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Is Doctrinal Unity a Luxury?

By TH. ENGELDER

Some time ago this view was expressed in the *Christian Century*: "In a world like ours, nothing seems to me to be less important than agreement about our theology. . . . Struggling to get such an agreement is a luxury which, perhaps, we can return to when the times are less desperate." (See CONC. THEOL. MONTHLY, 1945, p. 569.) Unity in doctrine is here called a luxury; it may be a good thing for the Church to have, but the Church can get along very well without it. Her health does not require it.

The common unionist uses stronger language. He denounces the struggle to get an agreement in doctrine as contrary to God's will. John De Witt declared: "Was it the divine purpose that those who love the Lord Jesus Christ should think alike on all points of doctrine—the Arminians and Calvinists, Churchmen and Dissenters, Sprinklers and Immersionists? If this were so, never has a divine purpose failed so lamentably." (*What Is Inspiration?* p. 142.) Unionism commonly declares that God desires multiplicity of doctrine. Accordingly E. Stanley Jones is in favor of organizing all denominations into one large Church, in which no denomination dare claim to have all the truth and no denomination would lose its identity, since each would constitute a branch within the Church of Christ. "It is a movement of the Spirit," Dr. Jones said in the *Christian Century* of Jan. 14, 1947, which will "create a union of difference—united diversity." Charles Macfarland, Secretary Emeritus of the Federal Council, believes that "the age of doctrinal unity has passed away and there is no possibility of educated and conscientious men agreeing in any one philosophy of theology" (*Christian Unity*, p. 163). And this variety of doctrine constitutes the strength of Protestantism. Dr. Ivan Lee Holt (Methodist): "Within the ranks of the Protestant Church are many varieties of opinion from Fundamentalism to Humanism. There is no body of doctrine that commends itself to all, and there is no authority which can compel. . . . At the same time there is a strength in the freedom of individuality within the large group. There is today a cry for freedom, and the genius of Protestantism

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is the right of each individual to his own interpretation of truth." (At a symposium conducted in St. Louis on May 16, 1930.)

The writer in the *Christian Century* seems to take a different view. He refuses to call the struggle for doctrinal unity a sin. He states that it is a luxury which the Church can dispense with in these hard days and take up later on. And so the question arises: Is doctrinal unity merely a luxury?

I

We answer, in the first place, that Scripture leaves no room for such a notion. Scripture nowhere states that doctrinal unity is dispensable, but insistently calls for it. Eph. 4:3 asks us to endeavor "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." 1 Cor. 1:10 demands that "ye all speak the same thing . . . that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment," and 2 Cor. 13:11 has the command: "Be of one mind." Scripture incessantly warns us against those who would disrupt the unity of doctrine. There is Matt. 7:15: "Beware of false prophets," and Rom. 16:17: "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them," and 2 John 10: "If there come any unto you and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him Godspeed." Scripture certainly does not treat the unity of faith and doctrine as a luxury item which the Church does not need for its well-being, but demands that the Church struggle to obtain and keep it.

Hear what Luther has to say on this point. "The world at the present time is sagaciously discussing how to quell the controversy and strife over doctrine and faith and how to effect a compromise. . . . Such patchwork is not according to God's will. The 'Word demands that doctrine, faith, and worship must be preserved pure and unadulterated.'" (XII: 973.) "The holy Church cannot and dare not brook any lie or false doctrine, but must teach the holy truth, that is, God's Word alone" (XVII:1341). Hear what Walther wrote in the Foreword to the fourth volume of the *Lutheraner*, from that time on the organ of the Missouri Synod: "We shall continue to make use of this small church paper not only to bear testimony to the truth, but also, so much as lies in our power, to

