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THE DOCTRINE OF OFFENSE

A thesis presented to the
Faculty of Concordia Theological Seminary

in partial fulfillment of the
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Bachelor of Divinity

by

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INTRODUCTION

The doctrine of offense is a very practical one. If we are to order our lives according to the teachings of God's Word it is necessary to consider the meaning of the term "offense". We must determine what the Scriptures teach about offense. Having established the Biblical principles we are ready to take the next step, namely, to determine how far we can go in urging the matter of offense for or against a given course of action. The following thesis is an attempt to deal with these questions and to arrive at Scriptural conclusions.

A study of the matter of offense always implies a study of the adiaphora. The questions of Christian liberty and Christian charity are effected by the doctrine of offense. Therefore it was necessary to treat these subjects somewhat extensively. There are two dangers. The prevalent attitude is that we use our liberty regardless of the consequences. The other danger is that in our zeal to avoid offense we relegate our evangelical freedom to the realm of theory.

Whenever people take their Christianity seriously they must come to grips with the problem of offense. This doctrine has very real implications for the everyday life of the Christian. There can be no question about the importance of the subject since our Savior Himself says: "Whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe on me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea." (Matt. 18,6) Certainly anything which moved the Holy One of God to the use of such strong language is worthy of our study. While not a fundamental doctrine it is taught in the Word of God and the Apostle writes: "For all the promises of God in Him are yea, and in Him amen." (1 Cor. 1,20)

The quotations from the confessions and from our contemporary theologians make clear their thoroughly Scriptural approach to this doctrine as well as to the great fundamentals.

THE MEANING AND ORIGIN OF OFFENSE

The fundamental thought of this thesis revolves around the word skandalon. For that reason it will be necessary to begin with a study of its etymology in the effort to bring out the full connotation of the word as it is used in the Bible. It is apparent from the following etymological study that the word skandalon means "a stumbling block or trap which causes one to fall."

In the ancient world we find the word skandalon recorded in the Papyrus Zen. 608.7 (3rd century B.C.) ⁽²⁾ and the meaning of σκάνδαλον seems to be "a trap laid for animals". The Papyrus Masp.4.9 (6th century A.D.) ⁽²⁾ uses the term σκάνδαλα ποιεῖσθαι. Pollianus Epigrammaticus (2nd century (?) A.D.) ⁽³⁾ uses σκανδαλῶσον for "stick in a trap on which the bait is placed and which, when touched by the animal, springs up and shuts the trap". Aristophanes Acharnenses 689 and Scholiast employ σκανδαλῶσις ἐπιῶν "setting word traps which one's adversary will catch at and so be caught himself." While this may be too late to offer conclusive testimony it should help shed some light.

More relevant is the Biblical meaning of the term. We find the root used to form various parts of speech. As a noun it is used for "stumbling block" in Joshua 23,13; 1Kgs.18,21; Rom.11,9; 1 Pet. 2,7; Matt.18,37; Luke 17,1. The verbal meaning is "to stumble, give offense or scandal" to anyone (σκανδαλίω) as in Matt.5,29; 17,29. When employed passively it means "to be made to stumble, to take offense" as in Matt.26,53; 11,6; 26,31. ⁽⁴⁾ σκανδαλίω then means "to put a stumbling block in the way or to be a stumbling block." The Authorized Version uses the English

1) Liddel and Scott: Greek Lexicon
 2) Liddel and Scott: ibidem
 3) Liddel and Scott: ibidem
 4) Thayer: Eng. Lexicon of N.T.

"offend". The word takes on various shades. a) Luther translates it as "Ärgern" (Luke 17,2; 1 Cor.8,13;Matt.5,29;18,6.8;Mk.9,24sq.) The Revised Version translates the passive of Rom. 14,21 and 2 Cor. 11,29 "is made to stumble." b)To cause a person to begin to distrust and desert one whom he ought to trust and obey"; "to cause to call away" (R.V. "to stumble") Jn.6,61 pass. Matt. 18,21. c) "To be offended in one"---to see in another what I disapprove of and what hinders me from acknowledging his authority! Matt. 11,6;Mk.6,3;Lk 7,23. "To cause one to judge unfavorably or unjustly of another"---Matt.17,27. d)"To cause one to feel displeasure at a thing", "to make indignant"---pass. "to be displeased and indignant". Matt. 15,12. This meaning has developed since the man who stumbles or whose foot gets entangled feels annoyed. It is interesting to note that the verb is not found in profane authors nor in the Septuagint but only in relics of Aquila's version of the Old Testament.

The word σκανδαλον occurs some twenty-five times in the Greek Old Testament and fifteen times in the New. ⁽¹⁾ It is the ecclesiastical word for σκανδαλιζου .

a) prop. the movable stick or trigger of a trap, trap-stick, trap, snare. Any impediment placed in the way and causing one to stumble or fall (a stumbling block, occasion of stumbling). Lev. 19,14: πέτρα σκανδαλον . (Auth. Vers:a rock of offense-- i.e.,a rock which is a cause of stumbling). Lat: offendiculum (post Aug--a stumbling block, cause of offense). Figuratively it is applied to Jesus Christ whose person and career were so contrary to the expectations of the Jews concerning the Messiah that they rejected Him and by their obstinacy made shipwreck of their salvation. Rom.9,33;1 Pet.2,8---from Is. 8,14.

1)Thayer:Op. Cit.

Πρόσκαμμα --stumbling block--used 1 Cor.8,9;Rom.14,13.

λίθος προσκάμματος ---Rom. 9,32.33;1 Pet.2,8.

b)Metaphor

b)Metaphor---any person or thing by which one is entrapped---

drawn into error or sin.

1) of person. Josh.23,13; Is. 18,21; Matt.13,41; Matt. 16,23
(where σκάνδαλον 'non ex effectu, sed ex natura et condicione
propria dicitur'--Calov) so Χριστός ἐστρωμένος is called
1 Cor. 1,23.

2) of things. τίθειν τινί σκάνδαλον (literally Judith
5,1)---to put a stumbling block in one's way;i.e., to do that by
which another is led to sin. Rom.14,13. The same idea is expressed
by βάλειν σκάνδαλον ἐνώπιον τινος (to cast a stumbling block
before one) Rev.2,14. οὐκ ἔστι σκάνδαλον ἐν τινί --1 Jn.2,10
Pl:σκάνδαλα ---words or deeds which entice to sin. Matt. 18,7;
Luke 17,1. σκάνδαλα ποιῆν παρὰ τὴν διδασχάν ---to cause persons
to be drawn away from the pure doctrine into error and sin
(cf. παρὰ III 2a) Rom.16,17. τὸ σκάνδ. τοῦ σταυροῦ ---the offence
which the cross gives (R.V.:the stumbling block of the cross.)
Gal.5,2. A cause of destruction---Rom.11,9,fr. Ps.68 (69) 25.

