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Ein Prediger muss nicht allein weiden, also dass er die Schafe unterweise, wie sie rechte Christen sollen sein, sondern auch daneben den Woelfen wehren, dass sie die Schafe nicht angreifen und mit falscher Lehre verfuerehen und Irrtum einfuehren.

Luther

Es ist kein Ding, das die Leute mehr bel der Kirche behaelt denn die gute Predigt. — *Apologie, Art. 24*

If the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle? — 1 Cor. 14:8

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ARCHIVES

Miscellanea

Union Funerals

[In 1881 the English District of the Ev. Luth. Joint Synod of Ohio and Other States discussed union funerals. The account of the paper submitted on that topic is so good that we reprint it here from the synodical report.]

Brother Simon, having been appointed at Lima to prepare an essay on union funerals, presented such an essay for discussion.

The essayist explained what we mean by union funerals, namely, such as take place when pastors of religious organizations not belonging to the same faith or communion unite in burying the dead with the religious rites and ceremonies. It is also a union funeral when a minister of the Gospel unites with a secret order in attending to the rites connected with the burial of the dead.

It was earnestly urged that this is not a mere matter of preference, but of principle, with the Lutheran Church. We don't oppose such union funerals from bigotry and under the influence of party spirit, but because we are constrained to do so by the plain statements of God's Word, which enjoins it upon us as a duty that we be of the same mind and of the same judgment and that there be no divisions among us.

It is sometimes claimed that we can afford to waive our principles on a funeral occasion. But whence is the proof for such a claim? It is certainly not found in the Bible; for when it is said that we are to mark them which cause divisions and offenses among us, contrary to the doctrine which we have learned, and to avoid them (Rom. 16:17), there is no exception made for the purpose of favoring union funerals or unionism of any kind. We must bear in mind that what is in itself wrong can never be right. If it, then, be wrong to have fellowship in religious matters with persons who have erred from the faith at any time, it is wrong at all times, funeral occasions not excepted, inasmuch as God Himself has made no such exception.

When, however, we oppose union funerals we do not sit in judgment on any *person*, but upon *principles* which are false because they are contrary to God's Word. We do not say that all persons belonging to other churches or communions are not Christians. On the contrary, we admit that there are Christians in all churches in which the fundamental doctrines of salvation are not confessedly rejected. But this admission does not excuse us from holding fast to every principle involved in God's Word and from continuing in every word of our blessed Lord and Master. If a bridge and a rope were both to span the same dangerous stream, there might be some found who would walk the rope safely and get across, either because they knew nothing of the bridge or did not fully appreciate the dangers connected with walking the rope. But would it not be foolhardy and a tempting of God for persons who are aware of the existence of the bridge and of the dangers of the other mode of passage still to prefer the rope to the bridge? It certainly would. Now whilst we admit that there are persons in other churches who still believe enough of saving truth to be saved, we justly claim that we would

be tempting God and despising His Word if we were willing to drop the differences between us and those persons on the ground of the admission we have made of the possibility of their being children of God. Of him to whom much is given much will be required. Our Church has received much; therefore much is required of her also in the way of consistency with the principles she finds laid down in God's Word.

Moreover, it is inconsistent with the principles of unionists themselves to have union funerals; for they claim that they have a divine right to be the overseers of their respective flocks, whilst they admit that the Holy Ghost has not made them overseers of anybody else's flock. But in union funerals Pastor A. does a work to which God has called Pastor B. and which A. therefore has no divine right to perform.

The first point in the essay proper is this: Union funerals are a public recognition of the different faiths represented. This is a glaring inconsistency and a sin against the plain commandments of God. We can take part in such funerals only by agreeing to disagree, which involves, for the time being, a denial of the truth and therefore a denial of Christ.

No doubt one reason why such union funerals are so prevalent is that death calls forth such tender sympathies. Another reason is that persons of different denominations are united in marriage. But whilst we have all respect for the sympathies connected with the death of friends and relatives, and whilst we appreciate the difficulties which are involved in the intermarriage of persons of different denominations, we still cannot, on account of human sympathies and difficulties, sacrifice principles founded on the unerring truths of God's Word.

