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*Memories from My Youth and Early Times in America**

* From *Samlede Skrifter*, Vol. III, pp. 5-40 (Decorah, Iowa: Lutheran Publishing House, 1912). Translated by C. M. Gullerud. —A most welcome contribution for summer reading. —Ed.

Dr. U. V. Koren

Translator's Preface: (I set myself the task of translating these "memories" with the belief that they would be interesting, entertaining, and useful to the reader for whom this material would be closed without a translation. The "memories" provide an insight into the conditions of pioneer times in our country and, hopefully, will move the readers to an appreciation of the hardships and endurance of the emigrants who came to this land to make a new life for themselves and their descendants. Of particular interest will be the struggles of Christian colonists, both pastors and church members, in providing opportunities for the regular use of the means of grace. It seems that there was no sacrifice too great for them to make that this might be accomplished. The external circumstances were often very humble and lowly, but the Word and Sacraments made them both beautiful and glorious. The reading of this record must put us to shame when we complain over difficulties which arise in connection with our church work today. At the same time it should move us to pray for a measure of the zeal which was so strikingly demonstrated by the activities of our forefathers. It is with such a prayer that this work is offered to those into whose hands it may fall. - C. M. G.)

When, earlier this fall, I was asked to write some remembrances from my "pioneer" days in this country for this yearbook, (*Symra* 1905), I promised to do so with the provision that I would have the time. I find that I have neither the time nor the strength to author a new work of this kind. But lest I should be the cause of an embarrassment to the editors who have informed me that they are expecting a contribution from me, I have put together some unpretentious lectures delivered to faculty and students at Luther College. These I am offering to the publishers of the yearbook, with some expansion and additions, if they see fit to use them.

I greet you this evening not as ladies and gentlemen but as my dear friends! I am reminded how, as a child (or was it as a student?), I once saw and heard the elderly Rosenkilde telling fairy tales. He sat in a corner of the stage where there was set up an old-fashioned green screen, such as was formerly used in the corner where the stove was located. He sat in a comfortable, high-backed easy chair, clothed in a dressing gown. This was the grandfatherly, domestic, cozy set-up which gave to the hearers the illusion of being children listening to a fairy tale.

The grandfather is not always telling fairy tales in this situation as he sits with the young ones around him. He is perhaps just as often drawing on

true personal experiences.

As a teacher in Christ's Church, and in an assembly such as this, I am not telling fairy tales nor embellished stories. But the aforementioned picture comes to my mind because it would be helpful to me in connection with the unpretentious account that I intend to give you if indeed the previously mentioned familiar, cozy, free feeling might characterize our gathering here tonight.

I do not stand before you as a "lecturer" (I have neither the training nor the time to prepare and to hold a lecture), but in an artless and straightforward manner I wish to present to you my memories, which may give you an impression of the pioneer church and may serve also to give you a bit of an understanding of the present. Unfortunately, I have no written record of those days. I have no diary to refer to. I must seek help from "my memories' hymnbook," as Schlenschlager somewhere calls it.

It was the hymnbook that most people in ancient times resorted to. Most people had very few books. In the hymnbook, then, they laid their flower petals and other memorabilia to which they attached precious memories. I also have such a "memories' hymnbook," which I wish to page through a bit and so tell you a thing or two. Preferably I would choose to sit in a corner in all privacy, but I will have to reconcile myself to be standing here. That was my introduction.

I.

While my remembrances from Pioneer Days are to be set forth here, it may serve a good purpose if I would mention with what previous training I came to this country.

I came from Bergen, a descendant of an old Bergennian family which produced pastors in the diocese of Bergen during a period of over 200 years.

My schooling began in 1832 when I became a pupil in "The Lancaster School," a school form now forgotten, but at that time new and imported from England. This form was based on a mutual training of the children, namely, in this way that the older ones were used to instruct the younger, wherefore the school was called an "Exchange School." I thought it was a very pleasant arrangement. In 1833 our school had a visit from Oscar I. He was crown prince at the time and we had what was called "Prince-Leave" for eight days.

Later I entered the "Real School" (*Realskolen*). [Very likely similar to our high school — C.M.G.] There I had Lyder Sagen as teacher. I was a student of his as long as I attended the Latin school. My first textbook was entitled "Thieme's Initial Diet for a Sound Intellect." The title tells you the nature of the course.

In 1837 I enrolled as a student in the Latin School. There I had happy days, especially in the first half of my schooling while we still occupied the ancient building with reminders going back to Gjeble Pedersen's days (Reformation times). That there were tokens of the influence of Sagen is a well-known fact. But neither was he nor any of our other teachers a Gamaliel, at whose feet we could sit in a spiritual sense. The ministers of the town were, at that time, of two kinds. Some were rationalists and others were of the type of Hersleb-Stenersen. In the diocese of Bergen rationalism had not made as great headway as, for instance, in the Christians and the Akershus dioceses. The powerful and commanding voice of Bishop J. N. Brun had hindered that. Thus they had succeeded in retaining Kingo's Hymnbook, or (in some places) Guldberg's. In my childhood and early youth there was scarcely any witness-bearing which in a Christian sense could bring about an awakening. For my confirmation I was instructed by an otherwise well-meaning rationalistic pastor. At my confirmation I was asked what kind of blood was to be found in a fish. That it was "red and cold" was to be considered a testimony of the wisdom of God. And then the next boy was called upon.

We received no conception of the difference between the Christians and "the world" — which was understandable under the prevailing condition of the State-Church at that time. The Haugianers, of which there were not a few in Bergen, had a repelling influence by their separatism and their judgmental attitude. Outsiders had little opportunity to become acquainted with their good sides. It was not realized that the State-Church type of Christian-

ity essentially provided occasion and temptation for such separatism. But I was fortunate, through my closest relatives, to be exposed to a daily witness regarding what it meant to be a Christian. This took place through the regular use of God's Word and prayer, and the referral of all things to God. And all of this especially with the true old Lutheran flavor. For a brief description of this type of Christianity I would refer you to the old Watchman's Verse. (See the complete restoration in the Synod's revised Hymnbook.)

Then came the the time to leave home. This was 61 years ago. These were the student days. That was a long time ago. That was the year King Carl Johan died. Henrik Wergeland lived in the grotto. A year later I was along and carried him to the grave. Welhaven was strutting up and down the streets of Christiania making his loud remarks or telling stories. He usually had someone with him as an auditor and this often fell to my lot, since in his childhood and youth he had been acquainted with my family and generally related stories from this time and from his school days.

Yes, it was a long time ago. The sainted Prof. Monrad, Bishop Jorgen Moe, and the senior University Professor Aschehoug were young candidates at that time. Prof. Gisle Johnson was still a student.

The sainted President H. A. Preus had enrolled as a student the previous year. J. A. Ottesen and I enrolled together, as well as Pastors N. Brandt, O. Duus, N. E. Jensen, and L. Steen—all of whom have been pastors in the Synod. The theological studies were for most of the students just "professional." Nearly all of them had respect for Christianity, but there was very little of a deep-seated spiritual acknowledgment. With a few exceptions, the students for the most part led a decent life. Especially was this the case with my intimate friends, among whom I can mention Pastor emer. J. M. Lund (who is still alive), the scholar Hartvig Lassen, and the vocalist Behrens. The latter two died as pious and humble Christians.

My studies were often interrupted by teaching assignments and progress was therefore slowed down. I was not much impressed by the theological teachers until Gisle Johnson and C. P. Caspari began to lecture. In church circles there was only one who was especially prominent, W. A. Wexels. Little by little his influence inspired interest in Christianity among those who gathered about him. When I entered the University, the two churches in town, Our Savior's and Garrison's, were nearly empty. Seven or eight years later, the former church was as a rule nearly filled whenever Wexels preached. One may wonder what it was that brought him so many hearers. He had a grating voice, and his external presentation was anything but attractive. He did not make use of any arts of elocution. He read his sermons, never moved a hand, and hardly ever looked around during the time when he was preaching. It must have been the deep earnestness that shone from him which drew the hearers and, more than that, the old Gospel that he proclaimed. The direction of his theology was a mild form of Grundtvigianism. For those who were not acquainted with Grundtvig's errors from other sources, this was of minor prominence, so that my friends and I had no conception that there was anything peculiar about his message or different from the old time Lutheranism. That Gisle Johnson was also a regular and thankful hearer was self-evident.

The awakening Christian life in Christiania took place at the same time as the strong movements in the political world. For many years everything had been peaceful in Europe. In general there had been peace since Waterloo. The July Revolution and the freedom fight in Poland did not last long and only had local repercussions. Then came the year 1848 with the February Revolution in Paris and the immediately-following uprisings in Hungary, Berlin, Dresden, Wien, etc., and thereafter, that which had a much greater effect among us, namely, the Danish 3-year war with Schleswig-Holstein. That these occurrences left their impressions with reference to religious matters is easily understood.

There was at that time a very remarkable man in Denmark who in the last 5-6 years had come to prominence. After I came to this country, he was the cause of another and more violent reaction which was, however, of shorter duration. But already at that time he had an affect upon me which was stronger than any other. This was the later-to-become-famous Soren Kierkegaard.

It would be difficult for me to tell you in a few words what I learned from him as distinguished from what I received from most of the other teachers. His influence showed itself for the most part in the spiritual sphere and personal activity which he called forth in his readers; a more idealized view of life and of man; in every domain, an intellectual consideration; a view of the disparity between the essence of Christianity and the world; an exposure of all kinds of "sham" and humbug; an incisive critique of all pretenses of Christianity in oneself and others; an unconditional obedience to God's Word and submission to it. Thereby there emerged a view of the requisites for the pastoral office and a view of the pitiful caricatures so often to be found in the office, whether it be the good-natured clergyman who is spiritually asleep while he, however, eats and drinks and sleeps and carries on the functions of his office like any other business — or it be the gifted preacher who "with the daring boldness of the speaker" draws his hearers along, in wonderment over the beautiful and touching words which neither he nor they have any use for as soon as the sermon has been concluded.