On the basis of the foregoing word study it is apparent
that the definition of offense as given by our theologians is
the true and correct one. Thus we read: ⁽¹⁾ "Aergernisz bedeutet
in der Schrift einen Anstoss auf dem Wege, der geeignet ist,
jeden, der daran stösst, straucheln oder fallen zu machen. Also
geistlicher Weise ist 'Aergernisz' alles, was geeignet ist,
einen Menschen auf dem Wege christlichen Glaubens und Lebens
straucheln und in Irrthum und Sünde fallen zu machen. (Aerger
zu machen)"

Or as Dr. Pfeper says: ⁽²⁾ "Aergernisz geben heisst,

1)Der Lutheraner 1900 Vol.56 No.4, p.49

2)Pfeper:Christliche Dogmatik Band I p.672

etwas lehren oder tun, wodurch wir andern Menschen zum Unglauben, zu fälschem Glauben oder gottlosen Leben Anlass geben und sie, soviel an uns ist, ewig verderben."

The sin of tempting anyone to evil is described in Scripture as giving offense. ⁽¹⁾ Offense, then, is given not only by doing that which is evil (false doctrine, wicked life) but also by unwise use of adiaphora. ⁽²⁾ Dr. Fritz says: "We give offense when we do that which is in itself wrong (Mk.9,42;Matt.18,7) or which, though not wrong in itself is so considered by a weak brother (Rom.14;1 Cor. 8,1-13) or such as have no knowledge of the divine will and who should first be brought to a better knowledge before we in their presence make full use of our Christian liberty." For the Christian the norm and rule must ever be the Word of God. Anything which contradicts that Word is an offense.

As sin never has its origin in God so we dare not seek the cause of offense within the Trinity. ⁽³⁾ "Der Ursprung des Aergernisses ist nicht Gotte, sondern dem Teufel und der Sünde der Menschen zuzuschreiben." That the sin of offense cannot be traced to our holy God is evident from the following clear passage of Scripture: "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all." (1 John 1,5) He who is holy and perfect, He, the all-righteous and spotless God, can certainly not be blamed for the presence of offenses in this evil world.

The devil, and he alone, is responsible for offenses. Ever since the Fall Satan has had but one objective---the utter destruction of the works of God. And since a believer is the noblest work of God, since the conversion of a sinner causes joy

1) Mueller: Christian Dogmatics, p.226

2) Fritz: Pastoral Theology. p.218

3) Der Lutheraner: Op.Cit. p.81

even among the holy angels, Satan takes a special joy in destroying faith. The devil causes offenses that we might not believe and be saved. ⁽¹⁾ (Matt. 13,24;36-43). On the basis of Matt. 18,7 some have held that God foreordained the offenses which we find in the world. When the Savior says: "Offenses must come" He merely states that since the devil and sin are in the world there will be offenses.

And the Christian is not perfect. St. Paul, exemplary Christian that he was, had to complain: "The good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do." (Rom. 7,19). So must every believer also confess that he is far from perfect, that he constantly has to contend against the devil. And all too often Satan manages to get the upper hand. It is at such times that the Christian may give offense. Stubbornly insisting on his Christian liberty he throws a stumbling block in the way of another's faith.

Another frequent cause of offense is a misunderstanding of Scripture. (2 Pet. 3,16-18) It has been said that "a little knowledge is a dangerous thing." There are probably few places where this is truer than when we are dealing with God's Word. The many sects which have arisen and divided Christendom are certainly a constant source of offense, a stumbling block in the path of the unchurched.

But when all is said and done the ultimate root and source of the evil---the final cause of offense is Satan. This sin, like all others, has its origin in the prince of hell. He who is the declared enemy of God and man walks about as a roaring lion seeking to destroy God's grandest work, the Christian. And he often does that by moving another Christian to give offense.

II ADIAPHORA USED INJUDICIOUSLY ARE A CAUSE OF OFFENSE

Unlike the followers of Calvin, Lutherans live according to the principle that whatever God's Law does not forbid is permissible for the Christian. There are many things which men do which are neither commanded nor forbidden in the Scriptures. These are called adiaphora---things which lie in the borderland of right and wrong. There is, for example, the matter of smoking. God's Word nowhere says either "Thou shalt smoke" or "Thou shalt not smoke." Conscious of his Christian liberty the believer uses tobacco or refrains from such indulgence according to his personal taste. The Bible does not command nor prohibit the drinking of alcoholic beverages. Therefore the Christian drinks beer or water with his meal and he has no qualms of conscience in either case. Holy Scripture, while commanding us to worship in groups, nowhere prescribes the particular form of worship to be used. One Christian congregation follows the Common Service to the last rubric while another invents a form of worship of its own---and both worship to the glory of God.

To a person possessed of sound Lutheran indoctrination these truths are self-evident. Unfortunately there is in our land a great host of Christians who do not see the matter so clearly. Many people sincerely believe that it is a sin, for example, to smoke, drink, or attend the theatre. Others, notably the Seventh Day Adventists, believe that one sins by failing to observe the Old Testament Ceremonial laws. Members of the Roman Catholic sect see sin in every defection from the rules of their pope and councils. Fortunately, God in His Word has given us some examples which throw much light on the proper attitude over against the adiaphora. It is a source of no little wonder to the writer that in the face of our Lord's miracle at Cana of

John 2
Galilee (Luke 2,1-11) the Women's Christian Temperance Union and similar groups continue their propaganda. One would think that after having read St. Paul's enunciation of freedom from Judaistic precepts (Col.2,16.17) no student of the Bible could be influenced by twentieth century Judaizers. It is difficult to understand why men willingly submit to manmade precepts when the clear words of Jesus have been preserved for us: "In vain do they worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." (Matt.15,9)

The fact remains, however, that very many denominations do not teach correctly in this matter of the adiaphora. Perhaps it is for this reason that the Lord has given us such clear examples, especially in the letters of St. Paul. The passage (Col.2,16.17) mentioned above is very relevant: "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holy day, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath days." In all of his letters the great Apostle testifies to the truth that the Christian may eat or drink whatever he chooses so long as he does so in moderation. Conscious of the liberty which was his in the Gospel Paul could write to the Church at Galatia: "Brethren, ye have been called unto liberty." In his day certain fanatics were laying great stress on questions pertaining to foods, drink, and observances of holy days just as modern holiness bodies and others condemn many harmless amusements. The Apostle's admonitions, originally directed against these earlier errorists, apply with equal force to those who today must reemphasize the Christian's freedom. The Church today must reemphasize those truths which Paul set forth so clearly in his epistles. We dare never concede that a single act is sin so long as God's Law is silent in the matter.

While the above is true and we can never yield an inch in proclaiming the principle of Christian liberty the fact is that we must guard against an injudicious use of that which is in itself permissible---an adiaphoron. No one was more conscious of his liberty in Christ than was St. Paul. He it was who wrote: "I know and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself." (Rom.14,14) Yet that same Paul said:"It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor anything whereby thy brother stumbleth or is offended, or is made weak." (Rom.14,21) Although Paul knew that he could, for example, eat things that had been strangled and offered to idols he knew also that there were certain Christians who were not so well grounded as he and who would be troubled were they to see him eating such meat. Conscious of the fact that "the kingdom of God is not meat and drink" (Rom.14,17) he was willing to forego the fulfillment of his personal tastes for the Kingdom's sake. Believers must at all times be willing to waive their Christian liberty unless the truth of the Gospel is at stake. ⁽¹⁾ Again we have Paul for a model. In that Magna Charta of the Christian, his Epistle to the Galatians, ^(5th) Paul begins his fifteenth chapter with the trumpet call:"stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free..." but says:(v.13)"Brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another."

