheran Church composing of the Norwegian Synod, the Hauge Synod, and the United Norwegian Lutheran Church. This brought the Anti-Missouri Brotherhood back together with the Norwegian Synod without truly resolving the election controversy that had initially separated them. Where there is compromise on Scripture, the leaven of false doctrine grows in leaps and bounds. Eventually this larger Norwegian group found itself in fellowship with the “old” American Lutheran Church, and along with others formed The American Lutheran Church in 1960. This was of course the other half of the ELCA merger of 1988. In tracing through a flow chart of separations and mergers we find that the ELCA contains many, many Lutheran synods that were nowhere close in doctrinal agreement. Time and again the liberal forces had greater influence, and the dream of external unity outweighed the reality of disunity in the teachings of our Lord. The goal of superficial peace and unity is as prevalent in the 20th century as it was in the 16th.

The spirit of compromise is seen not only in what is said, but also sometimes in what is not said. Melancthon altered the Augsburg Confession because by omitting portions concerning the Lord’s Supper there could be agreement with others. In these cases the idea was “the less said, the better.” This idea was promulgated not only in the previously mentioned Four Points, but also in talks between the LC-MS and the ALC. The Chicago Theses of 1930 and The Common Confession of 1950 needed to be rejected not so much for what they said, but for what was not said.

The Missouri Synod also found itself abandoning the Scriptural principles that distinguished it (and The Synodical Conference) as an island of orthodoxy in the late 1800s. The discussions and eventual temporary fellowship with the ALC did not bring the ALC into orthodoxy, but pulled the LC-MS into heterodoxy, and led to the dissolution of the Synodical Conference.

This history is a warning to be heeded by us in the CLC. We too need to beware the fleshly desire to craft a solution that will pass a vote, rather than putting forth Scriptural principles even if there might be fallout. By all means there should be clarity so there isn’t misunderstanding, and care should be taken to speak the truth in love, but the truth does need to be spoken. A “solution” achieved by being ambiguous, or by avoiding the point at issue, or by coming up with doctrinal compromise is the road to ruin, and a repetition of the disastrous mistakes of Melancthon and other Lutherans throughout history.

B. The Influence of the Reformed —Reason over faith

Another thread in the doctrinal controversies addressed in the *Formula of Concord* is the influence of Reformed doctrine, particularly the use of reason taking precedence over faith. The

gospel of Jesus Christ is indeed a mystery to us. It goes against all human reason. A child-like faith and trust is needed because what cannot be understood must simply be believed. Calvin and Zwingli and their followers let human reason trump faith, and in this way perverted the gospel. Here again Melancthon and the Philippists were influenced, and then influenced others with this perversion.

After 1580 there was a period of just over a century in which there was true concord and unity within the Lutheran Church.

The age of Lutheran orthodoxy may be divided roughly into three periods.

- a. "THE GOLDEN AGE OF ORTHODOXY." The first period extends from the time of writing of the *Formula of Concord* to the second decade of the 17th century. . . . Many of the representatives of this period were either framers or signers of the *Formula of Concord*. ...
- b. "HIGH ORTHODOXY." The second period, which may be called the period of high orthodoxy, takes us through the Thirty Years' War. . . . The Lutheran doctrinal position is increasingly clarified relative to Romanism, Calvinism, and other antitheses, and a more noticeable unity of doctrine is apparent. . . .
- c. "THE SILVER AGE OF ORTHODOXY." . . . It covers the time from the close of the Thirty Years' War to the final decline of orthodoxy.¹⁷

During this period men like Chemnitz, John Gerhard, and Abraham Calov produced voluminous writings which aided men like Walther two hundred years later. The age of orthodoxy came to an end as the pendulum swung toward pietism, rationalism, and humanism. The reformed doctrine could not be stamped out.

The persistent enemy of synergism would again and again rear its ugly head. The election controversy in 1880 was nothing more than a repeat of the synergism controversy of the 16th century. Attempts were made to answer the question of why some are saved and not others. Calvin answered it with double predestination. Schmidt and others erred on the other side by asserting that God elected those in view of their faith. This, of course, would give man partial credit for his salvation.

Of course false doctrine is never static. It is always growing, always reaching toward obscuring and erasing the central doctrine of justification by grace through faith. Out of deference to reason we now find in the ELCA errors on creation, the authority of Scripture, the sacraments, the virgin birth, miracles, and even the atonement and the resurrection of Christ!¹⁸ One wonders if it could get even worse in what is called Lutheranism. In the ELCA we see the result of many of the post-Luther controversies. From the root of synergism and compromise in the 16th century the ELCA has grown into a denomination that is moving out of the sphere of Christianity. Can it get any worse? God forbid.

C. Defense becoming offensive

In their defense of Scripture, Flacius, Amsdorf, and Stancarus all went too far. They went past Scripture and established their own errors. Flacius and Amsdorf were both zealous for the Word of God, and were doing their best to refute what they knew to be false doctrine. It would seem that they got so engrossed in the one point (perhaps making it a personal battle) that they stepped away from the analogy of Scripture. Even more unfortunately they would not revisit the issue and retract what they had said.

