

JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY

VOLUME 41      SEPTEMBER 2001      NUMBER 3

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(Reviewer: David Lau)

**The Alpha and the Omega**

John K. Pfeiffer

[The “President’s Address” at the graduation service at Immanuel Lutheran College,  
May 19, 2001.]

Fellow redeemed and especially you, our graduates, grace be unto you and peace from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Life is filled with transitions. Each one marks the end of one aspect of life and the beginning of another. Some of the transitions are welcome, while others can be frightening.

Graduation is one such transition. It can be both welcome and fearful. How shall you face this as well as those yet to come? The answer is found in our text.

"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End," says the Lord, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."

The setting is the island of Patmos. The Lord of glory is about to reveal to the Apostle John many details regarding the future of the world. If there ever was a time that a man needed assurance about transitions, this was it.

Thus Jesus introduces Himself as the Alpha and the Omega. These are the first and last letters in the Greek alphabet. Every other letter is embraced by these two letters. Nothing is left out. Nothing slips by undetected.

Even so, Jesus is the beginning and the end of all things. Everything in time and space is locked in His embrace. The course that is traveled by the most distant star and the time of death for the smallest sparrow on this campus is under His control.

Not only is this true at the present, but it has always been and will always be true. This truth applies to time as well as space. Jesus was here at the moment of creation and He will be here at the end of all things. He is the Beginning and the End, who is and who was and who is to come.

So, as you face one more transition in your life, I would like you to reflect back on a different time and a different place. Think back to the first transition: your days of security in the warmth of mother's womb came to an end and you were rudely pushed out into the cold, wide-open spaces. What a fearful moment.

However, the great Alpha and Omega did not abandon you to your fears. He brought you safely through this transition and gave you a time of grace in this world. As the Psalmist says: "By You I have been upheld from birth; You are He who took me out of my mother's womb. My praise shall be continually of You" (Ps. 71:6).

The next transition for most, if not all of you was the greatest transition of all. It was the kind that is frightening as

it approaches, but most welcome after it has taken place. I am talking about your conversion.

Your sinful nature hated and rebelled at the idea of the end of a life dedicated to wickedness. It resisted as the Spirit of God approached. However, through the Word mingled with the water of baptism, the Spirit overwhelmed your sinful nature and a new man was born within you.

This new man rejoiced in this new beginning. It was a beginning of freedom . . . freedom from sin, from Satan, from death, from hell. For the first time in your life, you experienced the peace of knowing that your sins are forgiven and that all is well between you and God.

This end and this beginning was made possible because of Him who is the Alpha and the Omega. He, who looked down upon the newly created earth . . . who touched a bit of clay and made the first man, this same Creator became what He created. God assumed the form of the servant, becoming man and as man offering Himself as the perfect sacrifice for the sins of all people.

Because He is the Beginning and the End, He was able to take upon Himself the sins of Adam as well as the sins of each son and daughter of Adam sitting here this morning. The Alpha and the Omega is the One who made possible your new beginning as the justified child of God.

After this there were a number of ends and beginnings in your childhood: the day that you took your first steps; the day that you spoke your first words; the day that you learned how to read; the day that you started going to school. All of these and others had their impact. Some were joyful; others fearful. However, the Alpha and the Omega was with you every step of the way.

Then came the day when you took your first, spiritual baby steps. The day of your confirmation was the day that you let go of your parents' hands and started to walk on your own. But of course you were not on your own. He, who is the Alpha and the Omega, was standing there with you. He is the one who instructed your hearts. He increased your faith and your love. He gave you the spiritual strength to stand before the congregation of Christians and publicly confess this faith.

The Lord Jesus was there when you were placed into the spiritual care of your parents. He was there when you began to take responsibility for your own spiritual care. Again the Psalmist says: "For You are my hope, O Lord GOD; You are my trust from my youth" (v.5).

Now, you are here in this field house, about to experience another end and another beginning. For many it is the end of one phase of education and the beginning of something else: college, learning a vocation, marriage, the public preaching or teaching ministry, or perhaps something else.

As you consider what is coming to an end, I am sure that there is a mixture of joy and sadness. As you consider what is yet to come, perhaps there is an added feeling of fear. However, in all of this you need to know that Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega. He brought you safely to this end and He will usher you safely into the new beginning. Whether you were at I.L.C. for four years, for eight, or for eleven years, Jesus has been at your side day after day, from the beginning to the end.

Each day as you confessed your sins, He was there to forgive you. Each day as you looked for help, He was there to strengthen you. Each day as you thought that everything was going wrong, He was there to make it turn out right.

The only reason you are here today . . . the only reason that you are graduating . . . the only reason that you are moving on to a new beginning is Jesus. He was with you, He is with you, and in days to come He will be with you.

Surely you put forth your efforts. You worked toward this end, as indeed you should have, but without Him your efforts would have come to nought. Therefore, today we praise Him who has made all this possible. With the Psalmist we say: "O God, You have taught me from my youth; And to this day I declare Your wondrous works" (v.17).

Ahead lies your pathway . . . the one which God has laid out for you. It may be as the shepherd of a congregation; it may be as a shepherd of little children; it may be in any one of many of life's occupations, for which the Lord has given you talents. As you take the first step forward, do so with the prayer of the Psalmist: "Now also . . . O God, do not forsake me, Until I declare Your strength to this generation, Your power to everyone who is to come" (v.18).

Be assured, the Alpha and the Omega is already there, ahead of you as you take each step into the future. — Have you ever watched a father and mother as their baby is learning to walk. They get in front of the child, hold him by the hands, and walk backward, giving encouragement for every step. — So it is with Jesus. He is not only the beginning; He is also the end. He is in your future, reaching out into the present to take you by the hands and lead you into a future He has already made safe and blessed. And even now as you hear these words, He is encouraging you each step of the way.

So it is that you can be confident. The future will be as the past. All things will work together for your good. Alpha and Omega will make it so. Even as you journey into the face of death itself, you need fear no evil. For He who is the beginning and the end is also the end of death and the beginning of a new life in heavenly glory. Just as death was not the end for Him, but rather He overcame the power of the grave, rising victoriously to life, even so He will raise you into His victory. Once more with the Psalmist we say, You . . . shall revive me again, And bring me up again from the depths of the

earth. (v. 20)

Therefore, this day is the day of the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty. He made this day possible; He makes this day a blessing; He makes this day but the beginning of a life of blessed service to God.

## Concord Has Its Formula

(continued)

R. E. Schaller

### Martin Chemnitz

Martin Chemnitz is the second man in our study whom the Lord chose to bring Concord to the Lutheran Church. His name Chemnitz means “von Stein.” Perhaps that is well chosen since this Martin became the “Rock” for the wording and development of the Formula.

He was born in the town of Treuenbitzen a little earlier than Andrea, November 9, 1522, and he developed more slowly into the famous theologian whom the Lord gave for the sake of the Formula. His formal education was begun at the normal age. However, the series of interruptions that followed because of poverty is almost unbelievable. He was born not twenty miles from Wittenberg and his first schooling was there, but it seems to have been brief and a rather negative experience. His father and brother were weavers of cloth and he was soon forced into this trade. However, during the next years he was in and out of the stream of education.

Melanchthon had advised him to study mathematics, which he loved. He also fell into astrology through his friend Melanchthon. However he only used it to gain money for a short period of time. He soon fell into teaching every time his money ran out and he had gained a little additional learning. Finally he was helped by a nobleman to finish his work for a masters degree.

He only decided to take up the study of theology seriously when he was about twenty-seven and the opportunity came to him. He was made librarian of the Ducal Library at Königsberg. He seemed to be a very systematic man and he set up his own course of study, which he finished just as he was inclined. His schedule consisted of exegesis, isagogics, church history, dogmatics and apologetics. He was thrown into theological “wars” of that time by the fact that Osiander was brought to Königsberg and soon started his false teachings. Moerlin, who became Chemnitz’ best friend, opposed Osiander vehemently and was finally banished, in accordance with the practiced custom. Chemnitz was brought into the disputation, took his first theological stand, and soon left Prussia, too.

He now went to Wittenberg and Melanchthon again, where he stayed at the latter’s home. His ability to teach came out when he lectured on Melanchthon’s *Loci* and the students flocked to hear him. After a brief stay on the Wittenberg Faculty, he was called into the preaching ministry in Brunswick, where he was also to become superintendent of the churches of Brunswick. Bugenhagen ordained him and he was again associated with his friend Moerlin. Here at the age of thirty-three he married Anna Jäger, who bore him three sons and seven daughters. His home life was very happy. He worked in his calling to relieve the tensions caused by the adiaphoristic debates and the synergistic controversy, but he also became a much better preacher. This had been his weak point but he developed into a very clear and systematic proclaimer of the truths of God. He also plunged into the study of Hebrew and dogmatics. He considered Hebrew to be the first language God spoke to men. His clarity of expression brought him a large listening audience among the common people. It becomes evident in hindsight that the Lord was developing this man for the Formula as the systematic dogmatician who could speak with the clearness that was needed.

In 1561 Chemnitz became disenchanted with the Crypto—Calvinists, who seemed so dishonest and deceptive in their methods and use of words. He wrote his first confession on the Lord’s Supper, taking only the words of institution as his basis. Moerlin’s answer to the Naumburg affair drew Martin deeper into the mixed-up doctrinal affairs of Germany. He was a signer. At this time he began his greatest work in life, opposing the Roman Catholic Jesuits in his *Study of the Council of Trent* (*Examen Concilii Tridentini*). At the age of forty-five he received his doctorate in sacred theology from the University of Rostock, where one of his professors was David Chytraeus, another Formula of Concord man.

Chemnitz and Andrea were now thrown together in the work of establishing the Reformation in the province of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel. Chemnitz arrived in the area first and began by drawing up the *corpus doctrinae*. He was very excited when he found that Andrea accepted his work. They found the churches in appalling condition. When they were finishing their task, Selnecker urged the printing of Chemnitz’ work and requiring all church pastors to have it in their library. This became the manual of church order.

Andrea’s approach was not the same as Chemnitz’. He had his confessional statements written out when he came to places of controversy while Chemnitz felt you should work them out on the spot. However, it appears that Chemnitz learned to accept what was well-done by Andrea and then add, change and enlarge as needed to complete the answers.

Chemnitz showed his pride at various times as his wounded feelings brought his break with Jacob Andrea, but these matters were solved and it was the much quieter approach of Chemnitz that was more appreciated by most people. Andrea had the force, pushiness and energy of Luther while Chemnitz had his more settled, domestic and renaissance virtues. Together they became the most important men in the drawing up of the Formula. Chemnitz was becoming very weak after the Book of Concord was accepted. He would never have crusaded for its signing, but Andrea did. Yet Chemnitz wrote its defense. Chemnitz died at the age of sixty-four in 1586, a highly respected theologian and the first great dogmatician of the Lutheran Church.

### David Chytraeus

David Chytraeus was born in a Lutheran parsonage at the time when Melanchthon was making his greatest contribution to the theology of the Lutheran Church, February 26, 1531. His father was Pastor Matthew Kochhaffe. David the son was destined to become the famous and brilliant “lay-man” among those writing the Formula. It is true that he became a preacher and a pastor, but he knew his weakness and shyness, which showed itself particularly in his speaking from the pulpit. He became the man whose spirit avoided violence and maintained peace. Kochhaffe was his German name and means cooking-pot. He was a student of Melanchthon, living in his home for some years, and he no doubt was led by his mentor to grecianize his name to Chytraeus. It was much more suited to his university type of work.

His brilliance was soon recognized and he found no ordinary place of learning suited to him, so at the tender age of eight or nine he entered the University of Tübingen. The enforced discipline fit right into Chytraeus’ desire for living and he kept it most of his life. At the age of fourteen he had his master’s degree and was happy to travel on to Wittenberg to study with the “giants” of theology.

After the Smalcald War the University of Wittenberg closed, and David’s education was cut short, but when the school reopened, he continued. For a short time he did have Luther as his teacher, but he lived in Melanchthon’s house for five years. Chytraeus loved to travel and always enjoyed people. His sensitive nature learned much from every type of person. At the age of twenty he returned from a journey and found waiting for him the call to be professor at Rostock. He married twice. Both of his wives were named Margaretha. His first wife bore him seven daughters, of whom only two lived through childhood. His second wife gave him two sons.

