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Theological Observer

THE DEEPENING LITURGICAL CRISIS

During the past year the theological journals of both seminaries have raised reasoned protests against the products of the Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship. Some districts of the Synod have joined their voices to this cry of alarm. The South Wisconsin District, indeed, has said what really must be said; at its June convention it urged the Synod to withdraw from plans for an inter-Lutheran hymnal and to concentrate on developing a new hymnal for our Synod (*Reporter*, July 5, 1976, p. 8; *The Lutheran Witness*, August 1, 1976, p.22). There is unfortunately no alternative for an orthodox Lutheran church. The Synod, indeed, will violate its own constitution if it continues to use the ILCW products. For one of the conditions of membership in Synod is the "exclusive use of doctrinally pure agenda, hymnbooks, and catechisms in church and school" (*Constitution*, VI, 4).

Yet the products of the ILCW are doctrinally impure in every case. We give but a few of the many possible examples:

- (1) They presuppose the validity of modern higher criticism and the so-called ecumenical movement (*Contemporary Worship* 6, pp. 4, 13-14, and *passim*).
- (2) They correspondingly reject what they call a "narrowly defined orthodoxy" (*CW* 6, p. 12).
- (3) They assert or imply that some of the traditional Scripture lessons are incongruous with the Gospel, are irrelevant to modern man, are no longer "exegetically defensible," or are socially hazardous (*CW* 6, pp. 16-17).
- (4) They do not distinguish properly between the apocrypha and the canonical books of the Old Testament (*CW* 6, p.23).
- (5) They commemorate as saints, not only unitarians and enthusiasts, but even the Antichrist himself (*CW* 6, pp.43, 46, 40).
- (6) They teach the brotherhood of all mankind without respect to state of grace (*CW* 1, hymn 4).
- (7) They misrepresent the doctrine of Christ's descent into hell as a mere descent to the dead (*CW* 5, p. 13, and *passim*).
- (8) They turn the Sacrament into a sacrifice by reintroducing the Eucharistic Prayer rejected by Luther (*CW* 2, pp. 15-17; *The Great Thanksgiving*, *passim*). And it is no use making a proper proclamation of the Words of Institution an alternate track to the Eucharistic Prayer, as the ILCW

has now evidently decided to do (*Reporter*, July 5, 1976, p. 1). The Commission may thereby meet the needs of the pastor who wants a hymnal in which he could choose orthodoxy for ordinary Sundays and heterodoxy for special feast days. But we hope that few in Synod will settle for seeing pure doctrine and impure side by side in their hymnal.

In other matters, moreover, which of themselves are adiaphorous, undesirable tendencies which have usually been indicative of doctrinal impurity abound in the products of the ILCW. Again, this case is clear from but a few instances:

- (1) They prefer agreement with Rome to "loyalty to our heritage" and "reverence for the Western lectionary tradition" (*CW* 6, p.14). This preference is understandable in view of the presuppositions noted above.
- (2) They omit from the marriage service any suggestion of the obedience which the wife owes to the husband (*CW* 3). This omission is a pathetic capitulation to the demands of the women's liberation movement. The church of our day must counter those demands more vigorously than ever before by emphasizing the proper role of husband and wife according to Scripture.
- (3) They direct that the bread and wine for the Eucharist be brought to the altar with the offering, thereby emphasizing the change from Sacrament to sacrifice (*CW* 2, p.31).
- (4) They have renamed the Sundays "after Trinity" Sundays "after Pentecost" (*CW* 6, p. 10) and they have dropped the Trinitarian conclusion to the collects (*CW* 6, p. 6). These actions are worrisome in view of the apparent erosion of the doctrine of the Trinity in American Lutheran circles. A recent issue of *The Lutheran*, the official organ of the Lutheran Church in America, advocated the ancient heresy of modal monarchianism (June 2, 1976, p. 29).

The important point which we must all grasp is that the ILCW materials are not generally sound productions which must now be cleansed of some unfortunate faults in order to produce a new hymnal. Quite to the contrary, the endeavours of the ILCW were from the start founded upon woefully unsound presuppositions. Hence, any resemblance between its products and authentic Lutheran theology is purely coincidental. If, then, the Synod is convinced that it needs a new hymnal, it will have to begin its preparation all over again. And the Synod will have to commit this task to orthodox Lutheran theologians with a deep appreciation for the tried and tested forms of worship, lessons, and

hymns whereby we have joyfully offered up our praises to God in the manner of our fathers and of their fathers before them. But the bad ship ILCW we must abandon as quickly as possible. It is no use trying to plug the holes; the hull is built of cheese-cloth.

Judicius