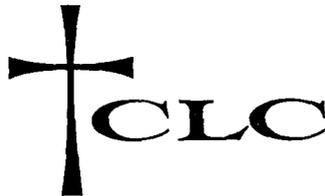


CLERGY and LAITY

Class Conflict?

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We have lived through years wherein the Lord has tested the work of former generations. During the first 35 to 40 years of this century the church organization of which many of us were members enjoyed relative peace. That peace was brought to an end by doctrinal conflicts. A time for giving clear testimony in word and deed was granted and abused.

Slowly from here and there individuals, groups, and larger numbers made their way out from under the tent of indecision and disobedience. By the grace of God the Lord's Word was dearer to them than the favor of men. More precious in their eyes was the purity of doctrine than the visible organizations of this world.

REORGANIZATION

Once again brought together by the Holy Spirit, and in accordance with His will that "everything be done decently and in order," groups formed congregations; congregations formed a synod. Congregations and synod set to work to draw up constitutions.

The work of the Lord must go on. The Gospel is to be preached at home and abroad. The young are to be educated. Teachers and pastors must be trained for the years that lie ahead. All the God-given work that we have known in the years past as the work of the Church must be continued.

The past history, however, has looked down over our shoulders as we, as congregations and synod, were busy with the external work of organizing and reorganizing. We have struggled with the wording in constitutions and with ideas of new or different systems of church government in order to avoid the experiences of the past.

In probing consciously or subconsciously for reasons and causes for the sad situations of yester year, that we might apply a proper remedy for the future,

Satan can very easily throw a bone of contention our way with the hope that he will divide what the Spirit has joined.

WHAT CAUSED THE FAILURE?

Just where lies the reason for the failure of a church body, once faithful to God's Word, to abide by the Word of God? Lucifer, in his clever way, may make it appear that the fault lies with those men who are called clergy (pastors, teachers, professors). He will supply you with ample proof to make a good sounding case. For many and various reasons pastors withheld information from their people. Professors and teachers dodged the issues in their classrooms. Since professors, teachers, and pastors represented a large part of voting strength at Synod, the church went down to defeat because of the clergy.

Apply this apparent cause to the future and it seems to say, "Beware of teachers, professors, and pastors. When you establish a new order, make certain the power does not lie there again."

There is a trend prevalent in church circles to take the leadership out of the hands of the so-called clergy. What a victory for Satan if he can sow distrust between pastor and people in our midst also for whatever reason he can produce.

To another the past looks like the failure of the man in the pew. How we preached! What years of instruction we gave! What material we provided! The man in the pew just didn't care. He was too busy with life, too satisfied with things the way they were. Don't stir up family trouble. The whole thing is just a preacher's argument. Let us be done with it. You have heard them.

The conclusion? In the future let us curtail the power of the layman. Perhaps the Roman Catholic Church has something in investing all power in the hands of the clergy.

Two groups looking at the same battlefield and Satan using the ghosts of the past to begin a new round of conflict or at least attempting to do so. Before such thoughts or those of similar vein take possession of us and conflict begins where there is no need for it, yea, where it is altogether out of place, let us turn to the Word of God and view the safeguards it has established for avoiding just such a conflict.

GUARDED FROM CONFLICT

Let us be aware of one thing immediately, namely, the outward system of church government, whether it be on a congregational level or on the level of the synod, will never be any stronger than the soundness of its members, clergy and laity alike. We certainly want our constitutions to reflect the spirit of the Gospel and purity of doctrine. It must be so for that which fills the heart will flow from the lips and pen. But let us never think that by carefully hedging our constitutions and systems of government within the church we thereby are going to safeguard the soundness of doctrine and practice for the future. You cannot legislate purity of teaching. You cannot write it into the hearts of men by writing it into articles or by-laws.

The deviating from the paths of truth on the part of church bodies was not caused by faulty constitutions or systems of government but rather finds its cause in the hearts of men — pastors, professors, teachers, and laymen alike.

THE REAL PROBLEM

The brutal reality that all of us are made of the same sinful clay provides the first safeguard against a class struggle between clergy and laity. The leveling finger of God's Law knows no class. It exposes each and everyone of us as having come short of the glory of God. In the letter to the Romans Paul takes

group after group and permits the full glare of the Law to shine on them. He clearly reveals that from the proud moralist to the most derilect deviate there is but one class to be found among men and that is the class of lost and condemned sinners. "Now we know," writes Paul, "that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law; that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God." Romans 3, 19.

All of us, regardless of our calling in life, are sinful flesh. The place where we sit or stand in the church building does not change that one bit. We are not pastors because we are less sinful. If such be our thought, we have not understood the words of the Apostle Paul, "I am chief of sinners." Nor is he who is called a layman of higher order. Such an idea has not yet learned to stand with the publican and cry, "God, be merciful to me the sinner."

Do we have something of ourselves wherewith to boast one against the other? Of ourselves all we have is a load of sin that needs to be disposed of. There is no need for a class struggle here for the Law makes it evident that we have in our possession only spiritual blindness and deserve naught but death.

THE REAL CURE

Although the Law casts us all down to the depths of hell, the Gospel lifts us all up to the height of heaven. Not we but the Lord has changed our lost and condemned condition. Paul makes that clear in Romans 3, 21-27:

"But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be

a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay, but by the law of faith."

