the Concordia Lutheran

"The Scripture cannot be broken." John 10:35.

"Thy Word is a Lamp unto my feet, and a Light unto my path." Ps. 119:105.

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"Thou therefore
endure hardness,
as a good soldier
of Jesus Christ."

II Timothy 2:3

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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE:

To set forth in simple and plain language the pure doctrine of God's Word as taught by the true Lutheran Church in full accordance with the **Book of Concord of 1580** and the **Brief Statement of 1932.**

To show, **on the basis of Scripture**, *what true Christians are to believe and* how, out of love for their Savior Jesus Christ, they are to lead godly lives.

To furnish aids for Bible study and articles for Scriptural devotion and meditation.

To demonstrate, by our Scriptural stand, that our **Concordia Lutheran Conference** is not a sect or a false church, but that the congregations which form it confess, teach, and practice the Word of God in its full truth and purity and use the Sacraments according to Christ's institution. All who do this are the true visible Church on earth.

To seek out all who truly share our Scriptural position in doctrine and practice, and to urge the mutual public acknowledgment of such God-given unity. Thus we shall be able thereafter to practice a God-pleasing fellowship with them.

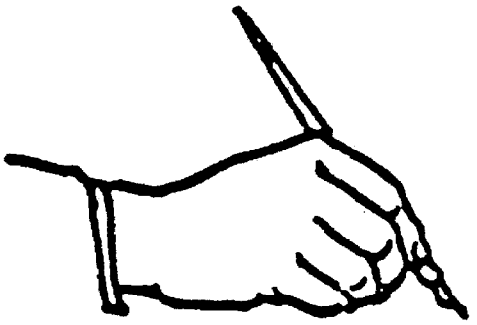
To show that we do not have among us a mixture of divergent teachings but that we are "perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment."

To set forth pertinent historical information which has a bearing upon the Church and to expose modern phil*osophical thought and the so-called scien*tific theories which contradict the Word of God.

To expose particularly the false teaching and practice of the various so-called "Lutheran" church bodies by comparing their teachings and practices with what is plainly recorded in the Word of God, in the Lutheran Confessions, and in the old orthodox Lutheran writings.

To expose false teaching and practice wherever it makes its appearance and to keep abreast of the current happenings in the church and among the nations as signs of the times.

To be truthful and factual in our reporting and freely to correct any misinformation of which we are not aware and which has been called to our attention. Also to clarify any information or statement of doctrine or practice which may be unclear to our readers or which may create a wrong impression.



The President's Column

Once again the school bells throughout the land have summoned our children to return to their classrooms to begin another school year. From what we hear and read, some of our schools have begun to initiate changes - in some instances quite drastic - to bring our educational system back to a realistic program which will enable the student to be more thoroughly equipped to step out into the world academically qualified to assume a responsible position in the business world. This is, of course, long overdue! For too long of a time the basics of education have been relegated to the background in favor of extracurricular activities. Is it any wonder then that we hear reports of high school graduates, for example, not being able to read and write proper English?

Recently I read an article in the **Reader's Digest, July 1995**, written by David M. Schwartz and condensed from **SMITHSONIAN.** Here are a few excerpts:

> Jim Trelease has devoted the past 16 years to promoting what he considers the best-kept secret in education today. "Most people don't believe me when they first hear it," he says. "They dismiss it for three reasons: One, it's simple. Two, it's free. Three, the child enjoys it. So how good can it be?" ... Trelease continues to persuade them that no matter how busy they are, the foremost nurturing they can give a child, next to hugging him, is reading aloud to him.
>
> He backs up his pitch with facts. Numerous studies, including recent reports by The Center for the Study of Reading and the National Council of Teachers of English, confirm that reading to children builds vocabulary, stimulates imagination, stretches the attention span, nourishes emotional development, and introduces the textures and nuances of the English language.

The whole article is thought-provoking and should encourage parents to read to their little children. The title of the article is: **Most Important**

Thing You Can Do for Your Child. It may well be that reading to your child is the most important thing you can do for his intellectual development. But parents who truly love their children will read not only the various educational books to them, but they will also read the Bible Stories to their children during these early formative years for their spiritual development. The Lord requires that parents are to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4). Teaching our children to know Jesus as their Savior from sin, death and hell and to listen devoutly to His Word with a believing and humble heart is the most important thing that we can do for our children!

Unfortunately, this is shamefully neglected by ever so many. What good would it do if parents only emphasized the secular education of their children so that they would get good-paying jobs and be able to enjoy the luxuries which money can buy if their spiritual education is shoved to the background as though it were of little importance? The Lord Jesus declares, "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mark 8:36,37). Faith in Jesus and striving to follow His Word is the one thing needful for time and eternity! For "he that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:36). Only faith in the Savior in whom we have forgiveness of sins can give that peace which passes all understanding. "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1).

Teaching our children to place Him and His Word first will assure them of God's blessings, His help and guidance, strength in the day of adversity, help in the time of trouble, and comfort in the hour of death. Now is the time to prepare them for eternity while they are still under our wings as our little sons and daughters!

