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## Why Should a Pastor Continue to Study Church History?

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## Why Should a Pastor Continue to Study Church History?

The history of the Church, the account of the progress of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the world, with all the many ramifications it presents, the great characters it introduces, and the stirring and dramatic events it portrays, strangely enough does not interest every pastor, as it does not interest every theological student at our Seminary. Some pastors sagely declare that they do not care about the *study* of church history, what they are interested in is *making* church history. The latter may be a most laudable ambition, but one wonders whether real, worth-while history can be made by any one who absolutely disregards the experiences and accomplishments of the past.

Much of the prejudice against the study of church history is due to the fact that it has not always been presented in the proper manner and the student's interest and imagination has not been captivated. To disregard the wide sweep of the Church's program and influence in the world; to overemphasize minutiae; to neglect showing events in their proper perspective; to remain in the narrow groove of man's part in it and not to point to the devotion of faith and not to demonstrate the master hand of the Head of the Church, without whose direction and permission there would be no Church and no church history, that is to fail in the teaching of church history, whether that teaching be done in the class-room or by means of the printed page. Or to endeavor to carry on the private study of church history without these considerations is to make it indeed a dry-as-dust subject, as Zoeckler points out, and to expose it to such satire as was formulated by Goethe in his *Dialog der "Zahmen Xenien."*

Sag, was enthaelt die Kirchengeschichte?  
Sie wird mir in Gedanken zunichte.  
Es gibt unendlich viel zu lesen;  
Was ist aber denn das alles gewesen?

Answer:

Zwei Gegner sind es, die sich boxen,  
Die Arianer und die Orthodoxen.  
Durch viele Saecla dasselbe geschicht;  
Es dauert bis ans Juengste Gericht.

Or this:

Mit Kirchengeschichte was hab' ich zu schaffen?  
Ich sehe weiter nichts als Pfaffen?  
Wie's um die Christen steht, die gemeinen,  
Davon will mir gar nichts erscheinen.

The fact is that, unless one has closed his mind altogether to the value and importance of historical study, there are many practical reasons why the average pastor should continue his



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studies in this field of theology, to say nothing of its cultural significance.

As paradoxical as it may sound, it is none the less true that our forward look is keener in proportion to our backward look. Our Lord and His apostles were intensely forward-looking. The panorama of the Gospel's progress in a sinful world loomed before their mind's eye; yet it was constantly on the basis of what had gone before. For the Lord the slogan was that the Scriptures might be fulfilled, that all might be accomplished which had been foretold through Moses and the Prophets. For the apostles, the shibboleth was that they might preach the Gospel of Him who had died and risen again according to the Scriptures. In their sermons and addresses the facts of the history of the redemption, as foretold and fulfilled, were the important thing. Listen to St. Stephen, to St. Peter, to St. Paul. It is always the same refrain: "Be it known unto you all and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by Him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the Stone which was set at naught of you builders, which is become the Head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved," Acts 4:10-12.

It was thus in the days of the Old Covenant. The glorious acts of God were retold by the faithful servants of God that they might not be thoughtlessly forgotten and that the children and the children's children might know what the Lord had done for them and for their fathers. David makes it a matter of solemn duty for himself when he declares: "I remember the days of old; I meditate on all Thy works; I muse on the work of Thy hands." Ps. 143:5.

We who are the heirs of all the wonderful promises of the Old Testament and the completed and declared redemption of the New Testament, we who are to serve as watchmen on the walls of Zion, as teachers and leaders of God's chosen people, we need to be backward-looking in order to fill ourselves with the necessary information and inspiration to inform and inspire those who are placed in our charge and within the sound of our voice. And this backward look need not be confined to sacred history alone; there are so many striking fulfilments of the promises, so many examples of nobility of Christian character, so many outstanding incidents of God's providence and protection, so many events that show how fruitless in the long run are all the forces of opposition that rise up against the Gospel, that the student of church history has an inexhaustible fountain at his command, into which he may dip again and again to inform and edify and inspire those who hear him.

If this is true for the Christian ministry in general, it is par-



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ticularly true for the Lutheran ministry. A Lutheran pastor, as an heir of the Reformation, has every reason to search the annals of the history of the Church in order to deepen his conviction more and more as to the real significance of that great movement, the Reformation, in which Martin Luther was the chosen instrument of the Most High, especially in view of the attitude which sectarian historians take toward it. He needs this study first of all for himself and then for his people, who are for the most part surrounded by sectarians or Romanists, whose views of the true meaning of the Reformation are usually sadly warped, but whose views nevertheless only too frequently impress themselves upon our laity, with the result that many of them look upon our Church as only another one of the sects, instead of as the true visible Church of Jesus Christ on earth, which it is.

A Lutheran pastor needs to carry on his study of church history also to appreciate the real meaning of, and the dangers connected with, the Roman Papacy. In spite of the many influences at work in the world today and also in our country to the aggrandizement of the Roman Papacy, many Lutherans and also Lutheran pastors have been lulled into a feeling of security, as if there were no dangers for our secular and religious liberty in the operations of this church-body. Many do not realize, for instance, that the American Catholic Church is in many respects not a favorite child of Rome and is not representative of the real Rome. We must learn to remember that Rome never changes, that its true program is still what it was in the Middle Ages, and that eternal vigilance on our part is still the price of liberty.