uncover and combat the doctrinal errors which are now rampant, particularly those which seek entrance into our Lutheran Church. . . . We do not want to come under the condemnation of the closing words of the Bible: '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' (Rev. 22:18-19)." And: "The Ev. Lutheran Church accepts the whole written Word of God (as God's Word), deems nothing in it superfluous or of little worth, but everything needful and important" (*Walter and the Church*, p. 125). Hear M. Loy: "We are constrained to stand aloof from all Church unions founded on any other basis than that of the truth revealed in God's Word and confessed in our Symbols. . . . The only Scriptural way to labor for union is to labor for unity in the faith and agreement in its confession. That is divinely required and therefore essential." (*Distinctive Doctrines*, p. 15.) And C. P. Krauth: "There can be, there is, no true unity but in the faith. . . . The one token of this unity, that by which this internal thing is made visible, is one expression of faith, one 'form of sound words,' used in simple earnestness, and meaning the same to all who employ it. You may agree to differ; but when men become earnest, difference in faith will lead first to fervent pleadings for the truth, and, if these be hopelessly unheeded, will lead to separation." (See F. Bente, *American Lutheranism*, II, p. 184.) And Ernst Sommerlath, Leipzig: "Our Lutheran Confessions stand for the truth learned from God's Word. They stand on guard lest anything be lost from the treasure of the Church. . . . Our Church hates false doctrine; the unity which she seeks is the unity in the truth. Her Confessions are not meant as a hindrance to unity, but are designed to bring about unity. She stands for honesty and truthfulness, and knows that only in that way, God being gracious, unity can be accomplished." (*Allg. Ev.-Luth. Kirchenz.*, June 9, 1933.) And Werner Elert: "The Lutheran Church declares itself ready to have church fellowship with all Christians — under one condition: that we are one in doctrine" (*Allg. Ev.-Luth. Kz.*, Nov. 18, 1927). And Hans Boehm (Germany): "Our Lutheran Confessions issue this watchword: when any union is accomplished which for the sake of external strength

ignores, or even suppresses, the desire to establish a common basis of the faith, that unity was not brought about by the Lord Jesus, but by the devil" (*Kirchliche Zeitschrift*, December, 1939, p. 756).

Let the unionist declare the struggle for unity on the basis of God's Word to be sinful and say with K. Barth: Let the Roman Church work out its doctrine of nature and grace, with the Tridentine teaching of justification, and the Protestant Churches stick to justification by grace. "These very men who have found themselves forced to confront a clear, thoroughgoing, logical *sic et non* find themselves allied to each other, in spite of all contradictions, by an underlying fellowship and understanding" (*Prolegomena* to the 1937 World Conference, p. 36). And let the unionist say with Bischof Zoellner: "We have no intention of killing off the denominations" (*Allg. Ev.-Luth. Kz.*, Nov. 27, 1936), or declare agreement in doctrine an unneeded luxury, the Lutheran Church and the Lutheran Confessions and Holy Scripture insist that all Christians agree in the doctrine.

And, mark well, agree *in all doctrines* and in all points of doctrine. Read the passages quoted above, and see whether the Christians are enjoined to be of one mind only in the most important doctrines and whether they should beware of only those false prophets who deny the essentials of the Christian doctrine. And then study passages like Matt. 28:20: "Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." The faith for which the Church must earnestly contend (Jude 3) comprises all the articles of faith. There will be oneness of mind and, consequently, oneness of mouth only if the Church observes "whatsoever things were written for our learning" (Rom. 15:4-6). True unity will be accomplished on the basis of the whole truth. The Church does not discount the least article of the revealed religion. Whether these articles be fundamental or non-fundamental, whether they be more important or less important for the body of doctrine, agreement in doctrine takes in all that Christ commanded, also the so-called secondary points, the subordinate details, the peripheral, marginal, minor matters of doctrine. "I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God" (Acts 20:27).