Oh, blest the parents who give heed
Unto their children's foremost need
And weary not of care or cost!
May none to them and heav'n be lost! (T.L.H. 625)

Your servant in Christ,
Pastor M.L. Natterer, President

THE SYNERGISTIC CONTROVERSY

Dr. Martin Luther had died in 1546. The Schmalkald War had erupted. The Schmalkald League, a standby army formed by nine Lutheran princes and 11 cities, which had been established in 1531 as a defensive force against two Romanist forces, the League of Dessau and the League of Regensburg under the control of Emperor Charles V, was utterly defeated. The chief founders of the Schmalkald League, Elector John Frederick of Saxony and Philip of Hesse, were imprisoned. Compromise of the pure teachings of God's Word, especially with the glaring errors of the Roman Church, had become politically feasible as interim settlements were being forced upon the German states. No longer was salvation by grace alone (sola gratia) and alone by faith in Christ (sola fide) to be heard from Lutheran pulpits and taught in the universities of Germany. Leading Lutheran theologians, who evidently felt themselves under the pressure of the period, looked about for compromise in order to alleviate strife and to maintain their comfortable positions. "They that are such," writes the Apostle Paul, "serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own bellies," Rom. 16:18.

Satan, the father of false doctrine and discord, indeed helped those false teachers (as he does to this day) to set forth a compromise of God's Truth in such subtle terms so as to deceive the hearts of the simple and to beguile the fearful to find a way out of impending strife and bodily harm.

The most trusted and influential theologians on the faculty of the University of Wittenberg, some of Luther's closest friends and associates, aligned themselves on the side of compromise--and much of their liberal teachings are found imbedded in the false doctrine which permeates the large Lutheran synodical bodies of today which, being influenced by numbers and earthly gain, no longer insist upon doctrine and practice which perfectly harmonizes with what God plainly sets forth in His Word.

The Reformed (Zwingli, Calvin, etc.) had always built their teachings on the shaky foundation of Scripture AND Human Reason or Scripture IN THE LIGHT OF Human Reason. In doing so, their false teachings appealed to the people especially in the areas of original sin, freedom of the human will, good works, the Lord's Supper, Baptism, and the like.

The Papistical System, leaning heavily on human wisdom and what they called "tradition," and moved especially by monetary gain and earthly power, had developed an elaborate and bulky doctrine of good works meriting salvation. In order, therefore, to compromise with the Papists and to bring about a peaceful relationship with the Reformed, the Scriptural principle of salvation by grace alone had to be ignored and good works as being necessary for salvation had to be emphasized--but in such a way as to feign a Scriptural stance while following human reason. (What tremendous lessons we can learn from history as it continues to repeat itself in the days in which we live. What is more reasonable to natural man than, "Be good and do good and you're going to get to heaven!" Our natural pride always wants to get credit for something whether this is in the form of doing something meritorious after we have become Christians or in the form of doing something which helps us initially to become Christians.)

Now, in the Doctrine of Good Works in the Life of a Christian (Sanctification in the Narrower Sense), the liberal and compromising Lutheran Theologians of the Wittenberg faculty became followers of the teachings of their colleague George Major and later Justus Menius who had been students of Melanchthon. Even while Luther was still living, Melanchthon had shown strong tendencies in this area where Major and Menius now boldly and vigorously propounded their false teachings. Their reasoning was simply this: If it is absolutely necessary for a Christian to do good works, it follows that no Christian gets to heaven without good works and that consequently good works are necessary to salvation. Their reasoning continued: Since evil works destroy faith, good works are necessary to preserve faith. Both men, Major and Menius (even though Menius strongly opposed the terminology of Major), tried to smooth over their false teaching by statements such as, "Yet we are not justified by love and good works, but by grace for Christ's sake," (Major) and "By faith in Christ alone we become just before God and are saved," (Menius). Both men even encouraged others not to use such statements as, "Good works are necessary to salvation," or "The new life or new obedience is necessary to salvation," in order to "avoid misinterpretation." Yet, they persisted in defending such terminology as not being contrary to Scripture. This resulted in what became known as the Majoristic Controversy which was finally settled, in the light of God's Word, by

genuine Lutheran pastors and theologians in Article IV of the Formula of Concord (Triglotta, p. 939 and Epitome, p. 797).

Notice carefully how Scripture teaches that the very opposite of the reasoning of Major and Menius (cited above) is true. A Christian performs good works as the fruit of his faith, out of love for Jesus his Savior. This fact has nothing to do with his salvation! Heaven is already his through Jesus' blood and righteousness and his good works flow only from this fact. Even though, as James declares, "Faith without works is dead," James 2:20, it does not follow that good works make faith alive. (A tree is not made alive by its fruits. Rather it bears fruit because it is alive. This is what St. James plainly teaches! So also, we breathe because we are alive; we are not alive because we breathe. We do things with our hands, feet, body and mind not in order to be alive BUT because we are alive!) The fruits of your faith have nothing to do with making you spiritually alive or with your eternal salvation. You who, by nature, were spiritually dead ("dead in trespasses and sins," Eph. 2:1) were made spiritually alive when the Holy Ghost through the power of the Gospel worked saving faith in your heart. Now you are spiritually alive, not because of anything you have done or will do, but by God's grace alone in Christ Jesus your Savior. Heaven is yours and you are an heir of salvation not by works of righteousness which you have done, Titus 3:5, but only through that faith which the Holy Ghost has worked in your heart and which trusts and believes, rejoices and finds comfort alone in Jesus who kept the holy Law of God perfectly in your stead and, as your Substitute, suffered the punishment of Hell, which you so richly deserve by your sins that through Him alone you might have the forgiveness of sins and the certain hope of life everlasting. It is such faith alone which makes you spiritually alive. That which you now do in your thoughts, desires, words and actions which flow from your faith in and love for Jesus does not make you have a living faith but bears witness to the fact that your faith is indeed already alive; nor do those things save you or have anything at all to do with your salvation. Rather, they show that salvation is already yours and that "your conversation (citizenship) is in heaven," Phil. 3:20.

