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Jesus:

I. The Light of the World.

JOHN 8, 12.

Less than a hundred years ago one of the world's greatest thinkers is reported to have exclaimed upon his deathbed: More Light. He had lived in a so-called Christian country, had been reared in the Christian religion, and had made the customary professions of the Christian faith in his early youth. In the battle of life, however, with its passions and its emotions he had lost most of his Christian character, had delved deep into the Pyrean spring of human learning, and though admittedly one of the colossal minds of all ages, with a knowledge of earthly wisdom, of the ways, the feelings, and the experiences of men such as few men ever had, on his deathbed the great Goethe had to cry out for more light. In the presence of death he was enshrouded in darkness.

About four thousand years ago there lived in a far eastern country, among Gentile peoples, a man who is described in Sacred Writ as perfect and upright, one that feared God and eschewed evil. He had been blessed by God in family, in riches, in friends. But under a permissive providence of God all was taken from him, and with his own body wasting away with putrefying sores, and his own wife tilting him with the advice to "bless God and die," old Job is portrayed as lifting up his voice, and with a vision that transported his believing soul, is recorded to have exclaimed: "I know that my Redeemer liveth."

Nearly two thousand years ago there lived in Jerusalem, the

Confessionalism of the Missouri Synod.

PROF. W. H. T. DAU, St. Louis, Mo.

3. THE CRITICAL SITUATION IMMEDIATELY BEFORE THE ORGANIZATION OF THE SYNOD.

We protest against the designation "Old Lutherans" that is forced upon us, because, in very fact, there are only Lutherans, that is, such as join in the Lutheran Confession, and non-Lutherans, that is, such as reject, more or less, this *thoroughly* Scriptural, orthodox-churchly Confession; whether they are papists, fanatics, or false brethren, and whether the principal cause of their partial rejection of the truth is the pride of self-righteousness and work-righteousness, as in the case of Romanists, or the pride of haughty carnal reason, as in the case of fanatics and false brethren.

*From Dr. Sihler's review of a report of the organization of the Missouri Synod, November 30, 1847.*¹⁾

Within two months after the organization of the Missouri Synod the report of its first convention was submitted to the public. In a review of this publication an Eastern writer introduced the new synod as follows: "This new synod is composed of genuine 'Old Lutherans,' the real, spotless orthodox, whose theology is as strict and straight as the Symbolical Books can make it, and whose acts of worship are as stiff as such thoroughbred old-school folks could desire to have them."²⁾ It is this remark that called forth the protest of Dr. Sihler cited at the head of this article. The

1) *Der Lutheraner*, Vol. 4, p. 51.

2) Contribution signed "Hermann" in *Luth. Observer*, Vol. 15, No. 1.

remark characterizes the confessional attitude of the writer and of those whom he represented better than that of the Missouri Synod. Nobody in America that was in a position to observe Walther and his followers could reasonably be in doubt regarding the distinctive feature of the new body that was organized at Chicago, Monday, April 26, 1847. The basis and plan of the new organization had been published long before the Chicago convention,³⁾ and it was known to all Lutherans in America that the sole reason for organizing a new Lutheran synod was the issue of confessionalism. Chapter 2 of the draft for a constitution of the new body had made this issue both plain and prominent, when it named among the "conditions of membership" the following: "Acceptance of all the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church" (these were enumerated in detail) "as the pure, unadulterated presentation and exposition of the divine Word; renunciation of all syncretistic church-fellowship, such as, serving union churches" (usually with a Reformed and Lutheran membership) "as such, taking part in the worship and sacramental acts of heterodox and mixed congregations" (unionistic pulpit- and altar-fellowship), "cooperating with heterodox tract- and mission-societies; exclusive use of pure books of worship and instruction in churches and schools (liturgies, agendas, hymn-books, catechisms, readers)."

But for this confessional issue, there are reasons to believe that the organization of the Missouri Synod would have been averted. Not all of the Saxon immigrants, Walther's immediate followers, favored the movement to organize a synod. The settlements in Perry County sent no delegates to the Chicago Convention; Rev. G. H. Loeber of Altenburg alone attended the Convention and joined the Synod as an advisory member.⁴⁾ In Walther's congregation at St. Louis there were long and tedious discussions of the draft of the synodical constitution, which was revised in important points, and of the question whether the congregation should join the Synod.⁵⁾ It was not indifference on the part of these Lutherans that caused them to hesitate, but chiefly the dread of raising up some kind of a hierarchy over the congregations. They were won

3) September 15, 1846; *Der Lutheraner*, Vol. 3, pp. 2—6.