In his Epistle to the Corinthians Paul again takes up the question of meat offered to idols. After enunciating the principle that a Christian can freely eat of sacrificial meats he urges the same point which he had advanced in his letter to the Romans: "Don't use your liberty so as to cause a weak brother to sin

and lose his faith!"⁽¹⁾ Acts 16,3 shows us Paul again carrying out his principle of Christian charity. Timothy, a Greek, was to accompany him on his missionary journey. Paul knew that the Jews would take offense at the presence of this uncircumcised Gentile in the role of a preacher of the Gospel. Therefore he has his young companion circumcised although he himself had so vigorously defended the position that circumcision is unnecessary. The sound principle which we can deduce from his procedure is that where instruction has not yet been possible or where it has failed of its purpose the Christian is to refrain from using his liberty except if another weak Christian might be offended by such restraint.⁽²⁾

All of Paul's admonitions and examples regarding the use of adiaphora are dictated by sanctified common sense. The Lutheran who invites a dyed-in-the-wool Methodist to his home and serves a cocktail before dinner is not only deficient in breeding but gives offense. The man who considers it his bounded duty to campaign against tobacco will care little about your Christian testimony if every word you speak is accompanied by the odor of stale tobacco. These are things which every salesman considers fundamental. How much more then should the Christian who, after all, is constantly selling Christ, see to it that he puts no stumbling block in his brother's way. If the use of an adiaphoron, be it ever so dear to us, causes a brother to lose faith we must abstain from such use.

If it is true that the lay Christian must guard against

1) Graebner: Borderland of Right and Wrong p.22
 2) Der Lutheraner: Op. Cit. p.289

giving offense it is doubly true that the ambassador of Christ must be zealous in this matter. St. Paul in beseeching the Christians at Corinth to hold fast to the faith says of himself and his coworkers that they gave "no offense in anything, that the ministry be not blamed." (1 Cor. 6, 3) The modern clergyman finds himself in an unenviable position. Many things that are permitted by God's Word and which the Christian may enjoy must be sacrificed by the shepherd of the flock. He has no eight-hour day after which he can forget his office. Twenty-four hours a day he is the representative of the King of kings and, although he may not always be fully conscious of it, the world so regards him. Certain adiaphora may be used by the conscientious Christian in one place while their use would be dangerous in another place. The Christian who, in a metropolis like New York or Chicago, stops in at the local tavern for a glass of beer as he comes home from a hard day's work would probably not give offense. On the other hand, the Lutheran deacon living in a small town dominated by the spirit of Carrie Nation would be most unwise in publicly partaking of the same beverage. Attendance upon a theatre where a clean picture is being shown is clearly an adiaphoron whether such attendance be of a Sunday or a weekday. The fact is, however, that there are many towns, especially in the South, where Sunday movie-going is offensive.

The next consideration is one which is not mentioned in anything that we have read but which is of more than a little importance. The personality of a man plays a great part in determining to what extent he may make use of his Christian liberty. Were most of our clergymen to be seen standing at the local bar while wearing clerical garb their neighbors would be offended. If these same pastors would offer to their parishioners

a "shot of rye" as they came to pay their respects on Christmas Day there would shortly be an undercurrent in the congregation. And---were we to greet the early arrivals at church with alcoholic breath the Visitor would be called in before long. And yet---the writer knows an aged pastor who does just the things mentioned and he is one pastor who is truly loved not only by his congregation but by the entire community in which he dwells. As one district official said in speaking of the man: "Pastor---- can do those things and get away with them. You or I would shortly be called on the carpet."

Particularly must the Church be careful lest she give offense. The Church exists for the sole purpose of preaching the Gospel. Every other consideration must be subservient to that of winning souls for Christ. Even many of the ungodly have a definite awe for the Church---they look upon it as the one institution which is, or at least should be, above reproach. Anything, then, which might tend to lower such a person's estimate of the Church is an offense. Here, again, good judgment must be used in determining what is or is not permissible. In St. Louis, Missouri some Lutheran churches sell beer in their parish houses on the evenings when the men's club bowls. Were one of our churches in Florida to follow that practice tongues would begin to wag and incalculable harm would be done. Many people who see no harm in drinking would be offended by drinking in a parish house. A similar principle obtains as far as card-playing and other adiaphora are concerned. That congregation shows evidences of Christian wisdom which yields its liberty for the sake of "them that are without."

Even as "no man liveth unto himself" so no church is without its influence upon the community. Unfortunately men do not always

think in straight lines. The result is that they often reason that, if a right use is permitted in a church its abuse is permitted outside the church. Where there is a danger of such conclusions the Church must certainly refrain from insisting upon liberty. "Be ye therefore wise as serpents and harmless as doves." (Matt. 10,16)

There is a danger that the Church take advantage of her place as an institution or that the pastor feel that his office gives him certain exemptions---that he is above these restrictions, a law unto himself. At times we feel that we do not care any longer to cater to the notions of misguided individuals who are not sufficiently enlightened regarding our position. At such times we feel like throwing restraint to the winds. In such periods when pride and self-sufficiency are in the saddle it is well to be guided by the example of our blessed Lord. He, the mighty Maker of heaven and earth, King of kings and Lord of lords, willingly paid tribute to earthly rulers. Why? "Lest we should offend them." (Matt. 17,27)

III THE CHRISTIAN'S CONDUCT IN VIEW OF OFFENSE

Anyone who has read St. Paul's tribute to love in 1 Corinthians 13 has the proper rule as far as the Christian's conduct in view of offense is concerned. No one can tell the individual believer just how he is to act in every given instance. But the well-indoctrinated Christian, conscious of his Lord's emphasis on the law of love, will not go far wrong. Very correctly the Small Catechism of Luther sums up the meaning of the entire Law in the one word "love". The Christian, in all of his thinking, speaking, and doing must be prompted by love toward his God and love toward his fellow-man. Thus, in spite of his evangelical freedom, the conscientious Christian does not have a free rein. St. Paul, after stating his position on Christian liberty, says: "For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." (Gal.5,13.14)

When Dr. Pieper writes: ⁽¹⁾ "Auf den Gebrauch der christlichen Freiheit ist zu verzichten, ausser wo die Wahrheit des Evangeliums verleugnet werden würde", he sums up the truth illustrated in ⁽²⁾ Matt. 17,24-27 of which Dt. Stöckhardt writes the following:

"Als sie wieder zu einem flüchtigen Besuch in Capernaum eingekehrt waren, wurde Petrus, wie Matthäus 17,24-27. mittheilt, von den Einnehmern der Tempelsteuer befragt, ob sein Meister auch diese Abgabe für das Heiligthum zu entrichten pflege. Jeder männliche Israelit musste zu der Zeit jährlich zwei Groschen oder zwei

