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Brief Studies

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BRIEF STUDIES

A FLACIUS "PSEUDEPIGRAPHON"

In 1548 Matthew Flacius published the following material in a brochure entitled *Etliche troestliche vermanungen in sachen das heilige Goetliche Wort betreffend*. The title page indicated that the material had actually been published by Martin Luther in 1530. It is true that most of the material was taken from letters which Luther wrote to Melancthon from the Koburg in 1530. Thus technically the brochure is not a pseud-epigraphon. The contents reflect Luther's absolute confidence in God and in the reliability of His Word in every danger and tribulation. Thus it makes a fitting Brief Study in this *Festschrift* issue. The German text is found in the *Weimar Ausgabe*, XXX ii, 700—710. The translation was prepared from this text and a partial Latin text by Carl S. Meyer for an essay which he delivered to the Colorado District Pastoral Conference in 1958 and which was entitled "Luther as Pastoral Adviser to Pastors."

When we experience hardship, tribulation, and persecution on account of the Word of God, such as the Holy Cross brings with it, then the following reasons should reasonably comfort us with the help of God and persuade us in such a time to be of good disposition and to commit our cause to the gracious and fatherly will of God and let it stay there. For St. Paul says, 2 Tim. 3 [:12], "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." And Acts 14 [:22], "We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." And Phil. 2 [:12], "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling."

In the first place, our cause is in the hand of Him who has said so plainly: "Neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand," John 10 [:28]; also Matt. 16 [:18], "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it." And Is. 46 [:4], "And even to your old age I am He,

and even to hoar hairs will I carry you. I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry and will deliver you."

II. So it would not be good counsel that our cause is still in our hand, for then we could and would lose it carelessly.

III. So all of the comforting passages are true and do not lie to us. Ps. 36 [sic, should be Ps. 46:22], "God is our Refuge and Strength, a very present Help in trouble." So says also Sirach the Wise [2:11], "Who has ever been put to shame who hoped in the Lord?" And [1] Macc. 2 [:61], "All who trust in the Lord will be sustained." Also, "Lord, You do not forsake those who seek Thee."

IV. So it is eternally true that God has given His only Son for us all, Rom. 8. If this, then, is true, what do we accomplish with our suffering, despair, sorrow, and fears? If God has given His only Son for us all, how could He bring Himself to forsake us in lesser circumstances?

V. That God is much stronger, mightier, and more powerful than the devil, St. John tells us in his letter, ch. 4 [1, 4:4], "Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world."

VI. If we go under, Christ Himself, the almighty King of the world, must also suffer with us. And even if this cause should go under, we should be more ready to go under with Christ than to stand on earth with the greatest power.

VII. This cause does not lie on our necks only, but there are many pious Christian people in many countries who defend us and stand by us with heartfelt sighs and Christian prayer.

VIII. So we always have many precious and comforting promises and assurances of God, of which the entire Psalter and all the gospels, yes, the whole Scripture, are full. These are not to be despised in any way but are to be prized most highly, such as Ps. 55 [:23]: "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee. He shall never suffer the righteous to be moved." Ps. 22 [sic,

should be 27:14]: "Wait on the Lord. Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen thine heart. Wait, I say, on the Lord." Also Christ Himself says, John 16 [:33], "But be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."

It indeed is not false, this I know for sure, that Christ, the Son of God, has overcome the world. Why, then, do we fear the world as if it were a victorious conqueror? A person really ought to fetch such a passage on his knees from Rome or Jerusalem; however, because we have so many such [passages], we despise them. But that is not good.

IX. Even if our faith is weak, let us only beg earnestly with the apostles, Luke 17 [:5], "Lord, increase our faith." And with the father of the child, Mark 9 [:24], we say, "Lord I believe; help Thou mine unbelief."

X. Now, this matter was much greater and much more dangerous under the Roman emperors Maximilian, Diocletian, and others, who persecuted Christendom severely and undertook to extirpate it entirely — likewise at the time of Jan Hus and others — than in our times.