Why did the Protestant sects separate from the Lutheran Church? Did they do it for the purpose of teaching doctrines which we and they hold in common? By no means. The sects separated from our Church for the very purpose of teaching doctrines confessedly distinct from ours. The doctrines which have driven us away from Rome keep us away from Rome today and on all occasions so far as fellowship with it in religious matters is concerned. The sects, however, do not say: "So the Word teaches; so God wants us to believe," but: "So we think; such is our opinion." But we ask: "What does God's Word teach?" and having found the proper answer, we hold fast to it at every hazard, at all times, and on all occasions. It is on this principle that we act over against union funerals. We hold and firmly believe that God's Word requires us to refrain from uniting with sectarians or secretists in performing the funeral rites of those who have departed this life; and for this reason we refrain from so doing. It is not likely either that a man who is a minister in a sect and is accustomed to preach false doctrine will teach only the true doctrine on the occasion of a funeral. Moreover, if it is ever necessary to have the pure Word preached and to beware of false doctrine, it is necessary when the dead are to be buried, inasmuch as we then generally have such persons before us as attend church only on funeral occasions; and besides, the people are then more susceptible to the truth than they are under other circumstances.

Furthermore, it is always wrong to deny Christ. But to deny any part of Christ's words is to deny Christ Himself. Now, at a union funeral Christ's words are denied, if not in whole, yet in part; and

therefore Christ Himself is denied, and hence a great and exceedingly dangerous sin is committed.

If, now, we cannot engage in union funerals with a sectarian minister, how is it possible for us to engage in such funerals with the chaplain of a secret order in which Christ is professedly denied? We certainly cannot do this unless we are willing to deny our blessed Lord.

The result of refusing to practice unionism has been the growth of those who so refused.

True church unity is unity in faith, in principle, and in confession. As union funerals are engaged in on the basis of a denial of a part of the faith of God's Word, it follows that such funerals are radically opposed to true church unity.

Quotations from the Church Fathers:

Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, who was cast into a den of wild beasts and torn in pieces because he would not deny his Lord (115 A. D.), writes in his *Epistle to the Philadelphians*, in the sixth chapter: "If any one will follow him who has separated himself from the truth, he cannot inherit eternal life; and whoever will not separate himself from the lying preachers, will be cast into hell."

Chrysostom, of the fourth century, who because of his faith was banished from his country, declares in his forty-sixth sermon on Matthew: "Not he separates himself from the Church who does this externally, but he who in spirit leaves the foundation of churchly truth. We are indeed separating ourselves from those (Arians who denied the doctrine of the Trinity) according to the body, but they are separating themselves by their doctrine."

Ambrose, of the same century, Bishop of Milan, a man noted for his affability and gentleness, says in his *Commentary on Luke 6*: "We must separate ourselves from a church that denies the faith."

In harmony with these Fathers is the very first confession of the Lutheran Church. We refer to the Unaltered Augsburg Confession. In this noble symbol, which caused the powers of Europe to tremble, we find in each article first a statement of the true doctrine and then, when such was necessary, a clause condemning those of the contrary opinion. In the first article, for example, the true doctrine of God is first stated, after which are condemned all heresies which have sprung up against this article, as the Manicheans, Valentinians, Arians, Eunomians, Mohammedans, and all such like. In the second article the doctrine of original sin is first stated and then are condemned "the Pelagians and others who deny that this original fault is sin." In the fifth article the Anabaptists and others are condemned, who "imagine that the Holy Spirit is given to men without the outward Word." The Methodists, the Reformed, and the Baptists of our day would fall under the same condemnation. In the ninth article are condemned the Anabaptists, and with them all "who reject the baptism of children and affirm that children are saved without Baptism." In the tenth article the true doctrine of the Lord's Supper is given and then added: "And they disapprove of those that teach otherwise." Now, it is known that all the Protestant churches outside of the Lutheran do teach otherwise. They are accordingly disapproved, or condemned.

And this confession we have made our confession and, by doing so, have approved what it approves and condemned what it condemns. And we shall now, in order to please men and to conform ourselves to the spirit of our age, become unfaithful to this confession and, by holding fellowship with errorists, approve what our forefathers condemned? Hear also what we confess in the last of our confessions, the Formula of Concord, p. 727: "From this our declaration, friends, foes, and all can clearly perceive that it is not our purpose for the sake of temporal peace, tranquillity, and union to make any concession that might prove detrimental to the eternal, immutable truth of God (which indeed does not lie within our power to do), nor would that peace and union which is adverse to the truth and tends to a suppression of it have any permanence; much less are we disposed to commend or to connive at any corruption of the pure doctrine or at manifest and condemned errors. But that union we love and delight in and cordially and earnestly desire on our part, according to our utmost abilities, to promote by which the honor of God is not violated, the divine truth of the holy Gospel not in any point impaired, the least error not countenanced, but by which poor sinners are brought to true and genuine repentance, strengthened by faith, confirmed in new obedience, and thus justified and eternally saved through the merit of Christ alone."

