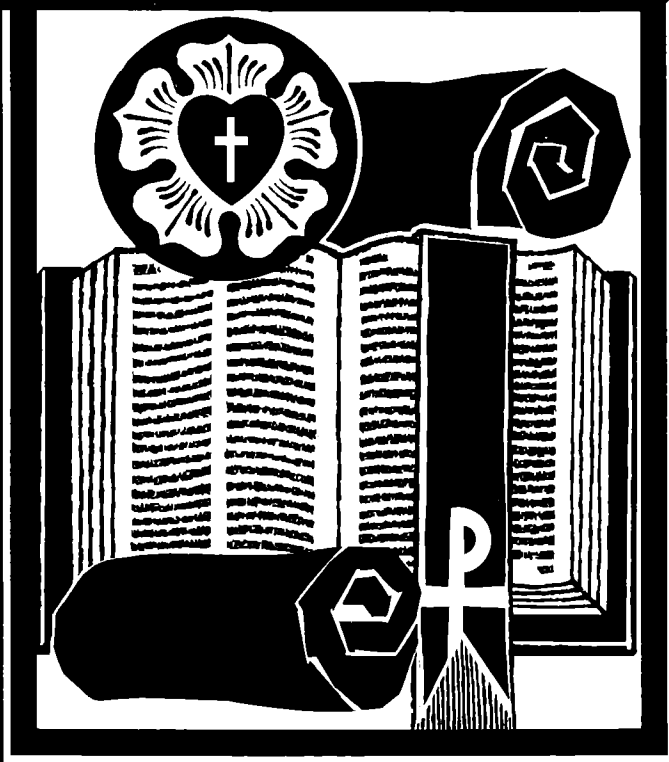


# THEOLOGIAN'S CONVOCATION



ESSAYS

# PREFACE

The 1975 convention of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, recognizing that "there is a hunger and longing for peace and unity" among all members of the Synod, requested the Commission on Theology and Church Relations to continue to carry out its responsibilities of "fostering and providing for ongoing theological education through institutes, seminars, and other means" and to "coordinate the preparation of a series of Bible Class Studies" in order to further "true and lasting peace and concord" in the Synod. (1975 Resolution 3-01 "To Seek Unity")

In response the CTCR, convinced that this assignment demanded a comprehensive and long range program, formulated initial plans which were shared with representatives from the synodical boards, commissions, and auxiliaries. As a result of these discussions, the "That We May Grow" program emerged and five major objectives were formulated. "That We May Grow" was adopted as the theme for the Planned Parish Program for 1977-78 and 1978-79, as well as for the 1977 Synodical Convention, and "That We May Grow" calendars and Parish Planning Kits which outlined the major facets of the program and provided suggestions for congregational planning were sent to all congregations in the Synod.

At the heart of the "That We May Grow" program is a comprehensive study of the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions. Under the direction of the Board for Parish Education a series of eight studies on the Scriptures and four on the Lutheran Confessions has been developed for lay study classes. The second phase of the "That We May Grow" study program was the Theologians' Convocation held on the campus of Concordia Seminary in St. Louis November 7-9. This three day convocation brought together approximately 175 Missouri Synod theologians to hear and discuss a series of papers and responses on the theme "Formula for Concord." District/Regional pastors and principals conferences to be held in 1978 comprise the third stage of the "That We May Grow" study program.

It is in preparation for these "Formula for Concord" conferences that the CTCR is herewith sharing the three major essays presented at the Theologians' Convocation with all pastors and teachers of The

Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. Included in this resource booklet is also Dr. Karl Barth's keynote address, which relates the purpose of the convocation (and thus also of the upcoming conferences) to the five basic objectives of the "That We May Grow" program. Some study questions have been appended to the essays to assist in focusing on the basic issues.