So the statements of Major, "No Christian can be saved without love and good works," or "No Christian gets to heaven without good works," must be rejected as absolutely false. To be clear on this, ask yourself, "Does a

Christian get to heaven with or without good works?" and observe that the answer, in the light of God's Word, must always be, "A Christian always gets to heaven without good works, only by God's grace through faith in Christ--otherwise he wouldn't get to heaven at all!" Good works must never be spoken of in connection with eternal salvation. There we must only speak of God's grace and Christ's work of redemption.

Now, the title of this article is "The Synergistic Controversy." Synergism, like Majorism, also brings in the works of man as being necessary for salvation but the works which the synergists address involve man's conversion rather than his life after he has become a Christian. The reasoning of synergism is this: Since those who are lost are eternally damned by their own fault so that God is not to blame but only themselves for rejecting God's grace in Christ Jesus, those who are converted must at least be given some small credit toward their eternal salvation--perhaps a better attitude towards the Gospel than those who are lost. In this respect, synergism is evidently more subtle and dangerous than Majorism since it reduces man's cooperation to a seemingly harmless minimum which the unsuspecting Christian might easily accept to his eternal destruction.

The word synergism comes from the Greek prefix "syn" which means "with" and the Greek word "ergasia" which means "work." The term therefore means "with works" and implicates the elimination of the Scriptural teaching of "by grace alone" as far as our salvation is concerned. This controversy closely parallels the Majoristic Controversy both time-wise as well as in its destructive influence against the sola gratia. It involves basically the same Wittenberg theologians--many of whom were former friends and co-laborers with Luther prior to his death. The seeds of synergism were being sown even before Luther was called to his eternal rest and in 1548, two years after Luther died. Melanchthon openly taught and defended synergism. At this time, however, the genuine Lutheran pastors and theologians (Chemnitz, Selneccer, Andrae, Chytraeus, Musculus, Cornerus, Flacius, Amsdorf, and a host of others) were so engrossed with the Adiaphoristic and Majoristic controversies (in their preparation of the Formula of Concord under the wholehearted encouragement and financial support of Elector August of Saxony who with his wife was often on his knees in prayer, while the theologians were in conference, beseeching the Lord to enlighten them with His Holy Spirit) that the synergistic error caused small concern and was given little

consideration. The Synergistic Controversy, therefore, did not begin until 1556 while Majorism was opposed already in 1548.

In their preparation of the Formula of Concord (over a period of 10 years) the loyal Lutherans endeavored to adhere strictly to what Luther had taught, in full harmony with Scripture, on conversion and salvation by God's grace alone--in their opposition to the Synergists. The father of synergism was, of course, Melanchthon, who, even 15 years before the death of Luther, began to teach in the University of Wittenberg three concurring causes of conversion, namely, 1) the Holy Spirit, 2) the Word, and 3) the consenting will of man. (The first two causes are absolutely right; the last cause, # 3, is contrary to what the Bible plainly teaches and to what Luther also plainly taught.)

Here it is necessary to add a note about this man, Melanchthon. Who was he? What part did he play in the Reformation and in the period after Luther's death? Philip Schwartzerd, later called Melanchthon, was born February 16, 1497, into a prominent and gifted family at Bretten, Germany. He was 14 years younger than Luther. When he was 11 years old, his father died and during the next years of his life he lived in the home of his maternal grandmother in the city of Phorzheim. Here he was taught the ancient languages by the famous humanist Simler and was greatly influenced by his great uncle, the celebrated Johann Reuchlin, also a humanist, who, as a compliment to his young, scholarly, great nephew, changed his name to Melanchthon. Melanchthon received his Bachelor's degree in 1511 from Heidelberg University at the age of 14, and his Master of Arts degree at Tuebingen University in 1514 where, for the next four years, he did research, wrote, and taught. Luther's most ardent desire for a good teacher of Greek at the University of Wittenberg was fulfilled beyond his highest expectations when Melanchthon, having been appointed by the Elector of Saxony through the influence of Reuchlin, became Professor of Greek and was solemnly inducted into his office at the Castle Church on August 29, 1518. He was 21 years old. In 1519, he received his Bachelor of the Bible degree and modestly refused every opportunity to become a Doctor of Theology. On November 20, 1520, he married Katharina Krapp, a daughter of the Wittenberg Burgomeister, who bore him two sons and two daughters--one son died at the age of two. As a classroom teacher, Melanchthon was outstandingly successful. The scope of his teaching was broadened so that besides the ancient languages