1) Pieper: Op. Cit. p.673

2) Stöckhardt: Biblische Geschichte. Neues Testament. p.151

Drachmen Tempelsteuer zahlen. Petrus beantwortete jene Frage mit Ja. Dieser Handel war dem Allwissenden nicht verborgen geblieben. Er kam Petro zuvor, als derselbe heimgekehrt war, und bemerkte, dass doch die Könige der Erde nur von Fremden Zoll und Zins zu nehmen pflegten, dass also die Kinder frei seien. So sind also auch die Kinder des neuen Bundes, zu denen schon die Jünger zählten, und vor Allen ihr Meister selbst, der Sohn Gottes, frei von allen Satzungen Israels. Aber der Herr will seinem Volk kein Aergernisz geben, und so schickt er Petrus aus, derselbe soll seine Angel ins Meer werfen, und im Mund des ersten Fisches, den er herauszieht, wird er einen Stater finden, das ist ein Viergroschenstück, das soll er dann für sich und seinen Meister den Steuereinnehmern einhändigen. Und so geschah es. Jesus hätte diese geringe Summe Geldes sich leicht auch wo anders her beschaffen können. Aber er will absichtlich durch ein augenfälliges Wunder die Tempelsteuer gewinnen. Er, der König Himmels und der Erden, der die Fische im Meer, Gold und Silber der ganzen Welt in seiner Hand hat, lässt sich so tief herab und untergibt sich allen Satzungen der Juden, wird ein Diener der Beschneidung, wird in allen Stücken den Juden ein Jude, um auch auf diese Weise von seinem Volk Etliche zu gewinnen. Und damit hat er seinen Jüngern, den Jüngern aller Zeiten den Weg gewiesen, dass sie Niemanden ein Aergernisz geben, dass sie die Macht und Freiheit, die sie in Christo haben, nicht missbrauchen zum Schaden des Nächsten, sondern, wo es die Liebe erheischt und wo es ohne Sünde geschehen kann, den Wünschen, Forderungen, Sitten, Satzungen der Menschen sich anbequemen und unterordnen." Love should prompt us to refrain from the use of adiaphora if those who are weak in faith

(1)
take offense.

The emphasis which the New Testament puts on the law of Christian love is very often lacking in our time. Modern Pharisees who study carefully the synodical and district reports know all the traditions of their synod and can cite the church fathers in order to keep men out of the church---these have no conception of the law of love. As one man has said:"They may be good theologians but a theology without love is not Christian." On the other hand, the more prevalent danger in our day and time is this that men insist upon the free exercise of their liberty while they let the chips fall where they may. Disregarding the weaker brother they insist upon their "rights" and by such insistence give offense.

Much of the success of the early Church was attributable to the fact that its members lived by the law of love. If it is true that the modern church has lost much of its power that is traceable to a stubborn insistence on technicalities of the law rather than on Christian love. Once we accept St. John's dictum: "God is love" and, aware of the fact that God wants us to be as He is, try to subordinate our lives to the law of love---then twentieth century Christendom will recapture the fire possessed by the Church of apostolic times.

The Christian must ever keep in mind the reason for his existence. God does not simply call a person to faith and then send the angel of death to bring the convert home. God permits His believers to remain in the world because He has work for them to do. Every Christian is to be a missionary. The Christian who is not constantly testifying to his faith is a contradiction in himself.

The believer who so testifies is prompted to his action by love. First of all---love toward his Savior who has purchased and won him moves him to do Christ's will by bringing so great

salvation to others. And, in the second place, love toward his fellowmen constrains him to bring them the one Thing needful. Love it is which makes him testify in the face of ridicule, love makes him support the work of missions even when he is in financial difficulty, and love prompts him to pray unceasingly that the Gospel of the Crucified be spread from pole to pole.

Since such zeal for souls is the mark of the fervent Christian it would be most foolish for him to do anything which would hinder that for which he works, prays, and testifies. Thus it follows that the more mission-minded a believer is the more scrupulous will he become in avoiding the giving of offense. The Christian who is consumed by a love for souls will never stubbornly insist upon his prerogatives. To the contrary, the conscientious Christian will make it a rule to refrain from anything that might give offense. Weighing his personal tastes as to an adiaphoron against a precious soul that might be lost because of the offense which indulgence in such adiaphoron would give---the Christian denies himself.

While the foregoing is true and correct there is another principle that must be remembered in this connection, namely that every teaching of Scripture is important and not to be ignored simply because of personal likes or dislikes. Significantly in His great missionary command the Lord Jesus included the words: "teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." (Matt. 28,20) While the Church rightly distinguishes between sections of Scripture that teach truths necessary for salvation and others which do not treat of the great fundamentals the fact remains that we must testify to all that the Bible teaches. What the Holy Spirit has deemed worthy of recording for our learning dare never be despised or set aside.

Therefore, although the Christian willingly foregoes his

personal indulgence when a danger of offense is involved that same Christian must be conscientious in proclaiming the glorious liberty of the children of God. Also the Biblical view of adiaphora beclouded as it is in so many of the sects, must be asserted by the Lutheran believer. With consummate patience and by emphasis on the completed redemption which is ours by faith in Christ, we must assert the evangelical freedom of the child of God.

And again St. Paul is our model. In Acts 16:3 we read that Paul had Timothy circumcised in order not to give offense. Yet it is that same Apostle who, in the second chapter of his Epistle to the Galatians, tells us that he refused to consent to the circumcision of Titus. The reason for these two divergent courses of action is not to be sought in an erratic temperament but is fully explained by Paul. Certain false brethren (v.4) had called into question the fact of Christian liberty. Like the Judaizers of today their intention was to subject the early disciples to the Mosaic ordinances. To these Paul "gave place by subjection no, not for an hour." (v.5a) Why was the Apostle so determined that under these circumstances Titus remain uncircumcised? He tells us that himself when he writes: "that the truth of the gospel might continue with you." (v.5) Had Paul yielded for the sake of harmony the truth of the liberty of God's children would have been sacrificed.

The Christian's norm and rule is the Word of God. Anything which contradicts that norm is eo ipso an offense. We cannot (1) cease using an adiaphoron if the truth is thereby concealed. (2) Paul had to take even St. Peter to task when the latter failed

1) Lutheraner. Op. Cit. p.162
2) Lutheraner. Op. Cit. p.331

to act in full confession of revealed truth.(Gal.2,11-14) There is a spirit abroad today which would persuade us that there are certain things which are unimportant and therefore need not become issues. That quest: for peace at any cost is exceedingly dangerous. In an effort to avoid "offense" and to promulgate harmony its proponents are ignoring the Lord's command "teaching them to observe all things." What the Holy has recorded dare not be despised by the puny mind of man.