His last thirty-three years were plagued with increasing illness and seemed to make him more and more sensitive. “The Theology of the Cross” was the theme of his life, and his aim was to write a popular and practical commentary of the entire Bible. He did not succeed in this but he did produce an exegesis of many a book. His last book was the first Lutheran eschatology. (Perhaps it should be mentioned here that one of the outstanding things about the theologians of this period was the astonishing number of books written and published by them in upholding the truth and combating error.)

He was sent to many diets and conferences because of his understanding and his brilliance. However, he did not speak up against many errors until after the death of his mentor, Phillip Melanchthon. He then became a decided opponent of the Crypto-Calvinists. His losing a brother to Calvinism was a deep wound in the spirit of Chytraeus. He spent great efforts in reorganizing the University of Rostock. In fact, organization was one of his great gifts. For an example of this, we might look to the task for which he was chosen in Austria. He was to set up and organize all the Evangelical Churches in Austria. For this he committed to paper a special liturgy, a church agenda, an order for the consistory, a commentary on the Augsburg Confession, and a concise epitome of the doctrinal position. It was by these publications that all the work and organization in Austria was to be guided.

Chytraeus had by this time become known as a man thoroughly Lutheran, sensitive and peace-loving, Scriptural and fair-minded, a mature man and brilliant. But he did not have the gift of preaching and so did not preach often, but worshiped with the congregation. He was often let down when people would take advantage of him, completely changing what he had set up. But he was also very touchy and easily hurt. He did arrange something in largely Catholic Austria which was very different from what Melanchthon produced in the Leipzig Interim. The pastors in Austria, even the Lutherans, were to be ordained by the Roman Bishops, but the form was written by Chytraeus and was very Lutheran. Their doctrinal stand was the same, very Lutheran, and all their forms and practices were Lutheran. It was his peaceful manner of presentation that could bring about such an effect, that even a Catholic Emperor Maximilian would accept it.

In fact, this was the great and important ability which the learned layman, David Chytraeus brought to the formulators of the Formula of Concord. He was not a forceful man in any way, and to him it often seemed that his help was not accepted but was brushed aside. However, he did have a decided affect in the manner and style of writing, especially in keeping the writers from becoming antagonistic toward Crypto-Calvinism or even Flacianism.

Because of Chytraeus’ learning and sharpness, Andrea stopped to visit with him in some of his travels for peace, and later sent him copies of his work toward the Formula, some of which Chytraeus took and rewrote completely in his style.

David was one of the main workers with Chemnitz and Andrea as the Formula was developed -- in Maulbronn, Torgau, and Bergen. However, at the last meetings for final revisions he was not invited right away. He was so sensitive

about this that he never quite got over it. He claimed that there was a slightly different spirit between the Formula of Concord and the Augsburg Confession, but he could not put his finger on it in spite of the fact that the difference was in regard to justification and the central doctrines. The odd thing is that, more than he ever realized it, he had much to do with the very spirit he was speaking about. He was the true moderating force who kept the idea of peace living. David Chytraeus, the layman, was chosen of the Lord as a sensitive man of peace and deep understanding in the words he chose to write.

### Nikolaus Selnecker

Nikolaus Selnecker -- the convert, the leader of meetings, the man who could move hearts -- was born December 5, 1530, to upper middle class parents at Hersbruck near Nürnberg. His father, a town clerk, was respected by Emperor Charles V and King Ferdinand, and a friend of Melanchthon and Veit Dietrich. His mother was the clerk's second wife, and his older half-brother George studied theology and became a pastor. Their father wanted both his sons to have the very best education, and he wanted the younger to become a jurist. Nikolaus developed a very peace-loving disposition and lived by a personal piety that was exemplary. Though a genius in many ways he was a very modest young man and was destined of the Lord to study theology. By the time he was sent to Wittenberg and the home of Melanchthon he was already nineteen years old.

It was a tragic event in his life that became a blessing of God and led him to a deeply pious life: He was ambushed by a tramp named Schlappenhauer, shot and almost killed. He was bed-ridden so long that it was a year before he could take up his studies at Wittenberg. He never fully recovered from that much-weakened body, but this led him to become a deep thinker as well as developing his natural musical and poetic spirit. He learned to look to God alone for comfort and strength and true direction in his life. He moved into Melanchthon's home when Chytraeus moved out. After gaining his master's degree as his father desired, he studied theology in earnest. At the age of twenty-five he showed his ability to hold an audience by drawing as many as two hundred students to his classroom lectures on philosophy.

That all ended when Selnecker accepted the call to become third court chaplain in Dresden, the residence of Elector August of Saxony. He became very close to the Elector and especially to "Mother Anna," the Elector's wife, who, as the name suggests, became a second mother to him. Here he began to use his musical gifts through his work with the boys choir. He was also ready at this time to establish his own household, marrying the daughter of the superintendent at Dresden, Margaretha Greiser. It is well to remember that Nikolaus was chapel organist at Kaiserburg at the age of twelve and worked with the emperor's royal singers, so people had been taking note of him among the nobility for some time.

Being a mild man, he was easily influenced by the more forceful personalities, especially in his youth. This influence began to show in his preaching. The example of his forceful father-in-law, Daniel Greiser, rubbed off on him, making him strident, discordant.

Finally, the circumstances arose in which this stridence got him into trouble. A friend took his place while he was ill and took special shots at the nobility from Nikolaus' pulpit. He was asked to leave and when Selnecker returned to the pulpit his first sermons were also on some of the wrongs of nobility, so his troubles mounted. At the same time the Crypto-Calvinists who had counted on this friend of Melanchthon found him holding fast to the faithful Word. Thus he soon had to depart from Dresden. He had two calls: to professorships at Jena and at Tübingen. He went to Jena where the Flacians had been deposed and a Phillipist faculty had been installed. Since Selnecker was associated with these Phillipists, when they soon fell into disfavor he was out also. Elector August however had by this time tempered his feelings about Nikolaus, who was then made Professor of Theology at Leipzig, Pastor of St. Thomas Kirche, and area superintendent (bishop). He was visited there by Andrea and his next assignment was drawing him toward this man: he became court preacher and general superintendent at Wolfenbüttel.

At this time he received his doctorate at Wittenberg and took part in some disputations which made Chemnitz and Andrea suspicious of him. Selnecker was once again overtaken with his old uncertainty problems, his feelings of inferiority. However, through the difficulties themselves and the work in theology which now followed, Selnecker was strengthened in truly Lutheran convictions. He became mature, turning away from the Phillipist background he had gotten from Melanchthon. Melanchthon was now dead and the verse Selnecker had penned a few years earlier became the guiding prayer of his life:

Let me forsake Thee never Nor wander from Thy Word.  
Let me be Thine forever, Thou faithful God and Lord;  
Lord, do not let me waiver, But give me steadfastness,  
And for such grace forever Thy holy Name I'll bless.

As Selnecker now grew in stature and importance, he was called on to be the chairman of a convention of theologians at Lichtenberg. He led them to a firm Lutheran stand and then proposed that the elector summon to Torgau Chemnitz, Chytraeus, Musculus and Körner in addition to the theologians that met with him at Lichtenberg. Andrea was made chairman of these meetings and conducted them so diplomatically that in ten days the "Torgau Book" was ready to be presented to Elector August. Selnecker preached the Thanksgiving Sermon as the Conference came to a close. The

Thanksgiving Services were continued in many areas where these new articles were now read and accepted.

Shortly after this event, back in Leipzig again, Andrea installed Selnecker into his new office. Selnecker was now one of the “big three” (Triumvirate) -with Andrea and Chemnitz. They met at the Berger Abbey to revise and do the final work on the Formula of Concord. Selnecker had become certain and self-confident as a theologian and leader. The Lord had led him completely from one camp to another and made Selnecker, who was very short in stature, a leader that men would follow, especially in meetings.

It is easy to see how the Lord led him to carry the ‘peace-attitude’ to many people. Nikolaus had already moved many hearts and would in centuries to come move many more through the singing of his hymns in worship services. For during the fifty-nine years of his life, Selnecker wrote some one hundred fifty hymns. Of these we are perhaps best acquainted with “Let Me Be Thine Forever” (The Lutheran Hymnal 334), and “Lord Jesus Christ with Us Abide” (TLH 292).

Oddly enough (or perhaps not so oddly) Selnecker never felt at ease with the aggressive Andrea and thought he would be more secure if that man were out of his area, but it did not help him. His difficulties finally came to an end as he was brought back once again to Leipzig, but he was so weak that he soon died there. He was a man of great experience, deep understanding, and filled with the truth. Thus he led others to follow in peace. He was certainly important to the Formula.

There are two other names mentioned from time to time as among the men who took part in the work of the composing the Formula of Concord: Andreas Musculus and Christof Körner. It appears from various sources that Musculus did indeed take part in much controversy. In fact it seems to have made him extremely contentious and even bitter. No doubt one such had to be on these committees so that they remained careful. However we do find that it took much diplomacy on the part of Andrea, for it seems that only Musculus brought much crossfire into the battle when it was no longer necessary. Of Körner we hear very little. It appears that he was a professor or important figure from one of the sections of Germany that had to be represented but of which we know little in this connection. The contributions of these two men are not apparent. The other men did the writing and rewriting that was needed, taking into account all of the criticism that came their way. Perhaps Musculus and Körner had a special part in bringing this criticism from their regions. God chose men who were very different and who possessed a great variety of gifts, all of which were extremely necessary in the production of a document that was to bring peace in such a sure and firm way. With these men of the second generation things began to look up and rise again in Lutheranism.

## THE RESURRECTION

### Concord Finds its Formula

The march to peace was a very long and uphill march. Time and again it appeared that it was stalled, and stalled forever. There seemed no possibility for concord. And there was no possibility except for the grace and the mighty working of the Lord. But to think that a formula, or even the bare idea of it, could develop very quickly was out of the question. It must be remembered that the majority of these men were students of Melanchthon and, as we saw previously, Melanchthon was himself the real cause of all the false doctrine through his work on the Leipzig Interim. The first steps of peace would necessarily have to proceed from Melanchthon if they were to be successful. And at first it did appear that Melanchthon was putting out the first feelers of peace, but he was apparently more concerned about the recovering of his own prestige, his position of authority as the heir apparent to Luther. No, it would have to come from Melanchthon’s students.

Flacius is in this situation the man who is often maligned more than any one else. Why was he so rough? It should be remembered that Flacius made possibly more peace overtures than all the others put together. He made attempts at private meetings, meetings with rulers, meetings of University faculties, and he urged conferences, yes, even general Lutheran conferences. Each one of them was bound to fail because Flacius made one thing clear when they met: the basis for peace will be the pure Lutheran doctrine based on the Word of God alone.

In itself this should not have drawn them apart. Immediately, however, opponents made one deduction: he is calling us false prophets. He is declaring us wrong from the start. And it should be said that the “names” both sides called each other were such that it would always ruffle their feathers without delay and the battle was on. How they could think of the names to which to compare their opponents? It is truly difficult to understand.

It is true that on one point Melanchthon was actually reconciled with Flacius, but that was as far as it went and the parade of false teachings marched on in the background. Melanchthon’s willingness to compromise the truth and to speak in ambiguous terms so that the Romanists and Calvinists could understand everything in their own way continued. So it appeared almost from the start that concord was impossible as long as Melanchthon lived, and this proved to be true. Melanchthon died in 1560 and the next generation took over. His students did far better than he did.

The need for peace and for a united stand in the Lutheran Church became so evident at the Colloquy with the Romanists at Worms. Here the Jesuits took every advantage and made the Lutherans appear foolish, like a hopelessly divided group of fanatics who couldn’t even stand by their own Augsburg Confession. The Roman camp knew well how to work it and how to make inroads into sections of Lutheranism to draw the people back under the control of the Antichrist.

At the same time Calvin and the other reformed groups were taking the same kind of advantage of the Lutheran theologians' weakness and especially of the fact that Melanchthon and the Phillipists were leaning, yes, turning completely to their teachings, such as the mere representation or symbolism of Christ's body and blood in the Lord's supper. At first this turning was hidden (hence the term "crypto-Calvinists" came to be applied), but later the real plot of the Phillipists and their Calvinism came out in the open and they became bold. So it appeared that the Lutheran Church would be torn apart within one generation of its inception.