Do you care to hear the Lutheran commentary on these

passages? Luther: "The doctrine is not ours, but God's, whose ministers only we are called; therefore we may not change or diminish one tittle thereof. . . . We protest that we desire nothing more than to be at unity with all men: so that they leave unto us the doctrine of faith, entire and incorrupt. Not by a hair's breadth will we recede in this matter. . . . We are bound to keep all the articles of the Christian doctrine, great ones and *small ones* (we do not, in fact, consider any of them small), pure and certain. We consider this of great importance, and it is very necessary." "Wherefore let us learn to advance and extol the majesty and authority of God's Word. For it is no small trifle; but every tittle thereof is greater than heaven and earth." "They say that one should not contend so arduously about one article of faith, that even though somebody should hold an error in a minor matter, one might yield a little and tolerate it. No, dear sir; none of that peace and unity for me, through which God's Word is lost." (IX: 644—649; 655; 831.) And the Formula of Concord states: "We believe, teach, and confess also that no church should condemn another because one has less or more external ceremonies — if otherwise there is agreement among them in doctrine and *all its articles*." "We have no intention of yielding aught of the eternal, immutable truth of God for the sake of temporal peace, tranquillity, and unity. . . . But we are anxious to advance that unity, according to our utmost power, by which His glory remains to God unimpaired, no room is given to the least error." (*Trigl.*, pp. 831, 1095.) And in the Preface to the Christian Book of Concord we read: "Therefore we also have determined not to depart even a finger's breadth either from the subjects themselves or from the phrases which are found in them, but, the Spirit of the Lord aiding us, to persevere constantly, with the greatest harmony, in this godly agreement" (*Trigl.*, p. 23).

Some more Lutheran commentary on our passages. Walther: "Baier remarks: 'This concerns the doctrine of the Christian faith and life; note here, that that does not mean exclusively those parts of the Christian doctrine which every man must know if he is not to lose faith and salvation, but it means the entire Christian doctrine in all its parts. . . . For agreement in all of these articles is necessary for establishing the right churchly peace, and as long as a dissensus remains,

the peace will not be a true one. . . . We cannot take and treat a doctrine which is clearly revealed in God's Word or which runs counter to God's clear Word as an open question, let it be ever so subordinate, lying ever so far away from the center of the doctrine of salvation, being ever so peripheral." (*Lehre u. Wehre*, Vol. 14, pp. 2, 66.) "In the orthodox Church no error contrary to God's Word dare be granted the right to exist; in the Lutheran Church there dare be no liberty to deviate at all from God's Word, even if such deviation consisted only in denying that Balaam's ass spoke. For God's Word says: 'Neither shall ye diminish aught from it,' Deut. 4:2; 'A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump,' Gal. 5:9; 'The Scripture cannot be broken,' John 10:35; 'Till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass away from the Law,' Matt. 5:18. . . . Who can, who dare destroy and break God's Word even in respect to a tittle? . . . Luther says: 'Wherefore let us learn to advance and extol the majesty and authority of God's Word. For it is no small trifle; but every tittle thereof is greater than heaven and earth!'" (*Der Lutheraner*, Vol. 25, pp. 42, 52.) "Our Church has taken for her foundation the Holy Scripture; on this foundation she has placed herself firmly; from this foundation she will not depart a hair's breadth (*'vel transversum, ut ajunt, unquem'*). . . . That is her crown and glory — she will not and cannot let it be taken from her. . . . True union, the goal of Christ's Church, has already been achieved in the true Lutheran Church. True union is none other than the true Evangelical Lutheran Church." (*Lehre u. Wehre*, 1871, p. 11.) F. Pieper: "Teaching in God's house, the Christian Church, is a very serious matter. The teachers should never forget: 1. Nowhere does Scripture give anyone the license to deviate from God's Word in any single point. The regulations governing all members of this household to the Last Day require: 'Teaching men to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you,' Matt. 28:20. 2. Any deviation from the Word of Christ, which the Church has in the Word of His Apostles, is called an offense (*σκάνδαλον ποιεῖν*), Rom. 16:17." (*Christliche Dogmatik*, I, p. 39.) "All Christians are required to agree on all articles of faith revealed in Holy Scripture (1 Cor. 1:10; Eph. 4:3-6). . . . The only way, therefore, to cause the divisions to disappear, is to remind the Christians of their duty to part with error,

