

Concordia Theological Monthly

Volume 11

Article 1

1-1-1940

Foreword

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Concordia Theological Monthly

Edited by
The Faculty of Concordia Seminary
ST. LOUIS, MO.



42,298

St. Louis, Mo.

CONCORDIA PUBLISHING HOUSE

1940

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Concordia *Theological Monthly*

Vol. XI

JANUARY, 1940

No. 1

Foreword

With the present number the **CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY** begins the second decade of its existence. We cannot but think of the gaps that have been made in the ranks of our leaders during the ten years that have been concluded. To mention but two losses, in 1931 our great dogmatician, Dr. F. Pieper, was taken from us, and 1939 saw the departure of our great churchman Dr. F. Pfothenhauer. In these two men we had representatives of the second generation of our church-body, men who had studied under Dr. Walther and one of whom, Dr. Pieper, had even been a colleague of Dr. Walther. These fathers were bridges spanning the gulf separating our time from that of the founders of our Synod. They were like "the elders that overlived Joshua and had known of the works of the Lord that He had done for Israel," Josh. 24:31.

As we, at the opening of another ten-year period, set out once more, one question which naturally presents itself is, Shall we, now that the fathers have left us, adopt a different course, or shall we continue to let our ship sail under the old flag, using the same chart and compass as our predecessors? Two aspects of this question we should like to consider. In the first place let us ask, What attitude are we to assume toward religious Liberalism, which is the order of the day? Religious Liberalism we understand to be that position which advocates tolerance of doctrinal error, declaring itself satisfied with acceptance of a small minimum of religious truth as a condition for church-fellowship. It is the tendency which lays more stress on the profession of good intentions and brotherly sentiment than on unity of doctrine.

To escape the stranglehold of doctrinal indifference, our Saxon fathers emigrated from Germany. Such indifference was not only frightfully prevalent in their native country, but it was definitely the attitude of the ecclesiastical authorities. The situation finally

became unbearable, and emigration seemed the easiest solution. Our fathers were foes of all false teaching. "Pure doctrine" they put on their flag. It is universally admitted that one great characteristic which distinguished them from most of their Protestant contemporaries was opposition to all indifference in Christian teaching, to syncretism and unionism. For them it was a horrible thought that they should close an eye to doctrinal error. Such a course signified to them unfaithfulness toward what is true and holy. Their adherence to "pure doctrine" found expression in their confessionalism. They stood for these two principles: 1. God's Word is everlastingly true; 2. the teachings of this Word are set forth in their purity in the Lutheran Confessions. When they had been in this country for a while, they decided to found a church-body of their own. All the synods they had come in contact with were not truly Lutheran. The Tennessee Synod, which was loyal to the old faith, was located in a territory which was too inaccessible for them, although there soon began an exchange of delegates. Thus our Synod had its origin in strict confessionalism, an uncompromising antiliberalism.

The flag of the pure doctrine—shall we lower it? How can we when the two principles mentioned above: God's Word is everlastingly true, and: In the Lutheran Confessions the teachings of this Word are set forth, represent our own sincere convictions? We have not changed our opinion on the nature of the Scriptures. The recent discussions on verbal inspiration and the inerrancy of the Bible have merely strengthened us in the belief that Scripture is given by inspiration of God, 2 Tim. 3:16, that it cannot be broken, John 10:35, that it, written by the apostles and prophets, is the foundation of the Church, Eph. 2:20, and that it will never pass away, 1 Pet. 1:23 ff. Furthermore, as far as doctrine is concerned, the whole Bible is a protest against religious Liberalism, against indifference toward doctrine as it has been revealed to us by God. If we think of what Moses wrote, Deut. 4:2: "Ye shall not add unto the Word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish aught from it that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord, your God, which I command you," and of what John declares in the last book of the Bible, Rev. 22:18 f.: "If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book; and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the Book of Life and out of the Holy City and from the things which are written in this book"; and if we then think of all the similar statements found between the writings of Moses and the Revelation of St. John, we must say that whoever devoutly accepts the Holy Scriptures cannot be an advocate of indifference toward the teach-

ings that God has given to us. We still subscribe to the strong words of Luther in which he declared this to be his conviction:

"Some foolish spirits, deceived by Satan, advocate this position with respect to the Sacrament or some error in another doctrine, that people ought not to contend so arduously about one article of faith and thereby destroy the bond of Christian love, nor should they on such an account consign one another to the devil, but even though somebody should hold an error in a minor matter, as long as there is unity in other things, one might yield a little and be tolerant and practice brotherly and Christian fellowship and communion. No, my dear man, do not talk to me about peace and fellowship which makes us lose God's Word; for such a course means at the very outset the loss of eternal life and of all things. Here our rule must be not to yield or concede in order to do either you or other people a favor. Rather must all things yield to the Word whether foe or friend is concerned. For the Word is given not for the sake of external or earthly fellowship and peace but for the sake of conferring everlasting life. The Word and doctrine must create Christian fellowship and communion; where there is unity of doctrine, the other matters will follow; if it does not exist, harmony will not endure." (St. Louis edition, IX, 831.)

Nor have we given up the belief that in the Lutheran Confessions the teachings of the Scriptures are set forth in their purity. The recent discussions have once more drawn attention to a great number of doctrines confessed by our Church, those pertaining to the Scriptures, conversion, election, justification, the Church, the last things, etc., and what our Lutheran Confessions say on these matters, either expressly or by implication (we are aware that the doctrine of inspiration is not discussed there *ex professo*), we have again found to agree with the teachings of the Scriptures. The emphasis of the Augsburg Confession and the other confessional writings on the work of Christ and on the proclamation of free forgiveness expresses our deepest conviction, and as we appropriate and apply to ourselves what these writings set forth as their chief message, we are aware that we are drinking the waters of life. Modern Liberalism naturally seeks to make it appear that what our Confessions teach is antiquated, that there we have sixteenth-century theology, that Bible-study has progressed far beyond these teachings. The classic example of the attitude of modern Liberalism we find in the Auburn Affirmation (1923), which makes it optional to believe in the plenary inspiration of the Scriptures, the virgin birth of the Savior, His vicarious atonement, His bodily resurrection, and the reality of His miracles. Here we perceive what Liberalism arrives at when it proceeds on its course without restraint. How shallow its arguments are can

readily be seen. Yes, the theology of our confessional writings is sixteenth-century theology, but certainly that does not prove that it is not true, as little as we feel that we must reject the Pythagorean Theorem because it was known and taught centuries before the birth of Christ.

That we, when we oppose Liberalism, are not fighting a foe who is far removed from the Lutheran camp became painfully evident when in the books of Dr. Alleman on the Old and the New Testament and in the *New Testament Commentary* which bears his name a determined attempt was made to foist modernistic views on the Lutheran Church of America. God be praised that there was a strong negative reaction and that as a result, so we are told, the *New Testament Commentary* has now been withdrawn and is to be revised. The Pittsburgh Agreement on the inspiration of the Scriptures, accepted by the commissions of the American Lutheran Church and the U. L. C. A., likewise proved that Liberalism is not having things altogether its own way in the U. L. C. A. While this Agreement is unsatisfactory, leaving loopholes for error, it marks an advance over the Baltimore Declaration of the U. L. C. A. Let us hope that what is inadequate will be remedied. Whether the Missouri Synod testimony and that of our brethren influences Liberals in the U. L. C. A. and other Lutheran bodies or not, with God's help we shall continue to insist on "God's Word and Luther's doctrine pure."

The other aspect of the general question we are asking has to do with opposition to separatism.