Along with all this there followed a longing for true and meaningful work and the spiritual struggle which accompanies it. "It is one thing just to sit in a quiet room and apprehend the Highest and it is quite another thing to sit inside in the big copper kettle which is being hammered out by all the smiths and nevertheless to apprehend the Highest." The world is that large copper kettle. "Out into the world, then, and get to work!"

The fixed, positive content of faith was not what S. Kierkegaard brought us. As an example, I can cite the case of my most intimate friend and me, both disciples of Kierkegaard. We went entirely different ways. He read Grundtvig and became a Grundtvigian; I read Luther and became "a Lutheran." ("With Luther there is never any nonsense," Kierkegaard had said.) Although I grieved over the fact that my friend was a follower of Grundtvig, I have always looked up to him as a more pious and better Christian than I.

Where should I turn to find the work that I longed for? I was a theological student and a teacher at Nissen's Latin School. Should I continue to be a teacher for years to come? What would become of the spiritual labor out there in the wide world? My view of America at that time was still entirely indifferent even though I had by chance read in the papers that there was a need for pastors among the colonists there and even though I knew that two or three of my colleagues had recently gone there.

Then there was the evening in January or February, 1853, when my previously-mentioned friend visited me in my lodging in Christiania. We had a long conversation. I remember that we talked about regeneration, about work, and controversy, and such things. America was not mentioned. It got late and since he wanted to go home to his lodgings near the Akers Church, I walked with him. It was a beautiful winter night, starlit and clear. When we came to the church cemetery and I wanted to return, a sudden inspiration came to me, and I said, "What if I should go to America! There is much work to be done there." He said neither yea nor nay and so we parted. That night I did not sleep. I could not shake the new thought from me. There was work to be done. There was need of laborers. What could be the use of thinking about it and talking about it and then doing nothing about it! A day or two were devoted to considering the matter, weighing the arguments for and against. At last I came to a decision. I wrote to my nearest of kin and to a number of my friends. In general the answers were in the negative, except for one. And that was my wife, now deceased. From her who lived to celebrate with me my golden wedding 2 years ago I received this answer: "I would be reluctant to leave Norway, but if you want to go I will consider it my duty to follow."

I immediately (still in February) wrote to Pastor A. C. Preus that I was willing to accept one of the two calls that had just been made available among the Norwegian emigrants. The one was in Wisconsin between Madison and Dodgeville. The other was in Iowa where, up to this time, no Norwegian pastor was located. There were six Norwegian pastors in America (i.e., candidates from the University in Christiania and ordained in Norway). They were: H. A. Preus (since 1848), A. C. Preus (1850), Gustav Dietrichson, H. A. Preus and N. Brandt (1851), and J. A. Ottesen (1852). Of these the last three and the first one were known to me from student days. At this

time (February 1853) they had just had a preliminary meeting together with representatives from the congregations for the purpose of organizing a church body—the Norwegian Synod—which also was established in October 1853 some weeks before I landed in New York.

In response to my correspondence with Pastor A. C. Preus, a letter of call was sent to me from a number of settlements in northern Iowa, located in the counties of Allamakee, Winneshiek, Clayton and Fayette. This call letter (issued by the temporary church council in Madison at the request of the congregations) reached me in the month of June. (Mail service was slow in those days. It took 4-6 weeks for a letter from Wisconsin or Iowa to reach Norway. If my memory does not fail me it cost 54 cents.) I then preached my Demission-sermon. It was the first time I had occupied a pulpit and I was very nervous. The sermon was delivered in the house of correction in the forenoon and in the prison (Akershus) in the afternoon. In the forenoon I saw a large number of heads, none of which I was conscious of having ever seen before. In the afternoon it was better. My pious friend and patron, Alderman Ebbell, comforted me by saying that I had "a sympathetic voice." He said nothing about the sermon. July 21st I was ordained in Oslo. The previous week Jorgen Moe had been ordained. The dean of the diocese, P. A. Jensen, the then resident chaplain in Aker, presented us. When I had delivered my ordination sermon and spoke to him of how I had agonized over my sermon, he comforted me by saying that I should not let this worry me for "Bishop Arup has heard many poor sermons." These were the only sermons I preached before I delivered my inaugural sermon in Iowa.

II.

Not until September 6 did I leave Norway, traveling to America by way of Kiel and Hamburg. It looked a lot different in Norway from what it does now. There was no railroad, no telegraph and very few steamboats. To reach Hamburg I had to take a steamboat to Kiel, and from there I had to travel by rail to Hamburg. From this city, so-called packet ships sailed regularly to New York. These were quite small sailing vessels but quite well fitted out for emigrants.

In Hamburg I had a new experience of what was being offered people in churches that were called Lutheran. In one of the most frequented churches I heard a preacher who was said to be an eloquent man. The church was large. Several hundred chairs encircled the pulpit. These chairs were occupied. Otherwise the church was empty. The text was Ephesians 3:13, "Therefore I ask that you do not lose heart at my tribulations for you, which is your glory." The eloquent preacher invited his hearers to learn from this: "What we shall do so that we may enjoy our good days in undisturbed peace, even though we see so much misery in the world, so many poor and sick." This was approximately the theme. The epicurean advice he gave was such that it made my Lutheran blood boil within me because of the profanation of the Word.

When, in the afternoon, I heard a real Christian, a truly Lutheran Biblical message, I poured out my heart to the preacher, though he was a complete stranger to me. He did not seem to be a bit surprised. "This is what you can expect in this town in times like these," he said.

We were now to cross the ocean in the little bark ship, "Rhein." Aboard this ship we were to spend no fewer than eleven weeks with many experiences.

In addition to about two hundred German emigrants in the middle deck, there were in the second cabin 30-40 persons of different nationalities and in the first cabin a number of remarkable passengers from Germany, Denmark, and Russia. Among some of these I saw, besides other things, that which I had not seen before nor seen after, namely, how the crassest unbelief and the most foolish superstition can exist side by side in one and the same person. The trip was not monotonous, for it brought many experiences. Cholera had been present both in Norway and Germany, and cholera was with us on board ship, so that not fewer than 14 corpses were cast into the sea. The trip was so stormy that sometimes, for several consecutive days, we had to "lie with rope and tackle," since the sail could not be raised and a part of the rigging had been crushed and had to be cast overboard.

The first danger that confronted us was when, one dark night, careless

steering grounded us on a sand bar 5-6 miles outside of the notorious Sable Island. In the uproar that followed among the people, we saw the various ways in which the threat of death is met. Since it was low tide when we were stranded, we came afloat when the water rose. The captain said that if we had been stranded at high tide we could not have been freed. After we once again had run aground (in fog, near Long Island), we reached New York in November.

The trip west was at that time no longer negotiated over the Great Lakes. The first railroad between Buffalo and Chicago was completed the same fall, if I am not mistaken. As I recall, the population of Chicago numbered 60-70,000 people at that time. Where Our Savior's Church is now located, at May and Erie streets, there were then green fields. We could not travel farther than to Chicago by rail, so we took the steamboat to Milwaukee. From there a railroad spur had been built, the present C. M. & St. P. R. R. By this means we came as far as to Whitewater. From there we traveled with horses to Koshkonong where we were to visit with Pastor A. C. Preus.

We rented a team of horses and a lumber wagon and had as driver a lively young man who was about 20 years old. He surprised me when he told me that during the winter he attended a high school and had come so far that he could cite Cicero: "*Quousque tandem, Catilina,*" etc. He was very unpretentious and was dressed in ordinary work clothes. In Norway I was not used to such a combination, and here I got the first example of what I later learned to know as one of America's greatest advantages, namely, that every honorable occupation, physical or spiritual, is held in esteem, and that any work, slight as it may seem, is considered "a thing of dignity"; while idleness and laziness, a shame. "If only we could have learned this in Norway," I thought. At the time of my youth this had not been learned. No doubt there has been progress in the homeland also in this respect in these 50 years.

And so we arrived at the Koshkonong parsonage. This was very plain, but we were received with open arms. Here the first "Norwegian pastor" in this country, the elder Dietrichson, had lived for 4-5 years. As is well known, he was much interested in ritualistic details. In the church regulations of Christian III there is written a law which says: "A pastor should always go forth in the proper clerical garb." This he kept most punctiliously. The story is told that also when he hauled wood or water and frequently "other stuff," he was dressed in his long preacher's robe with his clerical ruff hanging around his neck with all the starch gone out of it.

Pastor A. C. Preus was president in the month-old Synod. He was somewhat naive in his ecclesiastical views and believed that it must now be determined which of two calls I wished to accept. He did not seem to be much concerned with the fact that I was ordained by virtue of a call from congregations in Iowa. He asked me where I wanted to go. I reminded him that I had been ordained after having received the call from Iowa, and I was ready to go there. This was the farthest away, and it was evident that the need there was the greatest. So it came about that I set out for Iowa.

I had not given much thought to the external circumstances that I was to encounter. I had been promised a house with three rooms and a kitchen. I was to receive some hundred dollars in salary, plus perquisites. However, I knew that there was no house. Having seen the log houses in our journey through Ohio, I asked my wife what she thought of such a dwelling. Neither one of us had an answer.

In the meantime, one of the pastors with whom I was acquainted, Pastor H. A. Preus, arrived at Koshkonong where he knew I was expected. It was a happy meeting, and it was decided that before we journeyed westward we should visit him and his wife at Spring Prairie and see how they had it there. And so we set out, but it was so late in the day that it got dark several hours before we arrived at our destination. In my ignorance I sat and expressed my amazement that Pastor Preus could find his way on this "coal-dark" road where there were no signs to direct the traveler. I believe that he was not unwilling to accept my admiration, but later I had the strong suspicion that it was his old horse who had been the pilot.

