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

Luther

Es ist kein Ding, das die Leute mehr bei 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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Advent and Lent "Closed Seasons"?

An outline submitted to, and adopted by, the Joint Pastoral Conference
Detroit, Michigan

Historical Background

A. *Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia* under the caption "Tempus Clausum":

"A canonical term applied to those days on which noisy festivities, especially the merrymakings usually incidental to marriage, are not allowed. These prohibitions had their origin, in part at least, in the theories that governed the introduction of fasts. At quite an early period, prayer and continence were commended by way of preparation for a worthy observance of feast-days.

"The Council of Trent" (1545—1563) "inaugurated a modified restriction in this matter and ruled (Session 24, chap. 10): 'From the Advent of our Lord until the Day of Epiphany and from Ash Wednesday until the octave of Easter, inclusively, let the ancient prohibitions of nuptial celebrations be diligently observed by all.'

"Benedict XIV" (1740—1758) "amplified the prohibition, stating: 'Even during the times expressed marriage may be contracted before the parish priest; only the nuptial celebrations, feasts, escorting processions, AND CARNAL INTERCOURSE [capitals are ours] are forbidden. Thus it appears that so-called "quiet weddings" may take place in the prohibited season, though not without episcopal dispensation, save in so far as in extraordinary instances the priest is permitted to officiate at a marriage even without a dispensation.'

"The German Evangelical Church retained the forbidden season as a Catholic custom; and the Church orders of the 16th century also, to some extent, recognize the same expressly. But from the beginning both legislation [!] and usage produced great variations."

B. The Modern Papal Church in the *New Catholic Dictionary*, published in New York, says under the heading "Closed Times":

"The present code of laws" (dated 1919) "does not forbid a marriage mass at any time; it prohibits the nuptial blessing during Advent and on Christmas Day and during Lent and on Easter Sunday; but with the permission of the bishop the blessing may be given even during those times."

A. Dr. Walther The Lutheran Position

In his *Pastoraltheologie* Dr. C. F. W. Walther says on page 241, Anmerkung 4: "Ob hier in Amerika die sogenannten geschlossenen Zeiten (*tempora clausa*), in welchen keine Aufgebote und Hochzeiten stattfinden sollen, naemlich die Advents- und Fastenzeit,

auch innezuhalten seien, ist, da diese Ordnung zwar Gottes Wort gemaess (1 Kor. 7:5; Joel 2:16), jedoch nicht *iuris divini* ist, billig der Entscheidung der Gemeinde zu ueberlassen."

Note that there is no papal legislation here; no *Tridentinum!* The CONGREGATION (each local congregation) exercises supreme authority in matters that have not been instituted *iuris divini* (by divine Law), in other words, in matters of indifference (*adiaphora*).

But what does Dr. Walther mean to say when he declares that this "*Ordnung*" is "*zwar Gottes Wort gemaess*"? He quotes 1 Cor. 7:5 (the chapter on marriage): "Defraud ye not one another" ("*Entziehe sich nicht eins dem andern*") "except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer." Plainly God's Word recommends abstinence under certain circumstances for the purpose of having those involved become conditioned for fasting and prayer (resp., more diligent and intensified prayer).—And the passage in Joel reads (2:16): "Gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children and those that suck breasts; let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber and the bride out of her closet." The *Weimar Bible* remarks: "Stellet die Hochzeitsfreude fuer diesmal ab; lasset auch die Eheleute bei so grosser Gefahr der ehelichen Beiwohnung sich eine Zeitlang enthalten, dass sie zum Fasten und Beten Musse haben."

Note that both texts speak of marriage, more particularly of cohabitation of man and wife. They recommend continence at certain times, under unusual circumstances. Instead of making use of their liberty of cohabitation, children of God are to give their attention to fasting and prayer.

Dr. Walther then quotes the *Saechsische Generalartikel* (A. D. 1580): "Obwohl vermoege christlicher Freiheit bei den Christen ein Tag wie der andere [ist], Gal. 4, jedoch, weil ermeldete Zeit besonders auf die Buss- und Passionspredigt gerichtet [ist] und also alles seine Zeit hat, soll es nochmals durchaus bei dem gemeinen Brauch bleiben, dass die Hochzeiten und Wirtschaften auf eine andere Zeit geleget werden."

B. Dr. Fritz

In his *Pastoral Theology* Prof. Fritz of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Mo., makes similar statements, though in an abbreviated form. On page 174, under the heading "Marriages during Lent," the writer declares: "Since the Lenten season, as well as other seasons of the church-year, is not observed by divine law (*iuris divini*), there is no compelling reason why marriages should at such time not be solemnized. The custom to do so [*i. e.*, to observe the special seasons] is, however, a good custom, which deserves to be encouraged, 1 Cor. 7:5; Joel 2:15, 16."

Note that Prof. Fritz says nothing at all about "closed seasons." He does not use the term in either language. He alludes to Advent only by way of inference.

C. *The Formula of Concord*

Under *Affirmativa* (Point 1) we read: "For settling also this controversy we unanimously believe, teach, and confess that the ceremonies or church rites which are neither commanded nor forbidden in God's Word but have been instituted alone for the sake of propriety and good order are in and of themselves no divine worship nor even a part of it. Matt. 15:9: 'In vain they do worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.'" — Point 2: "We believe, teach, and confess that the congregation of God of every place and every time has the power, according to its circumstances, to change such ceremonies in such manner as may be most useful and edifying to the congregation of God."