Luther was indeed decidedly opposed to every connivance at false doctrine, yet earnestly desired that the divisions in the Church might be healed. He writes in his letter to Bucer: "Believe me that I desire to put an end to this dissension, and if it would cost my life three times. For I have seen how necessary you are to us and what calamity this (division) has brought and is still bringing upon the Gospel, so that I am confident that the gates of hell, the entire Papacy, all of Turkey, the whole power of the flesh and all evil, could not do so great injury to the Gospel, if we were united. . . . That I refuse to enter into this union you will accordingly not ascribe to my obstinacy; but if you will deal at all justly, you will ascribe it to my righteous conscience and the necessity of my faith. The Lord Jesus enlighten us and make us perfectly one. For this I pray; for this I lament; for this I sigh."

So decided was Luther in his mind that union with false teachers and the consequent recognition of false doctrine was sinful that, even at a time when a division in the evangelical party seemed detrimental to the Church, inasmuch as the Papacy had passed the death-sentence upon the Reformation and was now mustering together all her forces to put an end to the work of the Reformation, still Luther, bound in his conscience, refused to extend the right hand of fellowship to Zwingli at Marburg and declared to him: "You have not the same spirit that we have."

Hear Luther once more: "In the first place, to begin with this, that they write and make books and then admonish that unity, love, and peace should not be destroyed on this account; for (say they) it is an insignificant matter and a dispute about little things, on account of which Christian love should not be hindered, and abuse us because we are so unbending and obstinate and thus cause division. My dear sirs, what shall we say? Our fate is that of the sheep which came to the water with the wolf. The wolf entered the stream above, the sheep below.

The wolf began to accuse the sheep of making the water cloudy for him. The sheep answered: How can I make the water cloudy for you? In short, the sheep had to bear the blame of making the water cloudy. So also these fanatics, who have kindled the fire, as they themselves loudly boast, and that it is a blessing, are now trying to put the blame of division upon us.

“Who told Dr. Carlstadt to make a beginning? Who told Zwingli and Oecolampadius to write? Have they not done so of their own accord? We would gladly have preserved the peace and would still do so, but they would not; now are we to blame, and this must be right. But it does seem to me that, if these fanatics do not fear God, they ought to be ashamed of the people and not write such shameless lies. They say that the peace ought to be preserved, and are themselves constantly disturbing it, as every one knows, and they delight also in seeing this evil spread. Again, they say it is a little matter, and yet there is nothing that they are so much concerned about as this very thing; no time is left for anything else. In this they become martyrs and saints; and whoever will not follow them in their fanaticism is no Christian, knows nothing of the Scriptures nor of the Spirit; so great and wonderful a thing it is to be able to say bread and wine; and this is at present the exclusive work of the Holy Spirit. It does seem as if the very devil were yet mocking us through them, saying: I will bring about every calamity and discord and will then wipe my mouth and say, I desire and seek love and peace, just as we find it written in the Psalm: ‘Which speak peace to their neighbors, but mischief is in their hearts,’ Ps. 28:3. Since, then, they are such profligate wretches, whose equals may not be found in all the world, I will here give them a Lutheran warning: Let such love and union be accursed in the depths of hell, inasmuch as such union does not only most wretchedly divide Christianity but, besides, in a Satanic manner mocks and ridicules her in her distress. I will not put the worst construction on their conduct and ascribe it to their malice, but rather that Satan has thus blinded them and that their conscience accuses them in this manner: We have indeed given great offense and kindled a fire, but we will now gloss and paint it over with words and endeavor to obtain forbearance by making it appear that the matter is of little importance. And if we should lose the cause, this would be in our favor, that we had lost nothing of importance and brought a little reproach upon ourselves, as it is said when singers make a mistake: That’s only a blunder. My dear sirs, no such love and peace for me. If I would murder a man’s wife and child and, besides, seek his life and then say to him: My dear friend, let us have peace; we will love each other; it is not of such great importance that we ought to fall out about it; what would the man answer? How very dear I should be to him! Such is the conduct of the fanatics; they destroy Christ, my Lord, for me, together with God the Father, in His words; they also destroy my mother, the Christian Church, together with my brethren, and are also seeking my life and then say: Let there be peace; let us love each other.”

In connection with the discussion of Brother Simon’s paper he was requested by Synod to publish the same in the *Standard*.