4) Rev. O. Fuerbringer, then at Elkhorn Prairie, Ill., did the same.

5) In the old *Protokollbuch* of Trinity Congregation the minutes for May 11, 18, 22, 25; June 2, 4, 8, 11, 15, 18, 1846; and for January 11; February 1, 16, 22; April 12, 1847, show with what care the plan of the new synod was discussed, and what scruples had to be removed.

for the plan when they realized the confessional issue that was involved in the proposed organization.

It is but fair to say that the confessional issue, and therewith the organization of the Missouri Synod, was forced by the very parties who afterwards denounced it in terms neither charitable, nor just, nor pleasant. To cite a few instances to the point. In 1845 the *Lutherische Kirchenzeitung*, in its issue of December 18, published, in the form of a letter addressed to the President of the synod, a notice of withdrawal from membership in the Ohio Synod that involved eight pastors and one teacher.⁶⁾ The reasons for this withdrawal were mainly of a confessional nature. The letter sets forth the following grievances of the parties withdrawing: 1. A conference in Eastern Ohio had, in 1844, laid before the Ohio Synod the question: "Which synods [in America] are Lutheran?" Synod deferred its answer one year, and then tabled the question. This was done while the spokesmen of the Lutheran General Synod, which had called itself the American Lutheran Church, had recklessly repudiated the Lutheran doctrine of the Sacraments, and adopted anti-Lutheran practises of the Methodists. The questioners had hoped that their synod would declare against these aberrations from the Lutheran standards. 2. The unionistic formula of distribution⁷⁾ had been in use in the Ohio Synod, together with an "unchurchly and Calvinistic formula of absolution." The ritual for the ordination of a minister demanded no confessional pledge from the candidate. A request that these defects be removed passed unheeded, and the members of synod were officially recommended the use of the Synod's *Agenda* of 1842, which embodied these un-Lutheran features. 3. Some of the parties signing the letter of withdrawal had previously petitioned their synod to state publicly that the Synod accepted all the Confessions of the Lutheran Church, and pledged itself to the same; to issue a testimony, or declaration against the General Synod's false doctrine on the Sacraments; to institute a thorough reform of the prevailing method of examining candidates for the ministry; to pledge candidates at their ordination to all the Con-

6) Rev. Fred. Winkler, Detroit, Mich.; Rev. Dr. W. Sihler, Fort Wayne, Ind.; Rev. A. Schmidt, Cleveland, O.; Rev. J. G. Buërger, Hancock Co., O.; Rev. J. A. Ernst, Neudettelsau, O.; Rev. Andrew Saupert, Evansville, Ind.; Rev. W. Richmann, Bern Township, Fairfield Co., O.; Rev. Aug. Selle, Columbiana Co., O.; Mr. E. A. Schuermann, Pittsburgh, Pa.

7) "Christ says: Take, eat," etc.

fessions of the Lutheran Church; and to cease serving union churches composed partly of Reformed, partly of Lutherans. The report on this petition was remanded to the committee in charge on technical grounds, and led to a withdrawal of the petition by its authors, who asked, as a substitute, that the Synod declare "that henceforth at the ordination of ministers there shall be given a solemn pledge to all the Symbols of the Evangelical Lutheran Church." Action on this request was deferred three years. The petitioners inferred from this that the Synod in the majority of its members did not seriously intend to take a definite stand on the confessional issue that had been raised. A minor complaint was that the seminary of the Synod at Columbus had "in a faithless and illegal manner" been deprived of its German character, contrary to the constitution, and this action seemed the more grievous because of the four Lutheran seminaries in the country the Columbus Seminary was the only one with a German character.

In reporting this incident in the issue of *Der Lutheraner* for January 24, 1846,⁸⁾ Dr. Walther remarked: "With profound sadness we communicate to our readers these transactions. They show us, alas! that even in America no denomination has suffered as great a decay as the society of those calling themselves 'Lutheran.' All the sects of our country are more zealous to preserve the false teachings on which their organizations are based and which give them their distinctive character, than the so-called Lutherans of our country are concerned about retaining the holy and pure doctrine based on the clear Word of God, which had been entrusted to them by God's unspeakable grace. Yea, we see that in the American Lutheran Church the prevailing spirit is not only one of negligence and indifference, but of hostility to the true Lutheran Church. It has retained nothing but the name; the old truth and the old spirit of confessorship it has lost.