of Greek, Hebrew, and Latin, he also taught philology, philosophy, ethics, history, mathematics, the natural sciences, jurisprudence, medicine, physics, astrology, grammar, dialectics, dogmatics, and the Bible. For many of these courses he prepared textbooks which were so highly regarded that they were still in use 300 years later. While Luther was teaching about 400 students, Melanchthon had about twice as many attending his lectures, and, when Melanchthon died in 1560 (April 19), his former students were active everywhere throughout Germany and the surrounding countries. He was known and highly respected as the "Teacher of Germany" (Praeceptor Germaniae). So closely associated was he with Luther that it was through Luther's influence with the Elector that Melanchthon was required to teach theology as well as philosophy and was head of the Theological Faculty in Luther's absence (at the Wartburg, 1521-22) and following Luther's death in 1546. He was vitally helpful to Luther in his work of bringing external Christendom back to the Scriptures alone, and, throughout his life, continued to be Luther's most highly respected friend and colleague.

During the early years of his work at Wittenberg, Melanchthon was perfectly agreed with Luther as to man's inability to do anything in spiritual matters and that making a person a Christian is entirely the work of God alone in Christ Jesus, our Savior, through the Means of Grace--the Gospel and the Sacraments. His views to this effect are incorporated in the Augsburg Confession (which Melanchthon authored)--especially in Articles II, V, XVIII, and XIX. Shortly thereafter, in the early 1530s, Melanchthon's errors in the Doctrine of Conversion were becoming more apparent both in the classroom and in his writings. However, during this period, until Luther's death, he was sufficiently skillful in avoiding a direct confrontation with Luther--giving his false teaching as little emphasis or publicity as possible, even backtracking in order to retain a peaceful relationship with the Reformer.

After Luther died, Melanchthon came out plainly and publicly with his synergistic teachings , namely, that man is able to cooperate with God in his conversion--much like the synergists among the Romanists and protestant sects of today who credit man with the ability to do something toward his becoming a Christian, for example, who teach that a person is able to make his own decision for Christ. Such a teaching destroys salvation BY GOD'S GRACE ALONE and corrupts the Scriptural

doctrine of Original Sin which teaches that no one, by his own reason or strength, is able to believe in Jesus Christ or come to Him. Here we must remember those Scripture texts which describe every person, as he is born into this world since the Fall of Adam, as being spiritually blind, dead, and an enemy of God, e.g. I Cor. 2:14; Eph. 2:1; Rom. 8:7, and which ascribe our conversion or regeneration to God alone, Jer. 31:18; Heb. 12:2; I Pet. 1:23; John 1:13.

NOTICE CAREFULLY: 1) Synergism is also a very prominent false teaching among those heterodox Lutherans who make a false distinction between "natural resistance" and "willful resistance," saying that the Holy Ghost can indeed work faith in the hearts of those who only naturally resist while He cannot accomplish saving faith in the hearts of those who are guilty of willful resistance--thus making a difference in people by nature and crediting some with that which helps toward their conversion. 2) Synergism also plays a part in that false teaching which is prominent among heterodox Lutherans in the area of Predestination. It is known as the doctrine of Intuitu Fidei (in view of faith). This doctrine bases God's eternal decree of predestination upon man's believing, rather than on God's grace alone for Christ's sake. Furthermore, 3) synergism is also active among those heterodox Lutherans who deny objective justification and make a person's faith the determining factor in the forgiveness of their sins, rather than God's grace alone through Christ's work of Redemption because of which the sins of all people are forgiven and all mankind is declared righteous. Such heterodox Lutherans follow right along in the footsteps of Melanchthon who, in his Loci of 1543 and especially in his later editions from 1548 on, never retreated from his synergistic position the remaining years of his life but rather gave it increasing emphasis.

By God's strength, grace, and wisdom, the writers of the Formula of Concord were able successfully to combat and expose the false doctrine of Synergism in Article II, Concordia Triglotta, pages 881-915, Of Free Will, or Human Powers. The State of Controversy is stated succinctly both by thesis (setting forth the true doctrine) and antithesis (setting forth the opposing false doctrine) in the Epitome on pages 785ff (Triglotta). In the three closing paragraphs of the Epitome, we find these words, "In conversion God, through the drawing of the Holy Ghost, makes out of stubborn and unwilling men willing ones," and that "man's will in his conversion is pure passive, that is, that it does nothing whatever."

"Therefore, before the conversion of man there are only two efficient causes, namely, the Holy Ghost and the Word of God, as the instrument of the Holy Ghost, by which He works conversion. This Word man is indeed to hear; however, it is not by his own powers, but only through the grace and working of the Holy Ghost that he can yield faith to it and accept it." These statements are substantiated by clear Scripture texts in that section of the Epitome, entitled AFFIRMATIVA (Triglotta, p. 787).