It is the prayer of the members of the CTCR that these essays will prove helpful as you prepare for the regional conferences, the final phase of the "That We May Grow" study program. May God bless our study of His Word and of the Lutheran Confessions so that "speaking the truth in love, we (may) in all things grow up into Him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From Him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work." (Ephesians 4:15-16)

Samuel H. Nafzger  
Executive Secretary  
Commission on Theology and  
Church Relations  
November 1977

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November 7, 1977

# THEOLOGIANS' CONVOCATION

## KEYNOTE ADDRESS

### I.N.I.

*by Dr. Karl Barth*

It was Mark Twain who remarked, "We should be careful to get out of an experience all the wisdom that is in it — not like the cat that sits down on a hot stove lid. She will never sit down on a hot stove lid again — that is well; but also, she will never sit down on a cold one anymore." This is not to suggest that in this Convocation we have been placed by the church on some collective hot seat. It is rather to underscore the importance of clearly defining at the very outset what it is that we are about in these three days together.

For one thing, this Theologians' Convocation is not to be viewed in isolation from the rest of the "That We May Grow" endeavor of the Synod. It is one part of a three-fold thrust in our efforts "to achieve true lasting peace and concord," as the last RESOLVED of Anaheim 3-01 states: One phase of this program has already begun. Scriptural and Confessional studies are being prepared — some already in use — for the lay people of the church. Through these studies we shall have the opportunity to review gratefully and prayerfully the basics of what we believe, teach, and confess regarding sin and grace, Law and Gospel.

A second phase, subsequent to this convocation, will be a series of pastor-principal retreats in each of the districts of the Synod at which many of the professional ministers of the Word will have the opportunity, as brothers in Christ, to discuss some of the same matters that are on our agenda here.

In other words, by calling for a Theologians' Convocation, we are not thereby dumping the issues before our church body over to the "experts," anticipating that by Wednesday noon all the problems

of the church will have been resolved by the theologians. One recalls, in this connection, the teasing remark of John Warwick Montgomery who opined that “if the Bible does not speak clearly to every layman — and the laity are not capable of distinguishing God’s truth from heresy and error — then we had better hie ourselves back to the bosom of the Roman church without delay, for one pope is far preferable to a legion of seminary professors.” . . . “Theology,” he went on, “is too important to leave to the theologians.”

This is true. None the less, those directly engaged in the theological task have the responsibility to provide sound and positive theological leadership regarding the questions of unity, concord, and fellowship. This gathering offers a legitimate and helpful forum for that purpose. Learned discussion and technical precision can be and hopefully will be practical and helpful as well.

The task at hand is not easy. We are tempted to two extremes when we talk of a formula for concord. The one extreme is to imply that by our gathering here we are somehow admitting that we really don’t know what unity and concord and fellowship are all about and now must consider a host of different positions to determine who or what is right. The fact is that we have, as a church, basic principles for concord, drawn from the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions. We know, furthermore, that our church has spoken on these matters in the past.

On the other hand, we dare not fall into the pitfall of assuming that therefore the final chapter and perhaps even the final line have been written. Our principles need not only constant re-study but constant re-application to a changing ecclesiastical community, so that we can act responsibly not only among ourselves but also in our relationships with the rest of Christendom. It is to this task that we set our attention.

In the remarks that follow we shall seek to relate the discussion of these three days to the goals of the entire “That We May Grow” endeavor with the prayer that God will bountifully bless by His Spirit — that amid all the theological jargon of this convocation we may each one be a responsible churchman in our day. And when we fail, we shall taste once again that the Lord is gracious as we are covered with the robe of His righteousness.

## I

The very first goal of the "That We May Grow" endeavor states:

"That the people of God in The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod intensify their study of the Holy Scriptures together, trusting the Holy Spirit to increase and enrich their personal faith."

This goal applies no less to our Theologians' Convocation than it does to the preparation and distribution of Biblical and Confessional studies for our laity or to the Pastor-Principal Retreats that are planned for next spring. It is our prayer that also here, through intensive study of the Holy Scriptures together, we might see an increase and enrichment of our personal faith under the blessing of the Spirit of God.