This was not the first or the last time such mistakes would be made. The main reason repetition is guaranteed is because sinful man is influenced by that monster of pride. Whether in a sermon or a paper we may regard our statements to be pearls of wisdom that cannot be misunderstood. We may figure that if there is a misunderstanding, the fault lies with the other person. Instead of defending our Lord and His Word we may begin to defend ourselves and our own word. What could be more foolish and dangerous?

History again forewarns us not to become so fixed on one doctrine to the neglect of the

others. To step away from the analogy of Scripture leads us on the path of Flacius and Amsdorf. We are all encouraged to step back and carefully examine what we have said, and out of love for our Lord and our brethren, to restate it in a different set of terms so that we can be understood more clearly. It also pays to listen carefully to what someone else is trying to communicate to us, and make sure that we are understanding exactly what he means. The benefits of such communication have also been seen among us, for which we greatly rejoice. One of the problems in the Majoristic Controversy was the failure of Major to communicate precisely and clearly what he wanted to say. We do well to prepare statements that cannot be misinterpreted, and are clear and obvious in their meaning.

D. Getting back on the road to Rome

The central teaching in Lutheranism is justification by grace through faith. All of the other teachings in Scripture are related to this like spokes on a wheel. When error starts on one of the spokes it works its way back to that hub of justification. Justification is also the most striking difference between Lutheranism and Roman Catholicism. There could have been all sorts of reforms in the Roman Catholic Church dealing with the moral decay among the clergy and other obvious problems, but without justification being addressed it would have all been for nothing.

The Roman Catholic Church has not really changed since the days of the Reformation. It may seem in ways to be kinder and gentler, reaching out with an ecumenical hand, but nothing has changed. Salvation by works is still taught. The Council of Trent solidified their position. Vatican II also entrenched them in their heresy. The papacy has not changed since the days in which it was first marked as the Antichrist. Granted the Pope is somewhat of a shape-shifter on the outside, flexing to meet changing times, but at the core he still places himself and good works in the place of Christ when it comes to salvation.

This is the same group which Melancthon wanted to pacify. When the ELCA holds joint Reformation services with the Catholics (as they have done at least in Minneapolis for several years), who has changed?

All roads lead back to Rome. After four hundred years things have almost come full circle. After years of divisions and synods breaking up, mergers are bringing us closer to the realization of a full return to Rome by the majority of Protestants. One could probably more quickly name those groups that are not in some kind of fellowship with the ELCA than the great number of those who are.

Satan must surely be gleeful whenever he sees indifference to Bible doctrine becoming the norm. At least in the 16th century those engaged in debate were agreed that the Bible is God's Word. Today that is not a fact that can be taken for granted.

Before the Reformation the common people did not have the Word of God in their language. Today that is not the problem. The problem is a lack of concern over what the Word of God says. Doctrinal controversies are becoming fewer in major denominations because there is no standard to which teachings may be compared. In this way also history is repeating itself. Ignorance of Scripture will lead back to Rome.

Before we reiterate the words of the Pharisee, and in arrogant tones thank God that we are not like these other synods, we should thank God for His grace in dealing with us sinners. His Word has been preserved among us though we have been sluggish, thoughtless, and cold. How long will His Word be preserved among us in orthodox fashion? Only God knows. We throw ourselves upon His mercy. We cannot say that we have not been warned of dangers that may befall us. A study of the past shows us what the future may hold. May God preserve us and hold us in true unity and peace by His Word?

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Notes

- ¹ Preus, I:34.
- ² Bente, 95.
- ³ Bente, 95.
- ⁴ Bente, 108.
- ⁵ Bente, 109.
- ⁶ Bente, 115.
- ⁷ Bente, 131, emphasis added.
- ⁸ Teigen, 5.
- ⁹ Bente, 160.
- ¹⁰ Teigen, 9.
- ¹¹ Teigen, 161.
- ¹² *Formula of Concord, Epitome*, Art. VI.
- ¹³ Bente, 195.
- ¹⁴ Leppien and Smith, 274.
- ¹⁵ Leppien and Smith, 276.
- ¹⁶ Aaberg, 49.
- ¹⁷ Preus, 45.
- ¹⁸ Leppien and Smith, 88-121.

Reformation and Christmas

P. W. Schaller

Lutherans around the world gather at this time of the year to celebrate the Reformation. They remember how in AD 1517—on the eve of November and the Festival of All Saints—a thirty-three-year-old professor posted ninety-five theses for debate on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany. Many consider this as the beginning of the Reformation which trumpeted the gospel of free forgiveness in Christ to the corners of the world.

Already in the seventeenth century the last day of October was being used as a time of remembrance and thanksgiving. It was a time for remembering how Dr. Luther, then thirty-eight, had been called before the rulers of the world to renounce his teaching, and how he had held his

ground. Many today remember his famous words, “*Widerrufen kann ich nichts und will ich nichts, weil wider das Gewissen zu handeln nicht sicher und nicht lauter ist. [Ich kann nicht anderst, hie stehe ich.] Gott helf mir. Amen.*” “Here I Stand. I cannot do otherwise. God help me. Amen.”