The Tenth Article of the Formula of Concord grew out of a situation similar to that in which St. Paul found himself. Emperor Charles had gained a military victory over the Protestants and had forced upon the Lutherans the so-called Augsburg Interim. According to its stipulations the Lutherans might retain their doctrinal position but were compelled to acknowledge the authority of the pope and bishops and to celebrate the Sacraments according to Roman ritual. Melancthon and the other leaders in the Leipzig Interim weakly accepted this compromise and based their position on the fact that the Augsburg Confession called ceremonies matters of indifference. The opposition was led by a young Wittenberg professor, Matthias Flacius, who was supported by Amsdorf, Brenz, Corvinus, and others. Their attitude was: "Nothing is an adiaphoron when confession and offense are involved."⁽¹⁾

When confession is at stake we dare not yield an inch. Such steadfastness, while misinterpreted by many, is called forth by loyalty to God's Word. Traditions of our denomination, customs of the particular congregation to which we belong, all these may be ignored in the interests of harmony and good fellowship. But---when one iota of God's Word is at stake the Christian

1)Graebner: Op. Cit. introd. p.vii

must stand firm. Just as the sincere Christian will, under certain circumstances, permit the question of the age of Methuselah to become an issue which he defends with all the vigor at his disposal (not because that question is of any practical importance but because it involves the larger question of the authority of Scripture) so also will the Christian insist upon his liberty in the use of adiaphora when such insistence involves confession of the freedom of the Christian man.

Here, then, the Lutheran Church again stands in a pivotal position. Just as in the days of the Reformation Dr. Luther refused, on the one hand, to sin by continuing in the papistic errors and, on the other hand, to yield an inch in the matter of Christian liberty by making common cause with the iconoclasts--- so the Church of Luther must ever withstand both tendencies. Always we get back to the fundamental truth---the Word of God is our only norm. Whatever that Word commands must be obeyed though death itself be the penalty for such obedience. Wherever the Word is silent the Christian is at perfect liberty, his conscience is not bound. The churches are hazy in this matter. The true visible church must shine as a beacon as she proclaims also this truth of God.

IV OFFENSE THAT IS TAKEN

When the Evangelist of the Old Testament wrote about the coming Messiah he was guided by the Holy Spirit to foresee the fact that when Christ came He would be "for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel, for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem." (Is.8,14) St. Peter states the same truth when He writes that Jesus is "a stone of [†]stumbling, and a rock of offence even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient whereunto they were called." (1Pet.2,8) Christ and His cross are and always have been an offense to many. To this day, wherever the Gospel of the Cross is preached, there some are offended.

This "offense of the cross" is an offense which every Christian must give or sin. ⁽¹⁾ St. Peter wrote his First Epistle which is a paean of praise to Christ and Him crucified although Peter was aware that He is "a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient." (1 Pet. 2,8) Paul who said: "Woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!" (1 Cor.9,16) was fully aware that the Christ whom he preached "lay in Sion a stumblingstone and rock of offense." (Rom.9,33)

If, as the foregoing passage shows, God teaches of Christ even though Christ is an offense to many then certainly we must also preach of Christ. To say otherwise would not only be flying in the face of our Lord's clear missionary commandments but it would be to claim that we are ⁽²⁾ wiser and more loving than God who is Wisdom and Love themselves. Far from making any such blasphemous assertion the Apostles preached Christ crucified although they knew that He was "unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness." (1 Cor.1,25)

1) Graebner: Op. Cit. p.32
 2) Lutheraner: Op, Cit. p.225

The evidences of the offense of the cross are not hard to find in our day. Modernism with its denial of the necessity and fact of the cross is striking proof that men want nothing of the Christ of Calvary. As through the ages so also in our time the cross divides mankind into two groups---those who bow at the foot of the cross and offer themselves in willing submission to Him who hangs thereon and those who turn away in disgust, those who are offended.

The natural, the unconverted man, rebels at the cross. The Jews, for example, were offended at Christ because of self-righteousness. ⁽¹⁾ "Because they sought (righteousness) not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumblingstone." (Rom. ⁹10,32) The desire to win salvation by works is common to all men. Every human religion is built on that desire and caters to it. The religion of the cross with its emphasis on the sola gratia is an offense to the unconverted. They assure you that they need no "slaughter-house theology" as they proceed to tell you of their exemplary mode of life. That is why, very often, it is simpler to win a gross sinner than the man who leads a life which, outwardly at least, is acceptable. ⁽²⁾

Every Christian still is troubled by his flesh. The faithful pastor who consistently preaches the true facts of sin and grace and who patiently instructs his catechumens in God's way of salvation, that pastor often wonders whether his labor is in vain as he hears one of his parishioners say: "I am not afraid to die because I try to live a clean life." While a student at the seminary the writer ministered to a small group of Christians in Illinois. One old lady in that congregation was ill and it was evident to all, herself included, that this would be her last

illness. We discussed this with her and when she told us of her good life, her care for her loved ones and her deeds of charity, we tried to make clear the fallacy of relying on one's good works and then cited passages such as John 3,16 and John 1,29 to point her to her Savior. Those passages were familiar. She joined us in the recitation of such hymns as "Christi Blut und Gerechtigkeit, Das ist mein Schmick und Ehrenkleid." and confessed that in Christ and in Him alone lay her hope for eternal life. We left, joyously believing that the spirit of work-righteousness has been cast out. How surprised we were to find that each visit called for exactly the same type of ministry for every time we called on this lady she would tell us of her good life. An experienced pastor told us since that such cases are not at all unusual. The natural man, also within the Christian, rebels at the cross.

The Gentiles were offended at Christ because of their carnal pride. ⁽¹⁾ "The Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness." (1 Cor. 1, 22-23) The cross of Christ has ever been and still is nonsense to the unbeliever. "For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness." (1 Cor. 1, 18) God has endowed man with reason. While it is true that the Creator expects the creature to use the gift with which He has blessed him He explicitly prohibits the worship of anything which He has given man for his use. The worship of reason is included in that prohibition. Nevertheless foolish men who think themselves wise assert that they will believe nothing which their reason cannot comprehend. Starting with that principle they discard every doctrine of God's Word which deals with a mystery. Thus they reject the Atonement. Thus, also, they displace Scripture with

their own intellect. The cross at which they rebel has become a stumblingblock for them.

Christ has promised His followers no easy road. The early Christians soon found that they could not be carried to the skies "on flowery beds of ease." Church history seems to indicate that when the believers were most faithful to the doctrine of Christ and most zealous in trying to emulate His life at just those periods they suffered the worst persecutions. That was no surprise for Jesus, foreknowing what should come upon His flock, had said: "Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in Me." (Matt. 11, 6) Thus did He prepare Christians against taking offense at the suffering which true confession often entails. If the possibility of being offended for this cause seems remote perhaps the reason is to be sought in the indifference and sluggishness of many Christians. Those people who, like the Christians in Russia, have been persecuted for their faith could testify that the danger of apostasy by reason of persecution is a very real one.

There are times also when offense is taken at the life of the Christian. ⁽¹⁾ When contact with the sects had caused many of our pastors and people to become lukewarm over against the Sacrament of the Altar it became customary in many quarters to partake of the Lord's Supper only four times a year. Such peculiar views prevailed that when a devout Christian availed himself of the opportunity for communing each time the Sacrament was administered his weaker brethren concluded that he must be an unusually vicious sinner and often were offended.