How sad if we were to look upon this meeting as an opportunity to parade theological acumen before what we hope might be an admiring church, or if we were to attempt to place everything into such neat and precise little boxes that all spiritual vitality is lost in the process. What J. B. Phillips remarked about the work of translating the New Testament applies as well to the theological task in general. He warned that "it is horribly possible so to dissect your subject that you remove its life. By the time each source and component has been tagged and labeled, this vibrant and compelling body is no more than a cadaver on the theological operating table."

Dr. F. Hebart of the Lutheran Church of Australia also emphasizes the importance of speaking directly to the personal faith, hope and love of the individuals in our world by our confession. In the very first of a series of articles on the 400th anniversary of the Formula of Concord, written for the official organ of his church body, Dr. Hebart says, "It is possible for individuals or even a church to subscribe officially to all the right doctrines, to celebrate anniversaries and the glorious memory of the fathers, and yet be in dire need of repentance and renewal. Our responsibility is not merely to preserve our past heritage, the way one might preserve an historical building without living in it. Our duty is to allow the past to speak to us today and challenge us. We are to capitalize on the great treasure entrusted to our forefathers and to apply it to the questions, hopes and fears of modern man."

Dr. Herman Sasse sounds the same note in the Preface to his book *Here We Stand* when he says, "When the Reformation demanded that the Gospel be taught in its purity, the phrase, 'pure teaching' or 'pure doctrine' was intended to be far more than correct theological theory. 'Doctrine' and 'teaching' have the same meaning in the writings of Luther and in the Lutheran Confessions as they have in the New Testament: to teach is to present to the people the saving message of the Gospel." Notice that he emphasizes presenting the saving message of the Gospel!

This goal should lead us to ask the following: What will this convocation do for the enrichment of the faith of our people throughout the church? Will the presentations and discussions at this convocation warm their hearts anew with an appreciation of the blessings that God has given to us in the Gospel of His free and unmerited salvation in Jesus Christ our Savior? Will the convocation help them to grow personally as the redeemed of the Lord?

In emphasizing this goal, we are saying that the Lord Jesus Christ, as we know Him from the sacred Scriptures, must be in the heart and center of our endeavor. He is the "spiritual adhesive" that pulls all things together, as Paul so beautifully describes it in the first chapter of Colossians. It is in Him that we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God. By Him all things were created. For Him they were created. He is before all things. He is the Head of the Church. He must have the pre-eminence. It is in Him that all fullness dwells. It is by Him that God would reconcile all things unto Himself whether things in earth or things in heaven.

Let us pray God that this increase and enrichment of personal faith begin with us who are gathered together as brothers in Christ. Our father-confessors felt this close tie between their theological expression and their relationship to the Father in heaven. What they proclaimed to the world was merely another expression of their personal conviction. Emphasizing in the Preface to the Book of Concord that they were not minded to permit the intrusion of any doctrine contrary to that confessed at Augsburg in the year 1530, they added, "By the help of God's grace we, too, intend to persist in this confession until our blessed end and to appear before the judgment seat of our Lord Jesus Christ with joyful and fearless hearts and consciences." (Preface to the Book of Concord, Tappert, page 9.)



## II

A second goal of “That We May Grow” is

“That the people of God in The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod grow in their ability to translate what the Holy Scriptures teach about the Mission of Christ’s Church into concrete ministries.”

There is no way that we can separate talk about concord from the mission of the church and the ministries needed to carry on that mission. The basis for concord, the way to concord, and the celebration of concord are all intimately related to the commission of our Lord to lengthen the cords and strengthen the stakes of His church, to make disciples of all nations and to teach all that He has commanded us. The relationships that we have with each other, with the rest of Christendom, and with an entire world that has been redeemed in the blood of Jesus Christ will certainly affect the way we carry on our mission and the way we conduct the ministries that are part of that mission.

Therefore, as we turn our energies to achieving “true and lasting peace and concord,” we do so for the sake of the mission and the tremendous opportunities that God has placed before our church in our world — the opening up of new areas in world missions, the training of pastors and teachers and other professional workers for the church, the use of mass media, the publication and distribution of Christian literature, and the alleviation of human suffering, spiritual, physical, and emotional. How this convocation will enable us to grow in our ability to translate what the Holy Scriptures teach about the mission of the church into concrete ministries is a question that must constantly be before us in these days.