The very small log house which was the parsonage looked strange both inside and out. To our inexperienced eyes there was a curious contrast be-

tween the house and its occupants. In the tiny parlor there were a few rickety chairs and an important looking so-called "sofa." It was a bench with a backrest, which the pastor himself had made from young poplar trees. The backrest of this "sofa" had been placed in front of a window so that the small first-born child in the parsonage (the present Professor Preus in Decorah) could be laid up on the window sill without falling down. This is where he lay the first time I saw him. A ladder gave access to the room above.

But I hastened to Iowa. It was difficult to get transportation since it took three days to get to the Mississippi. At last one of the pastor's neighbors graciously took charge of us and with his leadership we journeyed through Madison, Blue Mounds, Wingville, etc., till we reached the ferry at the Wisconsin River. Our leader, using his broken English, managed to keep us from losing our way. The trip was bitterly cold, and we were not prepared for such weather. All went well until we arrived at the ferry where now the railroad depot, "Bridgeport," is located. There was the ferry, but it was not in operation. There had been thick ice on the Wisconsin River; but the ice was broken up, and in the powerful stream the sheets of ice were piling up, so it was difficult to understand how we could cross over to the other side. There was no house on the south side of the river and none from whom to seek advice. We understood that help must come from the other side where there were houses. What should we do? Should we go back 4-5 miles to the nearest house so late in the day and in such cold weather? This we would rather not do. We began to shout and yell as loud as we could. After a while, to our great joy, we heard responding shouts from the other side. Soon we saw men dodging between the ice sheets in a sort of a vessel which we finally identified as a canoe. There were two men who were on their knees each in his end of the canoe. In this fragile vessel we would have to cross if we wanted to continue our trip. We were ordered to sit still in the bottom of the canoe, facing each other with hands on each side of the boat. There was no way that we could take along our two trunks which constituted all of our baggage. It took another trip to get them. The two "half-breed" Frenchmen then took their places on their knees, each in his end of the canoe. They could not use oars (paddles), but instead they used long, sharp boathooks to fasten into the ice sheets. Our friend and driver from Spring Prairie wept when we pushed out from the shore.

Later on, when we got our trunks, we made a quick trip to Prairie du Chien, which city we reached long after dark. Here we were informed that we could not cross the Mississippi for the time being because it was ice-covered. So we were stalled there for a number of days. At last a man came who had heard of our problem. He said he thought he could help us cross. True, no horse had crossed the river, but a light buggy could make it. While my wife sat in the buggy, the rest of us walked and pulled the buggy. The man who helped us said that he was a doctor. He was a short man with large gold-framed glasses and a tall hat. It must have been a strange procession to behold. The small doctor went ahead with a long pole in his hand to test out the ice. Following him I came with a vest over my head and overshoes that reached to the knee. In the buggy (or the one-horse carriage) sat my wife enveloped by a buffalo robe. There was room for our trunks in the carriage. In the rear, pushing the buggy, we had a young Norwegian boy whom the doctor had engaged. As soon as the doctor found that the ice was safe, he came back and threw out a rope which was tied to both ends of the equipment, looped around his neck and under his arms, and thus we set out. It was a great help that we had *terra firma* under our feet on the large islands which were located in the course of the river. And so we came fortunately and safely to McGregor. I have, on many occasions since, made dangerous crossings over the Mississippi, which I cannot here describe, but this first crossing was surely the most curious of them all.

In McGregor there were at that time only a few houses, but among them there was, of course, a "tavern" and here we made a stop. The question was how my wife could be accommodated. For there was, as far as I could see, only one common sleeping room. But the host said, "She shall, of course, occupy our ladies' room." There was an addition or annex to the common sleeping room with a door opening upon it, but no window—a small, dark room with a bed. This was "the ladies' room."

We were fortunate to be able to rent a team of horses and a lumber wagon with a Scotsman as the driver. And so we set out for Little Iowa (the name of the area where the congregations gathered). Toward evening we reached the first Norwegian farm. The man was kind enough to mount a horse and precede us as our guide. He said that we should drive to Nils Katterud (from Lier in Norway) who was one of the most highly regarded Norwegian colonists. He did not know something that we later found out when at sundown we reached the Katteruds, that the house was filled with relatives who had recently come from Norway. This friendly family nevertheless welcomed us with goodwill and offered us lodging for the night, although we were not able to remain there.

The next morning Nils Katterud and I walked to the home of Thron Lomen (from Valdres), the oldest and in many respects the best-informed man among the colonists. He advised me to seek lodging in one of the houses closest to the Katteruds, since nearby they had bargained for an 80-acre piece of land for the parsonage. After a number of fruitless attempts to find housing, we finally found a place with Erik P. Egge (from Hadeland). This consisted of a one-room log house. They didn't want the pastor's family to go searching any longer if we were willing to stay. We were happy to accept the kind offer which had been made at such great sacrifice. Nils Katterud then hitched up his oxen and transported us and our two trunks to Egge's place, where we stayed for three months.

III.

Our nearest neighbors were one from Sogn, one from Hjartdal, one from another parish in Telemark, one from Tinn, one from Eggedal and one from Lier. In the west there were many from Valdres and in the east, many from Sogn. Representatives from other parishes in Norway could be found here and there.

We arrived at the Egges on the afternoon of Christmas Eve. The little house measured 14 x 16 feet. By means of calico curtains we were able to divide it into two rooms, one of which provided a place for two beds which in turn were separated by another curtain. This filled one wall of the house. The rest of the house had to provide place for the kitchen with cook stove, a place for the house-father, his wife and two children, and a space for the pastor's family as well as study space.

Notice had been sent out, as far as possible, that there would be divine services the following day, Christmas Day. So now I was to study my Christmas sermon. The only books that I had were the New Testament, the altar book, an Agenda and hymnbook. My entire library was still in Milwaukee and was not unpacked until a half year later. Pen, ink, and paper were on hand, but I had no adequate lighting for my writing. There was no light. But we manufactured a lamp by placing a strip of linen into a saucer filled with fat which was then placed on top of an upturned coffee cup so that the lamp was in a position higher than the note paper. And so I worked nearly all night on my inaugural sermon. I wanted to make adequate preparation for the sermon, a custom that I have kept up in my ministry.

The service on Christmas Day was held in the house belonging to Thorgrim Busnes from Telemark, Egge's nearest neighbor. This was about a mile south of the present Washington Prairie Church. Considering the circumstances, there was a large gathering and all things went well. The people had only one complaint: I had omitted the offering hymn; consequently there had been no offering, a thing which the people were accustomed to have on Christmas Day. And they didn't like it that this had been left out. The fact of the matter was that I had not even given it a thought. Partly this was due to the fact that there had been no such custom in the towns where I had lived in Norway. Furthermore, I had forgotten that in my letter of call an offering had been promised to me on the high festivals of the church year. I had other things to think of besides money. So now I had preached three sermons and the fourth would be delivered second Christmas Day 6-7 miles farther west. It did not occur to me that I could use the same sermon there, and so I spent a greater part of the night preparing a new sermon. For New Year's Day I was to visit another main section covered by my call, about 30 miles east, at Painted Creek in Allamakee County. Here I was also well-received and informed that people wanted me to live there.

The next preaching day, the Festival of Epiphany, I was again functioning at the Busnes home and the Sunday thereafter 12-14 miles west at the Hans Aakres (near Ridgeway). I had now begun to perform baptisms, weddings, and to administer communion. One thing followed another, so that I had 14 services and meetings in the month of January, partly in Winneshiek County and partly in Allamakee, Clayton and Fayette Counties. It was a difficult task for me to locate all of my members. It was only after a month that I heard that some of Little Iowa's church members lived in "Whiskey-Grove" near the present town of Calmar.

The land had just recently been colonized, so there were no landmarks or names which might help one to find his way. When I finally learned how the country was divided into townships and sections, then I had something to go by. I then drew a chart with these divisions and, with the use of letters of the alphabet and the numbers with which I was acquainted, I could determine which farmers lived in the different sections. Each farm was designated by a letter or number, the meaning of which was added in the margin. This was a great help to me. In the letter of call the congregations were designated as follows: "Little Iowa," "Painted Creek," and "Turkey River."

In reality the call included the following territories: Decorah, Madison, Lincoln, Calmar, Stavanger, Washington Prairie, Glenwood, West Painted Creek, East Painted Creek, Faegre, Lansing, Norway, Marion, Clermont. My stated call included all of these places and to these were later added: Little Turkey River and Crane Creek. All of this was spread out in six counties. Thereafter, little by little, there was added a mission area which included the congregations now served by Pastors Sehus, St. Reque and Wein, Kasberg, Magelssen, Joostad (Krohn's), H. Rasmussen, G. Rasmussen and Bu.

Now it was necessary to effect a proper order of activities, since my letter of call simply stated that I was to preach the Word of God according to the Lutheran Confessions and make use of the Norwegian Church's ritual and Altar Book. Besides, I was to be present every three weeks in each of the three chief areas covered by the call. Three weeks after my arrival, I convened a congregational meeting for the purpose of dividing the Little Iowa congregation into school districts with assistants and for the purpose of selecting places for church building and parish houses. A committee had to be elected to carry out the plans that were being made. A month later I held meetings for the framing of a Constitution and for the drawing up of regulations for various activities. I had very little to serve me as a guide. I did have a paper from Pastor A. C. Preus, which contained a number of regulations in use in Wisconsin. Many of these did not fit our circumstances. I experienced great difficulties also because of the fact that I had no books to guide me except for the volume of rituals. I therefore turned to the elderly Thron Lomen and said: "There is something that I would request of you. You are old and I am young; you have had experience in many things and I am inexperienced. Will you promise me that when I propose one or another thing which is not appropriate or fitting, you will apprise me of it?" He thanked me for my confidence and said he would do what I asked of him. He kept his promise, examples of which I will mention later.