Politically the Church was not really separated from the State and the nobility was held responsible for the state of the Church. Thus as early as 1555 Christopher, Duke of Württemberg, wanted a meeting of the Lutheran nobility to reach a peaceful religious agreement. But the Saxon rulers refused. In 1557 and 1558 it was tried again without success. In the latter of the two meetings Melanchthon wrote a "union" document by which all teachings and books were to be censored. But his writing was so vague and ambiguous that even Calvin found that he could come under that agreement. In 1561, after Melanchthon's death, a large number of nobility or their representatives gathered at Naumburg. Their purpose was to regain the Palatinate, which was going Calvinistic. They decided to use the Augsburg Confession and the other Lutheran Confessions as the basis of harmony, but this failed since the Palatinate would only use the "variata," Melanchthon's alterations of the Augsburg Confession. Soon after this the Palatinate decided to leave the Lutheran camp completely, so all political attempts failed completely.

Thus steps were moving slowly toward the theologians of a new breed. As we noted, most of these men had been students of Melanchthon at one time, but Melanchthon had not stayed with Luther's teaching, the Bible alone. What could be expected of his students? Jacob Andrea had already seen the great need at Worms and his energy and drive would never let him rest. Besides, he thought of the common people who were being lost. He had already worked with Martin Chemnitz and had no doubt appreciated his wisdom and organization, particularly when it came to doctrine.

At first Andrea thought he could lead the Phillipists by compromise, but after taking some articles to them for discussion all these hopes were shattered. He decided one must present the truth plainly and clearly and stand on that platform. But where to start? His first five points had been hopelessly rejected but he was not easily discouraged. He had the winning ability always to learn from others. In connection with his attempts to compromise he found some of his new friends became suspicious of him. Men like Chemnitz and Chytraeus wondered about him. But he was ready to learn.

He soon came out with his Six Sermons, which he sent to them and to other men. Sometimes we read that the other leaders did not agree with him. That does not seem to be true. They did not agree with this sermon style for a confession, but they spoke highly of the points which he made. After receiving the criticism of his friends, he developed these sermons into eleven articles known as the Swabian Concordia. And if you want to boil it down, this was the first manuscript of the Formula of Concord. Andrea had incorporated many of the criticisms of others, who sometimes wrote whole articles, and then he sent them out to people in many areas of Germany, men like Chemnitz, Chytraeus, Selnecker and some noblemen Jacob had looked up before in his quest for that illusive concord.

A very important occurrence had just taken place at this time. August, Elector of Saxony, had finally seen through the Wittenberg faculty of Phillipists. Up to this time he had been completely taken in by them. But now they became over-bold, almost arrogant, and thus gave away their dishonest plans to lead the Lutheran Church into Calvinism, if for no other reason than to create a united front. August's entire attitude changed, the faculty at Wittenberg was summarily dismissed, and a new one was hired or called. This was the customary way of the nobility.

In the meantime Chytraeus had taken the articles of the Swabian Concordia, along with the many suggestions, and had completely rewritten the articles on Free Will and the Lord's Supper. And Chemnitz in his study also added revisions throughout the Concordia. In the new form that came back it was now called the Swabian-Saxon Concordia. However this form was still under some criticism. It still was too heavy and there was too much Latin in it, even though it was just in phrases. Another big stumbling block seems to have been that Melanchthon was quoted too much, rather than Luther. This was natural for students of the man.

Elector August was now in the middle of things and he entrusted Lucas Osiander the Elder and Balthasar Bidembach with the task of writing a straightforward answer to the false doctrines plaguing the church, without Latin phrases and without technical terminology and above all without quotations from Melanchthon, who had bamboozled him for so long. They were also to omit references to sects that were no longer a threat to the Lutheran Church. This was published in 1575 under the name of The Maulbronn Formula, after the place where the theologians met. The two documents (the Swabian-Saxon Concordia and the Maulbronn Formula) were then handed by August to Andrea for an opinion and an evaluation as to which he might prefer.

Jacob very diplomatically and objectively chose the latter, or Maulbronn Formula, for its style and form. He also suggested that the elector call a general conference of selected theologians to evaluate the two documents critically. Selnecker was called to head the twelve theologians when they met at Castle Lichtenberg in February, 1576. At this meeting it was suggested by Selnecker that the past hard feelings be forgiven and forgotten, that all quotes from the troublesome

Melanchthon be avoided and that a broader group be invited including men like Chemnitz and Chytraeus. It was this meeting which filled Andrea with admiration for Selnecker. Nikolaus may have been a very sensitive man, but he was also a leader who understood theologians and could handle them in meetings.

Elector August then sponsored a meeting of some twenty theologians at Castle Hartenfeld, Torgau, during the late spring of the same year. Here the two documents mentioned above were distilled carefully into a new document of twelve articles called the Torgau Book. This was one of the most joyful meetings ever held by these men of peace, and it was concluded with a service of Thanksgiving, Selnecker preaching the sermon.

Copies of the book were sent out all over Germany: to cities, estates, princes, and clergy, as well as university theologians. It was received as nothing had been since Luther's ninety-five theses. Most judgments were favorable with the exception of the Calvinists. This was only to be expected since it stopped their intrigue. In fact, in many congregations thanksgiving services were also held after it had been read publicly.

Some still wanted the "pound of flesh" by having certain names placed in a sort of chastisement, but this was rejected. Another suggestion was that after checking it out and making needed revisions, it be published together with a shorter version. Andrea immediately went to work and wrote the Epitome, or shorter form. Then he met with Chemnitz and Selnecker at Cloister Bergen, near Magdeburg, in 1577. Here the triumvirate, as they were called, asked that Chytraeus, Körner and Musculus be added to their ranks and they went over both the longer and shorter documents with a fine-toothed comb. This was first called the Bergen Book and later the Formula of Concord. These six men then signed the same with the solemn statement:

Since now, in the sight of God and of all Christendom, we wish to testify to those now living and those who shall come after us that this declaration herewith presented concerning all the controverted articles aforementioned and explained, and no other, is our faith, doctrine, and confession, in which we are also willing, by God's grace, to appear with intrepid hearts before the judgement seat of Jesus Christ, and give an account of it; and that we will neither privately nor publicly speak or write anything contrary to it, but, by the help of God's grace, intend to abide thereby: therefore, after mature deliberations, we have, in God's fear and with the invocation of His name, attached our signatures with our own hands.

Some modern writers have made attempts to run down the various writers of this Formula because they had certain human weaknesses. For example, they note the vigor and zeal of Andrea which sometimes repelled such quiet men like Selnecker. They point to some notes in his diary. Chytraeus was also a very tender-spirited character, who was hurt because much of the writing of this document had been done by him and yet he was omitted in the triumvirate. This seems to be grasping at sensationalism to a great extent, since there was such joy at what this document accomplished.

In some modern writings it is a matter of an entirely different spirit, which wants nothing to do with subscription. They want people of different persuasions to be incorporated under one faith in a unionistic manner. They call this a new spirit of understanding. They consider it a great step forward over the writers of the Formula. In fact, they miss the true spirit of the Formula itself, namely that when the Word of God is confessed it stands with one statement: Take it or leave it. It is the Will of God, nothing more, nothing less, nothing else. It is well stated in the Concordia Triglotta in this manner:

But for the Formula of Concord it may be questioned whether Protestantism could have been saved to the world. It staunched the wounds at which Lutheranism was bleeding to death; and crises were at hand in history in which Lutheranism was essential to the salvation of the Reformatory interest in Europe. The Thirty Year's War, the war of martyrs, which saved our modern world, lay indeed in the future of another century, yet it was fought and settled in the Cloister at Bergen. But for the pen of the peaceful triumvirate, the sword of Gustavus had not been drawn. Intestine treachery and division in the Church of the Reformation would have done what the arts and arms of Rome failed to do. But the miracle of restoration was wrought. From being the most distracted Church on earth, the Lutheran Church had become the most stable. The blossom put forth at Augsburg, despite the storm, the mildew, and the worm, had ripened into the full round fruit of the amplest and clearest Confession in which the Christian Church has ever embodied her faith. (Krauth, quoted in Concordia Triglotta, Historical Introduction, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, 1921, 254.)

The fact that the large majority of pastors, theologians, cities, and princes signed and held to this Formula of Concord speaks loudly for its wonderful confession before the world. We have read a number of encyclopedic works from other faiths which have realized the scriptural power enclosed in its words. This bears witness to the fact that these fathers were standing before God and His Word, and not before world opinion, mighty rulers of the earth, learned teachers of men, Melanchthon, Luther, Augustine, Polycarp or a host of other men. They had the spirit of a Martin Luther, who was once asked whether he had read the books of a certain sect leader. He answered: no, he did not have time. But came the question: What will you say to the heavenly Father some day in that you did not use their gifts also? His answer was profound, as always -- I will say to my Heavenly Father: they were indeed great gifts that you gave to these men. You gave them the ability to write and to persuade. But I was convinced that You were still greater and I would simply stick by You and Your Word.



# SEZ WHO?

Warren Fanning

## Introduction

The theme of the assignment is “Knowing The Difference Between The Christian's Resignation To God's Will In Our Life and The Philosophy of Fatalism.” The title (SEZ WHO?) is deliberately sassy. It will spring from a diabolical source, Satan himself; but we can also use it in pious impudence to aim at that same diabolical source, as we shall see.

“Fate” surely seems to be a terrible and dangerous word. It comes from the Latin and refers to words, speech, saying, utterances, decrees. Almost all uses of the word or its synonyms are negative and depressing to the Christian, and probably to anyone else! The Holy Scriptures, our Lutheran Confessions, and orthodox Lutheran dogmaticians do not know or use the word in any positive sense, as far as I can tell. We are really in negative, even scary territory.

The Christian does not want much, if anything, to do with fate, for fate has nothing to do with the Will of God. The Will of God, and submission to it, is bound up with what God says, speaks, and utters. His ultimate Word is the Christ of the humiliation: the Virgin's womb, the cradle, the temple, and soon the betrayal, the denial, the whip, the thorns, the nails, the tree, and the grave (at first sealed, and then opened). All this was according to uttered and written promise, fulfilled (filled full) in this now exalted Word made flesh for our salvation.

SEZ WHO? God says so in His Word written.

## God's Will - I.

A good starting point would seem to be the Biblical teaching of the providence of God, the teaching that God, who created the world, also takes care of it. By His wisdom and power God preserves it. He has not deserted it. He rules and controls everything in it, and cares for all His creatures, especially people, you and me.

SEZ WHO? Well, we can say it together, confessing it in these familiar words:

I believe that God has made me and all creatures, that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still preserves them; also clothing and shoes, meat and drink, house and home, wife and children, fields, cattle, and all my goods; that He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life; that He defends me against all danger, and guards and protects me from all evil; and all this purely out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me; for all which it is my duty to thank and praise, to serve and obey Him. This is most certainly true!

SEZ WHO? God says (and we with Him). This Providence of God is known in its truth only from Scripture, which teaches us that providence is “the external act of the entire Trinity whereby God

- a) most efficaciously upholds the things created, both as an entirety and singly, both in species and in individuals;
- b) concurs in their actions and effects; and
- c) freely and wisely governs all things to His own glory and the welfare and safety of the universe, especially of the godly” (J. T. Mueller, Christian Dogmatics, 189).

By “godly” we mean believers, those in whom the Holy Spirit has worked that faith which clings to the Vicarious Atonement of Jesus Christ.

It is of particular consolation to these godly ones (again, you and me) that the Bible especially depicts Jesus our Redeemer as the Preserver and Governor of the whole world, and as the Church's Head. SEZ WHO?

Hebrews 1:2,3 In these last days God has spoken to us by a Son, whom He appointed to be heir of all things, through whom also He created the world.

Colossians 1:17 He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.

Ephesians 1:22\_23 God has put all things under Jesus' feet, and had made Him Head over all things for the Church.

The special object of Divine Providence is the Holy Christian Church. For her all things exist. All things must serve her welfare. Even the smallest details are taken care of. SEZ WHO?

Romans 8:28 All things work together for good ... to those who are the called in keeping with His purpose.

Hebrews 1:14 The angels are ministering servants sent for the sake of those who are to obtain salvation.

Matthew 16:18 the powers of hell shall not prevail against the Church.

Matthew 10:30 All the hairs of your head are numbered.

Luke 21:18 Not a hair of your head will perish.

Luke 21:6,7 Not one of them (sparrows) is forgotten by God ... you are of more value than many sparrows.

Acts 17:28 In God we live and move and have our being.

God uses means to preserve us, means that are subordinate to Him. So food strengthens us, water cleanses and relieves us, medicines cure us, animals assist us, people comfort us. This has nothing to do with either Deism or Pantheism (or Atheism) or some kind of will or law apart from the Will of God. The Bible disallows any notions of natural, immutable laws apart from God's Will. Things might seem that way to us at times, but nothing in the whole universe happens apart from God's knowledge, presence, power, and will. SEZ WHO?

