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## LUTHERANISM AND PURITANISM.<sup>1)</sup>

Four hundred years have elapsed since Dr. Martin Luther nailed his Ninety-five Theses to the door of the Castle Church at Wittenberg. Through this chosen vessel of His the Lord brought about the reformation of His Church. We heartily thank Him, especially during this year of jubilee, for the deliverance He has thus granted us from the slavery of the Bishop of Rome. This is the great theme of innumerable sermons preached, of countless discussions carried on, and of numberless books and pamphlets written within the folds of the Protestant Church during these months of rejoicing. But we Lutherans are just as grateful to our God for having kept us in the faith again restored to His flock by the great Reformer, and for having guarded us against the deceit of the many false prophets that have gone out into the world since the days of Luther.

Among the many pernicious sects which sprang up in the countries blessed of God through the Reformation, the Puritan is one of the most conspicuous. A comparison of Lutheranism with Puritanism would therefore not be out of place nor without value to us at this time.

“Puritans” was the name given to such in England as were opposed to the Established Church of that country during

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1) This article and the next one were prepared for a new edition of the commemorative volume of essays on the Reformation, *Four Hundred Years*. Since the new edition will not be forthcoming soon, we publish them here.

the reign of Queen Elizabeth. Because they did not conform to the accepted "Thirty-nine Articles of Religion," they were called Nonconformists and Dissenters. Some believed in the presbyterial system of church government over against the ecclesiastical government of bishops of pretended apostolic succession with certain prerogatives. These went by the name of Presbyterians. Still others would have neither bishops nor presbyters as a ruling power in the Church, but taught that each congregation was independent and self-governing. They were called Congregationalists, or Independents. A number of these Independents, following a certain leader by the name of Robert Browne, are known as Brownists. Being most severely oppressed and persecuted, especially during the latter part of the reign of Elizabeth, many of these Independents fled to Holland. Later on a part of them returned to England. In spite of all afflictions heaped upon them, these Independents multiplied and grew to such an extent that from 1640 to 1660, under the leadership of Oliver Cromwell, they had the affairs of the government in their hands. Some of those who fled to Holland emigrated to America, in order to be able "to cultivate unmolested that form of Christianity to which they were attached." History records them as the Puritans, or Pilgrim Fathers. They landed at Plymouth Rock in 1620. A certain writer has this to say of them: "Nowhere did the spirit of Puritanism in its evil as well as in its good form more thoroughly express itself than in Massachusetts."

On the following pages I shall mention a few points of comparison, or rather some of the differences between Puritanism and Lutheranism.

What is the fountainhead of each of these confessions? How did Lutheranism and how did Puritanism come into being? What is the basic principle of the one and of the other? Lutheranism is wholly and solely taken from, and founded upon, the Bible. To Luther the Bible was the Word of God, every syllable of it inspired by the Holy Ghost. His conviction was that this divine book alone could frame articles

of faith. He held that everything taught in this sacred volume must be accepted by the Christians as truth coming from God, and that everything adding to, or opposing, the teachings of the prophets and apostles must be rejected. One word of the Old or the New Testament made the world too narrow for him. That is why he met the shameless sale of indulgences carried on by John Tetzel with "Since Christ, our Lord and Master, says," etc. Therefore he declared before Emperor and Pope, "My conscience is bound in God's Word. Except I be convinced by passages of Holy Writ, I can and will not retract. Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise, God help me! Amen." For that reason he remained immovable in his debate with Zwingli concerning the real presence of the body and blood in the Lord's Supper, again and again remarking, "The text is too powerful." In short, come what might, everywhere, at all times, and under all circumstances, Luther stood squarely upon the Bible, raising his voice mightily against all that would not bow to every iota of the Law and the Testimony. And that is the stand which the Church justly bearing his name has always taken. Lutheranism is therefore Scripturalism.

Now, what of Puritanism? To the fathers of this school of theology Luther said most aptly, "You have a different spirit from ours." Zwingli and Calvin, who, as far as human agencies are concerned, are responsible for all the Reformed denominations, would not always follow the plain words of the holy men of God. And why not? The old Evil Foe having received a deadly blow when Luther was flying in the midst of the heavens preaching the everlasting Gospel, he cast about for some one to fill the chair which the Pope had occupied in his behalf in the Church, and again to dethrone the Word of the Lord, by which that Stronger, called Jesus Christ, comes upon and overthrows Satan in his palaces, the human hearts. Ah! and he that had such success in Paradise with his "Yea, hath God said ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" *i. e.*, "Is it reasonable that God should have said anything of the kind?"

again made use of his old trick to the destruction of many immortal souls. Through his treachery, preached by such men as Zwingli and Calvin, the Word of God was more or less supplanted by reason. "God does not ask us to believe anything we cannot comprehend," these words of Zwingli sound the keynote of the Reformed theology. Especially through the efforts of John Knox, a warm friend of Calvin, Calvinism took the place of Lutheranism in Scotland. Other Reformed theologians, during the reign of Edward VI, introduced the Reformed doctrines into England, where Lutheran doctrines had been taught and accepted. True, the Puritans separated themselves from the Anglican Church, but not on account of the Reformed principles. They rather accepted them. Reformed principles are at the bottom of all Puritan teachings. Puritans profess to be followers of the Bible, but are largely governed by their reason. So much for the springs from which Lutheranism and Puritanism issue.