There I sat in my little room at Egges, five travel days distant from the nearest neighboring pastor, without books, with no experience, and now order was to be established. I say, "I sat." No, there was not much sitting. I was continually on the go. It would amuse you to know what kind of travel equipment I had. My first sleigh consisted of runners made of two long hickory poles with a box on top with a turned up edge for a seat, all of which was held together by wooden pegs. Not a single nail was used. My first wagon was a one-horse chaise with wooden axles and "linchpins" without any springs under the wagon box. My first harnesses, reins and bridle were made of "bed rope."

I will remember the testing, uncertain, and calculating glances with which I was measured, when I, with this rigging, stopped off at a "tavern" and gave the reins to the "hosteler" and asked him to grease my wagon. From his glances I could tell that he wondered if I was a "tramp" who should grease his own rickety wagon.

I had no overcoat nor buffalo robe and I froze. But I maintained good courage with the thought of the ministry which had been placed before me.

This drove me forward with eagerness and effort. On most of the trips I laid over, thus spending most nights with my church members, especially when I was not visiting in the Little Iowa congregation, although I stayed with members there, too. In this way I got well-acquainted with the people who received me obligingly and with good will.

One of the feelings that came to me again and again was sorrow over the thought that my dear homeland had to miss so many exceptional men and women. They were a people that I had never learned to know except from books, and this means that I had not known them at all. The people I had known in Christiania and other cities were of a different sort. Among them I had the reputation of "having a good understanding of people" (as was stated in a certificate that I received at one time). Here I found out that my knowledge of people was very limited, and what knowledge I did have was of little help in the new surroundings. I had to learn anew. And I found out that, with regard to real worth, my new acquaintances, the Norwegian farmers, were by far the finer people from among those I had associated with, even though the best of these latter people unquestionably had enjoyed greater advantages.

I found more genuineness, more earnestness, more piety, more industry, greater willingness to make sacrifices, greater honesty, less pretentiousness than I had, by and large, been acquainted with. There were, of course, also degrees here. I found here and there poor subjects, dishonest characters, hypocritical persons, cavalier, censorious, self-made saints, eye-pleasers and drunkards; but in general I found the aforementioned virtues. I found that not a few farmers and their wives were true pearls, and I had to consider it a privilege to be their friend. Our Norwegian farmers in this country belong, in my opinion, to a class of greater worth than any other class that I have personally known. No wonder then that, as a patriotic Norseman, I grieved over Norway's loss. One thing that caused me wonderment and not a little grief was this that I found that most of the newcomers gave such little thought to Norway and felt no longing for the land of their birth. If I sought to lead the conversation in this direction, I got nowhere. "Do you often think of Norway?" I once asked a Halling in whose house I often was a guest. "Don't you long to go back?" "Do I long for Norway?" he said. "No, sir, I do not, for there was so much stone there." He sat for a while in deep thought and then broke forth, "Yes, the lingonberries in the fall—those I miss. Well, sir, those were mighty good berries."

The outer circumstances were indeed plain. Many luxuries there were not, but the people met me with friendliness and cared for me the best they could. When it came bed-time they would say: "You will have to crawl into the corner over there" or "You will have to get up on the ladder, for we have made a bed for you upstairs." "Upstairs" could mean a number of things with reference to the roof above, in those days. It might be necessary to sleep under an umbrella in case of rain or one might see the stars twinkling down upon you in the bed, or in the morning you could find a small snow bank on your blanket. Or you might find the sheet frozen stiff as far as your breath had reached (that is, if there was a sheet). But these were minor things for a young, healthy man.

One frequently hears people talk about how much the pioneer pastors had to suffer, how many deprivations, and difficulties, etc. In my opinion, the later missionaries and pastors in new congregations did not have it any better, in some instances perhaps even worse, and then there is the great difference that we were nearly always received with joy and trust while now it is often otherwise. More difficult than suffering the lack of certain external luxuries was the occasional need to write sermons clothed in an overcoat with the back turned to a red hot cook stove while the fingers were stiffened by the cold. Or to study one's sermon making penciled additions to it—all of this in a small room, full of small children, where the floor has just been scrubbed for Sunday and is still wet, while it is raining outside and no place "upstairs." I had to write a new sermon for every service. I perhaps made it difficult for myself in this regard, but in one of Pontoppidan's pastoral letters I had been warned against "warmed over food." And furthermore I considered it my duty to give the people the benefit of my best effort. To begin with, I felt that I should write out my sermons in full. I recall my fright the

first time that I had not been able to write out my conclusion in full. But there were times when I had to be satisfied with a detailed outline. I do not have much time for those, however, who are ready to preach without much preparation, although I admit that there may be exceptions. There is no cloth easier to weave than that of the church.

As soon as my books arrived, I began to use Luther in the preparation of my sermons, and I continued with this practice for the first ten years. In comparison with this spiritual giant one feels very small, that is, if one knows himself. His "*methodus heroica*" cannot be imitated. But he who would be sincere can at least learn from him to use simple and plain language, although here, too, I feel very inadequate. But from him we can learn to get rid of such bad habits as wordiness, mere recitation, and the striving for effect which is often mistaken for eloquence.

The common Norwegian communion practice caused me considerable distress. I told the people that I did not want to have sole responsibility, and therefore I asked that honorable Christians would give me information if they knew with certainty something I should be made aware of regarding those who asked to receive the sacrament. I also announced a preparatory service for holy communion as soon as it was possible to conduct it. This also was instituted when I was freed from serving such a large number of congregations.

The divine services were well-attended. The settlements were at this time not populous, and consequently it was immediately noticed if someone was absent. The order of service was kept as simple as possible, since the worship was usually held in the small houses of the newcomers. Many a time the emigrant's red-painted chests had to serve both as altar and pulpit. It often occurred to me how beneficial these conditions were for the young pastor, namely, in this way that the externals which often become the important things and the differences in incidentals do not become obstacles. Thus the pastor's service is more easily appreciated and remembered.

We did not hold services only in log houses, but occasionally in the forest, sometimes in a schoolhouse, in an empty "store," in an empty barn, and again "upstairs" (where there happened to be a larger house). I remember that some years later, in the summertime, when the first pastor in Highland Prairie congregation was to be installed, the service took place in a large log house. When I arrived the house was entirely filled with the women of the congregation while the men were outside in the scorching sunshine. It did not seem right to me to install the preacher in the presence of the women only. I went outside and asked, "How far is it to the Overland forest?" The answer came: "Two miles." "Are there any boards or planks to be found around here?" "Well, that could be arranged," said Ole Overland. "Yoke up," I shouted to the people, "we are going to the Overland forest. Here we cannot install the pastor." So we pulled out for the woods, and there the new pastor was installed quite close to the present location of Highland Prairie parsonage.

There was a desire for God's Word among the people in those days as well as a need for it. There was truly an enthusiasm for the establishment of church order. I received letters from many places, containing urgent pleas for me to come to them, since they had no pastor. Some of these people traveled long distances, on foot, for the purpose of talking to me.

While I was on a journey, my wife sat quietly at home. She did not have any housework to take up her time, since we were not able to have our own housekeeping. She, therefore, devoted a great deal of her time in visiting in the neighborhood. This was not an easy matter, since the farms were so far apart. She kept busy with much correspondence and with her diaries, or she occupied her time with such domestic activities as sewing and knitting. Thus the time was passed which otherwise would have seemed long and cumbersome.

When we had been at Egges for three months, we had to seek lodging elsewhere because of family circumstances there. We moved to the neighboring Sorland farm where we had sleeping quarters upstairs and during the day, living arrangements with the family downstairs. After three months we could not remain there for reasons similar to those mentioned before. An elderly couple, Erik and Guri Skaarlia (from Eggedal), were kind enough to

rent us their "little bitty house," while they moved to their claim cottage where they had previously lived. This small, new house was our first private residence. There was room only for a bed, a table, two chairs and a cook-stove. When we got one, we set it up outside and laid some boards over it to protect it from the rain.

My wife recorded in her diary that, when we moved to Skaarlia, our household equipment consisted of a coffee grinder, a mixing stick, and four tin cups. Where we got these she does not say. But she adds that we did own one 20-dollar gold piece.

To begin with we did not have a bed, and so we had to be satisfied with a straw mattress on the floor. Lying on this sack of straw, I suffered my first serious illness, a bilious fever (so said the learned people later). They claimed that I had brought this upon myself through travel weariness, and the drinking of ice cold water when I was overheated. Those were hard days for my young wife. We had no doctor and after a month, although I was still weak, I was able to walk with my wife up to the parsonage property where we counted the logs that had been delivered for the building of the house which had been promised. The progress was at a very slow pace.

In August of 1854 a pastoral conference was to be held in Wisconsin (Synod meetings at that time were convened every other year, with the first meeting scheduled for Spring Prairie in 1855). Together with my wife, I traveled over the same ground which I had covered the previous year in the trip to Iowa. I had only one horse and the same uncomfortable wagon previously mentioned. We had an umbrella to protect us from sun and rain. But we made the trip with no mishap. It was a bad summer in Wisconsin since in the midst of extreme heat there was a severe epidemic of cholera. In Spring Prairie I had occasion to admire Pastor H. A. Preus and his guest, Mr. Jorgen Zuolner (from Austin, Minnesota), for their devoted and fearless care of those who were stricken with the cholera. They visited them, they clothed their corpses and buried them when other people sometimes refused to do it. After we had the joy of visiting a number of pastors, we set out for home. Now we experienced the most unusual episode of being snowbound on the eighth day of September. Two inches of snow had fallen over this entire part of Wisconsin. Nothing similar to this had taken place at this time of the year in the past 50 years.

