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General Synod Liberalism in the U. L. C. A.

The CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY has frequently expressed editorial amazement over the teachings which are permitted to represent the theology of the United Lutheran Church through pages of the *Lutheran Church Quarterly*, edited jointly by the faculties of the theological seminaries at Gettysburg and at Philadelphia. Particularly the book reviews have been permitted to express views which diverge considerably from the doctrine of the Lutheran Confessions. But it is rarely that a single issue of the *Quarterly* contains so much as the October issue of this year (1940) to discourage those who have been hoping for an upward trend in the confessionalism of that large and important body of Lutherans. Particularly must those who have been hoping for a realization of Dr. Delk's *bon mot* on the occasion of the 1918 merger — "Merge the best, submerge the rest" — been shocked by the article in which Prof. Herbert Alleman of Gettysburg discusses *The Pittsburgh Agreement* in its bearings on Lutheran unity. The article represents in undiluted force the position of the old General Synod on such matters as secret orders, church-fellowship, and the doctrine of verbal inspiration.

That which makes the article somewhat more significant is the fact that in its announcement of aims the *Lutheran Church Quarterly* includes that of "giving intellectual expression to the faith of the United Lutheran Church in America as set forth in its doctrinal basis." And the author of the article is designated in this issue as "professor of Old Testament Language and Literature in the Gettysburg Seminary and an influential member of the Central Pennsylvania Synod of the United Lutheran Church." In every way we must regard an expression from such a source in

such an organ of the leading theological seminaries of the U. L. C.¹⁾ as justifying detailed study and evaluation.

Dr. Alleman compares the Pittsburgh Agreement with an earlier doctrinal statement, the Washington Declaration of 1920. This document, termed vague and non-committal on some of the more important doctrinal issues by conservative critics at the time, seems "a singularly narrow and unprogressive document" to Dr. Alleman as he interprets ecumenical Christendom. But he finds some excuse for the conservatism which displeased him in the 1920 Declaration. He looks upon it as a sop thrown to the conservative synods. (These are referred to as the "scattered children" of the Augsburg Confession, "particularly those of the wide-open spaces of the West, where a frontier psychology has caused them to huddle together in comparatively small groups for the preservation of their beloved faith."²⁾)

The Pittsburgh Agreement consists of three paragraphs, dealing with secret orders, pulpit- and altar-fellowship, and the inspiration of Scripture. It is especially because of the negotiations pending for union with the American Lutheran Church that Dr. Alleman views with alarm the possible adoption of this Agreement and asks his Church to "count the cost to its own conscience before it votes its approval." He disagrees with all three paragraphs of the Agreement.

The admonition against affiliation with secret orders ("organizations injurious to the Christian faith"), weak as it is since it does not call for discipline, is pronounced objectionable by Dr. Alleman, as "legalistic," for one thing. He does not want the lodge-connected clergy to receive even this admonitory slap on the wrist. But, more than this, he holds that no one has the right to "challenge the sincerity of a brother who has found such associations helpful or to say that they were injurious to his Christian faith." This is the historic attitude of the old General Synod, which not only tolerated Freemasonry but which was definitely friendly to this and similar organizations.

Article II is "even more objectionable" — "little short of an affront to a large part of the U. L. C. A." While it simply re-emphasizes the old Galesburg Rule, which pronounced that there must be no fellowship which ignores differences in doctrine, none

1) In fairness it should be remarked that the *Quarterly* is not an official organ of the United Lutheran Church.