"However, we also see from the foregoing account that we have no reason to despair utterly of the existence of the Lutheran Church in America. Evidently, God is once more seizing His fan to purge His threshing-floor, and to winnow His wheat. Evidently God has decided to look on no longer at the pilfering of false saints and at their fishing in troubled waters. God is beginning again here and there to open a few eyes that are horrified to behold the defection of which the Lutherans have become guilty. Here and there God is again raising up men who cry aloud that there

8) Vol. 2, p. 42 f.

must be a return to the first love which has been forsaken. God be praised: after 'a long winter the voice of the turtle-dove is again heard in our land!⁹⁾

“Up, up, then, dear brethren! Let us not idly look on while false brethren are closing their ranks more firmly, to undermine and remove the foundation of our Church. Fighting treacherously under our name, they are more dangerous than our declared enemies: they are our enemies' allies, and yet are in our camp. True, 'He that sits in the heavens laughs at them, and the Lord has them in derision.'¹⁰⁾ For, 'though the waters of the sea roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. Selah. There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early.'¹¹⁾ However, just as impossible as it is to force Luther's doctrine out of the world, just as easy is it for us, unless we hold fast the faithful Word,¹²⁾ and contend for the faith,¹³⁾ to lose our treasure,¹⁴⁾ and, in the end, to be rejected as unfaithful stewards.

“Therefore, let us who not only call ourselves Lutherans in hypocritical fashion, but purpose to be and remain such in deed and truth,—let us band together and once more rally around the banner of the old unalterable doctrine of our Church. Let us jointly beseech the Lord to arise and set us in safety from them that puff at us.¹⁵⁾ Let us join in a faithful confession of the truth. Let us together fight with the sword of the Spirit against all falsifications, and together bear the reproach with which the Lord, as a rule, marks His servants. While we may not hope in these last, horrible times to restore the Church to a flourishing and glorious condition by our testimony, we must not, on the other hand, surrender the hope that our testimony and our contending will not be altogether in vain, but will result in praise for the Lord and turn many a soul from the error of its way.”

A similar event in the summer of 1846 took four pastors¹⁶⁾ out of the Synod of Michigan. These pastors had remonstrated

9) Song of Sol. 2, 11—13.

10) Ps. 2, 4.

11) Ps. 46, 3—5.

12) Titus 1, 9—11.

13) Jude 3.

14) 2 John 8. 9.

15) Ps. 12, 5; Luther translates (v. 6): “Ich will eine Hilfe schaffen, dass man getrost lehren soll.”

16) Rev. W. Hattstaedt, pastor at Monroe, Mich.; Rev. A. Craemer, pastor of a mission congregation at Frankenmuth, Mich.; Rev. Fr. Lochner, pastor at Toledo, O.; and Rev. J. Trautmann, pastor at Danbury, O.

against the admission of Rev. Dumser to the membership of their synod on the ground that he declared an unconditional pledge to all confessional writings a violation of his conscience and refused to give such a pledge. The Michigan Synod itself stood officially pledged to all the confessions of the Lutheran Church, but the majority of its pastors were inclined to tolerate the confessional license of Rev. Dumser. The remonstrants also asked the synod to discontinue its practise of serving union churches as such. Their remonstrance was set aside by a majority vote of the synod in June, 1846, and thereupon they left the Michigan Synod.¹⁷⁾

Of the men who passed through these experiences in their synods, Ernst, Sihler, Craemer, Selle, Richmann, Trautmann, and Hattstaedt were among the charter members of the Missouri Synod a year later. Since the entire clerical membership recorded for the first convention amounted to twenty-two pastors, these seven men who had left other synods because of the confessional issue represented nearly one-third of the membership of the new body. Their grievances were, of course, the grievances of every member of the Missouri Synod.

On November 10 — Luther's birthday — 1845, a remarkable document was signed at Gettysburg, Pa.,¹⁸⁾ which was printed the same year and sent to Germany. Dr. Walther reviewed the contents of this paper January 24, 1846, in *Der Lutheraner*.¹⁹⁾ He characterizes it as "the General Synod's official avowal of its defection from Lutheran doctrine and from the Lutheran Church." A brief examination of this document will show the justice of Dr. Walther's verdict. The authors, speaking as representatives of the General Synod, declare that they have always regarded as a fundamental principle of Lutheranism the statement with which Mosheim introduces his description of the Lutheran Church, *viz.*, that in the view of this Church every vital duty must be established solely and exclusively from Scripture, and that the Symbolical Books must be subordinated to the Divine Word. This principle, they

17) *Der Lutheraner*, Vol. 3, p. 98 ff.