When we left home we understood that upon our return at least one room of the new house would be ready. We did not feel right about occupying the little Skaarlia house any longer, for these old folks needed it. But we found that the new house was not ready for occupancy since there were no windows and no doors. I gathered some of the congregation's recently elected trustees and told them that I would have to make a trip to the congregations at Painted Creek and Turkey River. The trip would take a number of weeks. If the house was not ready upon our return, then I would find it necessary to take my wife to Wisconsin. They promised and we set out. When we returned after three weeks and drew near to the new house, we looked to see if there were windows. Yes, there were, but no doors.

So we had to call again upon our friends, the Egges, and seek cover for the night. They welcomed us graciously even though the house was full of workers. We were to find a place "upstairs." We went up and I remember that we sat down on a red chest and there, for the first time, I saw my wife in tears. I had never heard a word of complaint from her and she upbraided herself for not being satisfied. But she had reason enough for being filled with anxiety. This was the latter part of October, and it was in the beginning of December that our oldest daughter was born. The next day doors were installed in the new house. We moved in the same afternoon and wished each other good luck in the new home. Sunday morning a friendly man came with a well-packed coffee kettle and some milk so that we might have something warm for the morning. And so I went to the services, but this time my wife stayed home.

Little by little we were able to get orderly arrangements made in the congregations. It was not so difficult to get the people to realize that it was their duty to see to it that Word and Sacraments should be provided for and used and that no one had the right to deprive the children of these blessings. Somewhat more difficult it was to get them to see that there was no

prospect of preserving the Means of Grace for a longer period of time if each congregation stood alone and did not work in unity with other congregations. It was indeed with the help of other congregations that the churches I served were established. How could individual scattered flocks have any hope for the future?

With much earnestness and enthusiasm I presented these thoughts at a congregational meeting held in the aforementioned home of Thronð Lomen. I had expected that all would immediately support my proposal that we should join the recently organized Synod. But in this I was mistaken. Our people were hesitant since this was something new. "Synod?" "What is that?" "Is this something that places restrictions upon us?" I pushed on with my youthful enthusiasm, but the people didn't seem to be convinced by my arguments. The meeting was well-attended. There were many heads and many opinions. Then old Thronð Lomen made a sign to me, which I alone understood, and he at once went outside. A while later I made an excuse to go outside and found him. "You asked me," he said, "to give you advice when it was necessary and it seems to me that such a time has arrived! You have presented good reasons for joining the Synod. I agree that we should. But this is new for the people. Do not push for a decision today, but let the people think about it until another meeting. If you do this, I believe the proposal will be accepted unanimously." "Thank you," I said, "I will follow your advice." This I did and the matter was settled just as Thronð Lomen had predicted.

And so we joined the Synod, had our representatives there in 1855, and hosted the synod meeting here in Washington Prairie in 1857. It had been my hope that all Norwegian Lutherans would join the Synod. For a time it seemed as though this would happen, but it did not. Concerning this I have written in my pamphlet: "Why is there no church unity among the Norwegian Lutherans in America?" What the future will bring, only God knows.

There is a Need to Give Greater Emphasis to the Doctrine of the Priesthood of Believers*

* Presented to a CLC Delegate Conference at Bethel Lutheran Church, Spring, Texas, June 6, 1992. The author is a member of Resurrection Lutheran Congregation, Corpus Christi, Texas.

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The doctrine of the priesthood of believers is a familiar one in conservative Lutheran circles. Most laymen in the congregations affiliated with the Church of the Lutheran Confession have at least heard or read that passage from 1 Peter where all believers are called "a royal priesthood." Although they may not be able to direct you immediately to Paul's words in Ephesians 2:18, virtually all CLC members understand that as Christians we need no intermediary between ourselves and God. They know that is why the CLC has no high priests and why we do not pray to Mary or to designated saints.

If you asked a Bible class composed of CLC members who is being addressed when John, in his first general epistle, says, "test the spirits," you would undoubtedly get the correct answer: all Christians.

The same would be true of Matthew 7:15, where the believers are warned to "beware of false prophets." And it would be true again where Paul tells the Corinthians to "judge for yourselves." CLC members would agree that Luke did well to compliment the Bereans because of their diligence in checking the teachings of Paul and Silas against the actual word of God to make sure that what they said was the truth.

If you had your Bible class turn to Acts 15:22 and asked them by whose authorization Paul, Barnabas and other Christians were sent to Antioch to speak the truth against the Pharisees, they would correctly answer that it was the whole church, which included the apostles along with the local congregation and its elders.

On communion Sundays, CLC laymen sit in their pews and hear their pastor speak the words of absolution, and they hear him declare, "I forgive you all your sins." While some of them may have an imperfect understanding of the Office of the Keys, they know that the forgiveness of sins comes from God, not from the pastor.

They know that the power to retain or remit sins, given to Peter in the 16th chapter of Matthew, was also given to the church in the 18th chapter. They can tell you that the Office of the Keys was given to the local Christian congregation, as well as to all Christians.

In summary, it is safe to say that CLC members in general know and rejoice in the fact that they have direct access to God. They know that they not only have the freedom to hear and read God's word without its being filtered through a hierarchical system, but that they are indeed encouraged and implored to listen to God and to speak directly to Him at every opportunity.

But despite the general understanding within our church body of the scriptural principles that comprise the doctrine of the priesthood of believers, there is reason to wonder whether these principles are being put to use in as full a manner as the Lord intended.

In his discussion of the authority and responsibilities of the local congregation, Edward Koehler, in *A Summary of Christian Doctrine*, says this: "Christians should also exercise the privileges and powers of their priesthood. In their homes, among their brethren and neighbors, in their contacts with the world they should by word and deed `show forth the praises of Him who hath called them out of darkness into His marvelous light' (1 Pet. 2:9). They should be witnesses to Christ, confess Him before men, teach His Word, reprove sin and error, admonish and comfort, pray and intercede for others; in cases of necessity they may also baptize and absolve. And whatever a layman does in these things is as valid and certain as if an ordained minister had done it; the official character of the minister does not add virtue and validity to the means of grace."

With respect to Holy Communion, we might ask how an isolated group of Christians going through an extended pastoral vacancy can receive the benefits intended by God in this sacrament if that congregation acts on a belief that only a pastor ordained by the synod can administer it.

The authority and the responsibility of the local congregation is well-established in scripture. The duty of the individual Christian to band together with fellow believers and the duty of that fellowship to carry out all of the commands of Christ, including administration of the sacraments, cannot be passed on to a higher organization simply because that organization has or is perceived to have a higher level of competence.

Why is it, then, that there are congregations—especially those that are small and isolated—that ignore the command to celebrate the Lord's Supper on the grounds that the synod has not been able to supply them an ordained pastor? Why do we see congregations go into decline or even disband because they cannot afford a pastor? Why do we see the work of evangelism come to a virtual halt when a pastor is not on the scene to direct it?

On the surface, the answers to these questions are not difficult. An ordained pastor is trained for this work; he is called to administer the sacraments; his experience in evangelism, in Christian counseling, in teaching God's word, are invaluable. There is no question that a congregation should have the services of an ordained pastor if that is in any way possible.

More important than any of that is the fact that the office of the public ministry is a divine institution. It is God's will that believers form themselves into congregations and that they select men to be their pastors. We learn this from many passages in the New Testament. In Romans, Paul asks the question, "And how shall they hear without a preacher?" He tells the Colossians, "Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God." In the epistles to Timothy and Titus, Paul goes to considerable length to describe the duties and qualifications of a minister.

But does any of this in any way abrogate God's charge to the local congregation? Does the fact that God calls certain men to be ministers mean that, if a local congregation hasn't been supplied such a man from the syn-

od, God's work is to be put on hold or canceled? The responsibility for spreading the Word, for seeing to it that the sacraments are properly administered, for providing comfort to disturbed souls, for preaching and teaching from the Bible, was not given solely to the apostles. It was given to all believers.

But, one may argue, there are matters of practicality and feasibility to be dealt with. It has been said, and may in fact be generally agreed, that a handful of Christians, hundreds of miles from the nearest pastor, cannot really be expected to carry on the activities of an organized church.

But is that a valid proposition? How small and feeble may a congregation be in order that it may plead a lack of viability? Christ himself answers that question in Matthew 18:20, when He says, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." Nowhere in scripture are Christians absolved from obeying God's word and from carrying out the Great Commission simply because they are few in number and scarce of resources.

Ultimately, then, we come back to the central question: Why do small flocks sometimes give up? Why do so-called mission outposts that once showed promise end up in failure?

Is it because God has abandoned them? Does He not want His churches to survive unless they can achieve some minimum number? But, of course, we have already answered that question.

Or is it because there is, after all, some perception of strength in numbers? Is there a feeling that, if we can't have at least some of the trappings of success, then we might as well abandon the effort? If we can't have a nice meeting place and if we can't afford a full-time pastor, are we then to conclude that we are of no use to God, that it is His will that His work not be carried on at this time and place? Is there in our minds an invisible "line of viability," which, if we fall below, gives us reasonable and acceptable grounds to sit on our hands and let God's work wait for more favorable circumstances to develop?

If, in our circles, there exists a general belief that there is some inevitability to a certain number of small, isolated congregations falling through the cracks, then that belief would tend to become self-fulfilling. We may well lose some small groups that might have been held together if they had been viewed by others and had viewed themselves as a priesthood of believers rather than a helpless, hopeless group of human beings relying on human institutions.

Can anything be done about it? A starting place might be to examine how it has come to pass that Christians fail to understand the extent of the responsibilities and authority given to them by God. Where do Christians get the idea that, if they are weak in numbers, weak in finances, and far removed from those within their fellowship, they are excused by those circumstances from exercising the responsibilities and authorities given to them by God in that collection of scriptural passages that make up the doctrine of the priesthood of believers?