While our journal intends to fly at its masthead in the future as it did in the past the flag of pure doctrine, does it perhaps intend to haul down another flag which our fathers unfurled and displayed prominently, that of ecumenical Lutheranism and opposition to separatistic tendencies? Ecumenical Lutheranism we understand to represent the position that the Lutheran Church is not the only saving Church, that there are children of God in all denominations in which the essentials of the Gospel are still proclaimed, that all those are true Lutherans who with their whole heart accept the teachings of our Confessions, whether they belong to our own Synod or not, and that to bring about full unity of doctrine with other Lutherans is a blessed, God-pleasing task. Our fathers had not been here very long as yet when it became necessary for them to wage a controversy in order to keep the Lutheran Church from losing its ecumenical outlook. It was contended that the Lutheran Church and the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, are identical and that to belong to the people of God a person had to be a Lutheran. There was an apparent justification for this view in what Art. VII of the Augsburg Confession says about

the Church: "The Church is the congregation of saints in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered." These words might be understood as saying that the holy Christian Church is found only in that church-body which teaches the Word without any admixture of error and which in its administration of the Sacraments adheres strictly and faithfully to the words of institution. That such was not the meaning of the confessors at Augsburg is brought out in the Apology, where Art. IV, Par. 10, states: "It [the Apostles' Creed] says *Church catholic* in order that we may not understand the Church to be an outward government of certain nations but rather men scattered throughout the whole world who agree concerning the Gospel and have the same Christ, the same Holy Ghost, and the same Sacraments, whether they have the same or different human traditions." The German text makes it still more plain that the confessors did not conceive the Church to be dependent on the existence of a society where absolute purity of doctrine prevails: "Darueber wird die rechte Lehre und Kirche oft sogar unterdrueckt und verloren, wie unter dem Papsttum geschehen, als sei keine Kirche, und laesst sich oft ansehen, als sei sie gar untergegangen." (*Trigl.*, p. 228.) The minutes of the Free Conference held in Columbus, O., October 1—7, 1856 (to be adverted to more fully in a subsequent paragraph), at which a large number of our fathers was present and which occupied itself with the Augsburg Confession, submit this explanatory remark on the point under consideration: "It was stated that where Word and Sacrament are maintained in complete purity, the existence of the Church can be discerned more easily and more clearly; but it would be an error to deny that the Church exists there, too, where alongside of pernicious error segments only of the truth are found. For these segments of the truth also, inasmuch as they are the pure Word, are still marks of the Church."

Our fathers with all their power opposed the view which endeavored to limit the *ecclesia, extra quam nulla salus*, to the Lutheran Church. Their testimony, based on the Scripture declarations which show that even erring followers of the apostles were still considered members of the Church (Rom. 14:1 ff.; 1 Cor. 3:11-15; 8:9-13), prevailed, and the opposite error is now universally rejected.

That they, while insisting on strict orthodoxy, did not permit the church-body they had founded to take on the character of a sect is evidenced by their attempts to unite the Lutherans of America on a soundly confessional basis. The cry that was raised against them, in which they were charged with being narrow separatists, was an utter perversion of the truth. If there were any

men who earnestly worked for the unification of the Lutheran Church on a God-pleasing foundation, our fathers belonged to their number. In the foreword to the second volume of *Lehre und Wehre* (January, 1856, p. 4) we find these significant paragraphs:

"Our brethren in Germany, scattered throughout the various State Churches (*Landeskirchen*), have chosen the means of free conferences, religious assemblies (*Kirchentage*), etc., to cultivate unity of faith and confession. . . . Are not circumstances here in America quite similar, and may we not expect that joint conferences of like nature through God's grace and blessing will, especially in our country, be the more effective, the greater the freedom is which the Church here enjoys and the more mere theorizing is contrary to the spirit of American religious life? We do not doubt it. Hence we venture to publish the following question: Would it not be profitable and helpful for the attempt of bringing about finally a united evangelical Lutheran Church of North America to hold occasional gatherings of those members of the various synods bearing the name Lutheran who without reservation consider and acknowledge the Unaltered Augsburg Confession of 1530 to be the pure and faithful exposition of the doctrines of Holy Scripture and of their own faith? We on our part would be altogether ready to participate in such a conference of orthodox Lutherans whenever and wherever, according to the wishes of the majority, it would be arranged, and we can in advance give assurance that this willingness is shared by several theologians and laymen of our community who as much as we desire the successful development of our dear Lutheran Church in this our new homeland and whom we have informed of this plan. Since it is a fact that even among those Lutherans of our country who sincerely adhere to the fundamental Confession of our Church there still exist differences of religious conviction (whose discussion in the church-papers might easily do more to hinder than to advance the unity of our Church which we desire), personal contact and oral exchange of views cannot but be useful, and above everything else there would be achieved this incomparable blessing, that controversies, which, of course, in our Church, too, would still remain necessary, would take on the form of friendly, brotherly rivalry in the endeavor to keep and retain unimpaired the grand treasure of doctrinal purity and unity." The man who wrote this, Dr. C. F. W. Walther, was not a narrow separatist but an ecumenical Lutheran.