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THE ADIAPHORISTIC CONTROVERSY

What happened to the blessed movement known as **The Reformation** within a year of the signing of the ***Augsburg Confession***, June 25, 1530, is not unlike the gradual weakening of the storm stirred by the founders of our own beloved Conference back in 1951. The ranks of those who at first defied the tyranny of men and held fast to the truth of God's precious Word quickly became "thinned" as pressure began to mount against them. It was not merely *psychological* pressure --the spectre of being all alone and virtually isolated in a tiny fellowship of impoverished remnant congregations; it wasn't just *social* pressure --the thought of suddenly being ostracized by former brethren for having been too "quick on the trigger" and "separatistic" and "loathe to stay in and fight" a losing battle. No, it was the **clear and present threat** on the part of synodical officials that pastors who saw fit to "rock the boat" and to warn their sheep against the deterioration of their church body would be deposed from office, put out of their parsonages, stripped of their pensions, sued in court, slandered in the press, and would likely end up <u>out</u> of the ministry, "ineligible for a call," and working at some menial job to support their families. And the threats <u>worked</u>! For, instead of the then *Chicago Study Club*, for example, standing together with one voice against the unscriptural ouster of one of their number and of another brother, both in the fall of 1951, they "cut" and "ran" to a man, silenced, defused, and assimilated back into the *body politic* **with no recriminations** --as long as the "sound and fury" of their whimpering protests "signified nothing". And most of them ended up living peacefully in Synod, retiring in Synod, and some already dying in Synod as respected "conservatives".

As early as 1531, Luther predicted impending turmoil in the ranks, doctrinal controversies arising from within, threats of violence and eventual open warfare in Germany, and the rending of the visible church to pieces by the instigation of the devil. Shortly before his death he wrote, *"Such is plainly his object. If he cannot accomplish it through the Pope and the Emperor, he will do it through those who are [now] in doctrinal agreement with us."* However, due largely to Luther's personal influence and heroic steadfastness under the gracious hand of God, the "enemies from without" made no overt and violent move against the Lutherans until after the reformer's death in 1546. But no sooner had Luther been laid to rest than the Pope and the Emperor joined in a combined, frenzied effort to crush protestantism by brute force (as had been their plan all along). Within four months, Emperor Charles V, generously financed by the Pope, embarked upon the ***Smalcald War***, a "Blitzkrieg" operation in which every political ally of the Lutherans was attacked, subdued, and forced to capitulate. Those who refused at first were imprisoned, and some were even sentenced to death.

Then in 1548, the Emperor proclaimed the ***Augsburg Interim***, a document intended by him to regulate the situation and to control the "heretics" until a permanent settlement could be imposed by the **Council of Trent**. This document, which the faithful Lutherans refused to sign and implement, effectively undid much of Luther's work and sought to return the churches in almost all respects to the doctrine and practice of the Papacy. Pastors who refused to cooperate were deposed, banished, imprisoned, and even put to death! Some, together with their families, had to flee for their safety and go underground in neighboring states, while bounties were offered for their apprehension. Others decided to go along with the Emperor's demands in fear for their safety. But the people generally regarded the persecution of their pastors as an unthinkable injustice and cruel tyranny; and many boycotted the churches in silent protest and even refused to work in crucial industries (like mining) until the *Interim* became an empty, unenforceable edict.

Many of the political leaders, of course, caved in to the demands of the Emperor to protect their personal interests; but staunch Lutheran men like the Elector of Saxony, John Frederick, refused outright to sign the *Interim*, even though it meant imprisonment and his replacement as elector

by a hand-picked "puppet" named Maurice. But even Maurice soon found himself torn between allegiance to the Emperor and his personal disagreement with the terms of the *Interim*; and he tried to craft a **compromise document** that might satisfy both the Emperor and the Lutherans of Saxony, and thus not only reduce the tensions between the parties but also the violence, threats and coercion being waged against unbending pastors, professors, and princes.

In order to craft a substitute *Interim*, Maurice enlisted the help of "Lutherans" whose terror of the Emperor, intimidation by his threats, and fear for their safety made them fitting "targets" for a crafty compromise and "putty" in the hands of clever manipulators. Like so many of the so-called "conservatives" in the large Lutheran synods today, these theologians fancied themselves to be loyal to the cause of the truth and yet, at the same time, ready "for the greater good" of temporal peace and tranquillity to be "peacemakers" and "conciliators". They were "disciples" or adherents of **Philip Melanchthon**, who once had been a co-worker and trusted ally of Luther, but who, as an early compromiser of the truth, had *altered* the ***Augsburg Confession*** in an effort to make it more "acceptable" to all parties. This theological scholar from Wittenberg was unwilling to "fight in the trenches" with the other *"soldier[s] of Jesus Christ"* (II Timothy 2:3) and to risk the anger of the Emperor. Thus, as we read Dr. Bente's comment in the *Historical Introduction to the Book of Concord*, "before long his fear to confess and his refusal to give public testimony to the truth was followed by open denial." (Triglot, p. 98) He and his colleagues at the universities of Wittenberg and Leipzig (who became known as "**Philippists**" after the name of their leader) collaborated with the Elector Maurice to water down the authority and theology of Holy Scripture (as championed by Luther and his faithful brethren) and to substitute for them their own *unionistic* and *liberal* doctrine and practice. In the name of "peace", Melanchthon crafted the ***Leipzig Interim***, in which he did not hesitate to bargain away truths of Holy Scripture and to accept into the equation of compromise what he regarded to be minor Papal errors, deploring the fact that Luther with his "contentious spirit" had kept the gap between Romanists and Lutherans open and festering by his unwillingness to compromise. And all the while Melanchthon basked in the *impression* left by Luther's praise of his gifts and certain of his writings that he was the great reformer's "heir apparent" and the theological leader of the Reformation! It was indeed a blessing

that Luther was safe in heaven and did not witness Melanchthon's open treachery!