When a person has been converted he will often find it necessary to sever old friendships or even family ties if they would prove a detriment to his growth in grace. The gambler,

1) Lutheraner: Op. Cit. p. 225

drunkard, or licentious person, conscious of St. Paul's admonitions to the Ephesians (Eph.5,7-11) will not continue in his former habits but will cast off the former works of darkness. His right-about-face will result in the questioning of his mental equilibrium and will even cause his "friends" to take offense at the Christian faith. Following the example of the Lord Jesus whose love caused Him to weep over corrupt Jerusalem (Lk.19,41) the new Christian will deal charitably with those whose eyes have not yet been opened as have his. St. Paul, far from dismissing the ungodly from his mind, writes that he is in deep sorrow and even says that he would rather see himself accursed than that so many of his fellow-Israelites should be lost. (Rom.9,1-3) It is that love for souls which distinguished Paul the Christian from Saul the Pharisee and a similar love for the lost souls of men is characteristic of all whose hearts have been touched by the love of Christ.

It must always be remembered, however, that he who takes offense is weak. Someone has said:⁽¹⁾"Spinnen saugen auch aus Rosen Gift." If that sentiment could be taught to and remembered by all Christians there would probably be less of the everlasting cry of offense. The arrogance and presumption of those who urge that their false views or their particular tastes be accepted as standards are surpassed only by their refusal to heed statements of Scripture or to employ sound reason in an endeavor to see another point of view. We have in mind the case of a layman who prides himself on his knowledge of the customs and practices of the Missouri Synod. Anything which was not the custom in our church and particularly in the congregation to which he belongs at the time of his confirmation is looked upon with suspicion. There are many such individuals who become troublesome when they

1)Lutheraner:Op.Cit,p.162

try to promulgate their particular eccentricities or errors and set those errors up as standards. When all others are not ready to fall into line they are roundly denounced for giving offense.

Dr. Graebner says of such people: "It should be noted, however, that the case must be a very clear one before the question of 'offense' or 'conscience' is urged in adiaphora."⁽¹⁾ Again, the same authority says: "We must cease to have any regard for the weak when the weak Christian demands our acknowledgement of his practice or at least demands an attitude of toleration which places his view on an equal footing with Scripture."⁽²⁾ The faithful Christian will be guided by two considerations---loyalty to the Word and love to his fellowmen. Under no consideration will he concede where a compromise of the Word is involved. On the other hand he will deprive himself of many adiaphora in order that offense be avoided. When a weak brother claims offense because his error is not accepted or even promulgated such a one becomes a false prophet.⁽³⁾

Such extremities have their roots in ignorance of Scripture. Such a one must be instructed. The Psalmist writes: "Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them." (Ps. 119,165) In direct proportion as we love and therefore study God's Law we will be strengthened in faith. Thus will the possibilities of our taking offense decrease. When at the seminary or in pastoral conferences one hears men oppose a particular view on the grounds of being "offended" one of only two conclusions is possible, viz., either the man does not know what offense is or his faith is so weak that he has no business in the ministry.

It is the Christian's duty to instruct his weaker brother. And, in the case of adiaphora, the stronger should refrain from using his liberty if instruction does not avail unless

1) Graebner: Op. Cit. p.5

2) Ibidem. p.31

3) Ibidem. p.31

(1)

another Christian is offended by such restraint. However, (2)
 sometimes it is necessary to offend in order to give testimony.
 For example, we sprinkle rather than immerse in baptizing as a
 testimony against the error of the Baptists. In every such
 case concern for the welfare of the Church as well as love of
 our neighbor must decide where the line is to be drawn.

"However, one who has been brought to a knowledge of the
 divine will or refuses to be brought to such knowledge and yet is
 offended by what a Christian is allowed to do such a one takes
 offense where no offense was given." (3) So, for example, the
 Pharisees were offended when Jesus taught them that man is not
 defiled by what enters his mouth but by what proceeds from his
 mouth. (Matt. 15, 12-14)

Significantly does Dr. Th. Graebner write: "No church or
 synod, congregation or conference, can bring charges on the
 mere ground of being 'offended!'" (4) That is important. When men
 do not like a person or a practice but fail to find clear Scriptural
 proof that the particular person or practice is wrong they
 usually resort to the argument from offense. The writer knows
 a layman who regularly uses that as a last resort when he does
 not like a pastor. All endeavors to impugn the character of a
 man having come to naught he invariably claims that something has
 offended him. Such people often will not even listen to a preferred
 explanation for the particular subject under discussion---with
 downcast mien they lament that they have been offended.

The only remedy against offense that is taken is thorough
 indoctrination. The words of the inspired Psalmist cited above

1) Lutheraner: Op. Cit. p. 289

2) Graebner: Op. Cit. p. 32

3) Fritz: Op. Cit. p. 218

4) Graebner: Op. Cit. p. 39

are the answer to this matter of offense when it is not actually given but taken by another. With alarming frequency one hears of defection from our congregations because of trivial matters such as the type of gown worn by the pastor or the manner in which his children conduct themselves. Whether they actually employ the term or not such apostates argue from offense. Perhaps there is a direct connection between this easy breaking of church ties and the gradual disappearance of the parochial school and other agencies which have as their purpose the laying of a solid doctrinal foundation in the lives of prospective church members.

So long as the weaker brother is willing to be instructed we must treat him with infinite patience. "The Church must tolerate and treat weaknesses tenderly but must never encourage them."⁽¹⁾ The mere fact that a fellow-Christian holds a view different from ours or different even from Scripture does not necessarily exclude him from the visible church. The man whose view contradicts the Word of God must be shown what the Scriptures teach. And that may take long for it is unevangelical to set a tian when the process of enlightenment is to terminate.

And yet---in her zeal to be evangelical the Church may never encourage errorists. "It (the Church) must vindicate the glorious liberty of the children of God."⁽²⁾ The unionistic and liberal spirits who today would tolerate any and every religious opinion under the guise of Christian love and tolerance are not in agreement with the practice of the Church. Error---whether in doctrine, life, or practice---must be called by its right name. And---when those who have been admonished take "offense" the guilt must be placed on those to whom it belongs, the errorists who take offense.

1) Graebner: Op. Cit. p. 32

2) Ibidem. p. 32

V SOME PRACTICAL EXAMPLES

Having considered what the Scriptures teach concerning offense and on the basis of the Word seen certain principles which, as Bible Christians, we can consistently hold it will be well to consider a few practical examples. The doctrine of offense is a very practical one for it touches directly the life of the Church and of the Christian as an individual.

Article XXIII of the Augsburg Confession deals with a question which, at that time, was a vexing one, namely the marriage of priests. The popes had forbidden the clergy to marry. Such an unnatural law was bound to have bad results. While there were some particularly strong souls who like St. Paul had the gift of continence there were also those who were given to all sorts of sins, natural and unnatural. As a result there had been common complaint concerning the examples of priests who were not chaste. Grave offense was given as the Augustana informs us when it says: "impure celibacy causes many scandals."⁽¹⁾ While celibacy was the rule chastity was not.

This was a problem with which the Reformers had to wrestle. Their decision to permit the clergy to marry was born not only of a desire to return to the teachings of God's Word but to avoid giving offense. They write: "Since, therefore, our priests were desirous to avoid these open scandals, they married wives and taught that it was lawful for them to contract matrimony."⁽²⁾ Because they restored to matrimony the high place which God Himself had given to it they were charged with having started the Reformation because they wanted to marry. The charge that underlying Luther's work was his eagerness to be free of his vow of celibacy was soon levelled at all the reformers. To this day that slander is a weapon of the Roman Church. In this connection

1) Augustana 61, 18

2) Augustana 61, 2f.

