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Miscellanea

Martin Graebner

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

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Miscellanea

Concerning Conscientious Objectors

The right of Lutherans to be conscientious objectors in time of war was voted unanimously by the executive board of the United Lutheran Church in America during its recent meeting in New York City. Dr. Frederick H. Knubel, President of the United Lutheran Church, presided.

In a "Statement on the Rights and Duties of the Christian Citizen in the Emergencies of War" the executive board expressed its belief that "the conscience of the individual, informed and inspired by the Word of God, is the final authority in determining conduct." In accordance, therefore, with this "principle of freedom of conscience" the board recognized "the individual right to conscientious objection to service in a war."

It was pointed out that this recognition does not necessarily "imply the Church's approval of such conscientious objection but does proclaim its devotion and respect for the Scriptural principle of the supreme moral responsibility of the individual conscience." Because the Church is "the exponent and defender of Christian principle," it must "respect and safeguard the Christian in his right to the honest exercise of that responsibility."

The board also pointed to obvious difficulties, "such as the abuse of the principle by hypocrites, using conscience as a cloak for cowardice." It was stated, however, that this does not "excuse the Church from its sacred obligation of defending the principle at stake." The Church, then, is challenged to exercise special care in judging the spirit and motives of those who claim conscientious objection.

The board made it clear, however, that—in accordance with the Church's confessions—it holds that war may on occasion be justified and that then the "Christian citizen is in duty bound to bear arms and to offer his life, if need be, in defense of his country."

The executive board also voted unanimous commendation of the joint protest issued last week by Dr. Knubel and Dr. Emanuel Poppen of Columbus, O., President of the American Lutheran Church, in which they condemned President Roosevelt's appointment of Myron C. Taylor as a personal representative to the Vatican.

As a result of the criticism Dr. Knubel, together with a few other Protestant Church leaders, was called to Washington for a conference with the President. In reporting the result of this conference to the executive board, Dr. Knubel repeated President Roosevelt's assertion that this action ought not to be regarded as the initiation of formal diplomatic relationships between the United States and the Vatican. Dr. Knubel reported also that he had urged the President to make a public declaration of this fact as soon as possible. He was unable, however, to give details concerning the President's plan for peace because those who attended the conference were pledged to secrecy.

N. L. C. Bulletin

"Need Not Be Divisive"

On account of the importance of the discussions going on now in our and other circles with respect to the resolutions which the Missouri Synod in 1938 passed concerning church-fellowship with the American Lutheran Church, it is proper that we should submit to our readers the concluding remarks of Prof. Martin Graebner, president of Concordia College, St. Paul, Minn., in his essay at the Southern Nebraska District convention of 1939. The paper dealt with Theses 22, 23, and 24 of Dr. Walther's treatise *The Evangelical Lutheran Church the True Visible Church of God on Earth*. Thesis 24 reads: "The Evangelical Lutheran Church holds fellowship in confession and charity with all at one with it in faith, Eph. 4:3." Concluding his remarks on this proposition as well as his essay in general, Professor Graebner analyzed the report of Committee No. 16 as presented to the convention of the Missouri Synod in 1938. We here reprint the last section of this analysis. In the printed report this section will be found p. 40 ff.

"This report of Committee No. 16 was discussed in four sessions and finally adopted and thus became a part of the synodical resolutions. We have already stated that for true unity it is necessary that all parties unite in a single declaration. We shall restrict our examination of these resolutions to the deviations in doctrine which have been described in this report as being not necessarily divisive of church-fellowship.

"We call attention first to the fact that the report does not say that a difference of doctrine is not divisive, but it says, 'It need not be divisive.' Every false opinion is divisive of church-fellowship if it is held with full knowledge of being contrary to the Word of God; but among otherwise orthodox Christians it is not divisive of fellowship. That is the correct understanding of the phrase 'need not be.' Now, then, we ask: If the American Lutheran Church really is orthodox in all matters with the exception of the points noted, did Synod do right in declaring them to be non-divisive of church-fellowship, or did Synod do wrong?

"We examine first the conversion of the Jews. That opinion is based on Rom. 11: 25, 26. 'For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits, that blindness in part is happened to Israel until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved; as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob.' We find no fault with our fathers who declare in *Lehre und Wehre*, 14: 'Im uebrigen stelle ich diese Annahme von der Intercession der Seligen in die Kategorie jener "wunderlichen Meinungen," wie z. B. die von der noch zu hoffenden grossen Judenbekehrung (welche sogar noch einen grosseren Schein von Schriftbeweis fuer sich hat als die vorliegende) usw., und sie wird niemand schaden, der nicht Konsequenzen daraus zieht. Wer so wie die Apologie, die Schmalkaldischen Artikel, wie Chemnitz und Carpoz und die *Confessio Wirtenbergensis* von Christi Amt, Rechtfertigung und den Gnadenmitteln zeugt und glaubt, mag diesen "Traum" immerhin behalten; deshalb ist er doch ein Christ und ein Lutheraner.' We translate as follows: 'As for the rest, I place the assumption of the intercession of the saints into the category of those queer notions as, for instance, that of the hoped-for great conversion

of the Jews, which has an even greater appearance of Scriptural proof in its favor than the one before us, etc., and it will harm nobody who does not draw consequences out of it. Whoever testifies and believes of Christ's office, of justification and the means of grace as does the Apology, the Smalcald Articles, Chemnitz, Carpzov, may, if he desires, keep this dream; in spite of that he is still a Christian and a Lutheran.'