The ***Leipzig Interim***, among other things, omitted the *sola fide* ("through faith alone") from the article on Justification, reinstated *gratia infusa* ("infused grace") as the power in man to do good works to merit God's favor, taught that good works are *necessary to salvation*, stated that the Church can never teach contrary to Scripture and therefore should remain the *governing power* over Christ's people, said that all pastors and ministers should be *subject and obedient* to the "chief bishop," the Pope, and reinstituted the "sacrament" of *Ordination* for the *bestowal* of the pastoral office. Finally, the ***Interim*** also *demanded* that abolished ceremonies --some in and of themselves *harmless* as neither commanded nor forbidden by the Word of God (*Adiaphora*) but nonetheless "traditionally" Roman Catholic, and some in and of themselves *false practice* on the basis of false doctrine-- be **reintroduced** in the churches of the empire as a show of solidarity between the Lutherans and the Papists in the "intervening period".

It was **this latter demand** that gave rise to and fueled the so-called ***"ADIAPHORISTIC CONTROVERSY"*** among the Lutherans, a controversy that separated between true and false brethren and revealed the thoughts of many hearts. While Melanchthon and his adherents, the "Adiaphorists", insisted that the reintroduction of Catholic ceremonies was completely "harmless" and hardly worth all the fuss and furor, particularly when their true interest lay in protecting the "weak" and "frail" from the terrors of persecution, the loyal Lutherans (called the "Gnesio-Lutherans"), chiefly centered in the city of Magdeburg and at the University of Jena under the leadership of Matthias Flacius, saw this move as just the tip of the iceberg poking through a dangerous sea of indifferentism, unionism, and ultimately the compromise and denial of sound doctrine; and the result for the weak among them would be spiritual disaster, as it was for Peter when he sat *"in the seat of the scornful"* (Psalm 1) and cozied up to Christ's enemies around their fire --a fire which in and of itself was neither commanded nor forbidden by God's Word.

The **question-at-issue** in the controversy boiled down to this in summary:

Under conditions that amount to spiritual blackmail and extortion, in order to protect themselves and their weak brethren from the ravages of threatened violence and persecution, may Lutherans submit in good conscience to the demand that papal ceremonies be reestablished, even if the ceremonies in and of themselves are truly "indifferent" (neither commanded nor forbidden by the Word of God), ***a)*** *without denying the truth of their Scriptural position,* ***b)*** *without denying the true nature of Christian liberty,* ***c)*** *without approving the errors of Romanism, and* ***d)*** *without giving offense either to their enemies (by letting them think that they have won a victory) or to their friends and brethren (by giving in to threats and by compromising the truth for the sake of temporal peace and tranquility)?*

The "adiaphorists" held that this posed no problem because it would be done for all the "right" reasons. After all, they argued, the ceremonies are *true* ***adiaphora*** and therefore a matter of Christian liberty. The "gnesio-Lutherans", on the other hand, rejected it as a treacherous capitulation that would confuse consciences, offend the weak, and give comfort to the enemies of Christ. In short, then, the question amounted in simple terms to this:

"When is an *adiaphoron* NOT an *adiaphoron*?"

The basic definition of an *adiaphoron* is quite simple, and the "gnesio-Lutherans" had no problem with it: ***Adiaphora*** are things ***neither commanded nor forbidden*** by the Word of God. As such, they may in Christian liberty be observed or omitted, adopted or rejected, without sin according to Galatians 5 and other passages. HOWEVER, as the "gnesio-Lutherans" pointed out, **confession of the truth** and the **giving of offense** ARE matters respectively commanded and forbidden by God's Word; and when these circumstances play into the matter of *adiaphora*, what was once a *free choice* can become a matter of *conscience*! Thus, under circumstances testing one's faith, an *adiaphoron* may become a matter of principle. *Adiaphora* must therefore be judged by prevailing conditions. Thus Flacius' axiom or "rule-of-thumb" was adopted by the *anti-adiaphorists*, the "gnesio-Lutherans", that

"Nothing is an *adiaphoron* when confession and offense are involved."

The matter was finally resolved to the complete satisfaction of all the Lutherans together when Melanchthon, in a letter to Flacius dated September 5, 1556, admitted that the "gnesio-Lutherans" were right in teaching as they did about *adiaphora*. He did NOT, however, confess that he had been guilty of any deviations from sound doctrine, nor that he had given any offense by his willingness to compromise and betray the Lutheran position. He only admitted to being "drawn into" the political infighting, and he expressed the following *qualified confession* of having possibly sinned in the matter: "IF in any way I have either fallen or been too weak, I ask forgiveness of God and of the Church, and I shall submit to the judgments of the Church."