Many remember how Luther stayed at the Castle Wartburg (having been declared an outlaw by the emperor), how he translated the Bible into the language of the people, how he wrote the Catechisms, how he preached and taught, how he married Katherine von Bora, raised a family and turned the “Black Cloister” into a hospitable parsonage.

Many things are remembered these days, but I would like to suggest that we also remember Christmas at this time—no, not to remind people to start shopping before it gets too hectic; and not as though celebrating Christmas was some new idea that the reformers came up with. The Eastern churches included a remembrance of the nativity in their Epiphany celebrations already in the third century AD and it had become more widespread by the end of the fourth century. During the middle ages Christmas became the great popular festival of Western Europe (*The Columbia Encyclopedia*, Columbia University Press, 2000, ed. B. Chernow/G. Vallasi, 552).

I am also not suggesting that we remember Martin Luther as the first one to bring a Christmas tree into the house and decorate it with apples (something which we cannot say with certainty). We may, however, do well to remember how Luther and his followers treasured the Christmas festival, as is evidenced in his Christmas hymns and his many Christmas sermons. In the *House Postil*, for example, we find one of Luther’s sermons for each of the four Sundays in Advent, but as many as three sermons for Christmas Day, another for second Christmas Day. These four (some editions have five), as well as the sermon for the Sunday after Christmas, are all based on the second chapter of the gospel according to Luke.

So when I suggest that we remember Christmas at Reformation time, it is not to remember to have our children’s Christmas Eve services planned well in advance, but to remember what Luke tells us in his gospel.

Why think of the Christmas story two months before Christmas? (Didn’t Luke intend that to be read only once a year?) What does it have to do with the Reformation? Just this: in the Bethlehem’s manger we find the whole point of the Reformation.

Some great novels seem to start very slowly. They must introduce the characters, the setting, and sometimes the background before they can get to the events about which they wish to tell. This can sometimes mean you must read a hundred pages or more before you are really “into” the book. But when Luke begins his second chapter by mentioning Caesar Augustus, and Cyrenius, he is not just setting the stage, and it is more than just a low-key way of introducing a wonderful story. He is (very quickly) placing the events in history.

This is not one of those “once upon a time” stories. This is a historical fact. You can look it up. You can find Nazareth in Galilee on your map. You can trace the route most commonly used by Jewish pilgrims along the eastern side of the Jordan, then across and up to Bethlehem in Judea.

If you were able to travel in Israel today, you might very well be able to walk up the same valley that Joseph and Mary did, “which, like an amphitheater, sweeps up to the twain heights along which Bethlehem stretches” (Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, I:184).

And these were real people, too. Almost everyone can picture how Mary probably felt when no room could be found for her at the inn.

There was no one to take pity on this young wife who was for the first time to give birth to a child; no one to take to heart her condition that she, a stranger, did not have the least thing a mother needs in a birth-night. There she is without any preparation, without either light or fire, alone in the darkness, without any one offering her service as is customary for

women to do at such times. (J. Lenker ed., *Sermons of Martin Luther*, I:139)

Most of us have felt out-of-place at times. This is no fantasy, but history that is here described. And the birth of Jesus Christ is told in such simple terms that give no reason for thinking that it was any different for Mary than for millions of others who have given birth to babies in this world.

Altogether, it takes Luke just seven verses to get from Caesar Augustus in Rome to Cyrenius in Syria to Joseph and Mary in Nazareth to Bethlehem and the birth of Jesus Christ. The very fact that the story is so short shows that it is not a legend which has grown up over the years. Compare, for example, the stories about King Arthur and the different accounts, recorded by Malory in the fifteenth century, of how he got his sword. But in Luke's straightforward narrative, without embellishments we see, not a legend, but a historical fact.

What does that mean? It means that Jesus Christ was actually born over 2000 years ago in a stable in a town called Bethlehem. It means that the Savior of the World, our Salvation, came to this earth that night! It means that there actually was a night when the long-promised Messiah went forth to save the people of the world from the penalty for their sins, taking that penalty upon Himself for every last sin. The day of Jesus' birth was the day in the history of this planet when the work was begun which ended on a cross outside the walls of Jerusalem, and in a newly hewn grave in Joseph's garden. It was through actual events of history—not through philosophy's ideas, or some history that we still must make—that death, the wages of our sin, was taken from us, and we were left with the free gift of God, eternal life in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

And was this not also what was behind the Reformation? Martin Luther did not stand before Pope and Emperor and remain firm because he thought he had some good arguments for giving wine to the laity in the Lord's Supper. He did not put his life on the line because some monks or priests were not acting in a Christ-like manner. The Reformation with which Dr. Luther was concerned dealt with another question: How can I, a sinner, become pleasing to God?

Luther's church pointed to God in the heart of the Christian. Martin Luther pointed to God in the manger.

The Roman Church taught that our salvation is a process, that it is not an accomplished fact until it is worked out by God in our lives. Martin Luther taught that our salvation has already been accomplished, outside of us, a historical fact. The Scriptures convinced Luther that we can contribute nothing to our salvation; that even the good works which come from faith do not make us any more acceptable to God than we already are because Jesus Christ was made to be sin FOR us.