Strict adherence to the Bible means fidelity to the Gospel, while following one's reason always leads into the Law. The center of the Bible is the Gospel, Christ and Him crucified. "To Him give all the prophets witness that through His name, whosoever believeth in Him, shall have forgiveness of sins." True, this book also contains the Law, not for the purpose of saving us by the keeping of its precepts, but in order to bring us to a knowledge of our sins and the need of a Savior. Having found forgiveness, life, and salvation in the grace of God in Christ Jesus, a child of the heavenly Father is admonished to walk in the way of the commandments, not for the purpose of meriting even the least part of his salvation, but to show his thankfulness toward God for what He has bestowed upon him, for having freed him through Christ, whose merits He offers in the Gospel, not only from the guilt and punishment, but also from the dominion of sin. A glorious, a cheerful Christianity, indeed, which springs from, and from beginning to end is brightened by, the glad tidings of the grace of God in Christ Jesus! Luther loudly proclaimed the perfectly lost

and condemned condition and the utter helplessness of natural man. He clearly set forth the justification of the sinner by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith. And, in spite of everything that may be said to the contrary, if ever man showed what good works are, and why we are to walk in newness of life, that man was Dr. Martin Luther, as may be seen, for instance, from his explanation of the commandments in his Catechisms, in which he sets forth so wonderfully what God would have us do and leave undone in His kingdom, always making it plain, however, that we are saved by faith, without the deeds of the Law. Indeed, he ever taught that Christians, because of the law in their members, which wars against the law of their minds, daily sin much and deserve nothing but punishment, and that the Holy Ghost must therefore richly and daily forgive all their sins. In his theology Christ was the beginning, middle, and end. And to this day the Lutheran Church, thank God, continues to teach these Scripture-doctrines. Lutheranism, therefore, is Gospelism.

But what is Puritanism? Reading their works, you will at times find Puritans speaking most beautifully of Christ and the redemption He has wrought for man. However, "buts" and "ifs" attached to such fine paragraphs destroy their comforting effect, and point man to the Law for his soul's salvation, not only the Law of God, but also certain rules and regulations of the Church, which must be observed to attain that end. In the tenets of all the Reformed denominations, but above all in those known as Puritan, we find "a large infusion of Judaism." They are very much "entangled with the yoke of bondage." Why did they separate from the Established Church of England? Not on account of the Reformed doctrines accepted by that body, but because of the vestments of the bishops and priests (which they called the bloody garments of Antichrist), the sign of the cross, the sponsors at Baptism, the forms of prayer, the pericopes, the kneeling at the Lord's Table, the bowing of the head when the name of Jesus was mentioned, the private baptism, the confirmation, the bells, organs, and

altars in churches, church festivals, and the like. Their confessions show that they do not correctly divide the Word of Truth, that they continually intermingle Law and Gospel, faith and works, justification and sanctification. Their religion is therefore a dreary religion, their doctrine a comfortless doctrine. For Puritanism is more or less legalism.

Lutherans and Puritans also differ greatly as regards their teaching concerning the efficacy and all-sufficiency of the Word and the Sacraments. These, and these alone, are the means through which God ordinarily deals with us. Paul writes: "It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." 1 Cor. 1, 21. "My Word shall not return unto Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." This is the promise given by the Lord in Is. 55, 11. Again we are told: "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." Rom. 10, 17. The Gospel is therefore called "words of eternal life." John 6, 68. As for Baptism, the Apostle Paul declares it to be the "washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost." Titus 3, 5. And the Lord's Supper, being Gospel, is the power of God unto salvation. Rom. 1, 16. Believing this, Luther confesses: "The Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith." Accepting the plain words of the Bible, he answers the question, "What does Baptism give or profit?" thus: "It works forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare." Following the Scriptures, he has this to say concerning the benefit of the eating and drinking of the Lord's Supper: "That is shown us by these words, 'Given and shed for you for the remission of sins'; namely, that in the Sacrament forgiveness of sin, life, and salvation are given us through these words." The Word and the Sacraments were to Luther the only means to extend, uphold, and defend the kingdom of Jesus Christ. Never would he have force to be used for the purpose of accomplishing any-