The **ADIAPHORISTIC CONTROVERSY** was permanently settled by **Article X** of the ***Formula of Concord*** (1580), which, in its **Epitome**, sets forth, first of all, *"the **correct** and **true** doctrine and confession"* regarding *adiaphora* and this controversy in particular in the following points:

> **1)** Ceremonies or rites that have been neither commanded nor forbidden in God's Word but have been instituted *alone for the sake of propriety and good order* [I Corinthians 14:40] are in and of themselves no divine worship nor even a part of it. [Compare *Augsburg Confession,* Art. XXVI. They are not necessary for salvation, are not on a par with the commandments of God, and are not necessary service essential to true Godpleasing worship. Matthew 15:9; Colossians 2:16].
>
> **2)** The local congregation has the power (under its Christian liberty, Galatians 5:1, etc.), according to circumstances, to change such ceremonies in such manner as may be most **useful** and **edifying** to the church in its midst. [Note that even *adiaphora* in the church are to have salutary purposes, particularly that they serve the Gospel of Christ and the edification of the members with the Word of God. They are not to be "art for art's sake," "ceremonies for ceremony's sake," or "rules for rule's sake."]

3) With respect to *adiaphora* (which are a matter of proper seriousness in the church, even though they are not commanded by God), people should not deal with rites and ceremonies in a light or joking manner, so that offense is not given, especially to the weak.

4) When a plain and steadfast confession is required of us (to identify us as separate from errorists and to avoid confusion of identification with the enemies of the Gospel), we should **not yield to the enemies** and thus give the impression, to our own people or to others, that we have anything in common with them. [So, for example, we **deliberately** DO **NOT** IMMERSE in the water of Baptism --not because immersion is wrong, but because it would serve the purposes of the enemies of the truth and identify us with the Baptists and others who require immersion for a valid Baptism. Likewise, we **deliberately** DO **NOT** BURN INCENSE or ANOINT WITH OIL as the Romanists do, even though such acts are not wrong in and of themselves. And, with reference to a more contemporary *"adiaphoristic controversy"*, we **deliberately** avoid giving even the **impression** that we have anything in common with the fanatic practice of the E.L.C.R. in Australia, which requires WOMEN to COVER THEIR HEADS in the divine service and to wear DRESSES or SKIRTS instead of slacks as *necessary service essential to true Godpleasing worship.* See *Augsburg Confession*, Art. XXVI]

5) No congregation should condemn another on the basis of local preferences in true *adiaphora* (vestments, liturgical forms, regulations, customs, days and times of service, types of assemblies, etc.) provided that **otherwise** there is **complete agreement** between them in doctrine and practice. (I Corinthians 1:10; Ephesians 4:3; etc.)

On the other hand, the ***Formula of Concord*** condemns the ***"false doctrine** concerning this article,"* including the teachings that

1) Human ordinances and institutions [regulations] should be regarded as a **divine worship** [that is, ***necessary*** for salvation, obedience to God, and true Godpleasing worship].

2) Such ceremonies, ordinances and institutions [regulations] may be even **violently forced** upon congregations contrary to their Christian liberty in external things.

3) In time of persecution, and when public confession is required, we may **yield to the enemies** of the Gospel in **outward things** and craft **compromises** with them for the sake of safety, etc., even if it means giving a **false impression of unity** to the weak and unlearned and thus **offending** them.

4) External ceremonies and *adiaphora* may be **abrogated** [taken away] in such a way as to restrict or strip a congregation's Christian liberty to establish such things in its midst according to its own circumstances and needs for salutary uses and particularly for spiritual edification.

IN SUMMARY, things neither commanded nor forbidden in God's Word --under normal conditions considered to be ***adiaphora*** and thus free to be accepted or not accepted by the congregation in its liberty-- *may **NOT** be TRUE adiaphora*

--when a forthright confession of the truth requires us to refuse them, so as not to identify ourselves with the enemies of the truth; and

--when their use may cause offense to weak brethren [not just stubborn brethren, Galatians 5:13] who need *first* to be edified and strengthened in their faith by the Word before they rightly understand and appreciate true Christian liberty.

--D. T. M.

THE FLACIAN CONTROVERSY

THE MAN

Matthias Flacius Illyricus, one of the most learned and capable theologians of his day and the most faithful, devoted, staunch, zealous, and able exponent and defender of genuine Lutheranism, was the author of the malignant controversy which bears his name. Flacius was born March 3, 1520, in Illyria, hence called Illyricus. He studied in Basel, Tuebingen, and Wittenberg. At Wittenberg he was convinced that the doctrine of the Lutheran Church is in complete agreement with the Word of God. Following the tragic controversy in which he later on in his career became involved, he was persecuted by his enemies and forsaken by his friends, moving from one place to another, until he found a last asylum for himself and his family (wife and eight children), and where he also died in a hospital, March 11, 1575.