"The conversion of the Jews is consistently rejected by our synodical writers, and yet it is called a queer notion and a dream having only the appearance of Scriptural proof, and our fathers declared this queer notion does not prevent a person from remaining an orthodox Lutheran.

"We now take up the doctrine concerning the physical resurrection of the martyrs. That is a view generally held by millennialists, and if any one draws from such doctrine of the resurrection of the martyrs the doctrine of the millennium, then he ceases to be a Lutheran theologian. We are speaking of people who reject the doctrine of the millennium and yet feel that the Holy Scriptures teach the resurrection of martyrs. Our committee declares that to be contrary to the doctrine of the general resurrection of the dead. It states that, if any one should hold that view, it would not deprive him of his status as an orthodox Lutheran Christian. We do know that, although there is only one resurrection of the dead, yet we learn from Scripture that at the death of Christ many graves of the saints gave up their dead, that God, therefore, actually did resurrect some of His saints before the general resurrection of the dead. We shall furthermore find no fault with any one who, for instance, will claim that Moses has been resurrected from the dead, as it would appear from his appearance on the Mount of Transfiguration. No one will, therefore, deny that God has resurrected some saints and no one will deny that He also has the power to do so in the future. And since God has already resurrected some saints, this goes to prove that the resurrection of some at an earlier time is not in conflict with the doctrine of the general resurrection of the dead. This declaration, then, simply states that, if some one should wish to believe on the basis of Rev. 20:4 that God may do again what He did once, and if such person from such viewpoint does not draw consequences in conflict with Bible doctrines, he may still be regarded as an orthodox Lutheran theologian. Again we can find no fault with that statement.

"The fourth point, concerning the time in which the thousand years of Rev. 20 are fulfilled, has already been dealt with above.

"And finally we come to the point in the doctrine concerning the Church. In distinction from the other points, this point refers to a fundamental doctrine. If this expression 'the visible side of the Church' were permitted to remain unexplained, some think it might give occasion to foster false doctrine, such as the Romanizing teaching which represents the Church as an external religious or social institution.

"The Declaration of the American Lutheran Church, however, accepts the doctrine of the Church as the invisible community of saints and would sanction the expression 'the visible side of the Church' only if by this visible side nothing else is meant than the use of the means of grace. We call the use of the means of grace a *mark* of the Church. And now some call it a visible side of the Church. They substitute for

an expression that cannot be misunderstood one that may be misunderstood, and we therefore believe that the use of this expression should be dropped for that reason. On the other hand, if any man firmly believes the correct doctrines of the Church and then makes use of the expression 'visible side of the Church' with the explanation here given, we cannot find fault with the committee in declaring that a difference in this point need not be divisive of church-fellowship when properly understood. It is better to use different language to mean the same thing than to use the same language with different interpretations. We believe, however, that, since the expression 'a visible side of the Church' may be misunderstood, and since there has been controversy concerning the doctrine of the Church, at least with some of the synods that now constitute the American Lutheran Church, therefore the use of this expression should be discontinued and a declaration should be arrived at which all parties can subscribe to. This is in harmony with the resolution of Synod as above stated.

"In this connection it is well once more to call attention to the fact that the report of Committee No. 16 did not attempt to rush the Synod into a union but distinctly recommended in No. 2 'that Synod declares that the *Brief Statement* of the Missouri Synod, together with the *Declaration* of the representatives of the American Lutheran Church and the provisions of this entire report of Committee No. 16 now being read and with Synod's actions thereupon, be regarded as the doctrinal basis for *future church-fellowship* between the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church.'

"Synod is further on record as resolving that endeavors should be made to establish full agreement on the four points of non-fundamental doctrines above referred to; that concerning 'the visible side of the Church' uniform and Scripturally acceptable terminology and teaching should be attained; that the establishing of church-fellowship will depend on the action taken by each body with reference to the *Brief Statement*, the *Declaration* of the representatives of the American Lutheran Church, and the report of Committee No. 16 as adopted by Synod; that the establishing of church-fellowship will depend also on the establishing of doctrinal agreement between the American Lutheran Church and those church-bodies with which it is now in fellowship; and, as far as the Missouri Synod is concerned, this whole matter must be submitted for approval to the other synods constituting the Synodical Conference. It has also been made very plain in these resolutions that for true unity we need not only doctrinal agreement but also agreement in practice, in which connection the resolutions mention the lodge evil, pulpit- and altar-fellowship, and all forms of unionism. It must be admitted by any fair-minded and unbiased reader of these resolutions that Committee No. 16 and Synod, which adopted this report, did not attempt to rush Synod into a union, but that these resolutions contain all necessary safeguards and should be assented to, and approved by, all of us.

"In summary, we believe that the synodical resolutions have steered clear of the Scylla of unionism on the one side and the Charybdis of separatism on the other side and that they constitute a sound and conservative basis for fellowship in the Lutheran Church."