This invitation of Dr. Walther was hailed with grateful joy, and meetings of the kind he had described were held. Before us lies a pamphlet having the title *Auszug aus den Verhandlungen der*

freien evangelisch-lutherischen Konferenz zu Columbus, Ohio (vom 1. bis 7. Oktober 1856), Pittsburgh, Pa. (vom 29. Oktober bis 4. November 1857), Cleveland, Ohio (vom 5. bis 11. August 1858). This pamphlet makes interesting and edifying reading. In the report on the first one of these conferences the list of those who were present bears the names of many Missouri Synod Lutherans. We mention Prof. A. Craemer, Dr. W. Sihler, Prof. C. F. W. Walther, and Pastor F. Wyneken. Members of the Ohio Synod that we can identify at once were Prof. M. Loy and Prof. W. F. Lehmann. As a member of the General Synod we recognize Dr. C. F. Stohlmann. The minutes of the second session of this first conference contain a paragraph which deserves being given here in translation: "Surely all who love our Lutheran Zion deplore with deep grief the sad divided state from which our Church suffers here in the United States of North America, and all earnestly desire to see the growth of this evil checked and all sincere Lutherans united on the basis of the truth. We Lutherans, too, who are at present assembled here in Columbus perceive with great sorrow the lamentable divided condition afflicting our dear Lutheran Church in this country. We recognize also the sacred duty which devolves upon us as children and members of this Church to do whatever we can through God's grace that the breaches in the walls of Zion be closed, that which is separated be united and, God willing, be formed into one Evangelical Lutheran Church of North America. For this reason we have convened here to humble ourselves before the Lord, aware of the remissness of which we as members of the Church have all become guilty. We wish jointly to ask for His forgiveness and in His fear fraternally to take counsel as to the means by which the desired help for our Church might be accomplished. Now, since, according to the Word of God, the true unity of the Church consists above everything else in the unity of faith and of confession (Eph. 4 and 1 Cor. 1) and only on this foundation true, permanent, external unity can be established, we regard the return of our Church in this country to its Confession as that which is chiefly necessary if true unity is to be achieved. Hence we consider it our duty in a humble spirit to address all Lutherans in the United States of North America, individuals as well as synods, and to ask them that they together with us gather again about the good Confession of our faithful, pious fathers and with us, before everything else, state freely, publicly, and without reservation that the fundamental Confession of our Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, presented 1530 publicly to Emperor Charles V, is their own confession and that the faith set forth in it is in all respects the faith of their own heart. The

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more frequently, alas! it happens in our days that people who accept the Confession of our Church and acknowledge it as the foundation are not thoroughly convinced of the full agreement of this Lutheran symbol with the Word of God and willing to use it as their doctrinal guide, the more necessary and salutary it appears to us that we should in this our meeting consider above everything else this fundamental Confession of our Church and through frank, brotherly exchange of views assure one the other that we all agree in the proper understanding of this document and thereby confirm each other in the unity of the faith."

