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Editorial ✠

"THE ALLELUIA WAY"

One's opinion on the proposed altar and pulpit fellowship with The American Lutheran Church should lend itself to singing, for a "Christian should be an Alleluia from head to foot." It's a good criterion by which to evaluate Christian thought and life. A Christian should be a living alleluia in his relationship to his fellow Christian, a living alleluia in his relationship to non-Christians.

Christians sing alleluias because they know whom they have believed. They rejoice because in Jesus Christ they stand on the other side of death. In Him they reign already. In Him they have learned to know the great goodness and steadfast love of God.

October is a special alleluia month for Lutherans, for it brings to mind Luther's confession of faith, which lends itself easily to singing. A good confession is a response to the proclamation of Christ's triumph and a well-structured effort to catch the alleluia cadences of the Gospel.

Can you put your fellowship opinions into song? This is a good criterion for Lutherans to keep in mind as the tempo of fellowship discussions with The American Lutheran Church increases. "I yearn for . . ." has real musical possibilities, but "but" is the hardest word in the world to give a good musical timbre. Alleluia is incompatible with fear; you cannot include alleluia in a sentence like "I fear for our confessional heritage" or "I fear this will be our last fellowship opportunity in this century." Our decision at Denver will be a good one only if it leads to a spontaneous alleluia from the entire assembly. All who are participating actively in the fellowship discussions in our Synod should help us to keep singing.

And we do hear many alleluias as The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod discusses fellowship with The American Lutheran Church. But there are many who cannot begin or end their opinions that way. This is creating a test of evangelical fellowship within our own family. Pastors and laymen are talking about "leaving the Synod" if fellowship is declared at Denver, and if it is *not*. This attitude cannot help the cause. The Missouri Synod has its faults and weaknesses, but so does The American Lutheran Church. To leave the LCMS for The ALC would be a case of jumping out of the frying pan into the frying pan. Both bodies are made up of *simul iusti et peccatores*. Legalism? They'll run neck and neck with us. Liberalism? We'll run neck and neck with them. Separatism? Probably some in The ALC think the LCMS is too liberal. Indifferentism? Look at their budget. Our decision at Denver will be a challenge to all of us to try in a statesmanlike way to maintain or, if necessary, rebuild our own fellowship.

Can we reject fellowship with an alleluia? Only if one is convinced that The American Lutheran Church is a heterodox body. "Heterodox" does not mean that there may be individuals in it who hold strange ideas. Nor does it mean that the body is

on its way to becoming heterodox (an opinion we do not hold). It means only: The American Lutheran Church in 1969 is a heterodox body. Then, and only then, can one reject fellowship with an alleluia. As a matter of fact, the criterion for determining the orthodox or heterodox character of church bodies has an interesting history of changing emphasis in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. It has changed from a simple recognition of the public confession to a rather stringent and inclusive demand for orthodox teaching and practice. When C. F. W. Walther faced this issue in Perry County, he proposed the criterion found in Thesis 8 of the Altenburg debate: "The true Church is to be judged chiefly by the general true public confession by which its members acknowledge and hold themselves to be bound."

When opponents of the Free Conferences in the 1850s argued against the conferences on the ground that many who subscribed publicly to the Augsburg Confession "with the lips or on paper" completely ignored the meaning of confessional subscription in practice, Walther replied in strong language: "That many are loyal to the U. A. C. with lips only and deny it in practice cannot be brought to bear against the principle in accordance with which the general conference is to be composed and held, since that objection would hold in the case of the best formulated confession." (E. L. Lueker, "Walther and the Free Conferences of 1856—1859," CTM, XV [1944], 540)

He continued to insist on the primary importance of public confession throughout his life. In the course of the predestinarian controversy he addressed himself to this topic from the opposite side of the coin. "But whenever a controversy arises concerning the question whether a doctrine is *Lutheran*, we must not ask: 'What does this or that "father" of the Lutheran Church teach in his private writings?' for he also may have fallen into error; on the contrary we must ask: 'What does the public CONFESSION of the Lutheran Church teach concerning the controverted point?' For in the confession our Church has recorded for all times what she believes, teaches, and confesses, for the very reason that no controversy may arise concerning the question what our Lutheran Church believes."