and, consequently, with all persons that persist in proclaiming doctrines contrary to Scripture, and to unite with those that teach the pure Word of God. Christians should never agree to disagree on any article of faith, but earnestly endeavor to bring about an agreement on all doctrines revealed in Holy Scripture. Nothing but the revealed truth, and the *whole* revealed truth — that is the platform which God has made for the Christian, and which every Christian is commanded to stand upon. An agreement on a more or less comprehensive collection of so-called 'fundamental articles,' selected by man, leaving a portion of the divinely revealed truth to the discretion of the dissenting parties, is a position wholly unbecoming to Christians, for, not to deny, but to confess the Word of Christ, is their duty in this world." (*Distinctive Doctrines*, p. 127; 137 f.) "Churches cannot unite on the basis of a partial consensus to the Christian doctrine. The reason for that is that nowhere in Scripture is the Church authorized to yield any one article of the Christian doctrine revealed in Scripture. The Church is not the mistress of the Christian doctrine, to add to it or take from it according to circumstances; she is only the maid-servant of the Word of God, and can only confess it." (*Lehre u. Wehre*, 1918, p. 130.)

Some more Lutheran commentary. F. Bente: "The unity of the Spirit, which God demands and which characterizes the Church, requires acceptance of all doctrines of Holy Scripture. . . . According to Eph. 4:13, 14 it is required that all members of the Church keep away from error and remain in one faith and knowledge of the Son of God. And he causes divisions and offenses in the Church who introduces anything un-Scriptural into the Church, Rom. 16:17." (*Lehre u. Wehre*, 1897, p. 204.) Adolf Hoenecke: "No man has the liberty to say: This article is contained in the Bible, but I do not believe in it. He would be subverting the authority of Scripture, the organic foundation. . . . It is certainly left to no man's discretion whether he will believe and confess any particular doctrine which is clearly revealed in Scripture." (*Ev.-Lutherische Dogmatik*, I, pp. 452, 454.) And the centennial publication of the Missouri Synod, *The Abiding Word*, says in volume II, p. 526: "Christ's disciples are not to become guilty of divisions among themselves. They must confess all of Christ, the Christ that rose from the dead, the Christ that

taught, let us say, Infant Baptism or whatever else He has taught in His Word. . . . God wants His children to keep the outward bond of fellowship intact, so that His Word is properly taught and confessed by them."

And some more. Writing in the *Lutheran* of July 15, 1942, Dr. W. H. Greever, secretary of the U. L. C. A., says: "The importance of Christian doctrine depends exactly upon the importance of God's Word. . . . Certainly God has not revealed any truth He does not deem of essential importance, and whoever teaches God's Word to others has no right to omit anything or to discount the importance of anything it contains. The great commission is to teach 'all things whatsoever I have commanded.' The unity in Gospel truth is no less vital than unity in the Law, of which it is said that 'whoever offend in one point is guilty in all.' . . . Every doctrine of the Scriptures which can be formulated clearly as a dogma is an essential doctrine in the Christian faith." In his book *What Matters* he says: "Every doctrine of Scripture which can be formulated clearly as a dogma is an essential doctrine of the Christian faith. . . . The confession of faith, through doctrinal statements, is the basis for any sound organic union in the Church. Any organizational union which is not based on confessional agreement in faith may be more of a manifestation of disunity than of unity." (Pp. 16, 51.) And, says the *Lutheran Witness* of Dec. 30, 1947, Dr. W. H. Greever, in a small pamphlet issued last month, rejects the notion that union may be established on such a simple declaration as this: "I accept Jesus Christ as divine Lord and Savior" (creed of the Federal Council of Churches). He regards every such proposal of union as "dishonest and ineffective." "Those who seek complete unity in Christ can allow for themselves neither doctrinal indifference nor doctrinal indefiniteness. To tolerate a difference in the interpretation of truth is to compromise conviction, and to compromise conviction is to destroy it." He points out that "the Lutheran Church now *stands alone*, in all Christendom, in the *emphasis it puts upon Scriptural doctrine.*" *Landesbischof Ihmels*: "We know that the Lord of the Church has placed the responsibility upon us that nothing of what He has entrusted to His Church should be lost through any fault of ours. And we know that we are responsible to all seeking and inquiring men that we do not withhold from them any-

thing which the Lord would tell them and give them. For that reason we pray in all seriousness: 'Erhalt uns, Herr, bei deiner Lehr.'" (See *Luth. Kz.*, Sept. 6, 1930.)

The proposition: "It is neither necessary nor possible to agree in all non-fundamental doctrines" is not in accord with Matt. 28:20.* Luther and the Formula of Concord disavowed it.