To answer that question, we need only remind ourselves of what Paul told the Corinthians: "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him." As He does so often, God, by making all believers members of a royal priesthood, has established a principle that is entirely contrary to the natural thinking and methods of man. In all of man's organizations and institutions authority flows from the top down. But in the organization of His church on earth, the Lord has given a full measure of divine authority and responsibility to rank-and-file believers.

That is a little difficult for us humans to work with. It is just not the way we do things. When we set up organizations, all power and authority flow downward from the top.

Particularly in the southwest portions of the country, the Catholic church is the predominant religious organization. People who have a background in that church, and even those who merely live in that region and are accustomed to hearing and reading about Catholic activities, are well aware of the structured layers of authority that govern all church functions and beliefs. The Catholic church is a product of the natural mind of man at work.

It is the way a person not familiar with God's ways expects things to be.

And, of course, the Catholic church is not alone as an example of the way human organizations are structured. Every man-conceived organization in existence offers a similar example. Corporations, governments, clubs, schools, the military, athletic teams—in whatever organization you can think of, power and authority comes down from above.

We are conditioned to expect that kind of structure. Unless a man is thoroughly schooled in the ways of God, that is what he expects and looks for in every organization he joins, including his church.

There is a problem, then, in overcoming man's natural inclinations and expectations when he is confronted with one of God's "upside down and backward" ways of doing things. Unless great pains are taken to make sure that individual Christians understand what is involved in terms of responsibility and authority under the doctrine of the priesthood of believers, their natural mental processes will lead them to think of the synod not as the communion of believers it properly is—like local congregations—but as a center of authority.

Think for a moment about a person who has recently joined a congregation of the CLC, or even of one who has been around for a long time but seldom inquires deeply into doctrinal matters and happened to be absent on the Sunday his pastor's sermon touched on the priesthood of believers. His natural inclination is to view the synod as an organization with authority over his local congregation and as the entity where responsibility for carrying on church work resides.

And what do his observations tell him? Do the actions of his pastor, his fellow Christians, or the synod tell him that the church, as described by God, is organized differently from human organizations? In most cases, unfortunately, the answer is no. He observes that doctrinal positions are promulgated not from his local congregation but from the synod. His pastor is trained by the synod. If his congregation needs financial help, it turns to the synod. He sees synod headquarters as the focal point for all activity, including mission work. From what he can observe, his congregation's connection to all of this is simply to send in money and receive reports. In virtually all of its outward manifestations, the synod system appears to be very similar to any other organization, providing services to be sure, but also exercising authority.

None of these observations is intended as criticism of the functions of the CLC at the synod level. No one would argue that the services provided by the synod are not absolutely essential to the local congregations and their work in carrying out divinely appointed assignments.

If there were any criticism to be handed out, it could not be directed at the synod in any case. After all, it is the main point of this essay that God has given full responsibility and ample authority to the local congregation. If there are places where Christians have been gathered by the Holy Spirit and they are not carrying out their Lord's commands, that is **their** fault, not that of the larger fellowship.

And that is the problem. It is too easy to lay our burdens on the synod. It is, in fact, natural. We are conditioned to look upward in our organizational structures for the resolution of difficulties, and our experiences and observations tend to confirm the notion that the synod is the leader and the local congregations are the followers.

When a little flock is struggling to build itself into an effective witness for the Lord, there is a natural tendency to look first to the synod for help instead of to God and to the resources God has given us right where we are. Of course, there is nothing wrong with looking to fellow believers for help in building and maintaining another station for the dissemination of God's word. It is just a matter of putting first things first. And the first place we should look in any circumstance is to the Lord. The second place we should look is to ourselves; to what God has already done for us; to the gifts and resources He has already give us. Having done those things, a congregation is certainly acting within methods established by God when it seeks and accepts help from others within the faith.

Looking first to God and second to man is, of course, a well-known scriptural principle in our circles. But our circles are infected and inflicted

with the world, the devil, and the flesh the same as anyone else. Like Christians of all times and in all places, we talk a better game than we play. If we can make a job of being a Christian an easy job, we tend to lean in that direction. If we can find a reasonable excuse for shifting our God-given responsibilities to someone else's shoulders, it is sadly true that we tend to do it.

This human fault, like all other faults, is not something to bemoan and grieve about; it is something we should work to correct. We should not allow ourselves to be led into the naturally slothful ways of mankind simply because we haven't taken the time to understand the way God wants things done. We should not, in the ways we carry out our activities and communicate with each other, send messages to our people that the synod is some kind of big brother that is there to take away the difficulties of discipleship and to relieve us of responsibility.

Pains should be taken to help all CLC members understand the doctrine of the priesthood of believers, including the responsibilities and authority given to the local congregation by God himself. They should be aided in understanding that when a pastor comes, he is there at the election and authority of the congregation. It should be explained and emphasized that, when the pastor administers the sacraments, preaches the gospel, and otherwise performs the duties of the public ministry, he does so not as an ambassador from synod headquarters but as a member of the local congregation and by that congregation's authority. When doctrinal positions are taken or affirmed, congregational members should understand clearly that those positions are not pronouncements of the synod, but are true representations of God's word, confessed and agreed to by a collection of local congregations.

If it is necessary for a layman to read sermons or even to administer the sacraments, the congregation should understand that neither the power of God's word to work faith in our hearts nor the grace of His sacraments to remit our sins is in any way diminished.

It is not within the scope of this essay to make specific recommendations regarding any enhancements to the general understanding of the doctrine of the priesthood of believers within the congregations of the CLC. But it is the opinion of the writer that such enhancements, to whatever degree they succeed, would be of benefit to the establishment of more CLC congregations and the spreading of God's word.

Broadening the understanding of this doctrine is essential for another, perhaps more important, reason. As is true of all doctrine, God did not give this one to us so that it would provide interesting theological discussion in commentaries, seminary classes, sermons, Bible classes and the like. He gave it to us so that Christians—wherever they are, whatever their circumstances—would be enabled and empowered to carry out all things Christ has commanded us to do.

ILC Chapel Address, February 11, 1992

Paul R. Koch

The Word of our Lord for our hearts is recorded in 2 Corinthians 4:18, *We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal [temporary]; but the things which are not seen are eternal.*

Just what sort of vision is this which God expects us to have? Does he ask us to look right through or past or beyond the obvious . . . and to behold things which are invisible? YES. And that is impossible for the person who does not have the gift of spiritual insight, for "with seeing eyes they see not," as the Savior himself declares. Yet it does not require a Christian minister to know at least the first half: how temporary things of this world ARE. Lord Byron in his epic poem *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* reminds us:

While stands the Colosseum, Rome shall stand;
When falls the Colosseum, Rome shall fall,
And when Rome falls, . . . the world.

Today that empty and broken shell of the Colosseum is but a grim reminder of the decay of a once-flourishing Mediterranean culture whose glitter the apostle Paul was still able to view when he said: "The things which are seen are temporal." From the pyramids to the Parthenon, from the Colosseum to the coast of Ubar (again discovered by satellite imaging), those ancient civilizations sleep in the dust of the ages, as Paul knew they would; and one day it will be so for the world. From the world's ruins, the crumbling stones cry out this vital truth which God lays on the hearts of His people: The stuff of this world has not lasted, does not last, and is not going to last. We do well to learn at least that from the vanished worlds of ancient history, as we stand back to view their artistic rubble with wise dismay—and turn to view the unseen, the eternal, the world of the heavens and of our God. I take you back to Rome for a moment; not far from the rotting hulk of the Colosseum lie the underground catacombs in which Christ's people sought refuge from the hate of their neighbors. Here lives even today one of the unseen things (not because it was underground, but) because it is a testimony to that which endures. On the wall of one catacomb, in a place used for both worship and the final resting place of a Christian body, an inscription traced on the wall reads: "His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom."

You know what the writer meant: that he viewed this world in the light of the world to come. Thus God calls us also to face reality (reality!) and to look not at the outsides of things, not to focus our attention on things which can be seen, not to become preoccupied and diverted with such, but to have an eye for God's things.

This school, to which you have come with solemn purpose, will one day, if God wills, be called your alma mater, filled with evergreen memories. It has become your home away from home, and you have grown to love it. But ILC will not abide forever. Already it is marred by the scuffing of your feet, the scratches of your pens, and all the bruises of living. Time and decay have had a head start on it before you arrived on the scene, and one day it will be gone. Treat it gently in love as long as you have it.

Yet do not forget meanwhile to reach out for the eternal things that are served here, for by these alone will you be sustained. Amid all the diversions and through all the busy-ness, hold fast that which God gives you for the long haul.

You young people,—take counsel with your souls, which though unseen, are eternal—enter into frequent communion with your God, who is eternal—walk with the Lord Jesus, who though flesh and blood, is eternal.

Seek to build memories here that will not rise up to shame you, but will be lasting memorials of trust unbetrayed and of love unsullied. Seek for yourself and your closest friend those things here which are "pure, lovely, of good report," God-pleasing, and thus everlasting.

To this end we plan our days here around things that are not seen, so we do not lose ourselves in the tangible and temporary things of living, but use them rather to lay hold upon the unseen treasures that abide.

The grass withers; the flower fades away; as do the icicles on a sunny February day —

but the Word of the Lord endures forever,
the life He has given us abides,
the unseen miracles of His grace are eternal,
and this our hearts know full well.

All glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost. Amen.

"A Lamb Goes Uncomplaining Forth"

David Lau

(Continuation)

The first three stanzas of the hymn "A Lamb Goes Uncomplaining Forth" describe Jesus as the Lamb of God, uncomplaining, patient, perfectly willing to take on Himself the burden of the world's sins and to suffer for those sins on the cross. Jesus was willing to offer Himself up a sacrifice for us because of His love for us. As it is written: "Christ hath loved us, and hath given Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savor."

