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Foreword

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No. 1

Foreword

When this initial number of the 1939 volume of the **CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY** reaches the reader, it will almost be a century since the Saxon Pilgrim Fathers of the Missouri Synod arrived at their destination—St. Louis. The political, economic, and religious situation which they left behind and that into which they came were about as distressing and bewildering as the one in which we are placed one hundred years later. Europe was slowly, painfully, recovering from the Napoleonic wars; economic troubles and political unrest were harassing the nations; the United States was emerging from a depression of an intensity without parallel up to that time. In the field of religion the fathers had seen the great spiritual affliction resulting, for a large section of Germany, from the union of the Lutheran and Reformed churches decreed by the Prussian government in 1817. Rationalism, though compelled to go into hiding when assuming its crudest forms, was still a potent force in numerous consistory meetings, pulpits, and lecture halls; D. F. Strauss had a few years before issued his iniquitous *Leben Jesu* and set all Germany agog. The situation was vastly different from what it had been a century earlier.

A little reflection of this nature may well form the stepping-stone to a consideration of conditions which our own generation has to face. The remark is heard on all sides that we are living in stirring times, that epochal events are happening in quick succession, that many pillars of the old order are crashing to the ground and great fundamental changes are introduced. In breathless amazement, often mingled with undisguised terror, the inhabitants of the world observe the upheavals going on in the social and political sphere, and many do not conceal their feeling that humanity is, as it were, sitting on a vast powder-keg with ominous sparks dancing about, threatening any minute to cause a cata-

clysmic, all-destructive blast. It is not our intention here to discuss Communism, Naziism, Fascism, the bitter struggle between capital and labor, the scrapping of the traditional economic system under which our Republic developed and became strong; the evident ascendancy of Socialism, the existence of want and famine in the midst of more abundant crops than can be consumed, the lure of schemes promising happiness and security without toil by a sort of financial magic, the confusion and bewilderment pertaining to educational aims and objectives, and other topics of a politico-social nature which at present absorb much of the attention of thinking people. Let the journals whose editors and contributors have expert knowledge in these fields address themselves to the task of analyzing and solving the numerous problems of a secular nature which make our vaunted civilization and twentieth-century enlightenment appear as a huge ironical question-mark. What this journal is legitimately concerned with is the religious scene and its various movements and developments. Here, too, the observer will notice vast changes, affecting deeply the work of the Church in its many ramifications, the theology of the schools, of the pulpit, and of the religious press and whatever other channels there are in which religious thought and conviction find expression. Naturally we are here thinking not of religion in general, inclusive of Mohammedanism, Shintoism, Buddhism, and Judaism, but of the Christian religion.

1

One of the striking changes which impress the observer as he in a large way compares the religious world of today with that portrayed in the literature of one hundred years ago, is the now prevailing marked lack of emphasis on denominational doctrine. While in the last century one saw denominations contending for the creed on which they had taken their stand,—Baptists upholding their tenets with vigor; Presbyterians stressing their Calvinism; Methodists endeavoring to inculcate the teachings of the Twenty-five Articles of their confession; Congregationalists, in spite of increasing vagueness in their pronouncements, still manifesting some interest in the doctrines bequeathed to them by their fathers,—these churches today have to a startling extent discarded the teaching of their specific doctrines and in their sermons, books, and journals largely devote themselves to the promulgation of a nondescript Christianity having hardly any recognizable doctrinal features. The remark made to the writer by a well-informed Presbyterian elder: "Presbyterianism has no doctrines any more," though an evident exaggeration, has more truth in it than it is comfortable to admit. Baptist churches are found which no longer insist on immersion and the rejection of infant baptism; certain

Congregationalists protest against the exclusiveness of the Utrecht Council in spite of the almost unparalleled latitudinarianism of its doctrinal basis, demanding compliance with no other condition of membership than "acceptance of our Lord Jesus Christ as God and Savior"; Methodists not only have disposed of the "mourners' bench," but they have in their ranks, for instance, a prominent bishop (McConnell) who, when challenged to repudiate modernistic teachings with reference to the person of Christ, refused to make a satisfactory statement. What is most tragic is that in this violent departure from old usage the doctrine of the atonement is quite generally relegated to the limbo of oblivion.