Is there room for a class struggle here? Paul flees under the shadow of the cross for salvation counting all other things but dung. Under the cross he stands with the dying thief, with the publicans and sinners who looked to Jesus for life and hope. Jew and Gentile, rich and poor, male and female, the honored and despised, all find but one entrance to God and that is through Jesus, Who is "the Way, the Truth, and the Life."

What a safeguard against class struggle the Gospel message provides. It covers all of us with one divine protection, namely, the robe of Jesus' life and death!

AN ATTITUDE

God calls us now "a royal priesthood, a chosen generation, a peculiar people." He tells us that we are "fellow citizens together with the saints, members of the household of God, heirs together with Christ." Our spiritual eyes should be open to see in our fellow Christians what God sees in them. How can I despise one whom the Lord calls a royal priest, a saint, an heir, His son? When we see one another as God sees us for Jesus' sake, then we will indeed "in love prefer one another."

These two truths must always be kept in mind in dealing one with the other. We are all sinners and we are all saints. Sinners born into this world who daily sin much. Saints we are only by the grace of God, who imputes the righteousness of Christ to us.

"Well enough," you might say, "but you have not touched the heart of the matter yet, for you have not pointed out which of these sinners, declared to be saints, should be presidents of synods, members of boards, serve on committees, doing the work of the church."

People, let us be well aware that we have touched the heart of the matter. Before we can look properly at these "practical" matters, we must first look deep into the grace of God. Only after we have been amazed, humbled, and inspired by His tremendous love, will we in humble thankfulness and loving obedience ask Him, "What wilt Thou have me do?" "Show me Thy will."

A HUMBLE SPIRIT

The third safeguard, which springs out from an understanding of our sinfulness, spiritual blindness, and from a taste of God's great love, is the God-created humble spirit that says, "I am willing to be instructed and to follow the instructions of God."

It is this very safeguard that the Apostle Paul uses when he prepares to speak to the congregation at Corinth regarding spiritual gifts and their uses in the Church of his day. In the opening verses of the 12th chapter of the First Letter to the Corinthians Paul reminds his readers of what they had been in former years. "Ye know that ye were Gentiles carried away unto these dumb idols, even as ye were led." Indeed a terrible condition had been theirs but now by the Spirit of God, they called Jesus their Lord. When he had humbled them by the Law and exalted them through the Gospel then he speaks of how they will live one for the other in those things wherein they differ.

A DIFFERENCE IN CHRISTIANS

Yes, there is a difference in Christians, a God-given and God-determined difference, a difference in

the nature and degree of "gifts" which God has given. This fact is presented in several ways by Scripture. It is stated in just so many words, "Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit..." It is revealed in a listing of the various gifts given to the members of the early church, "To one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; To another faith by the same Spirit, etc." 1 Corinthians 12, 8ff. The fact is also set forth by a comparison, "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ." 1 Corinthians 12, 12.

CONFLICT IN CORINTH

Now in Corinth there was trouble because of these gifts. The trouble stemmed from the sinful heart of man. They forgot that the gifts they possessed were gifts of grace; gifts given as He will, according to the Spirit's determination. They forgot that they were all members of one body, Christ's, and that the gifts were given, not for the glory of the individual, but for the benefit of the body as a whole.

Not honor of self but a selfless service to others was to underlie the use of God-given gifts. Instead of asking, "What wilt Thou have me do?" the Corinthians used the gifts as they willed. Not only were they abusing the gifts they possessed in themselves, but they were also abusing the gifts others had by failing to recognize them and by failing to put them to use for their own spiritual good.

GIFTS IN EACH OF US

Let us not make the same mistake. God still gives gifts to His Church. They are such as we need for our particular place and time in the history of the Church. They are as Prof. John Fritz points out, "Not only such gifts as the Spirit's own indwelling, faith in Christ, love, and hope (these every Christian must have, and God gives them for the asking), but

also such special gifts as Christians do not absolutely need for their salvation but for their greater blessings, happiness, and usefulness, as, for example, the gift of deep spiritual insight, the gift of quick spiritual discernment and understanding, the gift of teaching, the gift of being able well to admonish and correct others, the gift of special missionary ability, the gift of governing and guiding others. These are gifts which the Holy Spirit still gives to His Church and there is perhaps no Christian who has not received some special gift, even though it be small in measure."

THE SOLUTION

You and I are to keep our eyes open. We are to watch for these God-given gifts and to use them wherever found for the purpose for which they were intended. We are not to despise or reject them because they are found in one who is a pastor or a layman, teacher, or professor. The mouth does not refuse food because it is brought by the left hand rather than the right. Just as members of the body work together in a harmonious whole so we out of love for our Head, Jesus, will work together. As members of one body, having differing gifts, we will perform our God-given duties for the benefit of the whole body. In humble thankfulness we make use of the gifts God has given for our edification, for the building of the Church.

As humble children of God we will recognize the gifts of the Spirit in others and we will not be demanding a recognition for ourselves. If needs be we will sit 40 years patiently tending sheep with Moses, until the Lord is ready to put a talent, a gift, we may have to use.