Now in the fourth stanza we have the Christian's response to Christ's love. How do I feel about Jesus since He loved me so much as to suffer and die for me? This is Paul Gerhardt's answer, and we pray that it will be our answer as well:

*From morn till eve my theme shall be Thy mercy's wondrous measure.
To sacrifice myself for Thee Shall be my aim and pleasure.
My stream of life shall ever be A current flowing ceaselessly,
Thy constant praise outpouring. I'll treasure in my memory,
O Lord, all Thou hast done for me, Thy gracious love adoring.*

What we see here then is that Jesus, THE LAMB of God, is WORTHY TO BE PRAISED. The only response that is fitting for what Jesus accomplished is to join the heavenly hosts of Revelation in singing Jesus' praises: "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing." This Lamb is worthy of our constant praise because of what He willingly did for us.

Thus the fourth stanza of Paul Gerhardt's hymn teaches us how we can praise the Lamb of God, not only by our words but also by our thoughts and by our actions. So likewise our text from Paul's letter to the Romans teaches us how we are to praise the Lamb of God. The apostle says: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God."

Notice that the starting point of praise is our consideration of the mercies of God. In the first eleven chapters of his letter to the Romans the Apostle Paul has explained in great depth the mercies of God. Here are just a few quotations. He says: "We are justified [or declared righteous] freely by God's grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." He says that "while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." He says that "we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son." He says that "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." He says that "God spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all." He says that "Christ died, yea rather, is risen again, and is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us."

On the basis of these mercies of God, centered in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, we are to praise our God. This means that our minds are to be continually occupied with the thoughts of God's great mercy. As the hymn says: "I'll treasure in my memory, / O Lord, all Thou hast done for me, / Thy gracious love adoring." But what happens to us so often is that instead of remembering what Jesus did for us, we tend to forget it. Our memory needs to be refreshed. We need to hear the Gospel over and over again, so that our minds have a chance to contemplate again and again the wonders of God's mercy. In our midweek Lenten services every year we read the complete story of our Lord's suffering and death. But who would say that we now know it so well that we don't need to hear it again? We do need to hear it again and again so that we can ponder it anew in our hearts and treasure it in our memory and think about it as we go about our daily tasks. This is the way our mind gets renewed so that our lives will be transformed, as Paul says in our text. It all starts with the contemplation of God's mercies in Jesus Christ.

But of course our response cannot stop with contemplation. For Jesus, God's Lamb, did more than think about how much He loved us. He did more than ponder how He was going to save us. He showed His love by His actions. He did the will of His Father even when it hurt, and finally He gave His life into death for us.

Therefore also our praise of Jesus must go beyond thinking of Him, and it must go beyond coming to church services to sing His praises. Paul says: "I beseech you, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God." As Jesus gave His body into death for us, so we are to give our bodies to Him as living sacrifices. Our contemplation of God's mercies in our minds thus leads us into living lives that glorify God. "From morn till eve my theme shall be / Thy mercy's wondrous measure. / To sacrifice myself for Thee / Shall be my aim and pleasure. / My stream of life shall ever be / A current flowing ceaselessly, / Thy constant praise outpouring."

Notice the emphasis on the continuing of this kind of life. Our Christian life is not to run in jerks or spasms of momentary excitement that soon fade away. Rather the Christian life is "a current [or river] flowing ceaselessly," constantly active in praising the Lord. Since Jesus has bought our bodies with His precious blood, we belong to Him, not just once in a while when we get into the right mood, but all the time. Everything we do from morning till evening is to be a reflection of His love for us.

Of course, this giving of my body as a sacrifice to God cannot in any way take away my sins. Only Jesus' sacrifice cleanses us from sin. My sacrifice to God is a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. It is my response to God's mercies in Jesus Christ. And God accepts my sacrifice and my service as long as I am bringing it in faith and love.

When God's mercies in Christ Jesus begin to penetrate our thoughts, things begin to change. Our minds are renewed. Our lives are transformed. We are no longer just like everybody else in this world, thinking worldly thoughts and seeking only to satisfy fleshly urges and doing the things that please ourselves. The flesh is still with us, but there is something else there, too. "Be not conformed to this world," says Paul, "but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God."

You see, Jesus' lifestyle begins to rub off on us. He devoted His life to doing the will of His Father, and this then is also how we praise Him. We are constantly seeking to learn God's will for our lives and do it. If we treasure in our memory what Jesus has done for us, what else can we do but give our lives to Him and serve Him in accordance with His will? Here is my talent, Lord. Use it! Here is my time, Lord. Take it. Here is my money, Lord. Use it for the spread of the Gospel. Here is my family, Lord. Take us and teach us and mold us to be Your disciples, all of us rivers constantly flowing in praise of God and the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ. Amen!

V

The fifth stanza of Paul Gerhardt's Passion hymn refers to the many difficulties we have here on earth. It speaks of "trouble's surging billows." It speaks of being "driven to and fro by woe." It speaks of being "weary" and being "oppressed by grief." It speaks of the noonday sun glowing down on us and making life miserable for us. It speaks of "death."

The author of this hymn personally experienced all of these miseries. He lived during the Thirty Years' War in Germany, which is generally considered one of the most devastating wars in all history. He wife and all of his children except one preceded him in death. He was persecuted by the government because of his loyalty to the teaching of the Bible. So he knew all about trouble and woe and weariness and grief, persecution and death. And yet all of these troubles did not destroy him, for he also knew about Jesus, the Lamb of God, who has taken away the sin of the world and has overcome for us all the consequences of sin, including death.

Jesus is THE DEATH-DEFEATING LAMB. For it is written that "through death Jesus destroyed him that had the power of death, that is, the devil, and delivered them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." The prophet Isaiah had foretold long ago that "death is swallowed up in victory." The prophet Hosea had declared: "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. O death, I will be thy plagues. O grave, I will be thy destruction."

These words were fulfilled by the death and resurrection of our Lord Je-

sus. For our text says: "The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." Jesus is the Conqueror of death. Jesus "hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel." Jesus is THE DEATH-DEFEATING LAMB.

This was Paul Gerhardt's belief also, and that is why he sings: "Of death I am no more afraid, / New life from Thee is flowing." And if death is defeated, then all of the lesser consequences of sin also lose their power over us. The noonday sun is used in Scripture as a picture of continuing fierce persecution that is designed by the devil to dry up our faith. But Paul Gerhardt sings: "Thy cross affords me cooling shade / When noonday's sun is glowing."

Grief and weariness come to us in great plenty in this vale of tears. But Jesus has said: "Come unto Me, and I will give you rest." And so the hymn goes on: "When by my grief I am opprest, / On Thee my weary soul shall rest / Serenely as on pillows." It is just as the prophet Isaiah said: "Thou hast been a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat."

Life on this earth is so troublesome that it is often compared to being out on a little boat in a rough sea, just as Jesus' disciples were so often out on the Sea of Galilee when storms suddenly arose. What did Jesus do in these storms? On one occasion He quieted the winds and the waves by getting up and saying: "Peace, be still." On another occasion He came to them, walking on the water. If Jesus is with us, we need have no fear. What He teaches us is, as the Bible calls it, "an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast." Therefore the hymn writer says: "Thou art my Anchor when by woe / My bark is driven to and fro / On trouble's surging billows." The Lord Jesus is with us on the seas of life, and He says to us: "Why are ye fearful? Be of good cheer. It is I; be not afraid."

Of all the fears we experience on this earth, the fear of dying is no doubt the worst of all and the most common of all. We are by nature afraid of dying and we are afraid of death because we are sinners. "The sting of death is sin," says the apostle. We are all sinners, and therefore the thought of facing the holy God after our death fills our hearts with dread. This fear is universal. That is, it is found all over the world among all people, whether they have been exposed to Christian teaching or not.

Why does the thought of our sin trouble us? "The strength of sin is the law." God's law tells us what is right and what is wrong. His law blesses the right and curses the wrong. The law says: "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." The work of the law is written in the hearts of all. That is why we are afraid of death. Moses speaks for all when he says: "We are consumed by Thine anger, and by Thy wrath are we troubled. All our days are passed away in Thy wrath. Who knoweth the power of Thine anger?" Of course the atheists try to avoid the problem by denying the existence of God. The evolutionists with a great show of wisdom try to explain away the evidence of creation that points to God. They are all trying to escape the stark realities of God, His law, and their own sin, which makes them afraid of dying and having to face that God whose existence they are trying to deny.

But all of man's efforts at trying to escape from God are doomed to failure. God is there. God is here. God is everywhere. "And it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." And because we are sinners, "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

But now look up at Jesus on the cross, the innocent Lamb of God. "He has done nothing wrong." Yet there on the cross God is showing the power of His anger and is punishing His Son. "Eli, Eli, lamah sabachthani?" He cries, because God has forsaken Him. There on the cross Jesus endured the punishment of our sin. There on the cross Jesus removed the sting of sin from death by dying in our place. There on the cross Jesus redeemed us from the curse of the law by being made a curse for us. "The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Jesus won the victory by dying our death for us. His resurrection is the proof of His victory. And He gives His victory to us sinners, just as He gave it to the repentant thief. Surely that criminal had reason to fear death, for

he was a sinner condemned by God's law and he knew it. But Jesus removed his fears by telling him: "Today you will be with Me in paradise." And so He says to us all: "I am the Resurrection and the life. He that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die."

The Lamb of God defeated death for us, and faith in Him is the only way that fear of death and the other consequences of sin can be overcome in us. "Of death I am no more afraid, / New life from Thee is flowing." The poisonous sting that makes death frightful has been removed. "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." Amen!