thing in God's kingdom of grace. The Word and the Sacraments, and they alone, should be used to draw souls to Christ. To bring home to sinful man the Word was, therefore, the aim of Luther. That was the trowel with which he would build, and the sword with which he would defend, the Church of God. He knew that it is the Christian's business to water and to plant, and God's prerogative to give the increase. Therefore he diligently preached the Word, wrote many books and pamphlets, composed many sacred hymns, translated the Bible, and urged the organization of Christian schools for the children—all for the purpose of bringing the souls bought with a price the Bread of Life and defending their inheritance against all enemies. And if any one having become a brother should trespass, and refuse to hear the church, he should be unto other Christians as "an heathen man and a publican." At no time, however, should these tares be gathered up by the Church, but they should be left to grow together with the wheat on the field of this world. In this connection it must be said that Luther was never in favor of turning over members that teach and live otherwise than the Word of God teaches to the civil authorities for punishment on account of their belief, as was frequently done by the Roman Catholics. He was entirely opposed to the union of Church and State. To him Christ's kingdom and the kingdoms of this world have nothing in common. The Church deals with man's relation to his God; and has the welfare of his immortal soul at heart. The State looks after the temporal well-being of its subjects, and must therefore be satisfied if these subjects bow to its authority, render to it tribute, custom, fear, and honor, and allow others about them, though they may not be of the same faith, to lead a quiet and peaceable life. It dare not, however, meddle with their religion, as long as that religion is not subversive of the work of the State. Following the Bible, Luther declared: The Church is governed by the Word of God and the State by reason. Fortunate are the conditions where the Church does not enter the province of the State, and the State does

not enter the domain of the Church. The separation of Church and State had its most faithful champion in Luther.

This is the stand which up to the present time is taken by all true Lutherans. The trowel and the sword with which they go forth to do the work of their Lord are the words of our divine Prophet, which are spirit, and which are life. John 6, 63.

But what do we find in Puritanism along these lines? To the fathers of the Puritans the Word of God was a dead letter. Zwingli, for instance, distinctly separates the preaching of the Word from the workings of the Holy Ghost. He says: "We see that with all nations the outward preaching of the apostles and evangelists, or bishops preceded faith, which we have the Holy Ghost alone to thank for." "I believe, yea, I know, that all Sacraments, instead of bestowing the grace, do not even bring and administer it." "The Spirit is not in need of a guide or a vehicle." This idea pervades the whole theology of the Reformed denominations. It is there the root of much evil and the only natural sequence of their religion of reason. In their work in the Church of God they were accordingly not satisfied with putting these means of grace into use, but introduced all kinds of regulations and disciplines, which they executed with great severity. They ever meddled with the affairs of the State, and used its arm to further their cause. Zwingli himself died in a battle in which he led his followers. And Calvin is known to have united, and thus commingled, Church and State in his sphere of action. Thus Christianity must lose its free and cheerful character, and groan under the burden of self-imposed laws. The Puritans, too, in fact, in many ways more than others of the followers of Zwingli and Calvin, were occupied and led by these false ideas concerning the Word and the Sacraments and the operation of the Holy Spirit. They, too, united Church and State wherever they could do so. They keenly felt the oppressions and persecutions of the Episcopal rulers in England, and complained against them. But no sooner were their own followers in power than

they, too, made use of carnal weapons of warfare. And if there is any difference between the two, it is to the disadvantage of the Puritans. The history of Cromwell and his time tells us of banishments and executions in the name of the newly established religion that are horrifying. And when those very people who had left their mother country on account of religious intolerance had set their foot upon this soil, they were for years extremely intolerant towards others, as the banishment of Roger Williams, John Cotton, John Wheelwright, Mrs. Anne Hutchinson, and others clearly show. And up to this day they would better the world by all kinds of rules, and regulations, and laws concerning Sunday, and drink, and the like, and in this way, to the great delight of the archenemy of mankind, spend many hours on inventions of their own instead of employing them to real advantage in the kingdom of the Savior by preaching and teaching the old, old story of the life, suffering, and death of the Son of God for the salvation of man. To try to better the world with laws, human or even divine, and to reform the nations by putting into operation these laws with severity, creates hypocrites, but never leads to God; in many cases such a procedure fills the heart of natural man with a deadly hatred against a religion so intolerant. We can rest assured, if the Puritans would have had their way when the Colonies united and formed this great Republic, we should never have enjoyed religious liberty in this country.

Considering the few points I have thus briefly touched upon, we find ample reason to be grateful to the Good Shepherd for having kept us in His Word and faith against the evil counsel and will of the world, the devil, and our flesh.

In conclusion I would say that one frequently hears the remark: The Lutheran Church stands closer to the Roman Catholic Church than the Reformed denominations, especially the Puritans. But this is a great mistake. On the contrary, the Lutheran Church is rightly and perfectly separated from the Roman Catholic Church, but not so the Reformed denominations. The Roman Catholic Church is founded upon the Pope;

the Reformed Church upon reason; the Lutheran Church upon the Bible. The Roman Catholic and the Reformed Churches rely more or less upon good works; the Lutheran Church believes, teaches, and confesses the justification of a lost and condemned sinner by grace for Christ's sake, through faith. This position alone has the promise: "If ye continue in My Word, then are ye My disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." John 8, 31. 32.

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