* If the statement criticized means or implies that unity in all non-fundamental doctrines need not be striven for, or that non-fundamental doctrines may be treated like open questions, it certainly must be rejected. But if it merely states that two church bodies may have fellowship even if agreement in all non-fundamental doctrines has not yet been reached and that here on earth full agreement in all non-fundamental teachings is not attainable, a thought is expressed which Dr. Walther voiced repeatedly. Cf., f. i., his Foreword for *Lehre und Wehre*, Vol. 14 (1868), p. 66 f.: "We do not wish to maintain that church fellowship must terminate with a member of the Church as soon as it is evident that he is entertaining an error which contradicts a clear word of God. It is hardly possible to imagine a more horrible fanaticism, definitely destroying the unity of the Church which it seeks to maintain. The Church has never reached a higher degree of unity in doctrine than a fundamental unity. Only an enthusiastic Chiliast could entertain the hope that the Church ever can reach a higher degree. As long as the Church lives in the flesh, it will be just as impossible for her to reach this high degree as it is for her to attain perfect holiness in Christian living and in Christian love. Luther therefore is right when he says: 'If the saints were not subject to error in faith and truth, why does St. Peter teach that they must grow in faith and in the knowledge of Christ? 1 Pet. 2:2. St. Paul also taught that we should grow in Christ so that we would not, like little children, be tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, Eph. 4:12, 14. But as faith decreases in us, error and unbelief will increase.' (St. L., XIX: 1131.) In the second place, we do not wish to maintain that a Church has lost the true character of a Church which an orthodox Christian may fellowship if she still harbors an error which, while not destroying the foundation of faith, nevertheless militates against the clear Word of God. To admit that every true member of the Church may err and to deny at the same time that the entire true Church may err, is a most despicable contradiction of which only a Papist could be guilty. As long as a Church has not hardened herself in her error, that error, even though it may be of a rather serious nature, does not necessitate a separation, least of all if she has begun to strive for unity on the basis of the truth. Luther's words, therefore, are right: 'The holy Church sins and stumbles or even errs at times, as the Lord's Prayer teaches, but she does not defend nor excuse herself. She humbly prays for forgiveness and improves herself as much as she can. Therefore she has forgiveness, and her sin is no longer counted against her.' (St. L., XIX: 1294.) Again he says: 'They (the Papists) do not distinguish between erring and continuing in error. It does not harm the Church to err, but it is impossible for her to continue in error.' (St. L., XIX: 1243.) Finally, Luther wrote: 'It is true that Christendom is holy and cannot err (for the Third Article says, I believe in the holy Christian Church). But this is true in so far as it pertains to the spirit. The Church is only holy in Christ and not in herself. But in as far as she is still in the flesh, she has sin, can err and be deceived. For the sake of the spirit, however, her sin and failings are forgiven. . . . Thus all Christendom erred in the beginning in Jerusalem when it insisted on

Is full agreement in the doctrine merely a luxury which the Church may pass up at the present time? The Lord has commanded the Church to strive after it at all times.

II

Our second point is that the acceptance of all Christian doctrine is needed by the Church for its healthy growth. We can dispense with luxuries, but we need at all times the life-giving food. We need every single doctrine revealed in Holy Scriptures for our spiritual development. "Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope" (Rom. 15:4). The Church feeds on the Savior and His Word. And yielding portions of the truth saps the Church of so much of her spiritual strength. False doctrine, any false doctrine, "will eat as doth a canker." It is a festering sore, and it will ultimately "overthrow the faith" (2 Tim. 2:17-18). Chewing on the chaff of erroneous teachings will destroy the faith. And it is the duty of every minister of Christ to combat the error in whatever form it appears. He must "hold fast the faithful Word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by