2) This characterization is singularly inept. Surely the Synodical Conference, Augustana, the Norwegian Lutheran Church, are not "small groups" even "comparatively," "huddled" on the frontiers of the wide-open West. We hope that during his recent attendance at the U. L. C. Synod in Omaha Dr. Alleman's conceptions have been corrected at least in this respect.

whatsoever with non-evangelicals, — this is too much for the contributor to the *Quarterly*. Any such restriction, he says, "will create division among ourselves," and he cites Dr. Reu's opinion (in his recent paper on *Unionism*) to the effect that the U. L. C. is still in disagreement with its own (Galesburg) pronouncement on church-fellowship, since "official publications within the United Lutheran Church have made far-reaching concessions to Modernism on some very vital questions," since "several seminaries have men on their faculties who disagree with the Confessions of the Church on many points," and since "pulpit- and altar-fellowship with the Reformed is practiced widely and with immunity." Dr. Alleman derides this criticism as a "trumpet call" for the U. L. C. leaders to "cleanse the Augean stables, which it is their lot to serve, of the heresy and promiscuity with which they are defiled." Sentence is then pronounced in these terms: "A World Federation of Churches is in the throes of birth. This is no time to be cultivating the sectarian mind. . . . It is not thus that we read the hand of Providence and the leading of the Spirit."

The greater part of Professor Alleman's criticism is devoted to an analysis of Article III of the Pittsburgh Agreement, the section dealing with the inspiration of the Bible. In view of the fact that this article has been considered by some as indicating a doubtful attitude towards verbal inspiration on the part of the American Lutheran Church representatives, it is interesting to note the reaction of a liberal U. L. C. theologian to this same statement. Quite recently it has been said that the A. L. C. committee, "which only a few months before had whole-heartedly endorsed the statement in which the Missouri Synod declares its belief in the inerrancy of the Bible, now" — by the signing of the Pittsburgh Agreement — "shows itself capable of signing another statement *in which this confession is clearly lacking.*" Note the words in italics and then observe that Dr. Alleman quotes from the Agreement the sentence beginning with the word "nevertheless" and ending with the words "errorless, unbreakable whole, of which Christ is the center (John 10:35)," and then remarks: "That sentence *introduces the doctrine of verbal inspiration*, a doctrine which is foreign to the genius of our Confessions and is not found in any of them." His entire argument through the following six pages is based upon the conviction that unquestionably this section of the Pittsburgh Agreement endorses a belief in the inerrancy of the Bible.

We are interested in the lines of argument by which the contributor to the *Quarterly* opposes the Pittsburgh statement regarding the Bible.

After saying that verbal inspiration is "foreign to the genius

of our Confessions," he continues: "It is, in fact, a carry-over from the old heathen conception of inspiration; a man who was possessed by a god lost self-control and became but a mouthpiece of the deity." This is the old (Wellhausenian) identification of the Hebrew prophets with the Moslem dervishes. "It is a Jewish and not a Christian theory and belongs to the literalness of Massoretic scholarship, which believed that, when Moses went up into the mount, he found Jehovah making ornamental letters in the Book of the Law." Next he attacks Dr. Reu, whom he terms the author of Article III, for treating the Bible as a deed of sale. He says that this makes the human authors purely passive in the act of composition. He attacks the idea of inerrancy as meaning that "one word is as important as another"—something no Lutheran theologian, to our knowledge, has ever maintained. Next he shows that John 10:35 ("The Scripture cannot be broken") simply proves "that the author of the fourth gospel was a thorough Jew." We have no space for the proof adduced in support of this judgment, which—and this is more important—definitely makes Christ's endorsement of the inviolate Old Testament canon the opinion of the author, a "thoroughly Jewish" author. Against Dr. Reu he defends the "source theory and personalized history in the early books of the Old Testament" and definitely claims the right to apply to Scripture "the use of the literary and historical methods commonly practiced."