THE CONTROVERSY

After Victorin Strigel, at the second session of the disputation in Weimer in 1560, had dilated on the philosophical definitions of the terms "substance" and "accident," and had declared that original sin was an accident which merely impeded free will in its activity, Flacius, in the heat of the controversy, exclaimed: "Original sin is not an accident, for the Scriptures call it flesh, the evil heart," etc. Thus he fell into the pitfall which the wily Strigel had adroitly laid for him. Though Flacius seemed to be loath to enter upon the matter any further, and protested against the use of philosophical definitions in theology, Strigel now was eager to entangle him still further, plying him with the question: "Do you deny that original sin is an accident?" Flacius answered, "Luther expressly denies that it is an accident." Strigel: "Do you mean to deny that sin is an accident?" Flacius: "I have said that Scripture and Luther affirm that it is a substance." ... The mistake of Flacius was that he took literally terms denoting substance which the Bible and Luther employ in a figurative sense. In the following (third) session, however, he repeated his error, declaring: "I must stand by my statement that original sin is not an accident, but a substance..." Flacius erred fatally by identifying this

inborn evil tendency with the substance of fallen man and the essence of his will as such.

According to Preger the first decided opposition to the Flacian teaching came from Moerlin and Chemnitz, in Brunswick, to whom Flacius had also submitted his tract (On the Appellations and essence of Original Sin or the Old Adam) for approval... In a letter of August 10, 1568, Hesshusius, who now had read the tract more carefully, charged Flacius with teaching that Satan was a creator of substance, and before long refused to treat with him any further... In 1572 Hesshusius, in order to prevent further accessions to Flacianism, published his Antidote against the Impious and Blasphemous Dogma of Matthias Flacius Illyricus by which He Asserts that Original Sin Is Substance. In this book Hesshusius correctly argued: "If original sin is the substance of the soul, then we are compelled to assert one of two things, - either that Satan is the creator of substances, or that God is the creator and preserver of sin."

THE SETTLEMENT OF THIS CONTROVERSY IN THE FORMULA OF CONCORD, ARTICLE I OF ORIGINAL SIN

This Article sets forth, on the one hand, the position of Flacius and, on the other hand, the position of the Lutheran theologians who, on the basis of Scripture, opposed Flacius. In clear and unmistakable language Article I sets forth the true Scriptural teaching that God is not a creator, author, or cause of sin, but by the instigation of the devil through one man sin (which is a work of the devil) has entered the world, Rom. 5:12; 1 John 3:7. Scripture testifies that God has created human nature not only before the Fall, but that God even since the Fall is the Creator of man, and creates his body and soul, Job 10:8-12; Ps. 139:14-16. Nevertheless, this same creature and work of God is lamentably corrupted by sin; for the mass from which God now forms and makes man was corrupted and perverted in Adam, and is thus transmitted by inheritance to us.

Therefore, in order that God's creation and work in man may be distinguished from the work of the devil, we say that it is God's creation that man has body and soul; also, that it is God's work that man can think, speak, do, and work anything; for in Him we live, and move, and have our being, (Acts 17:28). But that the nature is corrupt, that its thoughts,

words, and works are wicked, is originally a work of Satan, who has thus corrupted God's work in Adam through sin, which from him is transmitted by inheritance to us.

Consider the unspeakable goodness of God, that God does not immediately cast from Himself into hell-fire this corrupt, perverted, sinful mass, but forms and makes from it the present human nature, which is lamentably corrupted by sin, in order that He may cleanse it from all sin, sanctify and save it by His dear Son.

If there were no distinction between the nature or essence of corrupt man and original sin, it must follow that Christ either did not assume our nature, because He did not assume sin, or that, because He assumed our nature, He also assumed sin; both of which are contrary to the Scriptures. But inasmuch as the Son of God assumed our nature, and not original sin, it is clear from this fact that human nature, even since the Fall, and original sin, are not one and the same thing, but must be distinguished.

It is clear that the doctrine must be rejected, when it is asserted and taught that original sin is the nature, substance, essence, body, or soul itself of corrupt man, so that between our corrupt nature, substance, and essence and original sin there is no distinction whatsoever. For the chief articles of our Christian faith forcibly and emphatically testify why a distinction should and must be maintained between man's nature or substance, which is corrupted by sin, and the sin, by which man is corrupted.

THE VERDICT OF HISTORY

Seeberg remarks: "Flacius was not a heretic, but in the wrangle of his day he was branded as such, and this has been frequently repeated." A similar verdict is passed by Gieseler and other historians. But whatever may be said in extenuation of his error, it cannot be disputed that the unfortunate phrases of Flacius produced, and were bound to produce, most serious religious offense, as well as theological strife, and hopeless doctrinal confusion.

(Compiled from the Concordia Triglotta, pages 144-152, 859-879)

What a lesson for us Lutherans as we observe the Reformation! How careful we must be with the words and terms which we use in the Church so that they neither add to nor subtract from to the Word of God which is to be the sole Source and Norm of all Christian teaching in the Church! Let us hold fast to sound speech (Titus 2:8) and continue to speak the same thing, that there be no divisions among us, but that we be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment (1 Cor. 1:10).

--M.L.N.

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