Psalm 115:3 Our God in heaven does whatever He pleases.

Psalm 135:6\_7 in heaven, on earth, in the seas, all depths ... makes clouds rise, makes lightnings, brings wind.

We are getting into a realm of great mystery here, where we dare not speculate. This has to do with evil in the world, and God's concurrence in it. Man alone is responsible for his own evil deeds; God is in no way accountable for human transgression (Pantheism). Here we must only say that God permits evil thoughts, words, and deeds to occur. "He permits, but He does not will that which He permits" (Quenstedt). He is never the aider and abetter, or cause of sin. SEZ WHO?

Psalm 5:4 You are not a God who delights in wickedness.

Romans 1:18 God's anger is revealed from heaven against all the ungodliness and wickedness of men.

Men are responsible to God for whatever they do. Scripture teaches that men are free, self\_determining beings, personally responsible to God for their sins. SEZ WHO?

Romans 1:32 Men know God's judgment (pronouncement) that those who do such things deserve to die.

### God's Will - II

This all borders on the matter of Free Will and leads into the subject of Fate. Let's start to go down that street, coming to a focus on the will of God for us specifically as Christians. We remember that the Lord Jesus has given us a Prayer which has the Petition: "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

When Martin Luther asked "What Does This Mean?" he answered: "The good and gracious will of God is done indeed without our prayer; but we pray in this petition that it may be done among us also."

This may cause some to ask: "Must things happen just as they do, or could they happen otherwise?" Luther is talking here about the good and gracious will of God for Christians, which is a much narrower field. But let's stay on this street, and confess that under God's ruling of all things, according to His providence and from His point of view, it is correct to say that all things happen of necessity; they have to happen that way. But from the standpoint of man, everything is done freely and contingently; they do not have to happen that way. SEZ WHO?

Both of these are Scriptural truths: the necessity and the contingency. They safeguard our Christian faith against Epicureanism and atheism (pure chance), against Fatalism and Stoicism (disregard of divinely ordained means). Our Christian practice should be that, in striving to do God's will, we make use of the means which God has provided (physical: food, medicine, etc; spiritual: Means of Grace).

Much the same applies to the end of our lives. From God's point of view, the end of life is immovably fixed. From our human point of view, our life may be longer or shorter. God speaks to us in our human\_ness, directing us to use the means which He has given for the sustaining of our earthly lives. Through either use or non\_use of these means, we reach our immovably fixed end. It is not only folly, but an absolute impossibility to enter that realm which belongs only to God in His bare majesty. We are to use His appointed means: work, food and drink (some wine!), pious living, prayer, flight from danger. These are God's will for us, part of His divine providence. SEZ WHO?

Psalm 128:2 You shall eat the fruit of your labor.

2 Thessalonians 3:10 If anyone doesn't work, don't let him eat.

Acts 27:33\_36 Paul ... and all ate some food.

1 Timothy 5:23 a little wine for the sake of your stomach.

Ephesians 6:2\_3 the first commandment with promise ... that you may live long on the earth.

Isaiah 38:1ff I will add fifteen years to your (Hezekiah's) life.

Acts 9:23\_25 they let him (Paul) down over the wall.

Now back to God's good and gracious will and what it includes: It includes our justification, our reconciliation with God, our sanctification (good works); that His Word of Law and Gospel be taught and proclaimed; that we suffer patiently according to God's good pleasure; that we resist Satan, world, and our sinful flesh. SEZ WHO?

1 Timothy 2:4 God wants all men to be saved.

2 Corinthians 5:20 We beg you ... Be reconciled to God.

1 Thessalonians 4:3 This is the will of God, your sanctification.

Psalm 119:35 Make me to walk in the path of Your commandments.

Matthew 28:19\_20 Go and teach all nations ...

Acts 14:22 We must through much tribulation enter the kingdom.

1 Peter 5:9 Resist the devil, steadfast in the faith.

Matthew 16:24 If any man will come after Me, let Him deny himself.

1 John 2:15 Do not love the world or the things of the world.

In all this, God is willing and able to strengthen, preserve, protect us, keeping us faithful to our end. SEZ WHO?

Romans 16:20 God shall bruise Satan under your feet.

1 Peter 1:5 You are kept by the power of God through faith.

2 Corinthians 12:9 My grace is sufficient for you.

Genesis 37\_50 God kept Joseph for important work later in life.

Exodus 2 God delivered the baby Moses.

Exodus 14 God saw the Israelites safely out of Egypt.

1 Samuel 17 God protected David from the giant Goliath.

Daniel 6 God preserved Daniel from the lions.

Acts 12:5\_11 God's angel delivered Peter from prison.

In these and other places of Scripture we hear God's voice, learn His will, see His care, trust His Son, our Good Shepherd, who gave His life for His sheep. SEZ WHO?

John 8:32,33 If you continue in My Word, you are my disciples in truth, and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

John 10:27\_29 My sheep hear My Voice, and I know them.

Let us confess this in some more familiar words:

I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord, who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death and from the power of the devil, not with gold and silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death; that I may be his own and live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, even as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity. This is most certainly true!

SEZ WHO? God does, and we with Him. And all this is under constant challenge by the world, our flesh, and the devil whenever God speaks His "Thus says the Lord!"\_as though somebody else has something better to say than God has said. Who does this SEZ WHO? We know. It's that other voice.

#### Fatalism

This voice persists, a constant challenge to God and to believers in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The challenge goes back to the very beginning, to Satan's triple or "3\_D" temptation strategy, there in the Garden of Eden. Bent on causing destruction, despair, doom, gloom, pessimism, tragedy, unbelief, and hopelessness, he gave out his first "D": doubt. "Did God say?" he sassed to Eve. "SEZ WHO?" Then came outright denial, and then displacement (a new "promise").

This strategy persisted right down to Matthew 4 (Luke 4) where Satan says to Jesus: "IF you are the Son of God..." "WHO SEZ you are...?" But it did not work on this tougher Word.

The voice has disguised itself down through history, particularly attacking the ones God loves so specially: people, unbelievers as well as believers, but also specifically you and me, and all the godly, the Holy Christian Church, believers in Jesus.

This evil voice tries to get believers to explore the realm of divine foreknowledge, using one's own reason and strength, an activity which leads to the gloomy pessimism of fatalism. Many Christians in the millennialistic camp have fallen prey to the idea of being able to know the future. These groups usually have a theology of glory rather than a theology of the cross. It seems to start with a feeling of helplessness, of ignorance, of impending doom. They have a desire for more material providence than God is already giving, and they look for wealth and income and success.

This wanting to know the future easily leads to wanting to control the future. The believer is moved right off the Means of Grace and falls further into helplessness and pessimism. The last state is usually worse than the first. Satan rubs his hands in glee. It is very difficult to bring back the charismatics and the chiliasts, once their "tongues have been curled."

That evil voice leads us to think we can discover the judgments of God, which are past finding out. God's revealed will is in His Son, incarnate and lowly, and in the Word and Baptism and the Holy Supper, in Absolution and the Ministry of the Word. Apart from these God remains a hidden God (Deus absconditus). God's hidden and revealed wills are not to be confused. His hidden will is not to be discovered, nor are God's intentions to be read from it. The devil knows that it is impossible for us to uncover the hidden God and reveal His will, but he wouldn't tell us that. He keeps leading people on.

Fatalism makes inroads among the godly, but it thrives among people who do not believe in the saving God of

Scripture. Looking back into history we are able to put some shape to a definition of “fatalism”:

It is a nascent (not full-blown) philosophy. It is usually called a belief or doctrine. Note that these two words imply something that is taught, as though instruction takes place. The belief is that nothing which the individual can do in any way affects the fate to which the person is destined (Will Durant). The belief is that events are inevitably determined, causes or no causes, hence it is often spoken of as a blind doctrine. It is most decidedly anti-Christian, denying the possibility of any personal relationship between the believer and God. Some think it to be a prominent feature of Islam, but this is contested by others.

The belief here is that there is no contingency, that things could not happen otherwise. There is a complete disregard for divinely ordained means. It is the acceptance of every thing or condition as inevitable, it assumes an attitude of apathy, and implies a denial of human freedom. “Fatalism” is a supposed force or principle or power that predetermines events, and includes the final outcome, result, or consequence. The outcome is most often unfavorable: doom, ruin. Homer long ago suggested that there is a power or fate to which even the gods are subject. It is seen by many as a mysterious, tremendous power, stronger even than the gods. To scorn fate was to bring Nemesis, the certain consequence of defying fate. Nemesis is a personified emotion found in poets Homer, 1100 B.C., and Hesiod, 800 B.C. The counterpart is Aidos or reverence. Nemesis is a female “goddess” type who demands retributive justice in satisfaction.

There are some synonyms in use. One is *kismet* which is Turkish and Arabic for fate or fortune, from the word *qismah* ‘he divided, he allotted.’ The closest Hebrew word is *נַסְקָה* used eleven times in the Old Testament, usually in negative references to oaths, witchcraft, and divination (skillful discovery/forecasting of the unknown future).

This is mentioned because speech, prophecy, and utterance are involved. Along with this comes lot, portion, or cup, all three of which are used in positive as well as negatives senses in the Scriptures. The Hebrew dictionary (Gesenius) lists only one passage under fate, and that is Isaiah 65:11: “**But you are those who forsake the Lord, who forget My holy mountain, who prepare a table for Gad** (“troop” or “fortune,” probably the latter in this reference, a reference to a pagan deity; for “troop” see Genesis 30:31--one of Jacob's sons) **and who furnish drink offering for Meni**” (“destiny” –Meni is the goddess of fate, for some reason also translated “number”, a reference to a Semitic deity. See also Daniel 5:25\_28, although no pagan deity is involved there in the *Mene, Mene, Tekel, Peres*, the famous writing on the wall at King Belshazzar's feast). The Hebrew word Meni from Manah is from casting lots, assigning, numbering, apportioning, somewhat related then to *kismet*. Commentaries on Isaiah here do and should have some interesting tidbits (e.g. Keil and Delitzsch).

There is a relation also between the *Meni* of Isaiah 65 and the *Manat* of Sura 53 (The Star or A1-Najm) of the Muslim Koran. This *Manat*, oddly enough, is named in that section of the Koran along with Al-Lat and A1-Uzzah, the names of three Arabian idols, claimed by the pagans of Mecca to be daughters of Allah! The Star leads us farther back into the ancient world, and it becomes highly interesting that astrology comes into the discussion of *fatalism*.

But first note that Shakespeare has fate and stars in his Romeo and Juliet: fatal loins and star-crossed lovers in the Prologue; Romeo's defiance of the stars upon learning of Juliet's death (V.I.24). In Henry IV Sir William also has Henry say to Warwick and Surrey:

0 God! that one might read the book of fate, and see the revolution of the times make mountains level, and the Continent ... melt itself into the sea ... 0! if this were seen, the happiest youth ... would shut the book, and sit him down and die (Pt 2, III.I.45ff.)

But the best of Shakespeare's Fates is in Macbeth, where Hecate herself, Queen of Hades and protectress of witches, meets with the three weird sisters, hand in hand, posters of the sea and land (See I.III.1\_36; III.V.1\_36; IV.I.1\_46; III.89\_104). These are the witches who say in unison the famous lines: “Double, double toil and trouble; fire burn and cauldron bubble.” It is a bit of a relief at the end to hear Malcolm say: “What's more to do ... this, and what needful else that calls upon us, by the grace of Grace we will perform in measure, time, and place.” Shakespeare was not a fatalist, but he referred to fate, and included its influences in his plays.

While you're at it, check out a good dictionary on the word “weird.” You'll find “supernatural, unearthly, eerie, uncanny, odd, unusual, inexplicable, strange, fantastic, fate and Fates, bizarre, grotesque, eccentric, markedly unconventional,” among the definitions.

Allah's three daughters! Shades of Moirae, Parcae, and Norns! The Moirae are the three goddesses of Greek mythology who controlled the lives of men. Recall Clotho, Lachesis, Atropos--who could ever forget the blind one? Parcae are the three Roman counterparts to Moirae. And Norns are the three Fates of Germanic mythology who spun and wove the web of life (Urth: past, Verthandi: present, and Skuld: future). By the way, the three Moirae sisters of the Greeks have three more sisters! They were also born of Zeus and Themis, and were called the Three Hours (Latin *Hora*), symbolic personages controlling the order of nature and the recurrence of the seasons: Irene ‘Peace,’ Dice ‘Justice,’ and Eunomia ‘Order.’ They appear in Wagner's *Götterdämmerung*. One wonders why the number “3” is so common? (Undoubtedly something insidious) And why so often three females?