51

it is well to study carefully two arguments from offense advanced by the Reformers. The first is aimed at the abominable practice of Rome according to which she teaches men to justify themselves by keeping the ordinances of the church. Since celibacy is one such ordinance we read: "It is no light offense in the Church to set forth to the people a service devised by men, without the commandment of God, to teach that such service justifies men." (1)

While it is not necessary here to consider the many arguments against celibacy this summary sentence is to the point: "Although we have so many reasons for disapproving the law of perpetual celibacy, yet, besides these, dangers to souls and public scandals also are added, which, even though the law were not unjust, ought to deter good men from approving such a burden as has destroyed innumerable souls." (2)

That the Reformers not only went back to Scripture but understood human nature and thus made a change with far-reaching implications is evident to this day. The writer knows many cases where good Romanists have been offended by the violation of the law of celibacy on the part of their priests. There is, for example, the waitress of that faith who worked at an inn in New Jersey. To her surprise one of the priests of her church spent the week-end there together with a young woman and to her greater surprise he made such visits periodically and in different company. Obviously cases such as this do not place all priests under suspicion nor are they cited as if to imply that all Protestant clergymen are above reproach. On the other hand it must be evident that when the abomination of celibacy is removed the chances for such scandals are minimized.

Laying down some general principles concerning traditions the fathers said: (3) "Here we have Paul as a constant champion,

1) Triglotta 81, 48
2) Triglotta 377, 51
3) Triglotta 329, 51.

who everywhere contends that these observances neither justify nor are necessary in addition to the righteousness of faith. And nevertheless we teach that, in those matters the use of liberty is to be so controlled that the inexperienced may not be offended, and, on account of the abuse of liberty, may not become more hostile to the true doctrine of the Gospel, or that without a reasonable cause nothing in customary rites be changed, but that, in order to cherish harmony such old customs be observed as can be observed without sin or without great inconvenience. And in this very assembly we have shown sufficiently that for love's sake we do not refuse to observe adiaphora with others, even though they should have some disadvantage but we have judged that such public harmony as could indeed be produced without offense to consciences ought to be preferred to all other advantages (all other less important matters)."

From the foregoing it is clear that the Lutheran Reformers were not at all iconoclastic but rather desirous of continuing in the traditions of the church wherever those traditions did not contradict the clear teachings of the Scriptures. "This is the simple mode of interpreting traditions, namely, that we understand them not as necessary services, and nevertheless, for the sake of avoiding offenses, we should observe them in the proper place."⁽¹⁾ In the same spirit they say of church ordinances that: "The use of such ordinances ought therefore to be left free, provided that offenses be avoided, and that they be not judged to be necessary devices."⁽²⁾ In other words, when human ordinances do not contradict the Bible they may be observed but they dare never be placed on a level with the commandments of Scripture--- men are free to accept or reject them.

1) Triglotta 447,17
2) Triglotta 447,16

These and related statements in the confessions are of practical importance at a time when there is a great liturgical awakening within our circles and when synod is urging liturgical uniformity. So long as the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity and the Sacraments are administered according to Christ's institution any mode of service is permissible. God has not given us an order of service which we are obliged to follow but He has left that matter to human discretion. Since He has given us such general instructions as : "Let all things be done decently and in order" (1 Cor. 14, 40) the Church wisely gives much study to the forms of worship. Naturally she leans heavily on the usages of the ancient Church and from the devotional expressions of Christians in the past gains much that is of value for the Church today.

Contact with the Reformed bodies has had a sorry effect upon Lutheran liturgies. The iconoclastic errors so studiously avoided by our founders became the pitfall for our immediate forerunners. The Lutheran Church which in faith and doctrine continues in an unbroken line with ancient Christendom severed that connection as far as the outward manifestations of that faith were concerned.

Happily, there are those who, deeply concerned about this inconsistency, are doing something about it. In each of the larger Lutheran bodies in America there are those who are pleading for the restoration of the liturgical life. That there is a growing liturgical movement within our own circles is evident at almost all pastoral conferences and district conventions. The Liturgical Society of St. James is doing much by way of research into things liturgical.

Unhappily, however, this movement is not meeting with universal approval. While the voices of the alarmists are beginning

to subside there are still those who shudder whenever they hear the term "liturgics". It is not in the province of this paper to take sides with either party in the liturgical controversy. When "offense" is mentioned as a reason for approving or opposing sound liturgical practices then we should be permitted an inquiry into the matter.

The weaker brother cannot be ignored when liturgical changes are contemplated. In an effort to return to the customs of the Church we must educate our people to the propriety of those customs. For a pastor to sit in a liturgical study group, arrive at a conclusion which satisfies him, and then make drastic changes in the forms of worship of his congregation will result in great harm to his work. The pastor may know what is correct but his congregation may not be ready for the change. If Luther could bide his time in making changes in the Lord's Supper (a doctrinal matter and therefore of greater consequence than things adiaphorous) certainly we must exercise great patience in things pertaining to liturgy.

The Reformers were conscious of the danger of giving offense in liturgics. Dr. Graebner says⁽¹⁾ that ceremonies may become a matter of conscience as when in the sixteenth century forms of worship distinctive of the Roman Catholics were forced upon the Protestants by the interims. Melancthon weakened but others recognized that the reintroduction of forms such as fasting on Fridays and celebrating the Corpus Christi Festival, while not inherently wrong, would cause offense to Christian consciences because to the people of that day these forms were inseparably connected with the Roman doctrine. But we must note what the confessions mean when they warn against making changes "with thoughtlessness and offense." (Article X, 9) They make their

1) Graebner: Op. Cit. p. 2

meaning clear in various parts of the text. The emphasis is continually on the danger of strengthening the idolaters in their craze for idolatry. "The freedom of the congregation to order its own liturgy, in the absence of offense, is stated in the most emphatic language.....In order to be sound in our Lutheranism we must apply these principles wholeheartedly and not pass the judgment of offense and scandal in a general way on those who discard ceremonies which we hold in veneration, or on those who advocate the introduction of ceremonies which we cannot pronounce sinful but which we dislike."⁽¹⁾

Those who are striving for liturgical uniformity and a fuller liturgical worship are certainly in harmony with the Lutheran cultus. But---haste must be made slowly. Perhaps a factual illustration will make clear the proper procedure by which offense may be avoided. One pastor wanted to introduce cassock, surplice, and stole ten years before he actually did so. During that period he was not idle but educated his congregation by means of articles in the parish paper and by discussions within the various societies. When the time was ripe he introduced the historic vestments and received a telephone call from a good Lutheran lady who was raised in a day of liturgical reparation. She bluntly informed him that she would cease attending services if he wore the "Catholic" vestments. The lady was sickly and hence unable to be present at all services. The pastor suggested that she call him up on the Sundays when she expected to be at church and he would gladly don the academic gown for, said he, vestments are not sufficiently important to keep people from church by their use. The good lady was completely humbled, apologized profusely, and has grown to like the vestments. Thus tact, common sense, and the desire to preserve peace within the congregation won the day.