The Roman Church taught that God was in the heart of the Christian, transforming his life by faith into a holy life which receives heaven as its reward. Martin Luther taught that "God was in CHRIST reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them" (2 Cor. 5:19).

What's the difference? Ask the thief who hung on a cross, dying. He knew that he deserved the punishment he was suffering, but there was no way he could undo what he had done, and he had no time left to live a better life. No matter what God worked in his heart, his hands were nailed. But when he turned to the Christ hanging next to him, he received the answer: "TODAY you will be with me in Paradise."

Once a Pharisee named Nicodemus came to Jesus at night (John 3). Jesus told him, "You must be born again, born of water and the spirit." Nicodemus needed faith, but that was not the message that would save him. There are millions of people today who have faith—in Chairman Mao, or Confucius or Mohammed. Many have faith in their deepest feelings, if they can just get in touch with them. It is not just having some faith within that matters, but it is faith and trust in the Christ outside of us—the one whom God so loved the world that He gave, the one who sat across from Nicodemus that night—that assures us that we will inherit salvation. It is not

believing and leading a more holy life in Christ, but receiving by faith the salvation that Jesus has already finished, from manger to majesty. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved” (Acts 16:31).

So, while it is true that rebirth to faith is important, it is not our rebirth that wipes away our sins, but that birth in Bethlehem, and all that it included. God does work in us, but if our acceptance before His throne depended on that, we would not be acceptable yet, for God is not finished in us yet. But in the manger God has done something without us, and for us. And the good news the shepherds heard that night from the angels was not about how they should look deep in their own hearts, or about how by God’s grace they might lead a holier life to merit heaven, but simply: “Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior which is Christ, the Lord.”

This is the Word that Luther proclaimed, and for which he risked his life. This is the glorious good news for which we praise our Savior-God on Reformation Day, Christmas Day, Easter Day, and Judgment Day:

Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness
My beauty are, my glorious dress.
Midst flaming worlds in these arrayed
With joy shall I lift up my head. (TLH, 371)

BOOK REVIEWS

Kremer, Kenneth: *From the Ground Up – A Plan to Build Your Christian Family*. Milwaukee: Northwestern. Paperback; 106 pages.

Using familiar Bible stories and pertinent Scripture references, Kenneth Kremer has drawn a clear blueprint for raising a family in the first century or the twenty-first century.

The title “From the Ground Up” is exactly what the book is about. Using the extended metaphor of house building to home building, the author leads the reader through each important phase of building a Christian family. Beginning with the correct architect we are led through the building process from foundation to finished product.

If you have ever been involved in a building project, you will love this completely scriptural plan for building a Christian family, as the author parallels that process to the building of a house. Each chapter covers a step in the process. At the end of each chapter are lists of “Building Objectives” for that phase of construction. Along with the objectives you will find “Building Blocks” which help achieve those objectives. Many of the blocks are Scripture references especially pertinent to the objectives for that phase. Others are activities or studies used to enrich the Christian family.

Throughout each chapter are strategically located “windows,” giving insight into the building materials of that chapter. An example of this would be from chapter two entitled “Deep Well.” We find a window telling us, “Without a steady stream of God’s spiritual blessings, our souls are as good as dead.” From chapter three, on Foundation, we find this window: “Because the Bible exists in a world that deals only in relative and changing truths, it is an island of absolute truth for anyone in search of a sure and certain foundation.”

Building a home can be a daunting challenge, building a family an even greater one. Kenneth Kremer, a teacher, has written a book which teaches how, with the help of the Lord, Christians can experience the joy and satisfaction of family building.

William E. Phipps: *William Sheppard – Congo's African American Livingstone* – Geneva Press, Louisville, Kentucky, 2002. Paperback, 247 pages.

William Sheppard was born in Virginia in 1865 and died in Louisville, Kentucky in 1927. He was an African American Presbyterian minister of the gospel. For twenty years (1890-1910) he served as a missionary in Central Africa in the territory of the Congo River and its tributaries. This mission work is the main subject of this very interesting book.

His dark skin helped him get to places in Africa that were closed to white men. The third chapter of this book tells about Sheppard's courageous trek into the land of the Kuba people, who 'had a well-formed culture and government' (p. 94). Sheppard himself said of them: 'They were the finest looking race I had seen in Africa, dignified, graceful, courageous, honest, with an open, smiling countenance and really hospitable' (p. 87). But, of course, they did not know Christ, and some of their practices were brutal. When a slave owner died, his slaves were killed and buried with him to increase his prestige in the afterlife. Sheppard said: 'Slaves are kindly treated in life but are often killed when their master dies' (p. 91). When someone was suspected of committing a crime, he was made to drink poison. When the poison took effect and the person died, it was believed he was guilty of the crime.

Mission work among the Kuba people was slow-going, but eventually even some of the Kuba royalty became Christians. One Kuba king said shortly before he died: 'I myself and my predecessors have all showed unrelenting hostility to all the foreigners; I want you to change that policy in so far as it affects the people of the Mission (that is, the Presbyterian missionaries). I am able clearly to see now that in all the years they have never done anything to harm us or our people' (p. 192). The next Kuba king himself professed the Christian faith and many of his subjects did so also. Their conversion to Christianity also brought about the termination of the awful practices of human sacrifice at the time of burial and the test of drinking poison.

