

# CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY

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# Editorial ✦

## *The Issue in This Issue*

"O sing unto the Lord a new song!" Thus the introit for Cantate calls God's people to celebrate His steadfast love that is new every morning. On Cantate Sunday, The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod begins the celebration of its 125th anniversary.

This issue is designated to be a tribute to The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod as it marks this milestone in the following 12 months. The seminary is 8 years the senior of the Synod, and the two institutions have enjoyed a warm, close working relationship throughout their mutual history. In its 133-year career the seminary has provided thousands of graduates and is presently producing about 175 pastors a year. Thus we take great delight in greeting the Synod on her 125th birthday and in wishing her, under God, many happy returns of the day and also committing ourselves to continue training men for a more excellent ministry so that they can be "in God . . . for the world."

Each contributor to this issue highlights one or more basic theological characteristics of the Synod, and thus the issue provides an analysis of the past strengths of the Synod and also, incidentally, a guide to understanding some of the current theological turmoil in the Synod. Erwin L. Lueker documents the centrality of the article of justification by grace through faith in the life of C. F. W. Walther,

and the consequent freedom that marked Walther and a contemporary like Ottomar Fuerbringer as they dealt with other theological and Scriptural problems. John W. Constable demonstrates that the oldest constitutional tradition in the Synod gave to the body an advisory role over against the local congregation. He shows how the Perry County experience convinced the fathers that the Synod must not be given binding powers, lest an episcopal-authoritarian form of church government develop along the lines of the "agreement" that the first Missourians had signed with Martin Stephan.

Edward H. Schroeder traces the history of the label "Gospel-Reductionism" and shows that the concept that lies behind this is crucial to a genuinely Lutheran theological system. Oliver R. Harms argues that the Synod has in the past always approached and solved its problems in a churchly manner and reminds the Synod that any other approach will jeopardize the churchly character of the Synod. Milton Rudnick reaffirms his thesis that the Synod was never significantly affected by American Fundamentalism. He had concluded in his original study that those characteristics of the Synod that some had attributed to Fundamentalism were really the product of the theologians of the later era of "Lutheran orthodoxy." Lloyd Goetz presents a set of theses on the difference

between Lutheranism and Fundamentalism that were well received at a number of pastoral conferences.

Carl S. Meyer analyzes Walther's theology of the Word of God and shows that his doctrine was shaped by the later 17th century orthodox theologians rather than by the Lutheran Confessions. At any rate, there are significant differences between Walther and Luther on the nature and function of the written Word. In a sense, Walther was a biblicist, but apparently his biblicism was restrained by his emphasis on justification by faith as the central article by which the church stands or falls and by his determination to understand every issue from the perspective of the proper distinction between Law and Gospel. In effect, then, Missouri's "fundamentalistic" concept of the Word is not derived from American Fundamentalism, but from German Lutheran orthodoxy, mediated through the teaching, lecturing, and writing of Dr. Walther. What is needed by the Synod is a series of studies on the origins of the doctrine of the Word in our circles, accompanied by carefully prepared articles that do justice to the doctrine of the Word in relation to the Law-Gospel perspective and the centrality of justification by grace through faith.

Not all of our readers will agree with certain positions that are set forth in this issue, but we believe that our calling to be teachers of the church calls us to speak out on the theological issues. We believe that many of these issues are of critical importance and that upon their proper resolution depends our continuing Lutheran character. We hope to avoid personal and political involvement while we speak candidly and honestly. Our purpose

is to argue that there are profound theological issues at stake.

We believe that our call to the seminary places on us the obligation to defend and to conserve the Lutheran theological heritage of the LCMS, to engage in constant examination of this heritage, and to reshape it where necessary in the light of the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions.

We accept without reservation the Scriptures as the inspired Word of God and the only rule and norm for faith and life. We are committed to studying the Scriptures in the Lutheran manner, which insists that the article of justification by grace through faith provides an extremely clear (and for Lutherans the best) light for determining God's truth and God's will as revealed in the Scriptures.

We further believe that the Synod has great resources of theological capital to invest in the mission of the church. We are determined that this investment shall be made, for our primary and sole purpose is not to preserve the Gospel (although, of course, we are committed to that and spend great amounts of time and energy in trying to make our little human contributions to that goal), but rather to invest the Gospel in the kerygmatic mission of the church. We deplore the fact that recently so much time and energy has been devoted to examining our understanding of the Gospel that little time has been left for speaking the Gospel to the world.

Several articles in this issue document the fact that Missouri has a split personality: an evangelical spirit and a legalistic coldness; a Lutheran approach to Scripture via the Law-Gospel understanding and a biblicistic literalism; a will to

pursue fellowship and a misguided separatism. Is it possible that some of the orthodox fathers did orient themselves wrongly in their relationship to the Gospel? Is it possible that in their zeal to defend the Gospel they introduced an attitude of pharisaic separatism? Is it possible that they made the preservation of the truth of the Gospel the chief task of the church

and thus introduced an element of fear of others who interpreted certain Biblical passages differently or who expressed themselves in different terms?

Origen described the church as "always teaching . . . always learning." It is in that spirit that we present this issue to all our readers.

HERBERT T. MAYER