XI. Even if this matter is great, He also is great, on the other hand, who instigated it, who leads and carries it forward, yes, the almighty Creator of heaven and earth, for this cause is His, not ours. Why, then, should we worry about it ceaselessly and finally torment ourselves to death?

XII. If this cause or doctrine is false, why do we not contradict it? However, if it is righteous, as certainly it is, as certainly as God lives and will remain in all eternity, what reproaches of lying do we speak against God in His manifold, comforting, unchanging, and eternal promises? He bids us be of good cheer in Him and happy, Ps. 32 [:11], "Be glad in the Lord," and Ps. 145 [:18, 19], "The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon Him, to all that call upon Him in truth, He will fulfill the desire of them that fear Him." And Ps. 91 [:14-16]: "Because He has set His love upon Me, therefore will I deliver Him. I will set him on high because he has known My name. He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him. I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honor him.

With long life will I satisfy him and show him My salvation."

XIII. Even though we are very much troubled and anxious, we cannot accomplish anything with our unprofitable worry. Yes, we plague ourselves, and we torment ourselves, and with that we make things only worse. He wishes that we should acknowledge Him as our God and Father in Christ, that we should call upon Him in all troubles, and that we should trust Him assuredly that He will care for us. Peter quotes from the 55th Psalm [Ps. 55:23, quoted in 1 Peter 5:7], "Casting all your care upon Him, for He careth for you." And Christ Himself says, Matt. 6 [:31], "Therefore take no thought."

XIV. So also the devil and his minions can never do more to us than kill us bodily; the soul they must and shall leave untouched, as Christ says and comforts His own in Matt. 10 [:28], "Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul."

XV. Thus Christ, our dear Lord and Savior, once died for sin, as it is written in Rom. 4 and 6, Heb. 5 and 6. Henceforth He will not die again for the sake of righteousness and truth, but He lives and reigns an almighty Lord over all creatures. If this, then, is true, as the Scriptures continually testify, of what, then, are we afraid?

XVI. Even if we must suffer death itself on account of the Word of God, if God also sends this to us, nevertheless the almighty, merciful God, who has become our Father for the sake of Christ, will also be the Protector and Defender of our wives and children, widows and orphans, a friendly and gracious Father and Patron. He, too, will order all things a thousand times better than we during our lifetime.

XVII. Thus our ancestors and progenitors from time immemorial did not have this high, noble, precious treasure, namely, the correct, pure understanding of the divine Word. We, however, have it so richly now (God be praised!) and are living at the same time in which that precious word was again brought to light shortly before the Judgment Day. We have experienced what inexpressible mercy is ours out of the sheer goodness and grace, as

a gift of God. This selfsame God will also hereafter be our God and Creator, and He will remain that, as He has been in the past, and will gather Himself a small remnant and keep it until the end of the world. And He will not die with us or cease to exist, as we of little faith permit ourselves to think.

Thus, the priest Eli thought, when the Philistines captured the ark of the Lord from the Jews, that the entire nation of the Jews had been destroyed together with the priesthood and the Kingdom.

When, however, the priest Eli fell backward and broke his neck, 1 Sam. 4, the kingdom of the Jews was in a much better condition than it had been during his lifetime.

Also when King Saul so pitifully stabbed himself because his people had been conquered and his three sons had been slain in the same battle, 1 Sam. 31, what could anyone suppose differently than that now the kingdom of the Jews would soon come to an end? But only after this, at the time of David and Solomon, did it arrive at its highest power and glory. When the papists burned Jan Hus at the Council of Constance in the year 1416 *(sic)*, they held a triumph and were certain that now they had exalted the papacy to a very great degree, but the pope was never more despised than from that time on.

XVIII. So we are constantly assured through the Word of God that after this miserable, perishable life, of which we are not certain for one instant, there will be an eternal blessed life and kingdom. Otherwise we should have to eradicate the First Commandment together with the entire Gospel and Holy Scriptures. For what need should we have of a God only for the sake of this perishable life, in which those fare best who have no God? If, however, there is a God, as all pious God-fearing hearts believe firmly and certainly and live in that belief and die in it, we shall live not only here a short time, but in all eternity we shall live in that place where He is.

