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Suggested Thoughts on the Question: Can We Escape Both Traditionalism and Liberalism

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Suggested Thoughts on the Question: Can We Escape Both Traditionalism and Liberalism?

I. History reveals that the visible Church of God has periodically tended to decline and degenerate. Think how true that is of the period from Adam to Noah; Noah to Abraham; Abraham to Moses; Moses to Elijah; Elijah to the Captivity; Ezra to Christ; Apostolic Age to the Reformation; Reformation to our own day.

II. The causes for these various declines are varied. Man's naturally depraved heart, the Evil One, and a world estranged from God are the fundamental causes. Two tendencies seem to be ever present, however, in the life of the declining Church. These are:

a. Either the attempt to abrogate, abbreviate, and neglect parts or all of the inspired truths of Holy Writ or

b. To add thereto.

The former attitude finds its classic exemplification in the Sadducees of our Lord's day. We know little about their origin and history, but we do know that they readily compromised with whatever current philosophies and cultures prevailed at a given period, so that ere long they reached the point where they completely abandoned supernaturalism for the rationalistic attitude and a mere moral philosophy.

Each period in the history of the New Testament visible Church shows a corresponding tendency and group: the Humanists of the Renaissance; rationalistic theism; American Unitarianism and Modernism.

The latter attitude of adding to the Word finds its classic exemplification in the scribes and Pharisees. They were very earnest and devout Hebrews, who desired to reestablish the religion of the fathers, the study of the sacred writings of Moses and the prophets, and the scrupulous observance of the Law.

Their very earnestness and intense zeal caused them to encounter numerous practical problems for which their consciences sought a solution. There was, for instance, the Sabbath-day law of rest. Rest was enjoined Ex. 23, 12. But the question arose: What constituted rest and what labor? Could a man take a walk on a Sabbath-day? Here was a practical question for the conference of Rabbis to answer, and they did answer it. They said that 2,000 cubits constituted a legitimate Sabbath-day's journey. They arrived at this particular figure by using what to them seemed helpful Bible-passages. They remembered that the Lord had told the Israelites during their desert wanderings, Ex. 16, 29, that they were not to go out beyond the camp on the Sabbath-day to look for manna.

They also remembered that the Lord had directed the suburban areas surrounding the Levitical cities to extend to a distance of 2,000

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cubits, Num. 35, 5. Putting these two Bible-passages together, they resolved that 2,000 cubits would not carry a man beyond the camp and hence constitute a legitimate Sabbath-day's journey. This law came to be as binding as the divine law which called for rest on the Sabbath-day.

We ask ourselves, What was fundamentally wrong with this scribal procedure? Surely it was not out of order for a pious Jew to want information concerning the practical problem of taking a walk on the Sabbath-day. Surely it was not out of order for earnest scribes to try and to answer this question. Well, then, what was wrong? Viewing the matter more carefully, we discover that the scribes erred in this, that they ascribed to their human opinion, deduced by processes of reasoning from general Bible statements, a validity and authoritativeness equal to that of the clear and specific Word of God itself.

This was typical of their manner of teaching, and what the results of such a procedure were we know only too well. They established a large number of human traditions, which in their accumulated form were superimposed on the Word of God, with the consequence that the great truths and the true spirit of the Word were lost, that true religion and genuine spirituality died out, and that a dead formalism and a cold religiosity took their place. Yes, more than that; endless ingenious devices were invented for the purpose of escaping the requirements of the traditions of the elders and of God's Law itself.

We have in later history, as counterparts of scribism, Romanism, scholasticism, and Puritanism.

III. Do these facts of the Church's history teach us anything for our own day and our own problems?

Our fathers came to these United States in order to escape the circles of rationalism which were dominating the religious life of their native land and also for the purpose of finding a greater measure of religious freedom, so that they might profess the full truth of God and worship the Lord according to the requirements of His holy Word and the dictates of their consciences.

The price which they paid for liberty of conscience and freedom of religion made them very careful, and rightly so, to preserve the pure doctrine of the inspired Scriptures in its entirety. They sternly refused to acquiesce in the looseness of teaching and practise characteristic of some of the Lutheran groups already operating in the United States when they arrived.

Hence the founders of our Church organized their own Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States. They established colleges and seminaries, published church-papers, held conferences and synodical

gatherings, and thus preserved a rather unique solidarity of organization and uniformity of both doctrine and practise.

A well-nigh perfect unanimity and common agreement of judgment in questions of casuistry was quite natural for them because of the great similarity of conditions under which their work was done. It must not be overlooked that they were isolated from the larger environment by their foreign tongue.