## III

Another goal of “That We May Grow” states:

“That the people of God in The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod study the Lutheran Confessions, grow in understanding and appreciation for their continued relevance, and praise God for 400 years of Lutheran heritage.”

One of the major papers of this convocation will talk about “The Way to Concord” and treat historically how our fathers went about

the task of achieving true and lasting peace and concord in the church. Let us here mention only in passing two qualities of our fathers in Christ that should characterize our posture as we approach our task. The fathers, in proclaiming God's message of Law and Gospel, bowed humbly before the authority of the Holy Scriptures. Literally dozens of quotations could be given in which the confessors made plain that they were determined to submit to the Holy Scriptures as "the only judge, rule, and norm according to which as the only touchstone all doctrine should and must be understood and judged as good or evil, right or wrong." (Ep. Rule & Norm 7.) They pledged themselves "to the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments as the pure and clear fountain of Israel, which is the only true norm according to which all teachings are to be judged and evaluated." (SD, Rule & Norm, 3.) Melancthon says it plainly in the Apology. Luther affirms it in the Smalcald Articles. The Augsburg Confession confesses it again and again, and the fathers wrap it all up in the Preface to the Book of Concord when they say, regarding everything in the Lutheran Confessions, "We have in what follows purposed to commit ourselves exclusively and only, in accordance with the pure, infallible, and unalterable Word of God." (Preface to the Book of Concord, Tappert, page 8.)

Furthermore, pray God we shall also grow in our understanding and appreciation of the *conviction* that our fathers evidenced regarding the truths that they believed, taught, and confessed. There are those today who equate conviction and certainty with Pharisaical pride. For some it has become fashionable to parade doubt as though it were an intellectual achievement, as if the man who lives in doubt were far more advanced than the one who has found the truth. Others remind us how important it is to have an open mind. But Kenneth Howkins warns us that "the mind needs to be opened at the top, to let new ideas drop in, not at the bottom, to let all former ideas drop out . . . to have an ever open mind in everything is simply a serious neurosis."

Our fathers in Christ had conviction. They believed that controversies ought to be settled and that they can be settled on the basis of the Word of God. They believed that there was and is such a thing as purity of doctrine. They were not cocky but calmly confident when they said in the Preface to the Book of Concord, "We are *certain* of

our Christian confession and faith on the basis of the divine, prophetic, and apostolic Scriptures and have been adequately assured of this in our hearts and Christian consciences through the grace of the Holy Spirit.” (Preface to the Book of Concord, Tappert, pp. 12f.)

Bernard of Chartres, writing more than 800 years ago, acknowledged his indebtedness to the ancients in the words, “We are as dwarfs mounted on the shoulders of giants, so that we are able to see more and further than they; but this is not on account of any keenness of sight on our part or height of our bodies but because we are lifted up upon those giant forms.” It is in that spirit that we seek the wisdom of our fathers in Christ and acknowledge the relevance of their work for the questions of our day.

#### IV

Listen to still another goal of the “That We May Grow” program:

“That the professional church workers of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod intensify their efforts to identify, discuss and resolve the theological issues that trouble us.”

It will not be helpful if we are determined, regardless of the consequences, to skirt the issues, to avoid open, brotherly dialogue. They who do, live in what someone has described as a “mental greenhouse.” Nor do we wish to be counted among those who assume, as J. D. Douglas put it in an article in *Christianity Today* a couple of years ago, “that keeping out of controversy shall be accounted to them for righteousness.” We have learned, to our sorrow, hurt and harm, that we cannot resolve theological issues by insisting that they do not exist or that they are mere semantic problems.

Yet, what a blessed thing it will be if we humbly ask God to help us during these days to identify the issues that trouble us, to discuss them as brothers in Christ under the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions, and with His help and benediction begin to resolve them. We pray once again for the spirit of the fathers who said they wrote the Augsburg Confession so that the matters at issue “may be discussed amicably and charitably, our differences may be reconciled, and we may be united in one, true religion, even as we are all under one Christ and should confess and contend for Christ.” (AC, Preface, 10.11.)