Under *Negativa* we read: "Accordingly, we reject and condemn as wrong and contrary to God's Word when it is taught (Point 1) 'that human ordinances and institutions in the Church should be regarded as in themselves a divine worship or part of it.'" Point 2: "When ceremonies, ordinances, and institutions are violently forced upon the congregation of God as necessary, contrary to its Christian liberty which it has in external things," etc.

Having now produced all the source material at hand, permit your essayist to submit the following

By Way of Conclusion

A. In the matter concerning "closed seasons" let us by all means and under all circumstances avoid every form of legalistic procedure and practice.

What exegetical follies the rabbinical schools at the time of Christ committed with much ingenuity when they catalogued no less than 613 laws or lawlets in their study of the Ceremonial Law of Moses, 248 of an affirmative nature and 365 of a negative nature!

Note, by the way, the outstanding characteristic of legalists. They usually emphasize the element of negation: "Do not do this; do not do that; do not smoke; do not chew; do not drink; do not play cards or checkers on Sunday." These people gloried in 365 man-made laws of a negative nature and had only (!) 248 of a positive nature. Then observe the ridiculous procedure of these legalistic practitioners. There are exactly 613 Hebrew letters in the Decalog; *consequently* there must be exactly 613 rabbinical laws! To be sure, Rev. 22:18 applies also to such irreverent mutilations of the divine Word: "If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this

Book"; and certainly also the other half of this fearful warning: "And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy" (indeed, with every new man-made ordinance just that much more is taken away from the precious Gospel of salvation by faith, without the deeds of the Law), "God shall take away his part out of the Book of Life and out of the Holy City and from the things which are written in this Book."

B. Avoid the other extreme! Do not profane sacred days, seasons, and memories by running rough-shod over them, as though they represented nothing of value at all. There is such a thing as propriety, even in secular things. Why should it not be applied also in connection with the solemn seasons of Advent and Lent? Why not say to our people a sufficient number of weeks in advance (still better, by means of a process of training throughout the years): "Now that we are again, by the grace of God, approaching the sacred season of Advent (or Lent, as the case may be); now that we are preparing once more to contemplate in our house of worship and in our homes the redeeming love of God made manifest in the gift of His Son or (in the case of Lent) the sacrifice of the Son of God as our Substitute on the accursed tree of the cross, let us avoid all unnecessary noise and merrymaking! Let us rather permit the Holy Spirit to awaken and nurture thoughts of repentance and thus become properly prepared for these sacred festivals of the Church."

C. The disturbing or disquieting element in permitting church weddings during these sacred seasons is not the solemnization of the sacred act itself, but the celebration, the party, and, alas! the drinking to excess and dancing that frequently follow. Elaborate celebrations, especially during Lent, should be consistently discouraged, while what is sinful must be branded as such at all times. However, your essayist does not regard an *ordinary Advent or Lenten season as extraordinary as that*. Neither the Scriptures nor our confessional writings teach us to regard them as such, despite the predominant feature of repentance-preaching during those seasons.

If marriages are requested (even church weddings) during Advent and Lent, your writer is willing to grant the request. *However*, when the announcement is made to the pastor, it is highly desirable that he speak *a word of caution*, in the Gospel manner, to be sure, reminding the applicants of the solemnity of the season and cautioning them to see to it that the celebration proceed in a quiet manner, befitting the season. But, having done this, your essayist is willing to let the so advised and thus cautioned parishioners make their own decision; for, after all, it is a matter

of personal piety that is involved rather than group piety. Away — let us say it again — with all legalistic methods and procedures!

D. Regarding plays or rehearsals for plays your essayist has had no difficulty in persuading his young people to arrange their society calendar in such a way that they will not intrude the sacred seasons of Advent and Lent.

E. Finally, the question as to the pertinency of the two Bible-texts quoted in support of observing these two seasons of the church-year as "closed seasons" (1 Cor. 7:5 and Joel 2:15, 16) must be looked into. Our Lutheran fathers, like Luther himself, retained to a certain extent the erstwhile universal Roman custom touching these seasons, considering it not commanded by God, but nevertheless wholesome. *Marriage* certainly is *not sinful* even during these sacred seasons; *cohabitation* of man and wife certainly is *not sinful* even during these sacred seasons; *the solemnization of marriages* certainly is *not sinful* even during these sacred seasons; *the use of the church* for the solemnization of marriages certainly is *not sinful* even during these sacred seasons.

What, then, are we to make of 1 Cor. 7:5 and Joel 2:15, 16? Let us look at these two texts once more.

In both, the refraining from marital intercourse is spoken of as a measure aiding God's children in becoming more fit for whole-souled prayer. In Joel 2:15, 16 a special calamity led to the injunction. Besides, it must not be overlooked that Joel belonged to the era of the Old Covenant. We may here think of the regulation issued by Moses at the time when the Law was given at Mount Sinai: "And ye men, come not at your wives," Ex. 19:15. In the days of the New Testament these passages cannot be invoked as containing a law we must follow. They should be looked upon, however, as giving us valuable hints. With respect to 1 Cor. 7:5 we must say that it submits advice, pure and simple. Thus a study of Joel 2:15, 16 and 1 Cor. 7:5 shows, on the one hand, why the fathers pointed to them, and, on the other hand, that they do not give us a law binding for us as to the observance of "closed seasons."

Advent and Lent ought to be regarded and observed as "closed seasons" by choice and not as if commanded by divine or ecclesiastical law; they ought to be regarded and observed as such only to the extent that the local congregation with its pastor has succeeded in persuading the parishioners to regard and observe them as such.

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