18) By "Dr. S. S. Schmucker, Professor of Theology at the seminary of the General Synod of the Lutheran Church at Gettysburg, Pa.; Dr. B. Kurtz, Editor of the *Lutheran Observer* at Baltimore, Md.; Dr. H. N. Pohlmann, Pastor of the Lutheran Church at Albany, N. Y.; Dr. J. G. Morris, Pastor of the First Lutheran Church at Baltimore, Md.; Rev. H. J. Schmidt, Professor at the seminary at Hartwick in the State of New York."

19) Vol. 2, p. 43 f.

say, has been frequently applied by them in their activity in America. Their synod has required of its members only an essential agreement in doctrinal and ethical views. Its formula for licensing and ordaining ministerial candidates requires that the following promise be given: "We believe that the fundamental truths of the Bible are presented in the doctrinal articles of the Augsburg Confession in a manner essentially correct." Their confessional views they condense in the maxim: "*In fundamentalibus Lutheranismi unitas, in non-fundamentalibus libertas, in omnibus caritas*" ("In the fundamentals of Lutheranism, unity; in non-fundamentals, liberty; in all things, charity"). Appealing to the heterogeneous population of America, they assert that strict uniformity is not attainable here. One must be tolerant of divergent views, be satisfied with the essentials of orthodox teaching, and in regard to Lutheranism practise a liberal eclecticism, and favor a free development of the Church under the peculiar conditions that exist in this country. "As regards our doctrinal views, we do not hesitate to state, yea, we profess emphatically and publicly, that the great majority of us are not Old Lutherans in the sense of a small party in Germany that bears this name. We are convinced that the great Luther himself, if he were still living, would not be an Old Lutheran. We believe that the last three centuries have produced men as able to think, investigate, and construct as those of the sixteenth century. Yea, though we have a humble opinion of ourselves, we are nevertheless bold enough, and our sense of duty urges us, to search the Scriptures for ourselves, and to draw our doctrinal views from this heavenly fountain. Still, we are Evangelical Lutheran. Holding fast the fundamental principle of Luther that God's Word alone is infallible, we have tested Luther's doctrinal system by this principle and found it essentially correct. In most of our ecclesiastical principles we occupy common ground with the union ['unierte'] church of Germany. We do not consider the distinctive views that divide the Old Lutherans from the Reformed essential. The school of the so-called Old Lutherans, it seems to us, is behind the age. The glorious Reformation of the sixteenth century was neither instantaneous nor perfect. The great Luther was progressive as long as he lived, and at the end of his career regarded his work as unfinished. We follow his advice," etc. The writers now proceed to endorse the dogmatical position of Mosheim and Reinhard, repudiate as obsolete Luther's peculiar view of the Lord's Supper, admitting merely a spiritual presence of Christ with believing communicants, and

declare infant baptism to be for the purpose of receiving the infant into the membership of the visible Church. Universalists, whose basis, as a rule, is Socinian, are denounced, but the Methodists are credited with having "done much good." Only their order of service does not suit Germans. Germans who are emigrating to America are advised not to attempt a separate organization, parallel to that of the Evangelical State Church of Germany; for the attempt would ultimately miscarry. There is little hope for a German Lutheranism in America. The *Lutherische Kirchenzeitung* is moribund. The Columbus Seminary, which recently came under the control of Germans and Old Lutherans, has been abandoned by Americans and has suspended operations.

Such were the conditions, viewed from the standpoint of confessional fidelity, in the Lutheran Church of America on the eve of the organization of the Missouri Synod. This new synod simply could not avoid becoming a standing offense, and being regarded as a constant provocation, and an irritant to the older Lutheran synods already existing in this country. The opprobrium that was heaped upon it could have been escaped only by the Missouri Synod's declining to be born; and it can be removed in most instances where it exists to-day only by the Missouri Synod as a confessionally distinct body going out of existence. Possibly this may happen. No visible church has a lease on endless perpetuity. But the vanishing of the name of the Missouri Synod would not remove the real difficulty. That lies in confessionalism. Confessionalism is an expression of a vital faith, and is as indestructible as faith, and the Word of Grace, which produces that faith, and Christ, the Author and Finisher of that faith. As long as this world endures, there will always be champions of God's Word and Luther's doctrine pure, and the trouble which the confessionalism of the Missouri Synod seems to have created will not end till Judgment Day.

Whoever will write the exhaustive history of the American Lutheran Church, we venture to say, will come to a point, about the year 1845, where it would have been easy to form one united Lutheran Church on a genuine Lutheran basis. It was not the fault of the men who were compelled to organize the Missouri Synod that this consummation devoutly to be wished was not achieved.