That these meetings were a great influence in the development of the Lutheran Church of America, that they may have helped to strengthen Lutheran consciousness in those synods which in 1867 formed the General Council, that they positively were a potent factor in bringing the Ohio and the Missouri synods closer to each other so that 1872 these two bodies with others could form the Synodical Conference, of that we have no doubt.

This ecumenical movement of our fathers did not escape all criticism. One of the warm friends of our Synod in Germany, the learned Lic. Stroebel, greeted it with some rather caustic comments. Walther, reviewing Stroebel's remarks, published in the *Zeitschrift* of Rudelbach and Guericke, writes (*Lehre und Wehre*, 1858, p. 323 f.): "Stroebel looks upon this means [*i. e.*, the holding of free conferences] as an attempt to furnish God, as it were, 'special aid,' a 'Davidic numbering of Israel in order to meet the army of the unbelievers with the united hosts of the believers,' 'an attempt to lay eyes on the seven thousand of the American Church,' and he maintains that our utterances 'strongly reminded him of expressions used by the Prussian Union and Church Federation.' This proves that Stroebel, misled by the comparison of our conference to German religious assemblies (*Kirchentage*), has formed a wrong idea of the former and hence arrives at an erroneous estimate of it. While Stroebel's strictures may indeed apply to the character and methods of the conferences held in Germany, they do not apply to ours. Our conference does not manifest any of the criticized tendencies. Its purpose is the same as that of the meetings held after Luther's death by theologians of our Church when, as the Formula of Concord shows, 'some theologians [have] departed from some great and important articles of the said Confession and either have not attained to their true meaning or, at any rate, have not continued steadfastly therein and occasionally have even undertaken to attach to it a foreign meaning, while at the same time they wish to be regarded as adherents of the Augsburg Confession and to avail themselves of it and make their boast of it. From this, grievous and injurious

dissensions have arisen in the pure evangelical churches.' (*Trigl.*, p. 847 f.) If at that time it was not contrary to the spirit of the Lutheran Church not only to assert the truth in writing but to hold meetings, colloquies, and conferences in order to remove the dissension which had arisen as to the correct understanding of the Augsburg Confession, we may assume that even now it is not in conflict with the spirit of our Church to hold meetings having such a purpose. Indeed, we must confess that we can hardly conceive of anything more un-Lutheran than to tell a Lutheran he cannot, if he is conscientious, avail himself of this adiaphoron. It is, of course, true, to endeavor to help the Church through various human means, through grand demonstrations, through sensational speech-making, through pacts and compromises with enemies of the pure doctrine, through external federations against a common enemy while internal differences in articles of faith remain,—all this is an idolatrous exaltation of man; but to meet in order to read jointly the Confession of the Church and to agree with each other as to its true meaning and to strengthen each other's faith in the saving truth confessed therein, such a course is far from being one of human invention and choice, interfering with God's plans, but it is rather an indefeasible Christian privilege, yea, according to our most firm conviction, in a time like the present and in a situation like the one obtaining in this country, a sacred Christian *duty*. To call such a course sinful is an attack on our precious Christian liberty, which we shall not permit anybody to deprive us of, let the attack come from whatever camp it please. If it is proper to *write* about the true meaning of a confession which is often twisted, misinterpreted, and misunderstood, why should it be wrong to *talk* about it? If the former is not an attempt to let man do what God wants to do, since it is through the Word that God governs the Church, why should the latter be so designated? Are not the written and the spoken Word one and the same thing?"

In a following paragraph Walther voices his disagreement with Stroebel because the latter quite vehemently condemned the fact that adherence merely to the Unaltered Augsburg Confession was demanded of those who wished to attend the conference, holding that acceptance of all the Symbolical Books of the Lutheran Church should have been insisted on as a condition of being permitted to take part in it. Walther points out in his rejoinder that many earnest, faithful Lutherans in the United States were not acquainted with all the confessional writings of our Church and hence could not conscientiously as yet subscribe to them and that these were the very people for whom such conferences were necessary. He mentions furthermore that some

synods, just like the Church of Norway, had made only the Augsburg Confession their official doctrinal standard, that it was hoped, however, the conference would acquaint the participants with the other confessions to such a degree that also these writings would be adopted by an increasing number of synods. And finally he states that in studying the Augsburg Confession, as the conference was doing, the subsequent Symbolical Books were constantly consulted to establish the true meaning of the primary declaration.