Wherever conditions are such, the danger is that the tendency may develop to enthrone matters of human judgment as found in the words of eminent men, conference resolutions, the opinions of authors, and so forth, and to give them something of binding force upon the consciences of men. We believe we are justified in saying that citations from our own literature for the purpose of supporting expressed doctrines or principles of conduct are sometimes accepted without asking whether the case under advisement is covered by the Scripture-texts on which such principles originally were founded.

To-day, when we are facing a world subject to rapid and frequent changes, when the emphasis of our work has definitely shifted from the farm to the city, and when the unchurched masses of America have by common consent become our new and challenging mission-field, any attempt to meet our new task aggressively soon enough teaches the necessity of new methods, new approaches, and the need of utilizing new opportunities. Since we have nothing in past precedents that can provide us with a ready-made answer for all the new situations which may arise, it is but reasonable that the dissimilarity of conditions and circumstances in various places should preclude the reasonable expectation of the same common agreement in judgment which was characteristic of an earlier and a simpler day. It is important to remember that differences in judgment in matters of casuistry need not be considered an indication of the existence of fundamental differences in principle. If this is overlooked, the inner unity of our Church is threatened.

It must be clear to every one that we must find a definite guiding principle lest some of us become guilty of superimposing human opinions on the divine Word and others among us by way of violent reaction abandon supernaturally revealed truths.

Let us thank God that we have such a principle. It is simple, Scripturally sound, and enjoys Lutheran recognition. The principle is this: *Whenever you have a specific word of God, clearly applicable to a given situation, then the Lord has spoken.* The opinions of men count for naught in such an instance. Whenever a situation arises, however, in the complexities of modern life for which we have no specific word, thus making us dependent upon deductions made by our processes of reasoning from what we believe to be the implications of Bible-teachings, then no one dare thrust his opinions and

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deductions upon the conscience of another as though they possessed equality with the Word and divine authority. It is as wrong and sinful to add unto Holy Writ as it is to subtract therefrom, Deut. 4, 2; 12, 32; Rev. 22, 18 f.

May it please God in His mercy to let us ever remain one in heart and mind and in our unanimous acceptance of all doctrines and principles of conduct clearly laid down in God's inspired Word! May the love of Christ also fill our hearts with the necessary attitudes of charity and kindness toward one another, so that we may in a spirit of Christian forbearance and proper humility ever grant to our brethren in faith the right of private judgment in matters of casuistry. Thus, and thus alone, can we by God's grace escape both the Scylla of a dead traditionalism and the Charybdis of a devitalized liberalism.

O. A. GEISEMAN.

Der Schriftgrund für die Lehre von der satisfactio vicaria.

(Fortsetzung.)

Eph. 2, 13: Nun aber in Christo Jesu [seid ihr], die ihr einst ferne waret, nahe gekommen in dem Blut Christi.

Dieser Satz enthält eine gewaltige und selige Wahrheit für alle Christen, die, wie einst die meisten Glieder der ephesinischen Gemeinde, aus dem Heidenvolk für Christum und sein Reich gewonnen worden sind. Und der Apostel stellt hier wiederum die stellvertretende Genugtuung Christi in den Mittelpunkt seiner Darstellung. Schon die Partikel am Anfang des Satzes ist bezeichnend; denn, wov, das im Klassischen Griechisch nur im temporalen Sinn gebraucht wird, hat in der κοινή, besonders im Neuen Testament, auch eine Konsekutivbedeutung gewonnen, so daß es eine Folge bezeichnet, ein Fazit angibt, ähnlich wie das deutsche „nun“ und das englische „now“. Wir können daher umschreiben: Da die Sache sich so verhält; oder: infolge des Verhältnisses, das durch die Stellvertretung Christi hergestellt worden ist, wobei aber die temporale Bedeutung noch immer durchschimmert: In der jetzigen Zeit, infolge der durch eure Bekehrung bewirkten Umwälzung, ist die Sachlage ganz anders als vorher. Sodann ist der Ausdruck ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ so emphatisch vorangestellt, daß wir wohl mit Wohlenberg (in Strack-Böckler) und mit Salmond (*Expositor's Greek Testament*) annehmen dürfen, daß es selbständige Geltung hat, so daß man übersetzen dürfte: Nun aber seid ihr in Christo Jesu. Das ist die Stellung der Christen, das ist der Skopus ihres Daseins: sie sind in Christo, sie haben ihr Leben, Wesen und Sein in dem Heiland, den sie im Glauben ergriffen haben. Früher getrennt von Christo, stehen sie jetzt in der innigsten, seligsten Gemeinschaft mit ihm.

Verstärkt wird die ganze Aussage durch den Partizipialsatz ἡ ἔ,