1) Graebner: Op. Cit. p.3

Those who oppose the liturgical movement in sister congregations are not fully conscious of the meaning of Lutheran liberty. In all such matters each congregation is free to choose the forms which it finds best. Dr. Graebner writes: ⁽¹⁾ "If we are going to be true to our Lutheran confession of freedom in adiaphora, we are going to permit every congregation first and last to settle such matters according to its own best judgment and not plead our being offended as a reason against the use of such Christian liberty by our brethren. The variety of forms which may result cannot be any more offensive than the variety which has existed in the past thirty years in our English work."

The opponents of liturgy are quick to cry "offense." Some time ago we received a letter from a brother in the ministry who writes: "Recently I became---all inadvertently involved in a little dispute over liturgy. One of the brethren pronounced 'idolatrous' my bowing of my head toward the altar during the first part of the Gloria Patri. Heated words followed. I was almost dumbfounded at the exception taken to this. I'm always amused at the manner they push to the fore the objection that 'our people take offense'. The tender people never object, of course---only the brethren of the 'bleiben bei'm Alten variety.'" These people see all such of dangers such as defections to Rome and kindred evils. Correctly does Dr. Graebner say: "The mere danger of going wrong doctrinally cannot be urged as a reason for opposing the liturgical movement nor for placing under suspicion those interested in it. The case must be a very clear one before 'offense' can be urged. Christian love demands that.

The individual Christian may, under normal circumstances, use the adiaphora. As has been mentioned elsewhere he may drink

1) Graebner: Op. Cit. p.3

or smoke if he does so in moderation. Those who aspire to a higher holiness than that commanded in Scripture are ever ready to cite the danger of drunkenness and of smoking to excess. While no one will deny that those dangers are very real the fact that they exist is not sufficient reason for condemning the man who drinks or smokes in moderation. It is not necessary to preach abstinence in order to urge temperance. Abusus non tollit usum. The weaker brother must, however, be considered. When a person who is willing to be indoctrinated is offended by my indulgence I must yield when in his presence. That does not imply that I must give in to every fanatic who has made up his mind and then closed that mind. The opposite is true. There will be times when one must testify to the false views of those people.

There are so many ways in which one may give offense that the matter must be of great concern to each believer. The minister who preaches false doctrine is constantly giving offense. He does so directly but also indirectly by the very fact that he teaches contrary to the doctrines of the true visible church. Countless unbelievers are offended by the existence of the many denominations in our time. Theological professors who teach false doctrine are also much at fault because of their tremendous influence upon the church of tomorrow.

School teachers, those people who are privileged to educate the young and who can be such a great influence for good, they can also be a source of offense. They are such when they teach "scientific" and other opinions which are out of harmony with Scripture and so lead little ones away from Christ. They give offense also when their mode of life is not exemplary.

The pastor whose life is not consistent with his preaching gives offense. Someone has said that no congregation can rise

above its clergy. While this generality doubtless has exceptions it is fair as a general rule. When he who is to be an example to the flock sins publicly men feel that noone, not even the preacher himself, really takes his admonitions seriously.

Parents can be the cause of much offense to their children. The parent who sends his child to Sunday School but never darkens a church door is a puzzle to the child and will often cause the child to belittle the need for the church, offends the child. When the child hears the church evil spoken of at home, when he hears the pastor or Sunday School teacher slandered, it is difficult for him to pay much heed to his lesson or to the sermon. There comes to mind an actual case. A family stopped attending church because of a petty difference with the pastor. During the period of non-attendance that pastor was roundly denounced before the children. Most of the older members of the family have returned to church but is it any wonder that the young children remain away? One cannot estimate the offense given to the little ones.

The writer tried to gain a child who had no church connections. For a time she came regularly. When we visited her after several absences she told us that her father was glad when she went to Sunday School and church. He himself leads a godless life. Drunkenness and violations of the Sixth Commandment are habits. Is it any wonder that his daughter has left the church and is walking in her father's footsteps? When the parent gives a godless example he gives offense.

There are countless ways in which offense may be given but these few examples should suffice to show that the doctrine under consideration is not at all of an impractical nature but one with which the Christian has to do almost every day of his life.

CONCLUSION

The doctrine of offense is important because of its very practical nature. When one considers that all the efforts of the Church, her preaching of the Gospel and administration of the Sacraments for which she engages in world-wide mission work, that this vast program can be undermined by means of offense then it must be apparent that this subject is by no means trivial. Clergy and laity alike often give offense unconsciously. There is no doubt that there would be less of this if more attention were given to what the Scriptures say about the matter.

A careful reading of the Confessions as well as of the more recent works of Lutheran theologians makes clear their thoroughly Scriptural approach to the subject. In view of the clear teachings of the Augustana and the other norms of Lutheranism it is unfortunate that the term "offense" is used so loosely and apparently without any concern for its real meaning also within our circles. The confused thinking and faulty conclusions that result from a misunderstanding of this subject are to be regretted.

That the giving of offense is no peccadillo is clear from the very words of the Savior. The true lover of souls will put forth every effort to avoid any semblance of offense lest one for whom Christ died be lost.

On the other hand the well-indoctrinated Christian is conscious of his liberty in the Gospel. He feels bound only by the clear words of Scripture; in all else he is free to follow his personal inclinations. Man-made rules and conventions do not trouble him. His is the glorious liberty of the children of God.

Thus, conscious of the seriousness of giving offense, he is not unduly troubled each time someone raises the cry "offense" for he knows that many who charge that offense has been given have themselves actually taken offense. So---he investigates

each case carefully. Finding himself at fault he will make amends. When he finds that offense has been taken he will endeavor to educate the weaker brother.

The Lutheran Christian keeps two principles in mind, loyalty to God's Word and love toward his neighbor. As a result he joins St. Paul in "speaking the truth in love." (Ep.4,15) Never yielding on any point of doctrine he stands firm as a rock where God's Word speaks. On the other hand love will prompt each Christian to follow the advice which Pastor O.E.Sohn gives to our chaplains:"On the other hand, the consecrated chaplain will be exceedingly careful to speak the truth of God in love. He will studiously avoid all abruptness and bluntness, all semblance of officiousness and professionalism. His public and private ministry will never be permitted to degenerate into cold routine. He will pray and strive for the sympathetic touch which characterized the ministry of the Master and will cultivate it. In a kind, friendly, brotherly, nevertheless firm, fashion he will seek to lead men to the due knowledge of their sins and then point them to Him Whose blood alone can cleanse them from sin. His manner, his tone, his entire ministry will breathe love toward his hearers and sympathy for them in their problems. Doing this, he may not gain all, but men will have to give him the testimony of sincerity, manliness, devotion to duty. And his labors shall never be in vain."⁽¹⁾

There are three remedies for this misconception about offense. First, a more thorough investigation of what the Scriptures say about it. Secondly, the use of much sanctified common sense. And---above all---a little more of the Christian love so often lacking in modern church life. Where these three elements are combined there should be less loose talk about "offense". It follows that there will be also more peace within the church.

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