circumcision for the heathen and commanded that the Law of Moses had to be kept, otherwise there could be no salvation. This insistence was contrary to the chief doctrine on which Christianity rests, namely, that we are saved alone through Christ and His grace, without the Law and without circumcision, a doctrine that St. Paul maintained only with great difficulty. It is not surprising that the Christian Church later on, when she was not so rich in spirit, erred and missed the mark at times; yet she remained holy through forgiveness of sins, just as the Apostolic Church.' (St. L., XVI: 1410 f.) Finally, we do not wish to maintain that there is no difference between the members of the Church and that all must share the same correct opinion on those points of Biblical doctrine which do not belong to the dogmatical foundation. It may happen that a simple Christian will deny a secondary fundamental doctrine all his life because he cannot grasp the correctness and the necessity of the deduction which is involved. If it is improper to exclude such a man from the communion of the Church as a heretic because he persists in his denial or clings to an error concerning a secondary fundamental doctrine, it all the more is not right to exclude a man because of an error in a point of doctrine which does not belong to the fundamental articles of the Christian faith. Kromayer therefore is right when he says: "The varying degrees of certainty with respect to conclusions drawn from the clear Word of God do not change the authority of the divine Word, but they constitute an excuse for many weak Christians (since they cannot all grasp these conclusions immediately) and demand that those who are able to understand these conclusions because of deeper insight tolerate the weak Christians." (Translated in C. T. M., Vol. 17, July, 1946, pp. 494-496.)

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sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers" (Titus 1:9). When we insist on keeping the whole body of doctrine pure and unadulterated, we are not dishing out a luxury for the Church, but we are providing the food which the Church needs. In the words of L. Keyser: "We must have the whole Christ of the whole Bible, if we want a whole salvation" (*A Reasonable Faith*, p. 50).

H. Sasse utters this warning: "The necessity of bringing into prominence as the essential revelation that part of the Scriptures which contains a direct declaration of the Gospel's promise of grace to the believing sinner, can result in failure to recognize *the importance of other parts of the Scripture.*" (*Here We Stand*, p. 117). And Pieper says: "The Church attains at all times its greatest strength when she abides by the Word of God *in all points.* . . . It is certainly folly to imagine that yielding this or that part of the Christian doctrine would be to the best interest of the Church. . . . If that were the best method for conquering the world, Christ would not have instructed the Church to 'teach them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.' . . . We would be deceiving ourselves if we thought that the union with false teaching or the toleration of false teaching would be of benefit to the Church." (*Proc., Oregon and Washington Dist., 1924*, p. 35.) The Church cannot get along without the doctrine of the angels; it daily needs the comfort given by the presence and protection of the good angels, and the warning against the seduction of the evil angels. But for the doctrine of Sunday the Church might be led back to the nomism of the Jewish Ceremonial Law. The doctrine of the Antichrist keeps the Church on her guard against the mystery of iniquity practiced by the Pope. And the Church needs to be warned against the false hopes of terrestrial happiness set before her by the teachings of millennialism. Not a single doctrine of Scripture belongs in the category of luxury; all of them come under the category of necessity.

In the Preface to the Triglotta edition of the Lutheran Confessions, F. Bente writes: "The Lutheran Church differs from all other churches in being essentially the Church of the pure Word and unadulterated Sacraments. Not the great number of her adherents, not her organization, not her charitable and other institutions, not her beautiful customs and

liturgical forms, etc., but the precious truths confessed by her symbols in perfect agreement with the Holy Scriptures constitute the true beauty and rich treasures of our Church, as well as the *never-failing source of her virility and power.*" (Trigl., p. IV.)