But back to synonymms. There are other synonyms as well, some more closely connected than others: “omen” (from Latin *ominor*, *\_ari*, *\_atus*, forebode, predict, prophesy; an ominator is a diviner; we are familiar with “ominous”); “portent, sign, presage, prognostication, presentiment, bode and forebode” (“bode” itself means “to foresee, foretell, portend, foreshow, to promise ill or well, usually evil”). “Destiny” and “predestination” also come in alongside a discussion of fate. But the Christian doctrine of predestination or election will not tolerate philosophies or beliefs in the realm of determinism or fatalism, or any human foreknowing.

Superstitions also are connected with fatalism to an extent: not just black cats, walking under ladders, certain numbers, breaking a mirror--the traditional things--but other occurrences that one might think certainly speak to destiny: a shoelace breaks, you see five red cars in a row (all Fords!), the phone rings just as you think it might ring, you see things that remind you of the past, particularly sins of the past, or a long hand is coming to reach out some day and get you (some tragedy that is certain to befall). You know the thing, and you could maybe add to the list of things that our flesh leans on or dreams up in times of distrust of God, ignorance and forgetfulness of His promises.

Then there's *karma*, from Hinduism and Buddhism, the sum and the consequences of a person's actions during the successive phases of his existence, regarded as determining his destiny, somewhat fate\_related.

Then there is the use of “luck” and “fortune.” I know an ILC student who was obviously taught, either at home or in school, not to use “luck” when describing the blessedness of being born and raised a Christian. Even “fortunate” is a bit too happenstance when we compare our citizenship, affluence, and status with others in the world who are poor, pagan, hungry, destitute, at war. SEZ WHO?

Psalm 67:6 God, our God, has blessed us. God has blessed us.

We must get back to the Latin base of the word 'fate.' When Latin verbs are learned, several forms of the verb are learned. Everyone's favorite Latin verb seems to be *amo*, *amas*, *amat* (I love, you love, he or she loves), first, second, third persons singular). That is one set of forms. There is another set: *amo*, *amare*, *amatus*; the indicative, the infinitive, and the participle. This is a little more complicated, but don't sweat it. It's this other set that we're interested in with regard to the word fate: *for*, *fari*, *fatus* (I speak, to speak, spoken). There are many Latin words which developed on the basis of these three forms, words referring to luck, chance, accident, happen and perhaps: *fors*, *forstis*, *forsan*, *forsit*, *forsitan*, *forte*, *fortasse*. There is a certain element of chance, happenstance, uncertainty.

Take the first word, *fors*. By itself it means perhaps, chances are, there is a chance, possibly.

The second word, *fari*, is the origin of fairy tale; fairies are supposedly small supernatural beings (devils, imps) with magic powers.

The third word, *fatum*, in Latin can mean divine utterance, divine will, predestination, necessity, oracle, fate, destiny, doom, mishap, misfortune, calamity, ruin, death.

Others include:

*fas* (indecl) divine law, sacred duty, divine will, fate, right.

*fas est* it is right, permissible, lawful

*deae fatae* the fates, literally: goddesses of fate

*fatalis* fateful, destined, pre-ordained, fatal, deadly

*fataliter* according to fate, by fate

*fatadicus* prophet(ic)

*fatifer* fatal, deadly

*fatiloquia* prophetess

*faticanus* prophetic

*fateor*, *-eri*, *-usus* confess, acknowledge, reveal, bear witness to

and how about *femme fatale*?! She lures into danger.

and *Fata Morgana*, a mirage produced by witchcraft by Morgan le Fay, sorceress sister and enemy of King Arthur

Well, enough already! The point is that this word seems to have a certainty about it, but it is empty, an absolute maybe. The only thing that tends to any certainty is its leaning in the direction of doom and gloom, away from God to despair and hell.

Our World

Hollywood has its “Fatal” movies; you can pretty well imagine how many of them had happy endings:

<i>Fatal Assassin</i>	<i>Fatal Attraction (two of them)</i>
<i>Fatal Beauty</i>	<i>Fatal Chase</i>
<i>Fatal Desire</i>	<i>Fatal Exposure</i>

*Fatal Hour*

*Fatal Image*

*Fatal Vision*

*Fatal Witness*

Fiftieth Anniversary celebrations and movies of the D-Day Invasion speak of the soldiers who died on the Normandy beaches as “men selected out of millions for reasons only known to Fate.”

The USS Indianapolis was sunk in 1945 by Japanese submarine I\_58, en route from Tinian to Leyte. They headed for each other unwittingly, on a “course set by the hand of Fate,” it was said.

Newspaper editorials after youths die on the highways around graduation time say “Don't test Fate in Celebrating at Graduation.” Why not? The article says: “Not even the resolve of teen-age immortality can stand up to the ugly force of Fate.”

Bizet's *Carmen* is still enacted. By Act III Carmen's passion for Don Jose has cooled. She plays (fortune-telling) cards with the girls. Again and again the cards predict one fate: death. And sure enough Don Jose stabs her.

Another headline declares: “Committee OKs Foster, filibuster's Fate in doubt.” And another: “NASA still wary of number 13 ... 25 years ago Apollo 13 commander Jim Lovell, his crew and NASA refused to believe it had anything to do with Fate. Lovell wasn't superstitious then, and he's not now. But he's not so sure about NASA.”

And another: “Crenshaw inspired by old master ... It was like someone put their hand on my shoulder ... Crenshaw said about Harvey Penlek ... I believe in Fate ... Fate has decided another (Masters Golf) champion like it has so many times before.”

And Doris Day still sings *Que Sera, Sera* (What will be, will be). And people still study their horoscopes. And a 'Honeymooners' rerun finds Ralph Kramden and Ed Norton both lamenting at the kitchen table because neither got the promotion he was seeking at the job (senior bus driver, sewer worker supervisor). Ed finally says, “I guess we're just a couple of hangnails on the fickle finger of Fate.”

“Fatal” is normal reporting, part of everyday life, singable and humorous and entertaining. But it is deadly, mortal, lethal. SEZ WHO? Any dictionary will tell you. We believe that it is deadly to our Christian faith.

#### Resignation to God's Will

Regular dictionaries and Bible dictionaries will give you good descriptions of the attitude of Christians who are brought under the good and gracious Will of the God of the cross.

We think of words like “resignation” to the guidance of God, rather than to our own or anyone else's. We think of giving up ourselves to sleep, of handing over one's soul into the safekeeping of a kindly Father in heaven. We think of relinquishing control of our lives to Him who has absolute control. Christian resignation means to consent, to comply passively and without protest, to agree tacitly, to assent, concur, subscribe, accede, place one's soul into the custody and confinement of God's safekeeping, to commit and to commend body and soul.

None of us can do this on our own. All the above words are synonymous with true belief and trust, are gifts from God. SEZ WHO? Let us say it, in some more familiar words:

I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith; even as He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith; in which Christian Church He daily and richly forgives all sins to me and all believers, and will, at the Last Day raise up me and all the dead, and give unto meant all believers in Christ, eternal life. This is most certainly true!

We are most blessed, because we have been given the spirit of resignation and concurrence and compliance, of being resignedly uncomplaining of sorrow or other evil. When we fret and worry, we call to mind God's Doctrine of Election, how that from eternity He chose us believers to be His own, and called us here in time through the Means of Grace. SEZ WHO?

Ephesians 1:4 He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless ... He destined us in love.

Matthew 11:28 Come to Me, all you who weary and are heavily burdened, and I will give you rest.

Romans 6:4 We were buried with Jesus by Baptism into death so that like Christ was raised from death ... we too might walk in newness of life.

1 Corinthians 11:24\_25 My Body ... for you; My Blood ... for you.

John 14:3 I go and prepare a place for you ... I will come again and take you to Myself, that where I am, there you also may be.

Psalms 37:5 Commit your way to the Lord ... also trust in Him ... and He will bring it to pass.

Psalms 55:22 Cast your burden on the Lord ... He will sustain you ... He will never permit the righteous to be moved.

Psalm 91:11 He will give His angels charge of you to protect you in all your ways ... they will bear you up.

SEZ WHO? Remember how the devil twisted the meaning of that passage when tempting Jesus, omitting “to protect you in all your ways.” With sacred sass we confront the devil with the utterances and decrees and statutes and ordinances of God, in Christ, and drive far from us the gloom and sadness he would have us wear, inside and out.

Most of us probably learned what resignation is through learning and saying Martin Luther's morning or evening prayers:

I thank you, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that you have graciously kept me today. And I pray that you would forgive all my sins where I have done wrong, and graciously keep me tonight. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the wicked foe may have no power over me. Amen!

Actually, the idea comes from Jesus. Like in the Garden of Gethsemane, when He said, “... Not My will, but Your Will be done.” We look to Jesus, and constantly hear what He said.

There are more people in the world who believe in Fate than those who are justified by faith. It has always been so. Satan cannot stand to hear God speak. Satan won't be “happy” until there is no one left to sass him back when he says: “SEZ WHO?” with a “God has told us, that's Who!” Then Satan and all unbelievers will suffer their, dare we say it, Fate. SEZ WHO?

This world's prince may still scowl fierce as he will,  
He can harm us none, he's judged; the deed is done;  
One little word can fell him. (M. Luther, 1529)

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## A Study of Jeremiah 6:10-20

David Lau

[Adapted from a paper presented at a Great Lakes Pastoral Conference in 1987 – Ed.]

*To whom shall I speak and give warning, that they may hear? Indeed their ear is uncircumcised, and they cannot give heed. Behold, the word of the LORD is a reproach to them; they have no delight in it. Therefore I am full of the fury of the LORD. I am weary of holding it in. "I will pour it out on the children outside, and on the assembly of young men together; for even the husband shall be taken with the wife, the aged with him who is full of days. And their houses shall be turned over to others, fields and wives together; for I will stretch out My hand against the inhabitants of the land," says the LORD. "Because from the least of them even to the greatest of them, everyone is given to covetousness; and from the prophet even to the priest, everyone deals falsely. They have also healed the hurt of My people slightly, saying, 'Peace, peace!' when there is no peace. Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? No! They were not at all ashamed; nor did they know how to blush. Therefore they shall fall among those who fall; at the time I punish them, they shall be cast down," says the LORD. Thus says the LORD: "Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; then you will find rest for your souls. But they said, 'We will not walk in it.' Also, I set watchmen over you, saying, 'Listen to the sound of the trumpet!' But they said, 'We will not listen.' Therefore hear, you nations, and know, O congregation, what is among them. Hear, O earth! Behold, I will certainly bring calamity on this people; the fruit of their thoughts, because they have not heeded My words, nor My law, but rejected it. For what purpose to Me comes frankincense from Sheba, and sweet cane from a far country? Your burnt offerings are not acceptable, nor your sacrifices sweet to Me."*

### Background

Jeremiah 1:1-3 tells us that Jeremiah began his work of proclaiming God's Word in the thirteenth year of King Josiah and his work continued until Jerusalem and its Temple were destroyed and the people carried off to Babylonia by King Nebuchadnezzar. It is probable that Jeremiah 6 was one of the words spoken by the prophet during the reign of Josiah, but there is no absolute way of knowing this. Some of the prophecies of Jeremiah are definitely ascribed to a certain time, for example, Jeremiah 25:1, but other prophecies are not dated. It seems likely that all of the first chapters of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:4 - 20:18) were spoken during the reign of Josiah, but Josiah is mentioned by name only once in this section, in Jeremiah 3:6, where it is said: **The Lord said also to me in the days of Josiah the king.**

Jeremiah 6:10-20 contains a repetition of God's threat of judgment on the kingdom of Judah and its capital city, Jerusalem. **I will stretch out My hand against the inhabitants of the land** (Jer. 6:12). **They shall fall among those who fall; at the time I punish them, they shall be cast down** (Jer. 6:15). **I will certainly bring calamity on this people** (Jer. 6:19). These threats were carried out when Nebuchadnezzar invaded the land and brought the kingdom of Judah to an end.