Dr. Alleman's chief attack is directed against the term "errorless" in the Pittsburgh Agreement. Here we must quote the author in detail:

"By the theory of verbal inspiration, which Dr. Reu, the author of this article, is quite frank in avowing, we are justified in expecting that we shall find no errors or contradictions or even any imperfections in what the Bible has to say concerning Christ and His ministry. If the Bible is the deed of conveyance of our salvation, there should be no discrepancies in the statements concerning the Savior. If He can be quoted as saying in John 10:35 (as the verbal inspirationists hold) that 'Scripture cannot be broken,' and if that means that it is without error or contradiction, how are we to square this statement with those instances, particularly in the Sermon on the Mount, in which He deliberately breaks Scripture? For example, Does not Matt. 5:39 abrogate Ex. 21:24, and does not Mark 7:19 repeal Lev. 11? In Mark 4:10-12 Jesus declares that parables are used to reveal truth to insiders and conceal it from outsiders; but in v. 13 it is insiders who have to have it explained, and in Mark 12:12 the outsiders understand the truth perfectly well. It would seem that there should be no uncertainty as to when the Last Supper was celebrated, whether in connection with the Passover (the synoptists) or at the weekly social-religious meal Kiddush (the fourth gospel). Matt. 21:7 says the disciples placed their garments upon them (the ass and the colt), and He sat on them. Does that mean that Jesus sat upon both animals? In Mark 2:26 Jesus says that David got the showbread from Abiathar; according to 1 Sam. 21:1-6 it was from Abimelech. Matthew and Luke both correct Mark at this point by omitting the name. Neither of them thought that Mark was 'errorless.' These are but a few of the many instances in which Scripture, at least as we have it, is broken."

What is the strength of this argumentation against the "verbal inspirationalists?"

In order to show that either Jesus (or the "thorough Jew" who wrote the fourth gospel) did not mean to say that the Scripture is "without error or contradiction," Dr. Alleman points out instances in which Jesus "deliberately breaks Scripture." As examples he points out the principle of non-resistance as abrogating the *lex talionis* and the principle of spiritual cleanness as repealing the food regulations of the Old Testament. The critic overlooks the principle governing all these teachings of our Lord, announced Matt. 5:17, that He was come "not to destroy but to fulfil,"—not to abrogate the Old Testament institutions but to realize in teaching and practice the ideals to which Old Testament institutions and revelations pointed but which they did not set forth in their fulness. He did not abrogate any provisions of the ancient Law (the abrogation of the Ceremonial Law came later), but He did reveal truths of which the Law had only contained suggestions. In the ceremonials there was the shadow of the truth of defilement; now He was showing the reality, the body of truth itself: all real good and evil dwell in the heart. And if the Jews of His time justified a passionate and revengeful spirit, Jesus now carries out more fully the spirit and design of the Law by urging the readiness of a true disciple to forgive, to win, to restore. And who is not able to see the difference established between public and official vengeance and the private relationship of men to men?

So superficial is the charge raised against the consistency either of the evangelists or of our Lord in the references quoted regarding parables that we can afford to direct the reader to the simple fact that there is a difference between hearers ignorant (and hearers prejudiced) of the Lord's discourses in the opening season of His ministry and the hardened opposition of enemies, to whom the Lord later spoke in plain, though figurative, parables, not of the Kingdom but of judgment.

Since Dr. Alleman does not inform us which of the schools of rationalistic higher criticism he follows, whether the Tuebingen School, which declares that John's gospel is biased in the account of the Last Supper, or the tradition of Schleiermacher-De Wette-Meyer, who impugn the truthfulness of the synoptists, we are unable to argue the matter but must refer the Gettysburg theologian to Luthardt, *Die moderne Darstellung des Lebens Jesu*, 1864; Wieseler, *Chronologische Synopse der vier Evangelien*, 1843; or J. B. McClellan, *The New Testament*, etc., Vol. I; *The Four Gospels with the Chronological and Analytical Harmony*, 1875, for reasoning which, "according to the simple standard of truth," has

demonstrated that St. John and the synoptists are in perfect harmony.

As for the question whether the Lord sat upon both animals at His entry in Jerusalem,—a notion which the professor evidently holds to be so absurd that the errancy of Matthew is demonstrated by the simple reference,—it might not be amiss to ask whether the pronoun translated by "them" does not agree in number and gender with the preceding Greek word for "garments." The *Expositor's Greek Testament* (*ad loc.*) thinks so.