Furthermore, the strength of the Church lies in the *united* confession of all the doctrines revealed. A church in which there is no agreement in doctrine does not appeal to the Christian. "Now, the God of patience and consolation grant you to be like-minded one toward another according to Christ Jesus, that ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 15: 5-6). Luther: "The Holy Ghost produces harmony in the house; He does that by teaching the Christians to believe the same thing, to know the same thing, to teach the same thing. . . . Any other unity is merely external and painted." (XIX:345.) Who would want to live in a house or worship in a church where the minister on one Sunday preaches on the necessity of observing the Jewish Sabbath and on the next Sunday has the guest preacher extol the freedom of the Christians from the Ceremonial Law? What hopeless confusion would arise if under Zwingli's plan, who called the difference in the teaching concerning the Lord's Supper only a "secondary point," at the same altar one minister would distribute the bread according to the Reformed doctrine and the second minister, in handing the cup to the communicants, would say: "This is My blood of the New Testament"? And when the question of the inspiration of Holy Scripture comes up, and H. E. Fosdick preaches the first sermon and declares: "For one thing, we are saved by it" (by discarding Verbal Inspiration and using the new approach to the Bible) "from the old and impossible attempt to harmonize the Bible with itself" (*The Modern Use of the Bible*, p. 24), and the second preacher contends for Verbal Inspiration, only the gross unionist (according to whom also inspiration, the form of it, constitutes a point on which different "approaches" are in order) will feel at home. Dr. J. A. Dell, however, would say that if it comes to a choice between these two: (1) outward unity, with a hushing up or smoothing over of deep-going differences in our view regarding the reliability of the Bible, and (2) outward disunity, even controversy, by which the doctrine of inspiration is

thrust into the foreground, he would prefer the second, for the former case never leads to a real unity. (See *Journal of the Am. Luth. Conference*, March, 1938.) And Dr. Pieper declared: "To have those who confess and those who deny the divine authority of Scripture dwell together in brotherly harmony in the same Church, as though nothing separated them, presents an intolerable situation — though it is practiced today quite generally, even in the Lutheran Church of America" (*Lehre u. Wehre*, 1928, p. 370).

And in the united confession of the truth and the united rejection of all error there lies a mighty power for good. A church thrown together by unionistic practices is not an army, fit to fight the battles of the Lord, but a rabble foredoomed to defeat. But if the Church used all the power put at her disposal by the Lord, employed all the weapons with which her armory is filled, and expelled all traitors from her midst, she would go forward like a mighty army and gain victory after victory.

Walther: "When a theologian is asked to yield and make concessions in order that peace may at last be established in the Church, but refuses to do so in a single point of doctrine, such an action looks to human reason like intolerable stubbornness, yea, like downright malice. . . . But in the end it becomes manifest that this very determined, inexorable Word by no means tears down the Church; on the contrary, it is just this which, in the midst of greatest dissension, builds up the Church and ultimately brings about genuine peace. Therefore, woe to the Church which has no men of this stripe, men who stand as watchmen on the walls of Zion, sound the alarm whenever a foe threatens to rush her walls, and rally to the banner of Jesus Christ for a holy war!" (*Law and Gospel*, p. 28.) Krauth: "In the great mercy of God . . . the work is going on, and will go on, until the old ways have been found — till the old banner again floats on every breeze, and the old faith, believed, felt, and lived, shall restore the Church to her primal glory and holy strength. God speed the day! For our Church's name, her history, her sorrows, and her triumphs, her glory in what has been, her power for the good yet to be, all are bound up with the principle that purity in the faith is first of all, such a first that without it there can be no true second." (*The Conservative Reformation*, p. 200.)

III

A third point. If men have the right to treat the belief of some non-fundamental as a luxury, it will inevitably follow that they will take the right to treat the most fundamental article as equally unnecessary. Whoever denies God in one word, will — unless the grace of God prevents it — deny Him in all words. Luther said that. "It is certain that whosoever does not rightly believe or desire one article (after full instruction and admonition) certainly does not believe any at all with true earnestness and right faith. And whosoever is so presumptuous as to deny God or call Him a liar in one word and does this deliberately, against repeated instruction and admonition, will also deny God in all His words and in all of them call Him a liar. Therefore it is necessary to believe all and everything truly and fully or else believe nothing. The Holy Spirit does not allow Himself to be separated or divided, so that He should teach or have us believe one doctrine as true and another as false." (XX:1781.) "It is a wily and Satanic proposition that demands that we should somewhat yield and tolerate one error in order to preserve Christian unity. Satan is thereby attempting to lead us away from the Word. For if we accept that proposition, he has won the case, and when we yielded only a finger's breadth, he has gained a whole ell and will soon take all." (IX:832.)