XIX. So the first commandment of God places our children and posterity under the protection and promise of God, since God Himself says: "And showing mercy unto thousands of them that love Me and keep My

commandments" [Ex. 20:6]. These exalted, comforting words of the Divine Majesty we properly believe.

And even if our faith is weak, nevertheless we give God the glory that what He says and promises He can and will also accomplish.

XX. If God permitted all this to be proclaimed to us through an angel, we should not be so free to throw it to the winds, nor should we despise it, as we, sorry to say, do when it is presented to us through the Word. But even if we do not wish to believe oral preaching so readily, yet we should not despise the prophets, Christ Himself, and the apostles. They proclaim to all of us so richly words of comfort, and they admonish us and coax us and, as it were, overwhelm us when they say: "Rejoice in the Lord" [Ps. 32:11]; "Be strong and of good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them" [Deut. 31:6]; "Trust in Him at all times; ye people, pour out your hearts before Him" [Ps. 61:8]; "Oh, give thanks unto the Lord" [Ps. 107:1]; "Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" [John 16:33]; "The Lord is at hand. Be careful for nothing." [Phil. 4:5]

Now, if we do not believe such manifold divine comfort, evidently we would not believe, even if not only one but many angels came and proclaimed this to us.

XXI. So it is certainly true, that if the opposition liquidated all of us at one time—granted that God would permit this to happen—it would not remain unavenged. In a short time even He would address them concerning this who said to Cain, "Where is thy brother?" (Gen. 4:9). He would make fugitives of them and would make the world too narrow for them.

XXII. Only be of good cheer in these matters, as God's Word requires. For Christ, to whom these things belong, will protect them and maintain them against the craft of the troublesome devil and the tyranny of the evil, false world. If they but confess Him before this evil, adulterous generation and on account of this permit themselves much suffering, He will in turn confess them before His heavenly Father and will in eternity reward them their sorrow. So God Himself says, 1 Sam. 2 [:30], "Them that honor Me I will honor." Now,

even if the water fountains of the sea are huge, many waves swell up and roar fiercely, as if they would now drown all of us, nevertheless the Lord is on high. He established His kingdom as wide as the world and has ordained that it should remain. He is greater, yes, He is almighty; He will bring it about. Amen.

Therefore there can be concluded nothing else than this: If we Christians want to live and rule with Him in eternity, we must now suffer continually beforehand.

Since therefore this is so, why, then, do we wish to boast of the dead gods and imagine vain things? Of these Psalm 2 says, "God is in the heavens and laughs and holds them in derision."

Since now the eternal and almighty Ruler, who is called God and who remains eternally, laughs at them and holds them in derision, why should we be afraid of them, fret, and weep? Truly God holds them in derision not for His own sake (He will evidently remain living as the One in heaven in spite of their anger) but for our comfort, that we too might take heart and courage and so might laugh at their onslaughts.

Therefore in these matters nothing is necessary for us but to believe such things and

in strong confidence to pray in the name of Christ that God, because He has erected His kingdom and this is His work, would desire to strengthen the same. For since He has stimulated all this through our activity, counsel, advice, thoughts, and undertakings, and up until this time has regulated it, guided it, and maintained it, I do not doubt in the least that He will surely complete it by our counsel and doings. For I know (says St. Paul), on whom I have believed. I also am certain that He can give more, can do, advise, and help exceedingly much more abundantly than we ask or understand. He is called the Lord, who wonderfully, gloriously, and mightily can and will help, and especially when the need is most pressing. We should be men and not God. (*Wir sollen Menschen und nicht Gott sein.*) We should comfort ourselves with His Word and with all confidence in His promise call upon Him for His deliverance in the day of trouble; He will help us.

That is the summary thereof; nothing else can be made of it; otherwise eternal discontent will be our reward. From this may God preserve us for the sake of His dear Son, our Savior and eternal Priest, Jesus Christ. Amen.
St. Louis, Mo.