VI

In the past five sections we have examined the first five stanzas of the Lenten hymn, "A Lamb Goes Uncomplaining Forth, " and have seen how the words of this hymn are based on the teaching of the Bible. The first three stanzas present Jesus to us as the Lamb of God, bearing the sin of the world, patiently and willingly going to the cross in order to save us from our sins. This was the Father's loving plan of redemption, and Jesus was willing to carry it out to the bitter end.

The fourth stanza presents our response to Jesus' love. As He sacrificed Himself for us, so we now give Him our bodies as living sacrifices to glorify His name. The fifth stanza reminds us that on this earth we have to endure many griefs and sufferings and troubles of various kinds. Yes, we even have to endure death. But we need not be afraid of any of these things, not even of death, for Jesus, the Lamb of God, is the Conqueror of death.

What remains then in this sixth and final stanza of this hymn is the contemplation of the glories of eternal life, when we with our own eyes will see Jesus, the Lamb of God, in all His glory and will live with Him forever.

*And when Thy glory I shall see And taste Thy kingdom's pleasure,
Thy blood my royal robe shall be, My joy beyond all measure;
When I appear before Thy throne, Thy righteousness shall be my crown,
With these I need not hide me. And there, in garments richly wrought
As Thine own bride, I shall be brought To stand in joy beside Thee.*

The hymn writer in this stanza uses the Biblical imagery that occurs particularly in the book of Revelation. Jesus is the Lamb of God, and His Church is THE LAMB'S BRIDE. In Revelation the Lamb of God is portrayed as the victorious Lamb. He was slain for the sins of the world, but now He has risen again and rules over His Church and over the world. The heavenly choirs sing: "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing."

And the great number of those who believe in Jesus, the Lamb of God, as their Savior stand "before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands." A voice explains who these persons are: "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. . . . The Lamb shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

As long as we live in this world, we must go through much tribulation, but when the Last Day comes, that will be our moment of glory. This glory will not be enjoyed by all human beings. The rejecters of Jesus will then have to face His wrath. For they "made war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings." On that day they will say to the mountains and rocks: "Fall on us and hide us from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of His wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand?"

But those who trust in the righteousness of Jesus as their righteousness and those who trust in Jesus' blood as having been poured out for them have their names written in the Lamb's book of life. They do not have to be afraid, for they are THE LAMB'S BRIDE. And the Last Day is the beginning of an eternal marriage feast. For it is written: "The marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready. . . . Blessed are they which are

called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb."

Jesus' disciple John was permitted to glimpse in a vision the glories of that day. That is what he reports: "I saw a new heaven and a new earth. I John saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." John heard a voice from heaven, saying: "The tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain."

John kept on looking, and this is what happened. "There came unto me," he says, "one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, 'Come hither, I will show thee the bride, the Lamb's wife.' And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me that great city, the Holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God."

Paul Gerhardt, the hymn writer, believed himself to be in that number of believers that make up THE LAMB'S BRIDE. Our Lord Jesus wants us to be in that number, too. He gave His flesh for the life of the world. He poured out His blood as a ransom for all. He wants all to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. He invites us all to put aside our stubborn pride and self-righteousness and fall down before Him and confess our sins and receive from Him our robe of righteousness. He wants us to say with the prophet: "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, He hath covered me with the robe of righteousness." "Yea, Jesus' blood and righteousness / My jewels are, my glorious dress. / In these before my God I'll stand / When I shall reach the heavenly land."

THE LAMB'S BRIDE is the Church, made up of all His believers from all ages of time. By nature they are no better than others, for all of us start out the same way in this world. We are all born dead in sins. But the believers are those who "have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

And so on that last Day all will be judged, and whoever is not written in the Lamb's book of life will be cast into the lake of fire. For nothing evil can be found in the holy city of new Jerusalem. Only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life shall be there. "And there shall be no more curse; but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and His servants shall serve Him; and they shall see His face."

All of this is true because over 1900 years ago a Lamb went uncomplaining forth to die for our sins on the cross. Before He went forth, He prayed for us. He said: "I pray for them which shall believe on me. Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory."

May we then sing with Paul Gerhardt:

*And when Thy glory I shall see And taste Thy kingdom's pleasure,
Thy blood my royal robe shall be, My joy beyond all measure;
When I appear before Thy throne, Thy righteousness shall be my crown, --
With these I need not hide me. And there, in garments richly wrought
As Thine own bride, I shall be brought To stand in joy beside Thee.*

Amen!

P A I D E I A

From a Pastor's and Professor's Notebook

Roland A. Gurgel

XVII

Isaiah

Perfect Peace in an Imperfect World!

As this is being written, the clean-up of the Los Angeles riots is just beginning; the contest for control in Afghanistan is heating up; the struggle for separation of the various republics in Yugoslavia continues; unrest in South Africa goes on; the revealing of corruption in the various branches of the United States government hits the headlines and has become a political tool in an election year. These are but a few of the situations prevailing throughout the world of man that remind us, **if we need something outside of our own selves**, that we do indeed live in an imperfect world, in a world desperately looking for peace and security, in a world that at times seems to have laid hold on a peace only too quickly to learn that it is a fragile peace, to say the least.

It is in this imperfect world, imperfect because of man's sin, that we live. It is to **you** who live in this imperfect world that the Lord through the pen of Isaiah comes with the bold proclamation that "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee." There should be no need to remind ourselves that the Lord is not speaking of a peace between nations; nor is He speaking of a temporal peace that would bring about a millennium of sorts in this world. Many are the passages that reveal that as long as the world stands there will be wars and rumors of war, etc. When the Lord speaks of peace in Isaiah 26:3, He is speaking of that perfect peace "which passeth all understanding." He is speaking of that peace established by the Messiah between God and man, the peace of heart that comes with the assurance of sins forgiven and that we rest secure under the gracious and almighty protection of a loving and mighty Father. Nowhere is that peace better illustrated than in David's prayer set down in the third Psalm. David, pursued by tens of thousands and hearing the shouts of many that "there is no help for him in God," yet boldly proclaims, "I laid me down and slept; I awaked; for the Lord sustained me." David confidently announces, "But thou, O Lord, art a shield for me; my glory and the lifter up of mine head; I cried unto the Lord with my voice, and he heard me out of his holy hill." In an imperfect world David found perfect peace in that his mind **was stayed** on the Giver of Perfect Peace, the God of Israel, the God of Abraham, the God of Promise.

We have throughout this rather lengthy series on Isaiah's prophecy attempted to focus your attention on the fact that God is speaking to you in these words, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee." Of course, Isaiah was called to write to the descendants of Jacob of his time, as well as to the nations of that era; of course, much of what he had to say looked forward to the Babylonian exile and the deliverance of Judah from that exile; of course, much of what he had to say looked forward to the fulfillment of God's promises in the birth, life, death, and resurrection of the Messiah; but penetrating all these situations is the constant and ever-recurring revelation that all is also meant for your attention, for your reception, for your comfort, for your security—for your **perfect peace—at this moment** in the history of the world.

Nowhere is that fact more clearly demonstrated and revealed than in the first twelve verses of Isaiah 49. Spend a few minutes in those verses to reassure yourself that God is indeed speaking to you when He promises perfect peace. The first twelve verses of this chapter contain a dialogue between God the Father and God the Son. They carry you into the eternal council chambers of the Triune God and let you listen as Father and Son discuss the work of redemption and to whom it applies, for whom it is intended. In this conversation recorded by the Holy Spirit through the pen of Isaiah some 700 years before the incarnation of the Christ, **you are mentioned**. Listen as the Savior calls out to you to listen, "Listen, O isles, unto me; and hearken ye people, from far." Israel was not an island. Israel was the people at hand. Now the Messiah calls out to people beyond the borders of Palestine and beyond the time of Isaiah. People on the islands, people in far lands and distant times, future times, are called upon to open their ears and listen to a message **meant for them**. He is **calling** 2700 years ago **to you** of this day and this place to give ear to a most important message.

There is no question that He, Jesus, was to be the fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham and his seed — "And now, saith the Lord that formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob again to him . . . to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel" (49:5-6), but that was by no means to be the extent of His work. Listen carefully to hear your name sounding out from that eternal council chamber some 2700 years ago, "Thou art my servant, O Israel [the Messiah], in whom I will be glorified . . . And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldst be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob . . . I will **also give thee for a light to the Gentiles**, that thou mayest be my **salvation unto the end of the earth** . . . Behold, these shall come from far: and, lo, these from the north and from the west . . ." (49:3-12).

Down through the centuries many of the physical descendants of Abraham have held that God's promises were meant only for them, to the exclusion of the Gentiles. The impression was given that God only had eyes for and concern for those in whose veins the blood of Abraham flowed. There have been others who would place other restrictions as to who might enjoy the peace of God. No clearer evidence that such "thoughts are not God's thoughts" is needed than this conversation from the eternal council chambers of God recorded in Isaiah 49:1-12. "I will make you the Light of the Gentiles . . . to be my salvation to the end of the earth."

It is not only others who might want to exclude me from that perfect peace in God's Servant; it is so easy for **me** to introduce doubts and questions into my own heart and mind. Can I, sinner that I am, one who must confess with the Apostle Paul, "I am chief of sinners," can I really be certain that God has me in mind when He says, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee"? When those doubts and questions arise—and they do—be aware of what is happening. You have turned your eyes away from Him, and then come problems. When you keep your eyes, heart and mind on Him, then and always then you will hear Him say, "I will also give thee [Jesus] for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth." Then you will learn to say with David, "But thou, O Lord, art a shield **for me**; my glory, and lifter up of **mine head**. . . . I laid me down and slept . . . for the Lord sustained me. . . . Salvation belongeth unto the Lord: thy blessing is upon thy people" (Ps. 3).

(To be concluded)