St. Paul said that when he, for instance, said: "I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2), he did not say that the various other doctrines which he preached were dispensable, but he included all of them in the doctrine of Christ. All of them affect, in a greater or less degree, the doctrine of salvation through Christ crucified. In the words of Dr. Pieper: "The Christian doctrine is not a big mass of doctrines which have no inner connection, so that one could lose a half dozen of them without noticing any effect on the whole. On the contrary, the Christian doctrine is, as Luther frequently said, a ring which forms a whole; it constitutes a large inner unity." (*Lehre u. Wehre*, 1918, p. 130.) The denial of one little doctrine prepares the way for the denial of some important doctrine and of all doctrines.

Let history tell the sorry tale. Unionism does not simply declare the difference in the doctrines of the Antichrist and of

Eschatology to be immaterial, but it also frowns upon making the difference in the Lord's Supper divisive of church fellowship. It will bear with both synergism and monergism. It will tolerate those who make justification judicial and those who see in it an ethical act. It considers the discussion of the *genus idiomaticum* and the *genus majestaticum* and the *genus apotelesmaticum* a frightful waste of time. It will harm the Church if some insist on the verbal inspiration of the Bible. All these things are non-fundamental; all that is needed is belief in Christ. Says a contributor to *The Reunion of Christendom*: "The acceptance of the historical revelation of God and the historical redemption of man in Jesus Christ is basic. Interpretation of some of the facts may vary and room must be left for literary and historical criticism of the documents; but I at least cannot think of a United Church which did not confess Jesus Christ as divine Savior or Lord. Without asserting the adequacy for the thought of today of the metaphysics of the Nicene Creed, or the literal historicity of every article of the Apostles' Creed, the United Church would declare itself in real and vital continuity of the faith with these confessions of 'the things most surely believed.'" (P.147.) And Dr. Visser 't Hooft, secretary of the World Council of Churches, on July 25, 1947, gave this as the *doctrinal* basis upon which a church is accepted or rejected: "The church must accept Christ as God and Savior." That and nothing more. And, as the *Christian Beacon*, Aug. 28, 1947, remarked: "However, Dr. Visser 't Hooft made it clear that it is up to each church to decide if they are within this bound. Hence, doctrinally the Unitarian Church apparently qualifies if they themselves say they come under its doctrinal line."—Orrin G. Judd declared that "private interpretation of the Scriptures necessarily involves the possibility of disagreement on some points that are not fundamental" (see the *Watchman-Examiner*, Dec. 9, 1943).—"Non-fundamentals," as used by the unionists, covers a wide territory—and R. W. Dale insisted: "It would be treason to trifle with the immortal substance of the Gospel of Christ; it would be treason to charity to refuse to receive as brethren those who may differ from us about the theological *forms* in which the substance of the Gospel may be best expressed" (see Fisher, *Hist. of Christian Doctrine*, p. 556).

The point we are here making is this: the toleration of a single error may be attended with frightful consequences. How, then, can the struggle for agreement in *all doctrines* be dismissed as a luxury? — And it is all the same whether you call it a luxury or something sinful; under either view it should never take place.

The Lutheran Church has never looked upon the agreement in doctrine as a luxury. It has always declared with Luther: "If the devil bring it about that men yield to him in one article, he has won the battle. . . . They are all bound and wound together like a golden chain; if one link is broken, the whole chain falls apart." (IX:827.) And: "I will not swerve one finger's breadth from the mouth of Him who said: 'Hear ye Him.' . . . They say: What is the harm of yielding one point? No, not by a hair's breadth may we yield. If they will hold with us, it is well; if not, let them go their way." (From Luther's last sermon preached in Wittenberg, XII: 1174 f.) And these sentiments of Dr. Luther were reproduced by Dr. J. W. Behnken at the Centennial Convention of 1947: "We must dread and abhor any and every false doctrine as a most dangerous virus which poisons the blood streams of the Church and profanes the name of God. . . . Why have many grown lukewarm in their interest for purity of doctrine? Why do some speak about an irreducible minimum of doctrine on the basis of which we should seek agreement, when no doctrine of God's Word clearly revealed dare to be ignored but all must be held inviolable? . . . If we carry out God's good and gracious will in our lives, we become instruments in His hands that His name may be hallowed and His kingdom come." (*Proceedings*, pp. 2, 3, 5.)

(To be concluded)

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