A Lutheran pastor needs to know also the history of the Church in its relation to the State in order to evaluate the political trends of our day and to see their strong points and their pernicious tendencies. He needs to know something about the unionistic movements of the past; of the life and morals of the members of the Church; of the missionary endeavors of the past, the victories won, the mistakes made; of the great leaders, their strength and their weakness; of the great preachers, their methods and influence; etc. The individual items are too numerous to mention but will occur to every thoughtful person.

While the study of church history is important for the practical ministry as such, it is also of direct benefit for the pastor's sermons and addresses. Illustrative material—feathers for arrows—is so important for the preacher that we cannot pass over this matter without further elucidation. A pastor must preach much. In a sense it is his chief work. His public utterances ought never to be merely perfunctory, never a simple recital of dry facts. Sermons must be vital. They must carry a message to the heart. They



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must be personal and to the point. And to bring home a message, to convince the hearer, a sermon or address must have illustrations. The sooner a preacher realizes this, the sooner will his sermons be what they should be and the less the danger that the common people will not hear him gladly. To our mind there is no greater tragedy in the ministry than to find oneself suddenly at the point where one is no longer wanted because one's preaching is stale, flat, and uninteresting. How diligently every pastor ought to use every means to save himself from the day when people will want to shelve him as a worn-out shoe!

When we entered the ministry, we served as assistant to Dr. C. A. Frank, the father of the *Lutheran Witness*, one of the really great men of the second generation of our Synod's history. We soon learned from him at first hand the practical value of an intimate knowledge of Church history. Those who are acquainted with the early volumes of the *Lutheran Witness* know that the sainted Frank regularly carried essays on some church-historical theme in its columns. When we became his assistant, Dr. Frank was about 69 years old and still very alert mentally and physically. While he was in no sense a great pulpit orator, he had real ability as a preacher and public speaker. His sermons, though delivered in a somewhat high, piping voice, were always interesting and edifying, and none the less so because he frequently brought in some church-historical character or event by way of illustration.

It so often happens that, when a man reaches seventy, he no longer is popular as a preacher especially among the young people. Not so Frank. At all special affairs put on by the Walther League of the congregation, such as the annual Thanksgiving Day banquet, Washington's Birthday party, and the like, he was the chief speaker by popular choice. In these addresses, as in his sermons, the historical element was not lacking. In fact, on these special occasions he usually presented some historical event or character and then made his application to present-day problems and conditions. And the young people as well as the old listened to him eagerly.

Another reason — and we shall close with this one — for the continued study of church history is that we need specialists in the various fields of church history. We have such men in our midst. We have a man in the East who is a recognized authority in the history of the early Lutheran Church in our country. We have another, also in the East, who is an authority in Liturgics. We have a third, in the Middle West, whose specialty is Church Architecture. We have a fourth, also in the Middle West, whose specialty is Church Art. We have a fifth, in the Far West, whose specialty is the history of the Church in the Northwest and Alaska. We have others who are authorities in certain fields. We need



more. Our CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY is always ready to welcome articles by men who can speak with authority in their field.

Why not select some particular field for yourself and enjoy the thrill of study, research, and accomplishment? Too busy? No; the history of the Church shows that it is the busy man who, under God, accomplishes most. Think of Origen, of Athanasius, of Augustine, of Bernard of Clairvaux, of Luther, of John Wesley, of William Carey, of Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther, and of A. L. Graebner.

W. G. POLACK

## Mental Hygiene and the Bible

Mental hygiene has been variously defined, depending upon the school represented or the scope intended. It is sometimes broadly conceived as including the cure of the abnormal and diseased mind (psychiatry), as also the development and preservation of a healthy mind, an integrated personality. The stress, however, is always upon the prophylaxis, upon the prevention of maladjustment. "All mental hygiene is directed toward a happy and successful life in conformity with the dictates of personal and higher laws." (E. W. Lazell, *The Anatomy of Emotion*.) "Mental hygiene is to develop an integrated personality at higher and higher levels, to preserve right mental attitudes, to train in healthful mental activity, to prevent mental disorder." (W. H. Burnham, *Great Teachers and Mental Health*.) "Mental hygiene as a method is educative rather than therapeutic. It is essentially preventive rather than ameliorative." (W. D. Blatz, University of Toronto.) The wider conception is represented by Professor Furfey of the Catholic University, Washington: "Mental hygiene is a method of forestalling and treating mental abnormalities."

If, however, we define psychiatry as the science that deals with every form of mind disorders and with all kinds of mental reaction in response to disturbing physical or psychic influences, then we may call mental hygiene that branch of psychiatry which deals with prophylactic and preventive measures; it is psychology applied as a preventive for mental disorders, and its purpose is to develop and preserve a healthy, happy personality, or, as Joseph Jastrow puts it: "Mental hygiene projects the program of right living with the psychologist at the helm."

If mental hygiene, then, is a preventive measure, and since personality development and growth has its inception at birth or, as some say, before birth (which is correct in so far as heredity is taken into consideration), then it stands to reason that child psychology must be the foundation of an effective mental hygiene.