Sad to say, the chief obstacles to mission work in Africa were not the Africans but powerful Europeans like King Leopold II of Belgium, who was guilty of horrible atrocities that were finally exposed by Sheppard and others. In his greed for rubber, 'Leopold had two thousand agents in the country, sharers in his interests, and at the same time confederates; under their orders were 20,000 blacks, many of them cannibals, as soldiers, let loose to work their will upon alien tribes. Children of the wilderness, with firearms thrust into their hands, were allowed to give free rein to their murderous impulses, and punished if they did not extort a sufficiency of rubber' (p. 135). It is a wonder any white Europeans or Americans could be trusted, when such activities were going on.

Throughout this book Sheppard is portrayed as being an ideal Christian missionary, but Phipps does not hide a fact that came to light only after Sheppard returned to this country, namely, that he had committed adultery with several Congolese women even at times when his loyal wife Lucy was with him. After Sheppard returned to the United States, he made a full confession and after a probationary period he was permitted to function again as a minister of the gospel, serving as the pastor of a small congregation in Louisville.

In this country Sheppard was the victim of the same kind of racial hostility that other blacks faced. For example, Phipps tells us that Sheppard's 'initial annual salary was \$120, one-tenth that of a pastor of one of the smaller white Presbyterian churches there. Over the years of his pastorate, his salary increased sixfold, but it never rose to half that of white ministers with mediocre performance' (p. 184). Sheppard did not allow such prejudice to get him down. He continued to do his work, and the Lord blessed his labors also in this country. Ironically, Sheppard's funeral in Louisville 'afforded the first auspicious occasion for integrated worship

among Louisville's Reformed Christians" (p. 188).

Armin Schuetze: *The Synodical Conference – Ecumenical Endeavor*, Northwestern Publishing House, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 2000. Hard cover, 470 pages.

The Synodical Conference (1872-1967) had various synods as members during its long existence, but the two synods that remained with it the longest were the Missouri Synod (now known as the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod [LCMS]) and the Wisconsin Synod (now known as the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod [WELS]). For the most part, then, this book on the Synodical Conference traces the relationship between the larger synod, the LCMS, and her smaller sister, the WELS, with reference also to other synods such as the Norwegian, Minnesota, Michigan, Ohio, Illinois, and Slovak Synods, which at times were Synodical Conference members.

The first chapters in this book by Armin Schuetze, a lifelong member of the WELS, and former president of its seminary, show how the Lord brought to an end the early hostility between the LCMS and the WELS. We can say that the Holy Spirit Himself created unity between them by giving leaders in both synods an earnest desire to follow Holy Scriptures and subscribe to the Lutheran confessions (*Book of Concord*, 1580) not only on paper but in practice. At the organizational meeting of the Synodical Conference in 1872 Professor F. A. Schmidt of the Norwegian Synod examined the Lutheran church bodies already in existence at that time and found them all defective in one way or another: the General Synod, the General Synod South, and the General Council. The basic defect that Schmidt found in all three was a unionistic spirit, a willingness to practice some forms of church fellowship with persons or groups that tolerated heretical teaching.

Thus the specific point where the Synodical Conference took a different position from other church associations of that age was its position on unionism, stated so well in Professor Schmidt's 1872 *Memorandum*: "Without violating our consciences we can have nothing to do with this unionistic spirit nor with the errors, false principles, and sins against the Word of God which are connected with it" (p. 57). "By virtue of our conscience bound by the Word of God we cannot agree to carry on church fellowship with obviously false teachers and un-Lutheran spirits for the sake of outward church union or to pull on one synodical yoke with such with whom we have no true unity of spirit" (p. 58).

The doctrinal unity enjoyed by the synods in the Synodical Conference for so many years was truly a tremendous blessing. A list of doctrinal essays presented at meetings of the Synodical Conference is printed on pages 210-213. C. F. W. Walther, A. L. Graebner, Adolf Hoenecke, J. P. Koehler, Franz Pieper, P. E. Kretzmann, J. P. Meyer, N. Madson, and E. Reim all presented papers at these meetings. This doctrinal unity resulted in the *Lutheran Hymnal* of 1941, a Synodical Conference project. This unity also resulted in important mission projects that are described in Schuetze's book, specifically, Bethesda Lutheran Home, mission work among the blacks of the South, mission work in Nigeria.

The subtitle, *Ecumenical Endeavor*, is justified by the fact that one of the chief aims of the Synodical Conference, as indicated in Article III of its constitution, was "the consolidation of all Lutheran synods of America into a single, faithful, devout American Lutheran Church" (p. 179). When the Synodical Conference was begun in 1872, there was hope that this aim could be achieved. The midwestern Lutheran synods were conservative synods for the most part, becoming more confessional in their doctrine and practice year by year as they became more and more convinced that the teachings of the historic Lutheran confessions contained in the 1580 *Book of Concord* are all solidly Biblical. Even the eastern Lutheran synods were becoming more confessional under the leadership of Charles P. Krauth.