Already in the days of King Hezekiah God had foretold the Babylonian Captivity. We read in Isaiah 39:5ff.:

**Behold, the days are coming when all that is in your house, and what your fathers have accumulated until this day, shall be carried to Babylon; nothing shall be left.**

Good King Hezekiah was followed on the throne by two notoriously idolatrous rulers: Manasseh and Amon. Because of their wickedness God announced through His prophets that He would send disaster on Jerusalem and all Judah (2 Kings 21:10-15). Yet in His mercy God postponed the day of disaster by sending to His people one last God-fearing king, namely, Josiah, a most zealous reformer who did more than any other king to rid the land of idolatry. Still, the most that Josiah could accomplish was a delay in God's judgment. The prophetess Huldah and the prophets Zephaniah and Habakkuk together with Jeremiah brought the same message from the Lord: the day of God's wrath was at hand.

One might wonder why the Lord would want to threaten judgment at a time when the people under the zealous leadership of King Josiah were putting away their idolatry and returning to the true worship of the Lord. After all, the Bible says of Josiah: **Before him there was no king like him, who turned to the Lord with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; nor after him did any arise like him** (2 Kings 23:25).

Yet, in spite of Josiah's zealous leadership in reformation, the Bible says: **Nevertheless the Lord did not turn from the fierceness of His great wrath, with which His anger was aroused against Judah, because of all the provocations with which Manasseh had provoked Him** (2 Kings 23:26). The problem was that even though Josiah made (2 Chron. 34:33) the people serve the Lord outwardly, his good example and his leadership and his obedience to God's law could not change the hearts of the people inwardly. This is shown by God's Word through Jeremiah in the days of Josiah (Jer. 3:10): **Judah has not turned to Me with her whole heart, but in pretense.** The Jews of Josiah's time thought they had done enough when they got rid of the outward idolatry. Jeremiah told them God demands more, much more. The sin of pretense or hypocrisy is the sin attacked most vehemently by the prophet Jeremiah. We can call this sin by other names: formalism, ritualism, sacramentalism, false security. The false teachers contemporary with Jeremiah spoke good words to the people. They proclaimed peace and prosperity as blessings from a God who was satisfied with the faithful worship of His people. But Jeremiah continued to threaten judgment and disaster, just like the true prophets of God before him: Isaiah, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah.

The shallow nature of Josiah's reformation came to light when Judah immediately returned to open idolatry after the sudden death of Josiah. Josiah's sons and successors were wicked without exception, and the people as a whole willingly followed them in their wicked ways. First there was Jehoahaz, then Jehoiakim, then Jehoiachin, then Zedekiah, all of them described as doing evil in the sight of the Lord (1 Kings 23:32, 37; 24:9, 19). Jeremiah's threats of judgment were soon fulfilled, rather than the good promises of peace and prosperity spoken by the false prophets.

In Jeremiah 6:10-21 we have God through the prophet announcing His threat of judgment. But, above all, we have the Lord God telling His people why this judgment must come to them.

Reason #1: They do not listen to God's Word or delight in it.

Reason #2: All of them are covetous, greedy of gain, self-centered, even the prophets and priests.

Reason #3: Their false teachers promise a false security, not based on God's Word.

Reason #4: They are not truly ashamed of their sins.

For these reasons God must send the threatened judgment on them, and their offerings in the Temple worship will not help them, no matter how elaborate the ceremony nor how expensive the offering.

If they would walk in the old paths God gave to Moses, they would still find spiritual rest, but they were not interested in that. Nor would they listen to God's prophets. Therefore judgment was on its way, and they would not be able to escape from it.

### The Importance of This Study of Jeremiah

I think the importance of studying the prophecies of Jeremiah in our time can be inferred by considering the following words of Francis Schaeffer in his 1969 book, *Death in the City* (InterVarsity Press):

"We live in a post-Christian world. If we are looking across the history of the world to see those times when men knew the truth and turned away, let us say emphatically that there is no exhibition of this anywhere in history so clearly in such a short expanse of years as in our own generation. Men of our time knew the truth and yet turned away, turned away not only from the biblical truth, the religious truth of the Reformation, but turned away from the total culture built upon that truth. In the United States in the short span from the Twenties to the Sixties, we have seen a complete shift. The whole culture has shifted from Christian to post-Christian.

"Do not take this lightly! It is a horrible thing for a man like myself to look back and see my country and my culture go down the drain in my own lifetime. It is a horrible thing that forty years ago you could move across this country and almost everyone, even non-Christians, would have known what the gospel was. A horrible thing that thirty to forty years ago our culture was built on the Christian consensus and now we are in an absolute minority.

"There is only one perspective we can have of the post-Christian world of our generation: an understanding



that our culture and our country is under the wrath of God. Our country is under the wrath of God.

“What, then, should be our message in such a world – to the world, to the church, and to ourselves?”

“We do not have to guess what God would say about this because there was a period of history, biblical history, which greatly parallels our day. That is the day of Jeremiah. The book of Jeremiah and the book of Lamentations show how God looks at a culture which knew Him and deliberately turned away. But this is not just the character of Jeremiah’s day of apostasy. It’s my day. It’s your day. And if we are going to help our own generation, our perspective must be that of Jeremiah, that weeping prophet Rembrandt so magnificently pictured weeping over Jerusalem, yet in the midst of his tears speaking without mitigating his message of judgment to a people who had had so much, yet turned away.

“The ‘Christian culture’ of Jeremiah’s day was disintegrating into a ‘post-Christian’ culture. It was my generation and the generation that preceded me that forgot. The younger generation is not primarily to be blamed. It is my generation and the generation that preceded me who turned away. Today we are left not only with a religion and a church without meaning, but we are left with a culture without meaning.”

### A Word-for-Word Translation and Comments

**Verse 10: TO WHOM SHALL I SPEAK AND GIVE WARNING AND (THAT) THEY WILL HEAR? BEHOLD, UNCIRCUMCISED (IS) THEIR EAR AND NOT ARE THEY ABLE TO GIVE HEED. BEHOLD, THE WORD OF JHVH WAS (IS) TO THEM FOR A REPROACH. NOT DO THEY DELIGHT IN IT.**

Jeremiah perceives that his warnings of God’s judgment are not going to be received by the majority of his listeners. They have a severe **hearing** problem because their ears are closed by a spiritual foreskin. In the Bible, besides the uncircumcision of the male member, which is called **being uncircumcised in flesh** (Ezek. 44:7, 9), there are also examples of **uncircumcised lips** (Exod. 6:12, 30 – Moses), and **uncircumcised hearts** (Lev. 26:41; Jer. 4:4; Jer. 9:26; Ezek. 44:7, 9; also Acts 7:51) as well as **uncircumcised ears** (Jer. 6:10; Acts 7:51).

Just as all males at birth are uncircumcised and need surgery to become circumcised, so also all of us human beings have uncircumcised ears by nature so that God’s Word is nothing but foolishness to us. We cannot understand it or delight in it, until God Himself gives us opened ears like the ears of the Messiah (Ps. 40:6). When our ears are circumcised, then we delight to do God’s will and His law is in our hearts (Ps. 40:6). As long as our ears are uncircumcised, we are **unable** to listen or obey or appreciate God’s message. Our hearts are dull, our ears are heavy, and our eyes are closed (Isa. 6:10). Confer 2 Cor. 3:12-18.

The Interpreter’s Bible (Vol. 5, p. 859) comments: “We have here the first hint of Jeremiah’s personal disappointment and bitterness over the cold response of the people which reaches its climax in 20:7-18.” Perhaps to “disappointment” and “bitterness” we could add the expression, “deep sadness,” not only because his people were rejecting his prophetic message, but especially because his people were rejecting God’s love and would have to suffer the tragic consequences.

**Verse 11: THE FURY OF JHVH I AM FULL OF. I AM WEARY TO HOLD IT IN. POUR IT OUT ON THE CHILDREN OUTSIDE, AND ON THE ASSEMBLY OF YOUNG MEN TOGETHER. FOR EVEN THE MAN WITH THE WOMAN WILL BE TAKEN, THE AGED WITH THE ONE FULL OF DAYS.**

Even though his listeners have uncircumcised ears, Jeremiah has no choice but to let God’s fury pour out of his prophetic lips and overflow over the nation with all its inhabitants: children, young men, mature men and women, the old, those full of days and ready to die. God’s fury is compared with the contents of a cup or container that God wants to force down the throat of this sinful and hardened people. Compare 25:15 where the Lord says to Jeremiah: **Take this wine cup of fury from My hand, and cause all the nations, to whom I send you, to drink it.** And 25:27: **Drink, be drunk, and vomit!**

The specific judgment that will fall on this people because they have aroused the fury of the Lord through their sins is that they will be taken. That is, they will be taken to Babylon when Nebuchadnezzar attacks.

**Verse 12: THERE WILL BE TURNED OVER THEIR HOUSES TO OTHERS, FIELD AND WIVES TOGETHER. FOR I WILL STRETCH OUT MY HAND ON THOSE WHO DWELL ON THE EARTH (LAND), ORACLE OF JHVH.**

Others from other nations will live in the houses of the Israelites and farm in their fields and even ravish their wives. This is God’s judgment on them. The Babylonians shall come because God has so decreed it. He will stretch out His hand, as Moses stretched out his hand over the Red Sea (Ex. 14:21, 26), and it will happen, just as He said.

Verse 13: **FOR FROM THE LEAST OF THEM EVEN TO THE GREATEST OF THEM THEY ARE ALL GETTING GAIN. AND FROM THE PROPHET EVEN TO THE PRIEST THEY ARE ALL DOING THE LIE.**

Josiah's reformation was unable to stem the tide of covetousness and deceit that was inundating the people of Israel. It was not just the big shots who were interested in getting gain. The little people had the same ideas. Getting rich was the goal – and the way of attaining it was deceit. Life was a rip-off, and the prophets and priests were leading the attack. **All getting gain. All doing the lie.**

The prophets of Ahab's time in earlier history agreed with everything that wicked king suggested. Why did they practice deceit? Why did they lie to their king? Because they did not want to go to prison like the true prophet Micaiah, being fed with bread and water. See First Kings 22.

Jeremiah experienced the same thing. The false prophets who lied to the kings of Judah were popular, for they said what the kings wanted to hear. Popular prophets are better paid than true prophets. It remains true that **the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil** (1 Tim. 6:10). There are many **idle talkers and deceivers, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain** (Titus 1:10-11).

Verse 14: **AND THEY MENDED THE FRACTURE OF MY PEOPLE IN A SUPERFICIAL WAY (SLIGHTLY, LIGHTLY, CARELESSLY), SAYING: PEACE, PEACE, AND THERE IS NO PEACE.**

This is the specific lie the prophets and priests were guilty of promulgating for the sake of getting gain. Their lie was: Peace; peace. Shalom; shalom. Everything is going to be just fine, because God is satisfied with the way things are going. We are God's people, the Temple He commanded us to build is in our city. The offerings are coming in, according to His prescribed regulations. What is there to fear? Let's not have all this negative talk about disobedience and judgment and idolatry and apostasy. Peace, security, prosperity – these are the positive things we want to hear. For such positive things are good for the economy and good for the morals of the whole country. So the prophets spoke, and the people were happy to hear them.

But these prophets were not speaking God's truth. They were not treating the fracture or wound of God's people in a way that would truly be of help in the long run. Some sores cannot be treated by using Band-aids. More potent methods must be employed, like radical surgery with sharp knives that remove the diseased portion. But the prophets and priests of Israel were acting as though the problems were minor, and they prescribed minimal treatment. The patient was ready to die, but they were still saying his health was excellent, with only a few minor problems that were in the process of being taken care of.

The Lord God had said to His people through Moses: **If you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments, and perform them, I will give peace in the land** (Lev. 26:3-6). Shalom means more than just an absence of war. It signifies that God's blessings are being showered on the people in every way. It includes spiritual blessings as well as earthly prosperity.

The people of Judah were not walking in God's statutes nor keeping His commandments. That is why there really was no peace for them at the moment, except in the lying words of their false teachers. Isaiah had said it many years earlier. **Peace, peace to him who is far off and to him who is near, says the Lord, and I will heal him. But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, says the Lord, for the wicked** (Isa. 48:22; 57:21).

To those who acknowledge their sins God is happy to extend peace, for our God is a God of peace, who delights in forgiving His people. God is able to forgive our failures and disobediences because His plan called for a Mediator, one who would bear our sins and guilt on the cross. The **chastisement for our peace was upon Him** (Isa. 53:5), says the prophet. That punishment which Jesus absorbed in our place on the cross is our only true source of peace. Through Christ peace is offered to the world, to all those far and near. But those who turn away from Christ and continue in their wicked ways without repentance should not be told there is peace for them. Rather, God threatens them with **a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries** (Heb. 10:27). When God threatens judgment, prophets accomplish no good at all when they proclaim peace. In fact they show themselves to be nothing but liars and deceivers, conveyors of false hope.