If a person thinks that, though doctrinal teaching has been largely banished from the leading camps of the old large American denominations with their evident leanings toward Modernism, he will find the old loyalty with the so-called Fundamentalists, he is doomed to some disappointment. He will indeed meet with doctrinal teaching, but instead of witnessing efforts championing the old creeds, he will frequently be introduced to meetings and campaigns in which chiliastic notions and speculations are spread and the old tenets are kept in the background or put into the incinerator. The big crop of Pentecostal organizations spreading rapidly, especially in the lower strata of society, lacks definitely a doctrinal emphasis. What is in the foreground with them is the misunderstood baptism with the Holy Spirit and the old yearning for signs and wonders, which they seek to gratify. Their religion is to a great extent a striving to satisfy emotional urges, which our fathers termed a false enthusiasm (*Schwaermerei*).

2

Closely allied to this peculiarity of our age is the character of those theological debates which are still conducted in religious papers and theological journals, a character quite different from what one witnessed a century ago. While formerly there was an earnest discussion, for instance, of the questions whether or not infant baptism was Scriptural, whether the Calvinistic conception of the Lord's Supper could be held, whether the procedure of Methodists in their efforts to bring about "conversion" had the sanction of God's Word, these debates, since doctrine is tabu, have largely ceased. The recent series of articles appearing in the *Presbyterian*, written by a layman, in which the Auburn Affirmation is examined in the light of the Scriptures and the Presbyterian confessions, is an exceptional phenomenon. If there is an investigation reminding one of former days, it usually has to do with the divine character of the Scriptures and their reliability. Yes, doubt or skepticism no longer assails merely one or the other

doctrine of the Scriptures, but the Scriptures themselves. People are not much concerned about the question whether the Bible teaches a certain mode of baptism; what they in perplexity ask is whether the Bible is trustworthy at all. This is the situation out of which Fundamentalism has arisen and to which it points in justification of its existence. "When a house is burning," we are told, "a person does not investigate whether the furniture is properly placed, but he tries to extinguish the fire and to save the house. Since in our days the very authority of the Bible is at stake, we quite naturally concentrate on its defense and rather leave individual doctrines to take care of themselves." We do not approve of this attitude, but it certainly bears witness to a great change that has descended upon the religious world.

Of the larger Protestant churches known to us, it is only the Lutheran Church which, thank God! has not succumbed to the swift currents of the antidoctrinal maelstrom, although in its midst, too, there have been ripples and eddies showing that the whirlpool of antagonism to definite doctrinal teaching is having some effect on not a few of its members.

3

Another prominent feature of the present-day religious life which represents a marked change, is the ever-increasing tendency to unite the various denominations or groups of Christians. Numerous unification projects are in progress or have been successfully concluded. In Canada the United Church is pointed to as one of the grand fruits of this movement. The three large Methodist churches in our country have all but consummated their amalgamation. The Evangelical Synod and the Reformed Church in the United States joined hands several years ago and have since then formed one denomination. In England Anglicans and Non-conformists are conferring with a view to bringing their churches into one body. The Protestant Episcopal Church and the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. are discussing articles of agreement. (See *Theological Observer* in this issue.) All these union efforts have culminated in the Utrecht meeting of churches intended to inaugurate a World Council of all Protestant denominations. Lutheranism has done its share in drawing separate groups together. The United Lutheran Church, the Norwegian Lutheran Church, the American Lutheran Church, and the American Lutheran Conference are monuments testifying to the successful endeavors to merge distinct bodies in larger church organizations. In our own Church the successful conferences with American Lutheran Church representatives and the less successful ones with the representatives of the United Lutheran Church bear witness that we of the Missouri Synod did not think it necessary or God-

pleasing to refuse participation in endeavors looking to the establishment of fellowship with opposing synods. We believe that in this respect our church-body has upheld the ideals of its founders. But whether one approves of the efforts mentioned or not, there is no denying that the last twenty-five years may well be called a quarter century of mergers. How different denominational alignments are from what they were in 1839 or even in 1889!