This hope of 1872, however, was soon shattered by the election or predestination

controversy, which resulted in the withdrawal of the Ohio Synod and the Norwegian Synod from the Synodical Conference and a war of words (between C. F. W. Walther and F. A. Schmidt and their associates) that continued from 1877 to the twenties or thirties of the twentieth century. One bright spot in the controversy is that it revealed the basic unity and harmony between the Missouri and Wisconsin Synods.

Nevertheless the aim of consolidation was not altogether forgotten. There was a serious attempt to attain unity among the various Lutheran synods by means of free conferences in the years between 1903 and 1906. Both sides, however, remained firm in their positions, although a sincere attempt was made to go back to Scripture and study the passages dealing with predestination in their context.

Another attempt to attain unity among the various Lutheran synods was made between 1915 and 1929. This resulted in the Chicago Theses of 1928, of which John P. Meyer of the Wisconsin Synod stated: "The Holy Spirit ... effectively brought about agreement in the hearts of the committee members so that they found themselves united in the true faith and now with the adopted theses make a unanimous confession before the church" (p. 199). The Missouri Synod, however, rejected the Chicago Theses as not resolving all the issues and as not rejecting specific wrong statements that had been made in the past. The Missouri Synod then presented the *Brief Statement* of 1932 as a statement of its position that, in its judgment, satisfactorily rejected all the false positions promoted by American Lutherans in the various controversies down through the years. Although the other synods of the Synodical Conference never formally adopted the *Brief Statement*, it can be safely said that they agreed with it and did not find fault with it.

In contrast, when the Missouri Synod began its ecumenical endeavor towards the American Lutheran Church (ALC) in 1938, it was the Wisconsin Synod and the Norwegian Synod (later known as the Evangelical Lutheran Synod [ELS]) that tried to put on the brakes. The author does a good job of summarizing the main issues dividing the Missouri Synod from its smaller sisters: the church and ministry question, which did not become divisive through the long years of controversy beginning in 1899; the Boy Scout issue; the military chaplaincy issue; the prayer fellowship issue; the matter of various unionistic practices; the *Common Confession* controversy.

In this connection Professor Schuetze makes the remark: "The question may be asked whether Scouting and the chaplaincy would by themselves have caused the breakup of the Synodical Conference. This is unlikely" (pp. 268-269). Professor Schuetze's answer may be correct, but it does not seem to agree with what the WELS stated at its 1955 convention: "A church body which creates divisions and offenses by its official resolutions, policies, and practices not in accord with Scripture also becomes subject to the indictment of Romans 16: 17-18" (*Reports and Memorials, Thirty-Third Convention, Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States*, August 10-17, 1955, p. 85). If the LCMS's resolutions on Scouting and chaplaincy were creating divisions and offenses contrary to Scriptural doctrine, should not the LCMS have been "avoided" for this reason alone, regardless of the presence of other problem areas?

I believe Professor Schuetze is correct when he concludes that the chief point of division between the Missouri and Wisconsin Synods was and is the doctrine of church fellowship or, more specifically, the doctrine of separation, as taught in Romans 16: 17-18 and other passages of Scripture. He summarizes as follows: "In 1872 agreement on the doctrine of church fellowship and a commitment to avoid unionistic practices was a primary factor in the formation of the Synodical Conference. Disagreement on these same matters resulted in its dissolution" (p. 395).

One can only marvel at all the time and effort put in by the leaders of the synods of the Synodical Conference in the years from 1938 to 1963, when the WELS and the ELS finally withdrew from the Synodical Conference. Even overseas theologians from other Lutheran church bodies became involved in the futile attempt to maintain the Synodical Conference.

Professor Schuetze refers more than once to the impasse of 1960 as the event that finally

made the separation inevitable. The 1959 WELS convention had instructed its Church Union Committee ‘to continue its efforts in the Joint Union Committees until agreement on doctrine and practice has been reached, or until an impasse is reached and no such agreement can be brought about’ p. 354). The Wisconsin Synod’s Commission on Doctrinal Matters met with representatives of the Missouri Synod countless times during this whole period, but finally in 1960 they said “an impasse has been reached” (p. 358). “The impasse ... meant that for the WELS the time for ‘patient admonition’ while in >a state of confession’ had come to an end. The time for decisive action had come” (pp. 385-386).

This emphasis on the ‘impasse’ of 1960 shows that even though the WELS in 1961 suspended fellowship with the LCMS “on the basis of Romans 16: 17-18” according to its resolution (p. 386), it was not really Romans 16: 17-18 that was the determining factor in the decision to suspend fellowship. If all that was necessary to suspend fellowship was evidence that divisions and offenses were being caused contrary to Biblical doctrine, this evidence had been present and recognized as such by a WELS convention already in 1955 by the unanimously adopted Preamble, which declared that “the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod has by its official resolutions, policies, and practices created divisions and offenses both in her own body and in the entire Synodical Conference. Such divisions and offenses are of long standing” (The proceedings for that year are titled: *Reports and Memorials, Thirty-Third Convention, Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States*, August 10-17, 1955, p. 85).