At the very beginning of his ministry Jeremiah was troubled by the apparent contradiction between God's promises of peace and His threats of judgment. Jer. 4:10: **Then I said, "Ah, Lord God! Surely You have greatly deceived this people and Jerusalem, saying, 'You shall have peace,' whereas the sword reaches to the heart."** Jeremiah would have liked to proclaim peace to the people like the false prophets, but he knew that God's message was now judgment because of the wickedness of the people. The false teachers were misapplying all of the words of earlier prophets concerning peace.

The false teachers contemporary with Jeremiah made light of his words of judgment. Jeremiah says of them (Jer. 5:12): **They have lied about the Lord, and said, "It is not He. Neither will evil come upon us, nor shall we see sword**

**or famine.”** The false teachers proclaimed peace, whereas Jeremiah foretold judgment.

It is clear from Jeremiah 7 that the false teachers based their confidence on the fact that God’s Temple was in their midst and that they were God’s chosen people. They should have remembered what happened when Eli’s wicked sons, Hophni and Phinehas, superstitiously believed that the presence of the ark of the covenant on the battlefield would give them victory and in that false hope went out to fight against the Philistines. The ark was stolen and Hophni and Phinehas died in battle, and Eli died also when he heard the news. See First Samuel 4. Jeremiah warned the people (Jer. 7:4, 8-10): **Do not trust in these lying words, saying, “The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are these.” Behold, you trust in lying words that cannot profit. Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, burn incense to Baal, and walk after other gods whom you do not know, and then come and stand before Me in this house which is called by My name, and say, “We are delivered to do all these abominations”?** There is no peace to the wicked.

Again in Jeremiah 14:13 we hear the prophet’s complaint: **Ah, Lord God! Behold, the prophets say to them, “You shall not see the sword, nor shall you have famine, but I will give you assured peace in this place.”** But in Jer. 14:14-15 we have the Lord’s answer: **The prophets prophesy lies in My name. I have not sent them, commanded them, nor spoken to them; they prophesy to you a false vision, divination, a worthless thing, and the deceit of their heart. By sword and famine those prophets shall be consumed.**

The false prophets kept on crying: Peace, peace. But God said: **I have taken away My peace from this people** (Jer. 16:5). But the false teachers of peace persisted in building up false hopes among the rebellious Israelites. **They continually say to those who despise Me, “The Lord has said, ‘You shall have peace’”; and to everyone who walks according to the imagination of his own heart, “No evil shall come upon you”** (Jer. 23:17).

The false prophecies of peace continued in the days of Jehoiakim and Zedekiah, as we learn from Jeremiah 27 and 28. For example, the false prophet Hananiah, claiming he was a spokesman of the Lord, said to the people (Jer. 28:11): **Thus says the Lord: “I will break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar within the space of two full years.”** But Jeremiah said: **You make this people trust in a lie** (Jer. 28:15). Events soon proved Hananiah to be a liar and Jeremiah the true prophet of God.

By the river Chebar the prophet Ezekiel had the same kind of struggle against the false prophets of peace. **They have seduced My people, saying “Peace!” when there is no peace** (Ezek. 13:10). **They see visions of peace for Jerusalem when there is no peace** (Ezek. 13:16). In contrast Ezekiel had to speak the true word of judgment.

It should be remembered that the Lutheran Reformation began when Luther attacked the false security proclaimed by the indulgence peddlers. The common people were believing that there was peace with God for them and their relatives through the payment of money, when in fact there was no peace. The last four of the 95 Theses zeroed in on this false hope. “92. Away then with all those prophets who say to the people of Christ, ‘Peace, peace,’ and there is no peace! 94. Christians should be exhorted to be diligent in following Christ, their head, through penalties, death, and hell; 95. And thus be confident of entering into heaven through many tribulations (Acts 14:22) rather than through the false security of peace” (*Luther’s Works*, Vol. 31, p. 33).

The Roman Catholic leaders had become guilty of leading persons to despair and death by teaching the uncertainty of salvation. But they were also guilty in the opposite direction by fostering a false sense of security in the hearts of hardened sinners. The indulgence abuse led to Luther’s strong language in Thesis 32: “Those who believe that they can be certain of their salvation because they have indulgence letters will be eternally damned, together with their teachers.” Strong language, but no stronger than the language of Jeremiah in the statements quoted above.

The Christian News of September 14, 1987, has an article critical of the present-day Lutheran Hour. A certain non-Lutheran is quoted as saying that the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod does not preach Law and Gospel; it preaches Gospel and Gospel. Let us examine ourselves and our own sermons in this light. If we do not preach God’s Law in all its holy fury, we may well be contributing to a false sense of security on the part of our members, who may think all is well with them when all is not well. Luther once said (*Luther’s Works*, Vol. 35, p. 268): “The godless always outnumber the righteous. Therefore one must always inculcate the law much more than the promises. Even without the promises, the godless feel secure; they are most agile in applying the divine comforts and promises to themselves, and the threats and rebukes to others. Nor do they let themselves be turned away, by any means, from this perverted notion and false hope.”

Therefore the Christian preacher today must draw out of his arsenal the strict demands of God’s holy law and God’s threats of judgment on those who resist His Word. As Luther said (*Luther’s Works*, Vol. 40, pp. 293-294): “It is necessary to preach repentance. For many who hear that they should believe, so that all their sins will be forgiven, fashion their own faith and think they are pure. Thus they become secure and arrogant. Such carnal security is worse than all the errors hitherto prevailing. True faith cannot exist where there is not true contrition and true fear and terror before God. If the preacher does not condemn the sin of those whom he teaches, God will lay the loss of their souls to his account. Such a verdict God pronounces upon that kind of preacher who comforts the people and says much about faith and the forgiveness of sins but nothing about penitence or the fear and judgment of God. Jeremiah, too, condemns such preachers: One should

not believe those who cry, Peace, Peace, when God is angry and there is no peace. God will severely punish those preachers and pupils because of such security. Faith without contrition is presumption and carnal security.”

The Law with its demands and its threats must be unleashed, for, as the Apology says (*Concordia Triglotta*, 117, 43): “We always imagine that God’s wrath against sin is not as serious and great as it verily is.” In like manner the *Formula of Concord* says (*Concordia Triglotta* 889, 21): “Man neither sees nor perceives the terrible and fierce wrath of God on account of sin and death, but ever continues in his security, even knowingly and willingly, and thereby falls into a thousand dangers, and finally into eternal death and damnation.”

The various televangelism scandals that have taken place in our country have revealed how little those who want to be Christian preachers are impressed by the holiness and purity of God. They excuse their damnable behavior instead of saying with the lowly publican: **God be merciful to me a sinner.**

No doubt some of our average “Christians” in the pews have the mistaken idea that they are saved through their Baptism or their contact with Word and Lord’s Supper, even though they are continually on a daily basis deliberately and knowingly living in a way that God’s Word condemns. It is to be feared that the *opus operatum* concept of Roman Catholic theology lives and thrives in many “Lutheran” hearts. A few sentences concerning this matter in David Barnhart’s *The Church’s Desperate Need for Revival* (1986) made me sit up and take notice. Barnhart says (p. 116): “Satan deludes and deceives many into believing that they have a right standing with God, when in fact they do not. Many believe that because they have been baptized, confirmed, have their names affixed to the rolls of a church, and lead relatively good lives, they surely will go to heaven when they die. They are tragically mistaken according to the Word of God. Within much of the Lutheran Church today, great emphasis is placed on a biblically incorrect view of Baptism. People are told that they should trust only in their Baptism for salvation. If they have been baptized, their right relationship with God is eternally secured. This teaching violates Scripture, as well as historic Lutheran doctrine, and may potentially render great damage to individual faith. Throughout the Lutheran Confessions there is repeated denial that the sacraments work *ex opere operato*, (that is automatically, apart from faith). Unfortunately, today, numerous Lutherans are led to believe improperly that the mere act of Baptism, not faith, brings them into a saving relationship with God.”

Although we may not agree with every word of the above paragraph, Pastor Barnhart is confronting a real danger among us. As Martin Luther said many years ago (*Luther’s Works*, Vol. 35, p. 63): “It is not enough that the sacrament be merely completed (that is, *opus operatum*); it must also be used in faith (that is, *opus operantis*). And we must take care lest with such dangerous interpretations the sacrament’s power and virtue be lost on us, and faith perish utterly through the false security of the outwardly completed sacrament.”

How tragic that “Christian” preachers still say, “Peace, peace,” when there is no peace!

**Verse 15: WERE THEY ASHAMED BECAUSE ABOMINATION THEY DO? EVEN TO SHAME THEY ARE NOT ASHAMED (THAT IS, THEY ARE NOT AT ALL ASHAMED). EVEN TO BLUSH THEY DO NOT KNOW (HOW). THEREFORE THEY WILL FALL AMONG THE FALLEN ONES. AT THE TIME I PUNISH THEM THEY WILL BE CAST DOWN, SAYS JHVH.**

Here you have Jeremiah’s description of hardened impenitent sinners. They have the gall to commit **abominations** (Jer. 7:10) like stealing, murdering, committing adultery, swearing falsely, burning incense to Baal, and walking after other gods (Jer. 7:9) and yet expect their prayers to be acceptable to the Lord God and think they are still entitled to the Lord’s protection and deliverance. We are reminded of Agur’s description of a hardened adulteress in Prov. 30:20: **This is the way of an adulterous woman; she eats and wipes her mouth, and says, “I have done no wickedness.”** Or we think of what Jesus said to the self-righteous Pharisees who excommunicated the man born blind whom Jesus had healed. **Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say, ‘We see.’ Therefore your sin remains”** (John 9:41).

Do these words not also describe the prevailing attitude of our time, particularly with respect to sexual sins and dishonesty? Many cases come to mind of persons in high office, both in government and in the church. We even hear in our time of such phenomena as “strippers for Christ” and admittedly “gay” and “lesbian” pastors.

Among ourselves we also have a tendency to make light of our own transgressions, such as disobeying the traffic laws of the land or being preoccupied with getting wealthy or being lazy in the fulfillment of our God-appointed tasks or allowing ourselves to be seduced by the pornography so prevalent on the Internet. Among us also there is a tendency to compare ourselves like the Pharisee in the Temple (Luke 18) with the false teachers and cheaters and adulterers around us instead of examining ourselves in the light of God’s purity and holiness. Surely we need the attitude of Ezra, who recognized in all his being the seriousness of his own sins and the sins of his people when he cried out: **O my God, I am too ashamed and humiliated to lift up my face to You, my God; for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has grown up to the heavens** (Ezra 9:6). Read the entire confession, and you will find a humble spirit that sometimes seems to be lacking among us.

From a spiritual point of view the abomination in itself is not as dangerous as the subsequent defense of the

abomination and the refusal to repent. Saul's sin of disobeying God's command to wipe out the Amalekites does not seem to be as sordid as David's adultery with Bathsheba and his murder of her husband. Saul, however, was not ashamed of his sin and did not blush, whereas David was led to confess his sin openly to God and to man.

We get the impression that Josiah's reformation was a thorough reformation as far as Josiah himself was concerned, but that the rank and file of the people did not really condemn themselves and their abominations. Their repentance was only in pretense. **You have stricken them, but they have not grieved; You have consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction. They have made their faces harder than rock; they have refused to return** (Jer. 5:3).

Therefore God can no longer postpone the day of judgment. **They will fall. They will be cast down.**

**Verse 16: THUS SAYS JHVH: STAND ON THE WAYS AND SEE, AND ASK FOR THE PATHS OF OLD, WHERE IS THAT WAY, THE GOOD WAY, AND WALK IN IT, AND YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. AND THEY SAY, NOT WILL WE WALK (IN IT).**

The Jews were standing on the crossroads of their lives, on the crossroads of the history of their nation. Which path were they going to follow? Josiah surely directed them to the paths of old, to the good way. In his removal of idolatry, in his zeal for the Law of Moses, in his desire to keep the Passover in the original way, in his burning devotion to God's covenant Josiah was a truly God-fearing leader. **The king stood by a pillar and made a covenant before the Lord, to follow the Lord and to keep His commandments and His testimonies and His statutes, with all his heart and all his soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people took their stand for the covenant** (2 Kings 23:3). But their "stand" proved to be a momentary thing. When Josiah was killed in battle, it became obvious that their real response to Josiah's reformation was this: **"Not will we walk in it."**

As Jeremiah saw the impenitence of his people and the sure judgment of God looming on the horizon, he thought back to the good old days in Israel's past history. **I remember you, the kindness of your youth, the love of your betrothal, when you went after Me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown. Israel was holiness to the Lord, the firstfruits of His increase. All that devour him will offend; disaster will come upon them, says the Lord** (Jer. 2:2-3).