Franz Pieper began his discussion of orthodoxy or heterodoxy with a reaffirmation of the Altenburg principle: "Congregations and church bodies must be divided into two classes according to their public doctrine" (Eng. tran., III, 422). By public doctrine he means confessional subscription, for subsequently he addresses himself to the question of public teaching in the pulpits. Pieper adds the qualification: "A church body is orthodox only if the true doctrine, as we have it in the Augsburg Confession and the other Lutheran Symbols, is actually taught in its pulpits and its publication and not merely 'officially professed as its faith.'" But he also reminds his readers that a church body does not forfeit its orthodox character by reason of the casual intrusion of false doctrine. "A church body loses its orthodoxy only when it no longer applies Rom. 16:17. . . ."

In John Theodore Mueller's condensed English version the expanded tests of orthodoxy are strengthened and discussed at some length, while the original Altenburg principle does not appear. This may have been due to the need to condense the material,

but a generation of theological students learned to know the tests of orthodoxy at some remove from the Altenburg principle. Thus, for example, Mueller omits Pieper's version of the Altenburg Thesis with which the latter had begun his discussion of orthodoxy and heterodoxy, although he translates the following paragraph almost verbatim. Mueller's version of the thesis runs as follows: "In the first place, a church is orthodox, or pure . . . not simply when it acknowledges the divine truth in general through confessions which are in accord with Scripture, but when it actually teaches the divine truth without qualification and prevents or suppresses all error." Then he adds the further qualification: "In other words, a church must be pure, or orthodox, not only in principle, but also in practise, so that it earnestly reproves and disciplines all who teach false doctrine. But this is not all. If a church wishes to be truly orthodox, it must not only teach in conformity with Scripture, but also insist upon a practise that is in accord with whatever the Word of God inculcates (conditions of church-membership, attendance at Holy Communion, regulation of the Christian life of its members, opposition to religious indifferentism and unionism, etc.)."

Thus the Altenburg Thesis, which was born in anguish as the Saxons sought to find the authority to preach and administer the sacraments, had undergone significant modification and tightening up. One could envision the Altenburg Thesis eventually being completely inverted to read: The true church is to be judged chiefly by the preaching, teaching, and practice of individual members of that body.

The current issue of this journal provides several alleluias that should enrich the ministry of our readers. David Ludwig offers an alleluia which grows out of an understanding of the real nature and power of the Gospel. He is thoroughly Lutheran in his assumption that the Gospel is the power of God for salvation, especially when it is proclaimed in a person-to-person context. We leave it to the reader to judge whether he has solved the problem of combining Law and Gospel with the non-directive, client-centered Rogerian method. Those who have read it are convinced that it is a workable combination. We are fully aware that this article will turn no pastor into a qualified Rogerian counselor.

Saul Levin provides an interpretation of the disputed "virginity" passages in the New Testament in the light of the general attitude toward marriage in the New Testament world. His approach is strictly sociological and historical. It is a good example of historical criticism used in a positive and helpful way by a non-Christian. No theological or philosophical presuppositions get in the way of his method or his conclusions. A number of our readers studied with Dr. Levin in the Classics Department of Washington University, St. Louis. They count him an excellent teacher and a warm human being.

Martin Scharlemann contributes a resounding alleluia as he pronounces a pox on what he calls existential and historical hermeneutic. Sitting sovereignly free in the saddle of the Gospel, he offers "radical orthodoxy" as his considered hermeneutic. His article is a good example of the freedom and clarity which the Gospel-centered approach brings to a field that is often muddied by improper considerations.

As you react to these articles, please begin and end your letters with "Alleluia!" We recall a sermon preached by Dr. Walter A. Maier in which he encouraged his listeners to respond to their neighbor's greeting on Easter morning with the traditional alleluia. When he was greeted by a colleague the next morning with "Christ is risen!" his own exuberant faith forgot the alleluia and bubbled over with "He sure is!" Alleluia! He sure is!

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