4

In enumerating changes noticeable in our generation, when past and present are compared, a careful observer could hardly fail to speak of the secularization of churches and their work. Influenced by the philosophy called humanism, which puts man rather than God in the center of the universe and worships the creature instead of the Creator, many churches are asking, What can we do to make the life of man here on earth more tolerable and pleasant? And the great truths that have to do with God's relation to us and our relation to Him, with eternity, heaven, and hell, are neglected. The so-called social gospel is preached, which seeks to bring paradise down on earth. While the magnificent efforts of our generation to beautify and embellish divine services in many instances are praiseworthy, they not infrequently, one suspects, have no other aim than to glorify man, that is, human artists, and to provide a fascinating spectacle. What many churches arrange in addition to divine services — lecture evenings, concerts, suppers, bazaars, bunco parties — often but too eloquently and unmistakably testifies to the actuality of the tendency which makes of the Church a secular institution. Not that all these things are sinful or must never be tolerated in the buildings belonging to a Christian congregation; our concern here is to emphasize the change which has come about in the Church and which frequently is due to the invasion of the spirit of worldliness.

5

A hasty survey of religious conditions such as has been partially attempted in the above, leaving aside for reasons of space the menace of Rome, higher criticism, the teaching of evolution, Christian Science, other antichristian cults, and similar important topics, will suffice to show that it is no easier today than it was a hundred years ago to hold high the banner of the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions, with the doctrine of justification by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith, as their chief message. While there may today be a greater proportionate outward profession of church-membership, spiritual conditions have not improved, and there has been no increase of loyalty to revealed truth. As much as our fathers in their day, we are sojourning in a

spiritual Sodom, and there comes to us the urgent call "Escape for thy life!" (Gen. 19:17) and, again, "O son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore thou shalt hear the Word at My mouth and warn them from Me" (Ezek. 33:7). We should not permit ourselves to be misled into the belief that gradually, as the years roll by, the old Gospel will become more popular and people will universally turn to its acceptance. Not only would such optimism give the lie to the descriptions of the last times which are placed before us in the Scriptures, but experience definitely teaches that, where one devil is expelled, seven others seem to be rushing forward to take the place of their evicted comrade. Generally speaking, such improvement as we witness in the religious sphere is either superficial, cutting off the tops of the weeds but leaving their roots untouched, or it is merely temporary, resembling a meteor, whose brightness, dazzling while it lasts, is quickly extinguished.

But this sad reflection must not for one minute lessen in us gratitude for the treasure which has been bequeathed to us by our fathers and to which the present centennial vividly draws our attention—the pure teaching of the Holy Scriptures set forth in its fulness and evangelical beauty in the Lutheran Confessions. Nor must the conviction that general appreciation of this treasure on the part of our fellow-men will never come about here on earth, dampen in us the ardor to acquaint people far and wide with the truths constituting this diadem, especially with its chief gem, the Gospel of free grace. The grand anniversary year upon which we are entering will have failed to produce its most important fruit if at the end we are less thankful for what we have received and less eager to share it with others than we were at the beginning.

6

Instinctively the question is asked by every one of us whose allegiance to the truth is more than a passing emotion, Can we in this constantly changing world retain the spiritual riches handed down to us by our pious fathers? It is a question particularly urgent now, when the matter of fellowship with Lutheran synods hitherto separated from us is a live issue. In lieu of an exhaustive investigation listing the important factors which here might be mentioned, let us draw attention to two great pertinent principles. One is that, if we wish to prove worthy heirs, we have to resist the tide of false liberalism which has engulfed a great part of Protestantism and wantonly discarded one section after the other of our holy Gospel. The false liberalism we have in mind is the attitude which considers strict loyalty to the Scriptures something outmoded, outworn, antiquated, and an unnecessary and un-

justified barrier against the free development of the Church. It is the position which is correctly described as indifference or laxity in matters of doctrine and practise. That in our age the tendency which cares little about what a person believes and teaches and which in matters of conduct is not much concerned about the Scripturalness of a certain course of action, but rather emphasizes its effect on the feelings of others, is immensely popular, must at once be conceded. Strange! we say. In medicine the question asked is not whether the remedy under consideration looks and tastes good and is universally praised but whether it is a means of combating the disease afflicting the patient. In law a probate judge does not inquire whether in a document purporting to be the will of a certain person all provisions meet with the approval of the majority of the citizens but whether this document actually represents the last will and testament of the deceased. A science which disregards facts and tries to base its conclusions on the plaudits of the multitudes is called a pseudo-science and is quite generally despised. But when we come to theology, the popular course is not to ask chiefly, What is true? but, What is likely to meet with general acceptance?