Let us say it again, we seek only the will of God through an intensive study of the Scriptures and a sharing of our Spirit-given insights with one another. No other considerations dare motivate us. We are not after the approbation of the world or good public relations for the sake of public relations asking other church bodies to pat us on the back. Charles Porterfield Krauth said it so well already in the last century, "The Lutheran Church can never have any real moral dignity, self respect, real claim on the reverence and loyalty of her children while she allows the fear of denominations around her, or the desire of their approval, in any respect to shape her principles or control her actions. It is a fatal thing to ask not, What is right? What is consistent? But, what will be thought of us? How will our neighbors of a different communion regard this or that course? Better to die than to prolong a miserable life by such a compromise of all that gives life its value."

## V

Finally, consider this goal of the "That We May Grow" program:

"That the people of God in The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod as fellow members of the Body of Christ grow in the fulfilling of their loving responsibility for one another as they confront their problems and challenges."

This goal is to be applied to all areas of our lives and certainly also to this convocation. We have a great responsibility for one another as fellow members of the body of Christ and fellow members of the same church body. We seek to be neither "unloving critics," nor "uncritical lovers." On the one hand, we will not lovelessly seek, by the sheer weight of logic, theological expertise, and a marshalling of evidence to bury any and all who disagree with us. To behave ourselves in such a way would be to forget who we are and why we are here. On the other hand, we can ill afford to glorify personal relationships at the expense of the truths of God.

Again, the Fathers said it so well. They had "no intention to yield anything of the eternal and unchangeable truths of God for the sake of temporal peace, tranquility and outward harmony." Yet, they confessed "a sincere delight in and a deep love for true harmony" and were "cordially inclined and determined on our part to do everything in our power to further the same." (SD, XI, 95.)

In conclusion, we do well to be reminded that while we gather here in the fear of God and as brothers in Christ to seek true peace and concord, the work of the Church of Jesus Christ goes on and indeed must go on. Even as we are meeting here this morning, pastors are making hospital calls; children are on their way to Christian schools; other Christians are witnessing at their work.

Dr. Walther emphasizes that so beautifully in one of the letters incorporated in the lovely little volume *Walther Speaks to the Church*. Addressing a concerned pastor he writes, "You speak of your apprehension that our Synod is involved more in fighting for pure doctrine than in the practice of true piety and the implanting of true concern for the soul's salvation. It may seem that way to you if you see only what we do polemically. But if you should visit in our congregations, you would see not only that we bear the sword through God's grace but also that we carry the trowel with sincere faithfulness; that we endeavor with our whole hearts to live in continual, true repentance; and that we seek to guide those entrusted to us with complete faithfulness and zeal. That there may be among us some who recognize no other principle than fighting for pure doctrine, who have not experienced true repentance, I dare not dispute; God alone knows. But this is the common aim of all our pastors; we want to be saved through genuine repentance and to bring others to salvation. My dear brother, a person must not judge people according to outward appearances. Some men seem in their outward appearance to be stiff while in their own little chambers and generally in their hearts they are in the midst of a continuous, hot battle and a burning life of prayer. They withdraw, as does the church in general, from the carnal eyes of short-sighted men, for the kingdom of God (or the church) comes not with outward signs; it is within us."

With this, let us be about our task. We join Philip Melancthon in his prayer at the conclusion of the German Preface to the Apology of the Augsburg Confession,

"Lord Jesus Christ, it is Thy Holy Gospel, it is Thy cause; look Thou upon the many troubled hearts and consciences, and maintain and strengthen in Thy truth Thy churches and little flocks, who suffer anxiety and distress from the devil. Confound all hypocrisy and lies, and grant peace and unity, so that Thy glory may advance, and Thy kingdom, strong against all the gates of hell, may continually grow and increase."

SOLI DEO GLORIA

Karl L. Barth