What happened after the 1955 WELS convention was an attempt on the part of some WELS leaders to justify the decision of the convention to delay action on suspension of fellowship. In this process a new doctrine was developed that Schuetze does not directly refer to at all in his book, namely, the policy accepted by the WELS convention of 1959 that stated: “Termination of fellowship is called for when you have reached the conviction that admonition is of no further avail” (*Proceedings of the Thirty-Fifth Convention, The Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States*, August 5-12, 1959, pp. 210-211).

In 1960 the WELS Commission on Doctrinal Matters reached the conviction that admonition was of no further avail; that is, they came to an impasse in their discussions. It was on this basis, and not just on the basis of Romans 16: 17-18, that the WELS in 1961 suspended their fellowship with the LCMS, as the preceding Whereases clearly state. See, for example, Whereas #2 and Whereas #5. Whereas #2 reads: “WHEREAS, Our admonitions have largely gone unheeded, and the issues have remained unresolved.” Whereas #5 reads: “WHEREAS, The Commission has faithfully carried out this directive but now regretfully reports that differences with respect to the Scriptural principles of church fellowship – differences which it holds to be divisive – have brought us to an impasse” (*Proceedings of the Thirty-Sixth Convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod*, August 8-17, 1961, pp. 197-198).

Professor Armin Schuetze was one of my high school teachers, and when I arrived at the WELS seminary, he was again one of my teachers. I have respect for his integrity and honesty and sincerity. He personally was deeply involved in the debate between those who left the WELS after the 1959 convention and those that remained. His footnote 41, on p. 441, says only this: “Many of the signers (of ‘A Call for Decision’) left the synod and in 1960 formed a new church body, the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC). Since this body had no relations with the Synodical Conference, we do not enter upon this further.” Among those who left the WELS at that time was Armin Schuetze’s brother, Pastor Waldemar Schuetze of Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, and another close relative, Pastor Paul Albrecht of Bowdle, South Dakota, founding fathers of the CLC. In my opinion Armin Schuetze came very close to leaving the WELS himself.

Reports and Memorials, Thirty-Third Convention, The Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States, August 10-17, 1955, pp. 86-87, refers to Armin Schuetze as one who registered his dissenting vote on the decision to postpone termination of fellowship with the LCMS. The full statement reads: “We, the undersigned members of the Floor Committee, although we are in full agreement with the Preamble and the resolution to terminate fellowship,

are of the conviction that the reasons stated for delay do not warrant postponement of action upon the resolution.” In other words, Armin Schuetze himself was in favor of terminating fellowship with the LCMS already in 1955 on the basis of the evidence. Nevertheless, in subsequent years he somehow became convinced that the course the WELS was following was not contrary to the Word of God.

According to the final chapter in his book Professor Schuetze believes wholeheartedly that the present-day Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC) is the rightful heir of the Synodical Conference, agreeing with it in its doctrine and practice. The American members of the CELC are the WELS and the ELS. It certainly should be clear that the convictions and aims of the Synodical Conference founders are to be found much more readily in the churches associated with the CELC rather than those associated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) or the LCMS.

But would Professor Schuetze be surprised if some future historian sifting through all the evidence would conclude that the true heirs of the Synodical Conference are neither the ELCA nor the LCMS nor the CELC, but the CLC and the churches associated with it? After all, the real problem the Synodical Conference founders had with the General Council was not its doctrine on paper, but its actual practice. One non-CLC source has made a connection between the CLC confessional document, *Concerning Church Fellowship*, and the position of the Synodical Conference in days gone by. See *Logia*, Vol. V, #1, Epiphany 1996, pp. 41-52, where the CLC document *Concerning Church Fellowship* is printed in abbreviated form with the following explanation: “We print this confessional statement here because we believe that it is the last and most thorough articulation available of the doctrine of church fellowship as it was confessed in the Synodical Conference.”

For the most part, the WELS and ELS no doubt have a fine doctrinal position on paper. But what about the practice? I am in no position to know what the practice is. One hears anecdotal evidence of inconsistent practice from time to time on the part of WELS and ELS members and churches. No doubt something similar might be said with respect to the CLC.

One important difference is evident, however. The WELS and ELS have seen fit to cooperate with and enjoy the benefits of cooperation with pan-Lutheran fraternal insurance companies such as Lutheran Brotherhood (LB) and the Aid Association for Lutherans (AAL), whereas the CLC has broken all its ties with these companies. We have a feeling that the Synodical Conference founders would not have been willing to do business with such companies and would have called their programs unionistic and therefore unacceptable.

One of my colleagues recently called attention to a judge’s decision concerning the AAL that he discovered on the Internet. A certain Judge Robert G. Mahony in 1994 gave this as his opinion: "AAL' s support of Lutherans and Lutheranism, the close relationship between its branches and Lutheran congregations, that it is a non-profit organization, and that its membership is limited to Lutherans, and it only sells insurance to members and their spouses is evidence I credit to support my finding that AAL is a religious organization whose character and purpose is not pervasively secular." Judge Mahony therefore concluded: "For these reasons, I find that although AAL is not officially connected with Lutheran church bodies, AAL' s character and purpose are so closely associated with the Lutheran religion that it is a religious organization entitled to First Amendment protection."