It was the spirit of false liberalism which in the Reformation age introduced Socinianism; about a century later, Arminianism; after the lapse of a little more than another century, the old bald Rationalism; and soon after that, in New England, destructive Unitarianism, and which now has poisoned the wells of doctrine through Modernism. How it affects the Christian life we see in its condoning of lodgery, easy divorces, and other evils. Francis L. Patton, at one time president of Princeton University and afterward president of Princeton Seminary, correctly characterized this tendency, now so prevalent, saying: "The disciples of the new Christianity are disposed to treat moral issues according to a method of easy-going relativity and, by measuring themselves by themselves and comparing themselves with themselves, which the apostle says is not wise, are able to make a convenient settlement of their account with moral obligations; so that in matters of faith it is enough to say, 'Nobody believes it,' and in matters of conduct, 'They all do it.'" (*Fundamental Christianity*, p. 175.)

The theology of our fathers is often called stern, forbidding, severe. It is that in its pronouncements on doctrinal and moral laxity. God be praised for it! They swung not weightless straws but ponderous sledge-hammers against the monster of false liberalism attempting to enter their household and did not emasculate the polemical vocabulary of the Apostle Paul. Their vigorous testimony, reflecting in its method obedience to the direction of the apostle "For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall

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prepare himself for the battle?" (1 Cor. 14: 8), has been of incalculable benefit to the Church of God. That the members of our Synod and many other Lutherans with them still avow unconditional loyalty to the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions, we owe largely to their determined opposition to a *laissez-faire* Christianity.

7

The other principle which we wish to advert to is the exact counterpart of the first. What it inculcates is that blind adherence to what is old, mere traditionalism, must be avoided. Traditionalism is the position which venerates things ancient not on account of their intrinsic value but on account of their old age, which swears by what was done in the past without thoroughly investigating whether it is right or not, which exalts opinions held by former theologians to the rank of absolute truths, and which is more concerned to conform to the views of former renowned leaders than to be loyal to the Scriptures. Traditionalism is as wrong as is pseudoliberalism. While false liberalism looses where the Scriptures bind, traditionalism binds where the Scriptures loose. Pseudoliberalism subtracts from, traditionalism adds to, divinely revealed doctrine. It was largely traditionalism which brought on the evils harassing the Church during the Middle Ages, and in all church-bodies which have a past they can be proud of it is likely to appear.

Our fathers, thank God! though avowedly conservative, opposed hyperconservatism, or traditionalism, and it is one of the glories of our heritage that it includes very definite rejection of this wrong tendency. When soon after their arrival in America the question arose whether or not the old ecclesiastical constitutions and regulations (*Kirchenordnungen*), which in some instances had been in use for centuries, would have to be adopted by American Lutheran congregations, they definitely said, no. In questions of a historical nature, for instance, that pertaining to the canonicity of James and Revelation, they did not hesitate to take a position different from that of Luther himself. While they placed the Lutheran dogmatists, such as Quenstedt and Gerhardt, on a high pedestal, they did not follow them, to give examples, in their teaching pertaining to the keeping of Sunday and the so-called *intuitu-fidei* view of election.

In his presidential address (*Synodalrede*) of 1866 Dr. Walther dwelt on this course of our fathers as they endeavored to avoid anti-Scriptural liberalism and hyper-Scriptural conservatism, a course which brought upon them the anathemas of extremists on both sides. His words (printed in *Brosamen*, p. 536 ff.) have more than mere historical value. We here present a summary.