And is not the opinion that Mark is "corrected" by other evangelists when he refers to Abiathar as high priest an arguing from a premise quite generally condemned by the text-books of logic—an argument *e silentio*? Or is there no merit in the suggestion that Mark was content with mentioning the chief high priest in David's time, who, for that matter, may have delegated some of his activities to his son? And if the "many instances in which Scripture, at least as we have it, is broken" (as Dr. Alleman contends), are no better than those mentioned above, is not the rationalistic opposition to Scriptural inerrancy standing on rather poor underpinning? We shall conclude this section of our review with the observation that there appears to be no better means for a person to equip himself once and for all with the deserved contempt for superficial and irreverent treatment of Biblical narratives than to dissect thoroughly a few typical products of that method.

"We are not at one in this matter, and it is hypocrisy to deny it," is the only note in this discussion of the Pittsburgh Agreement that permits us to hope for a more conservative, Lutheran attitude towards the lodge, unionism, and verbal inspiration than is in evidence in this article. It is conceded at least that the U. L. C. A. will not *unanimously* reject a set of paragraphs which, inadequate as they may be in some respects, still give voice to a conservative standpoint. (As matters turned out, the convention at Omaha, by a very large majority, accepted the Agreement. The vote was taken after Dr. Alleman and others representing the old General Synod theology pleaded against endorsement of the articles.³⁾)

3) At that, the vote on any such question as this by the United Lutheran Church must be taken with a grain of salt because the constitution of the body permits Dr. Alleman and those who agree with him to go back to their lecture-halls and teach their higher criticism and publish their views through the *Lutheran Church Quarterly* without thereby incurring the danger of being disciplined by their synod. The constitution of the U. L. C. A. makes provision for such cases. It makes responsible the synods composing the U. L. C. A. only for that which is printed in the "official record" of a sister synod. In other words, unless

In conclusion Dr. Alleman refers to the doubts expressed by Dr. Reu after the meeting at Pittsburgh whether, if they are accepted, these Articles will be carried out in the life of the Church. He is stung by the closing remark of Dr. Reu's article: "Without doctrinal discipline (*Lehrdisziplin*) no Church can in the long run remain healthy." Any suggestion of doctrinal discipline is to him "sectarianism," a "method of securing agreement that is out of harmony with ecumenical Lutheranism, not to say, of Christianity." He suggests the possibility that "at St. Louis and Dubuque they already have a list of our teachers and preachers who will have to be excommunicated if agreement is to be secured."

On this note ends a survey which distinguishes Faith and the Confessions, which latter are "but photographs of that faith on occasions which called them forth."

Are we permitted to hope that the editors of the *Lutheran Church Quarterly* will give space to a rejoinder from the ranks of the United Lutheran Church ministry to the resurgence of General Synod Liberalism in a body which, we had reason to believe, is headed for better things?

THEODORE GRAEBNER

Lectures on Galatians

SIXTH LECTURE

THE SOCIAL GOSPEL

Gal. 5:13 to 6:10

(Continued)

The saving Gospel we have been learning is also the social Gospel we shall be learning.

"Brethren, ye were called unto freedom. Only use not this freedom for an opening of the flesh." Freedom is to be used, not abused for a cloak of wickedness, 1 Pet. 2:16. A frightful abuse of freedom was that of the Anabaptists at Muenster, in Westphalia, at the time of the Reformation.

"But through love slave for each other," 1 Cor. 7:22. Here

the official records of the Central Pennsylvania Synod contain such departures from Scriptural theology as we have noted in this article, no other synod of the U. L. C. A. has a right to protest or demand correction. The large majority which at Omaha accepted the Pittsburgh Agreement is possibly a sign of better things in the future. For the present the radicals and errorists who plainly revealed their mind at the convention will continue as members in good standing of the United Lutheran Church.