In the words of my colleague: “While we do not need the government to tell us what constitutes a religious organization, this is still interesting.”

The LB and the AAL are now in the process of merging into a company to be known as Thrivent Financial for Lutherans.

– David Lau

Brief Notes on

The Synodical Conference, Ecumenical Endeavor

by Armin W. Schuetze

At its first reading this is an impressive book, covering the entire history of the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America. A considerable amount of detail is given to many aspects of the conference's origin, growth, development, and demise.

It would require a great deal of time (not to mention obtaining access to the source material) to make a thorough and critical analysis of all the historical detail in the book. These brief notes are limited to just one aspect of the material in the book. Since certain inaccuracies were found in this one aspect, should one wonder whether or not there may be similar inaccuracies or omissions in other areas? This reader will leave that as an "open question."

It was during the 1940s, 1950s, and early 1960s that the WELS/ELS criticisms and accusations of the unionism that had developed in the LCMS came to a head. Schuetze reports: "They [WELS Standing Committee on Matters of Church Union, in its 1953 'Preliminary Report'] had, however, come to the firm conviction that the time had come to recommend to the Synod for consideration and action the following resolution:

“Resolved: That with deepest sorrow, taking notice of the fact that the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod is causing divisions and offences [*sic*] contrary to the doctrine which we have learned, we, in obedience to God's injunction to avoid such, declare the fellowship which we have had with said synod to be terminated.” (323-324)

Schuetze continues: "The 'Supplementary Report' [of the same standing committee, still in 1953] again called on 'our synod, bound by the Word of God,' now to declare itself on the matter. A break in fellowship seemed imminent" (324). It was evident that the standing committee, at least, had come to the conviction already in 1953 that the LCMS was by that time clearly identified as causing divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine of the Lord.

The 1955 WELS convention had to deal with the standing committee's recommendation, which it presented as its "conviction," namely to terminate fellowship with the LCMS. Schuetze comments: "The convention floor committee, which was to consider the Union Committee's report and proposed resolutions, consisted of nine pastors and professors, four teachers, and nine laymen, representing all areas of the Synod. After many hours of discussion, hearings, and debate, they presented their report. It consisted of two parts: a Preamble, and Resolutions. The Preamble briefly drew attention to the years of patient admonition that had finally resulted in the 1953 synod resolution. This resolution recognized the break in relations caused by Missouri's acceptance of the *Common Confession* and its persistence in adhering to unionistic practices. This was threatening the existence of the Synodical Conference and continued affiliation with Missouri. The Preamble pointed out that this was the kind of situation to which Romans 16:17,18 was applicable. The following resolution was presented to the convention [the vote to be delayed until the following year, 1956]:

“Resolved, that whereas the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod has created divisions and offenses by its official resolutions, policies, and practices not in accord with Scripture, we, in obedience to the command of our Lord in Romans 16:17-18, terminate our fellowship with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.” (324-325)

It is quite revealing, it seems to this reader, that Prof. Schuetze appears to agree with the assessment given by Prof. John Brug of the above-mentioned Preamble which was adopted unanimously by the 1955 WELS convention. For Schuetze the Preamble merely "drew attention to the years of patient admonition that had finally resulted in the 1953 synod resolution," and "pointed out that this was the kind of situation to which Romans 16:17,18 was applicable." Brug writes: "The convention unanimously adopted a preamble that rebuked Missouri's unionism and declared it to be the cause for a break in relations" (*Church Fellowship: Working Together for the Truth*, Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1996, ch. 9, 87-97).

The facts are quite different. While the vote on the resolution itself was postponed for questionable reasons, the Preamble was adopted by the convention then and there, and its wording clearly is an indictment. It speaks for itself: “A church body which creates divisions and offenses by its official resolutions, policies, and practices not in accord with Scripture also becomes subject to the indictment of Romans 16:17-18. The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod has by its official resolutions, policies, and practices created divisions and offenses both in her own body and in the entire Synodical Conference. Such divisions and offenses are of long standing” (emphasis added) (Wisconsin Synod Proceedings, 1955, 85). God’s Word makes it clear that when that is the case, the God-pleasing response of the Christian is: “Avoid them” – not possibly next year, but now!

In Schuetze’s account of the WELS 1959 convention no mention is made of the synod’s reaction to the memorial titled “A Call for Decision,” namely the adoption of the following false doctrinal position: “Termination of fellowship is called for when you have reached the conviction that admonition is of no further avail.” The resolutions that were adopted in that convention clearly indicate that the WELS intended to and did follow the directives of this false position, especially in light of the Preamble which had been adopted in 1955. Following are the pertinent 1959 resolutions:

“Resolved,

b. That we instruct our Church Union Committee under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to continue and accelerate the discussions in the Joint Union Committees [of the Synodical Conference] to bring about complete unity of doctrine and practice in the Synodical Conference;

c. That we instruct our Church Union Committee to continue its efforts in the Joint Union Committees until agreement in doctrine and practice has been reached, or until an impasse is reached and no such agreement can be brought about.”

– *John Lau*