"Because we taught the Lutheran Church is the true visible Church of God on earth, we were called papists; because we insisted that the Lutheran Confessions teach the divine truth and that Lutheran ministers would have to adhere to them, we were accused of putting human writings on the same level as the Scriptures; because we acknowledged Luther as the divinely sent Reformer, we were accused of hero-worship; because we protested against the view of those Lutherans who identified the Lutheran Church with the holy Christian Church to which every one must belong to be saved, it was said that we were unionists; because we warned against espousal of any and every doctrinal error and refused to endorse syncretistic, unionistic tendencies, we were accused of intolerant Pharisaism; because we taught the universal priesthood of believers, people said that we lacked due appreciation of the holy ministry and permitted all things to be decided by majority vote; because we taught that ministers should be permanently called, that there should be registration for Holy Communion, and that church discipline should not be neglected, we were accused of fostering a papistic spirit and the government of the Church by priests; because we in matters of organization and in other adiaphora stood for freedom, people called us enemies of propriety and order and liberalistic innovators; because we retained many of the good old ceremonies, we were said to be on the way to Rome; because we defended the sovereignty of congregations, we were suspected of being separatistic independents; because we formed a synod with boards and Visitors, we were accused of advocating hierarchical principles; because we put the doctrine of justification by grace, through faith, without the works of the law, into the center of our teaching and kept away from the new measures of the enthusiasts, people called us proponents of dead orthodoxy; because we insisted on true, heartfelt repentance, we were accused of being pietists; because we refused to endorse an ultra-free attitude toward the government, we were termed friends of tyranny and oppression; because we opposed the tendency which sponsors a development and evolution of doctrine, we were accused of being conceited enemies of theological learning and of introducing a mechanical repristination of old views."

A remarkable list. The only fitting comment that occurs to us is the proverbial saying uttered by the Savior in view of the rejection by the scribes and Pharisees of both the stern preaching of John the Baptist and the gentle pleading of the Son of Man: "Wisdom is justified of all her children," Luke 7:35. Stated differently, the condemnation of extremists pronounced upon a certain course proves that this course is right. It is evident that, with all

their high regard for the grand old Lutheran masters, our fathers maintained a remarkable independence, acknowledging no authority but that of the divine Word. Not by blindly accepting every view which they sponsored, but by insisting on the absolute and sole supremacy of the Word of God in questions of faith and morals, shall we prove ourselves their worthy successors. If through the grace of God we shall avoid, as did our fathers, the extremes of pseudoliberalism and of traditionalism in our endeavors to promote the cause of confessional Lutheranism, an important condition for the future healthy development of our Church will have been met, and we may hope that other essentials, such as the proper differentiation between Law and Gospel and a whole-hearted devotion to the support of Christian missions, will not be lacking.

To conclude, in all these shifting scenes with their terrifying gloom there is a center of security and peace, "the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness neither shadow of turning." At the century mark we look up to Him. "Lord, Thou hast been our Dwelling-place in all generations," Ps. 90:1. "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday and today and forever," Heb. 13:8.

W. ARNDT

Pilgrims of Hope*

A Practical Exposition of the Argument of First Peter

The Address to the Pilgrims. "Peter, the apostle of Jesus Christ," etc., 1 Pet. 1:1, 2; that means, Jesus through His duly commissioned servant writes this letter to Christians, who have their true home in heaven and so are living as aliens on earth, specifically to Christians of Asia Minor who most probably have received the Gospel, either directly or indirectly, through the Apostle Paul. They live not in an integrated, visible commonwealth as the people of God but are scattered, now here, now there, among a heathen populace. As aliens in spirit they are despised by those whose fatherland is upon earth. Before God, however, they are precious. From eternity God the Father, according to His purpose and decree of free grace, chose them as

* This paper was read before the Milwaukee College Conference as one of a series of papers being prepared by members of the conference and treating in a practical, somewhat homiletic, fashion the essential thought-content of the several New Testament books. The papers are not to require more than one hour for the reading. The treatment of the various books, of course, cannot follow a definite pattern. First Peter lends itself to a running analysis. The present paper is based on the Greek text. The writer has consented to have it appear in this journal in the hope that it may suggest a similar program feature to other conferences.