The time period referred to is the very short time between Israel's escape from Pharaoh at the Red Sea to the giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai. But there were other good times in Israel's history, most notably the days of Joshua and the elders who outlived Joshua. **Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua** (Josh. 24:31). Perhaps we can also think of the days of Samuel and the early days of David. But the old and good ways were always mapped out for Israel in God's Word. They knew from what God had said to them how they should live, and they knew also that when they conducted their lives within the framework of God's covenant (not only the law of Moses but the promises to Abraham), they would find rest for their souls.

In the early years of the history of Messiah congregation in Hales Corners, Wisconsin one of our members drew up a little brochure explaining the origin of our congregation. This verse from Jeremiah was quoted, and it seemed to fit well the situation of that time. Lutherans were being confronted with a decision: whether to walk on the paths of unionism according to the new approach of ecumenical leaders, or whether to continue in the old Biblical paths of the once-staunch Synodical Conference. Once the Christian had determined which way was the good and the right way, there was a critical period of anxiety and tension between the time of knowing what was right and the time of doing it. Those who knew what was right and did it experienced rest in their souls. They were immensely relieved to have escaped from membership in a disobedient synod, when they did what they knew the will of the Lord required them to do. Peace of mind and conscience is a precious gift. Martin Luther experienced it when he learned to know the true and right way and taught it to others.

In a deeper sense, of course, we can never find rest for our souls in our own obedience to God's Word. The old paths, the good way, cannot be restricted to God's rules for right and wrong. God's covenant made provision for sacrifices for sin and forgiveness of sin, pointing ahead to the sacrificial death of the Messiah. Hear the words of this Messiah in Matthew 11:28-29: **Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.** In the final analysis the only true rest is the rest that Jesus "gives" us. When we come to Him, as He invites us, we find true rest for our souls: forgiveness of sins, a good conscience, and the assurance of eternal life.

**Verse 17: AND I SET OVER YOU WATCHMEN. GIVE HEED TO THE SOUND OF THE TRUMPET. AND THEY SAY, NOT WILL WE HEED IT.**

The watchmen were God's prophets like Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. All of them sounded the trumpet, warning God's people to repent of their sins because the judgment of an angry God was about to descend on them. God was not lax in warning His people. God was not quiet in the last days of Judah. But the people of Judah refused to

listen to the warnings of the Lord. For an extended discussion of the duties and responsibilities of God's watchmen read Ezekiel 33.

**Verses 18-19: THEREFORE HEAR, O NATIONS, AND KNOW, O CONGREGATION, WHAT IS IN (AMONG) THEM. HEAR, O EARTH (LAND), BEHOLD, I WILL BRING EVIL TO THE PEOPLE, THIS PEOPLE, THE FRUIT OF THEIR THOUGHTS, FOR MY WORD NOT HAVE THEY HEEDED. AND MY TORAH THEY HAVE DESPISED (REJECTED, ABHORRED) (IN) IT.**

God is making clear through His prophet exactly what He is going to do. He wants both the heathen nations, the *goyim*, as well as the congregation of Israel to hear and know what is happening. It will not be an accident or coincidence. God will be at work. He will bring the evil to this people. It will be the fruit of their thoughts, that is, the consequence of their rebellious attitude. In effect they have brought this evil on themselves. God in justice can do nothing else except punish them. For they did not listen to His Word.

**Verse 20: FOR WHAT PURPOSE TO ME FRANKINCENSE FROM SHEBA DOES IT COME, AND CANE, THE GOOD (SWEET) CANE, FROM A LAND FAR AWAY? YOUR BURNT OFFERINGS NOT FOR A DELIGHT, AND YOUR SACRIFICES, NOT ARE THEY SWEET TO ME.**

The sense of this verse is repeated in many words of the prophets, particularly Isaiah and Jeremiah. God simply is not satisfied with formalism, ritualism, a hypocritical worship that ignores the real sin-problem of the people. God surely commanded burnt offerings and sacrifices. But such burnt offerings and sacrifices are acceptable to Him only when they come from sincere, repentant hearts.

The Israelites must really have been endangered by this type of hypocrisy. Otherwise God's prophets would not have sounded forth on this matter so frequently and so vehemently. Listen to a few examples of God's rhetoric against insincere worship.

**Psalm 50:13-20: Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats? Offer to God thanksgiving, and pay your vows to the Most High. Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me. But to the wicked God says: "What right have you to declare My statutes, or take My covenant in your mouth, seeing you hate instruction and cast My words behind you? When you saw a thief, you consented with him, and have been a partaker with adulterers. You give your mouth to evil, and your tongue frames deceit. You sit and speak against your brother; you slander your own mother's son."**

**Amos 5:21-24: I hate, I despise your feast days, and I do not savor your sacred assemblies. Though you offer Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them, nor will I regard your fattened peace offerings. Take away from Me the noise of your songs, for I will not hear the melody of your stringed instruments. But let justice run down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream.**

**Isaiah 1:11-15: To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me? says the Lord. I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed cattle. I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs or goats. When you come to appear before Me, who has required this of your hand, to trample My courts? Bring no more futile sacrifices; incense is an abomination to Me. The New Moons, the Sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies – I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting. Your New Moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates; they are a trouble to Me, I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood.**

**Isaiah 66:2-3: On this one will I look; on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word. He who kills a bull is as if he slays a man; he who sacrifices a lamb, as if he breaks a dog's neck; he who offers a grain offering, as if he offers swine's blood; he who burns incense, as if he blesses an idol.**

**Jeremiah 7:9-10, 22-23: Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, burn incense to Baal, and walk after other gods whom you do not know, and then come and stand before Me in this house which is called by My name, and say, "We are delivered to do all these abominations"? For I did not speak to your fathers, or command them in the day that I brought them of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices. But this is what I commanded them, saying, "Obey My voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be My people."**

How do you think God feels today about the glorious ecumenical services that make a mockery of God's warnings against syncretism? How do you think God feels about the worship offered up to Him by "gay" churches? What do you think God's attitude is towards the well-publicized masses of the pope, or the fabulous entertainment put on in His name by sacrament-rejecting charismatics? Or think of your own congregation and how its worship appeals to God. Are our hearts far from Him? Are we just mouthing the words? Is it all a lifeless routine without any trembling at God's Word or radiant rejoicing because of God's forgiveness? We are a part of our rebellious generation, and God's judgment comes closer every

day.

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## BOOK REVIEW

**Dale E. Varberg: Faith and Fellowship – A Look at Lutheran Brethren Theology 1900-2000, paperback, 208 pages, Faith and Fellowship Press, 1020 Alcott Ave. West, P. O. Box 655, Fergus Falls, MN 56538-0655.**

Like the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC), the Church of the Lutheran Brethren of America (CLBA or CLB) is a small Lutheran church body centered in the Midwest that has missions outside the United States with more members than the American church (There are Lutheran Brethren churches in Cameroon, Canada, Chad, Japan, and Taiwan). But in almost every other respect the CLC and the CLB are very different from each other, as this book by Dale Varberg makes clear.

The CLC was forty years old in the year 2000; the CLB was one hundred years old. Dale Varberg, married to the granddaughter of one of the CLB founders, has written this interesting account of CLB theology as part of the CLB's centennial celebration. Notice that Varberg's book does not intend to cover the history of the CLB; it is just a look at CLB theology as it has been taught for the past one hundred years.

In the year 1900 many Lutherans in America were involved in the Gnadewahlstreit or Predestination Controversy. The CLC's ancestors in the Lutheran Synodical Conference, men such as C. F. W. Walther of the Missouri Synod, Adolf Hoenecke of the Wisconsin Synod, and Ulrik Koren of the Norwegian Synod, agreed with Acts 13:48 and the Formula of Concord that "God's eternal election ... is a cause which creates, effects, helps, and furthers our salvation and whatever pertains to it" (The Book of Concord, Tappert edition, 617). But one of the chief founders of the CLB, Knut Lundeberg (1859-1942), got part of his theological training at the Anti-Missourian seminary in Northfield, Minnesota, where one of his teachers was Walther's adversary, F. A. Schmidt. The Anti-Missourians taught that "God elects those to salvation whom he foreknows will respond in faith" in agreement with some of the later Lutheran dogmatists and the popular catechism drawn up by Danish theologian Erik Pontoppidan (1698-1764). In their view God's election does not bring about faith, but faith brings about God's election. They taught an election of God *intuitu fidei* (in view of faith).

The controversy on predestination led to controversy on other doctrines as well: the doctrine of conversion, the doctrine of absolution, the doctrine of universal justification. On all of these issues the CLB leaders took a stand in opposition to the Synodical Conference.

Other strong influences in the CLB were the pietistic teachings of Philip Spener (1635-1705), Hans Hauge (1771-1824), and Carl Olof Rosenius (1816-1868). These pietists were not sticklers for pure doctrine, but they stressed the importance of living a certain kind of Christian life. The main reason that the CLB was founded and maintained a separate existence for one hundred years was that its leaders subscribed to "the principle that only true believers should form the communicant and voting membership of a local congregation" (21). The CLB founders believed that the other Lutheran church bodies of the day, even the pietistic free Lutherans, allowed unbelievers as well as believers to rule the churches. They based this judgment on the fact that "some church members liked to spend their weeknights carousing in the local saloons" (23).

To this day Article IV of the CLB Constitution includes the provision that "the local congregation shall conform to the scriptures in that its membership be made up only of those who confess Jesus Christ as Lord and whose testimony and life confirm that confession" (200).

Varberg points out that Knut Lundeberg himself left the CLB in 1911. Some reasons listed: "He is now convinced that it is impossible for human beings to discern the heart. ... He had noted a judgmental attitude. ... Finally, but here one must read between the lines, he is disappointed in how slowly the CLB has grown in America. ... As of 1911, only nineteen congregations had joined the CLB with a total of 954 members" (133).

There is a danger that stress on certain aspects of the Christian life may lead to legalism. Varberg admits, in fact, that the CLB "has often been accused of being narrow-minded, puritanical, and legalistic. There is some truth in this accusation" (176). The pietists sometimes made rules that went beyond Scripture, for example: Do not drink, do not dance, do not play cards. Yet Varberg claims that in spite of these legalistic tendencies, the CLB has always proclaimed that we are saved by grace alone, not by our works.

At the beginning CLB teachers were dispensational premillennialists, following the end-time schemes spelled out in the Scofield Reference Bible, first published in 1909. In fact, the current CLB Statement of Faith (first adopted in 1963)

still refers specifically to Christ's "millennial kingdom." But Varberg points out that some CLB pastors and teachers today are open amillennialists, and the CLB has taken no action against them.

In other ways also the CLB has become more orthodox in its teachings. Ever since the 1960s Franz Pieper's *Christian Dogmatics*, with its strong emphasis on the inspiration of Scripture, God's grace, and the means of grace, has been used as the doctrinal textbook in the CLB seminary. Nevertheless, the CLB has certainly not followed F. Pieper in his teachings on church fellowship. On the one hand, they say: "Only true believers ... should take communion" (154). But at the same time "from the beginning the CLB had practiced open communion, meaning anyone regardless of sex or age or even denominational affiliation who confessed faith in Christ was permitted to take communion" (142).

Likewise, the CLB, while maintaining its separate existence through the years, has always cooperated with evangelicals of all types, including the Billy Graham organization. In fact in many ways the CLB resembles typical conservative Protestant churches more than Lutheran churches.

After reading Varberg's very interesting presentation of the history of CLB's theology, we conclude that the CLB today is a unionistic fellowship in which various tendencies, both orthodox and heterodox, are striving for dominance. Of special interest is Varberg's remark: "There is a longing on the part of many in the Church of the Lutheran Brethren to more explicitly emphasize our Lutheran doctrinal roots, to get back to Luther. This is particularly true of the present seminary staff and it is reflected in the practice and preaching of some of the pastors" (157).

We pray that this movement towards Lutheran orthodoxy may gain momentum, so that the true Gospel of Christ may be sounded forth by the CLB in agreement with holy Scripture and the Lutheran confessions.

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