We have quoted at considerable length to show that whatever the faults of our fathers may have been, they cannot justly be accused of having been fanatical, bigoted separatists, that, as they promulgated and defended orthodox teaching, they did not lose sight of ecumenical considerations, that it was their burning desire to bring about fellowship among the various Lutheran synods of our country, that they went to much trouble in their endeavor to reach such a goal, and that the criticism of an honored friend did not keep them from pursuing this course.

We now have to ask the question, Shall we, eighty-five years after the launching of *Lehre und Wehre*, decide to leave the path blazed by the fathers and become separatists? That such a course would entail certain advantages is clear. How much labor, anxiety, sleepless nights, disappointments, criticism, and dangers could be avoided if our Synod simply refused to carry on intersynodical discussions and our CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY championed a policy of permanent isolation! But would it be right to adopt the attitude which refuses to lend a hand in bridging the gulf separating us from other Lutherans? Would not our course in this case be like that of the servant who, instead of using the talent his master had entrusted to him, "went and digged in the earth and hid his lord's money"? Should we be doing the will of Him who said, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God"? Would it be proper for us to thank God for our possession of the pure doctrine without yearning for an opportunity to share these treasures with others? Will the wielding of the sword against all error dispense us from the duty of using the trowel to repair the rents and crevices in the walls of our Lutheran Zion? Were the fathers wrong when they, in arguing for attempts to remove the existing divisions, quoted 1 Cor. 1:10: "Now, I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment"; and Rom. 12:16: "Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits"; and Eph. 4:3-6: "Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

There is one body and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling: one Lord, one faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in you all"; and 1 Cor. 12:13: "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free, and have been all made to drink into one Spirit"? (Cf. Western Dist. Syn. Report, 1867, President's address, p. 11.) Furthermore, must not the success which God has abundantly bestowed on the recent negotiations between the American Lutheran Church and our Synod and which fills our hearts with gratitude and joy at the same time be an incentive for us to continue these endeavors?

There can be but one answer: We have to manifest the same spirit of ecumenical Lutheranism as the fathers; and while we with might and main have to oppose the temptations of false religious Liberalism, which undoubtedly is our chief foe in these latter days, we must likewise beware of falling prey to the enemy on the other extreme, that of fanatical separatism. May God help our journal to steer the right course as it launches out at the opening of another decade!

W. ARNDT

Der Lutherische Weltkonvent *)

Der Zweck des Lutherischen Weltkonvents wird von dem Exekutivkomitee folgendermaßen bestimmt: "The Need for Lutheran Solidarity. This fundamentally ecumenical character of Lutheranism should receive more concrete expression than has yet been done. The times seem to demand that the inner unity already existing among the Lutherans of the world be cultivated and mobilized. The purpose of this outward expression of Lutheran fellowship is not ostentation, not the display of size or so-called achievement. . . . The purpose in seeking to develop Lutheran solidarity is to help meet the difficulties that confront our churches just now in common with all Christendom, to unite our forces in support of our Lutheran brethren who are now suffering for their faith. . . . The purpose is to help one another in preserving, and sharing with all nations, the treasures we possess in the Gospel of our Lord, whom we know to be the Redeemer of the world from sin. This purpose is to be achieved . . . (b) by cultivating a Lutheran consciousness in individual Lutherans and in Lutheran church-bodies, (c) by furthering Lutheran unity within the several lands where Lutheran

*) Lutherischer Weltkonvent zu Paris vom 13. bis zum 20. Oktober 1935. Denkschrift, herausgegeben im Auftrag des Exekutivkomitees. Als Handschrift gedruckt. Berlin, 1939. 175 Seiten 5½ x 9.