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J. Lau

THREE
ESSAYS
ON
ROMANS 1:16

Church of the Lutheran Confession

I Am Not
Ashamed
of the
Gospel
of Christ

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ESSAYISTS:

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421, 422, 423

APOSTOLIC ERA: THE GOSPEL FOR MAN

Religion was a personal and vital force in the life of Paul. He went into it with heart and soul. There were no halfway measures; no Sabbath day or Sunday religiosity sharing time with weekday secularization; no shoving off until tomorrow what had to be done today; no sitting on the sidelines while others did the work. He literally consumed himself in favor of what he believed to be right. This was true of him when he was caught up in the meshes of a false religion as it was when he was converted to the true faith.

THE MAN SAUL: ASHAMED OF THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

Standing before King Agrippa at Caesarea Paul said: "My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews; which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee. And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers; unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come. For which hope's sake, king Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews. Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead? I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem; and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities." Acts 26:4-11. To the Philippians Paul wrote: "If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless." Phil. 3:4-6. To the Galatians he wrote: "For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it: and profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers." Gal. 1:13-14.

This was the man Saul. There can be no doubt that he threw himself wholeheartedly into the pursuit of the religion in which he believed. If anyone should have been able to be saved by the works of the law, that man would have been Saul. He was most conscientious in following what he believed. He was most sincere in what he professed. He went all the way in seeking to wipe out and eradicate what he believed to be wrong. He didn't say one thing in private and practice something else in public. He was honest and a man of integrity. There was no danger that an FBI type of investigation would turn up some secret or back room affair which would cast a shadow upon his character and disqualify him in the eyes of his superiors. People knew where he stood and what his convictions were. He practiced the sternest discipline and did so without partiality or favoritism for friends or relatives. This man was not ashamed of what he was doing or of the beliefs that he promoted. Here was strength of character which one might be moved to admire in the face of the wishy-washy vacillations of the run-of-the-mill unbeliever or of the compromising spirit of the false prophet and unionist.

But, alas, the man Saul was in bondage, shackled in the chains of the law which judged and condemned him every day. He himself later declared by

inspiration of God: "As many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, the just shall live by faith. And the law is not of faith; But, the man that doeth them shall live in them." Gal. 3:10-12. Strong as the man's character was there was not an ounce or a gram of spiritual weight, not a particle of spiritual worth in anything he did or in anything that he was, for he was in enmity against God, since he was in enmity against Christ. Indeed he was ashamed of Jesus--ashamed of the Gospel--ashamed that the Jewish blood of his ancestors flowed in the veins of Jesus, ashamed that men who were his countrymen confessed Jesus and were willing to die for him, ashamed that Jewish men and women bore witness to the resurrection of Jesus which he considered a fraud and a lie. He had dedicated himself to the task of closing the mouths of those who confessed Jesus and preached His Gospel. But the judgment of God rested upon his soul. Jesus whom Saul persecuted on one occasion said to the people and to His disciples: "Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels." Mark 8:38. Ashamed of Jesus and of His words; this was the man Saul of Tarsus.

THE MAN PAUL: NOT ASHAMED OF THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

But then came the miracle of grace. On the way to Damascus on a murderous errand of persecution, a light from heaven surrounded the man Saul and the resurrected and glorified Christ whom he had persecuted appeared to him. He was filled with the Holy Ghost and received the gift of grace in Christian Baptism. Of Holy Baptism and its blessings such as Saul received and experienced, the converted Paul, the Apostle of Jesus Christ, later wrote with conviction and without shame: "Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection; knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin, for he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him; knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once; but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God." Rom. 6:3-10. Concerning baptism and its attendant blessings Paul the Apostle wrote to his co-worker Titus whom he calls his own son after the common faith: "After that the kindness and love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; that being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men." Titus 3:4-8. These were not vain and empty words in the mouth of this reborn instrument of God, for it is recorded that this man Paul in the power of the Gospel and through the grace conferred upon him in Holy Baptism took a vital interest in conforming his life to the immutable will of God. He now looked upon his life not in terms of the works of the law but in terms of the works of the Spirit. In this spirit he also wrote to the Roman Christians: "I beseech you therefore brethren by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable

service. And be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is the good, and acceptable and perfect will of God." Rom. 12:1-2. This was a complete negation of Paul's former way of life, but he was not ashamed to confess it and to sever all connections with what he had been before. The Gospel of Christ which he before had sought to suppress, he now was ready to proclaim even to the hated Gentiles, for to this special task God had set him apart. X

But this was not an easy assignment. At once the people said: "Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name (the name of Jesus) in Jerusalem and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests?" But did this deter this vessel of God? Did it slow him down in his efforts? Did it dim the light that had brightened his horizon? Nay, rather on the other hand he "increased the more in strength and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is the very Christ." Acts 9:21-22. "He spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and disputed against the Grecians; but they went about to slay him." Acts 9:29. Even the disciples were suspicious of him at first, but this did not cause him to be offended at the Gospel. He went on with his testimony and gained their confidence and their support as well as their respect. He became a vessel of God to bear the name of Jesus before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. When the Lord said: "I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake," (Acts 9:16) this did not cause him to turn back even though the persecution took on forms not only of physical suffering but also of social ostracism. Thus he wrote to the Corinthians: "We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye are honorable but we are despised. Even unto this present hour we both hunger and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwellingplace; and labour, working with our own hands; being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it; being defamed, we intreat; we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day." I Cor. 4:10-13. Truly he bore in his body the marks of the Lord Jesus. Gal. 6:17b. In the midst of all this, Paul did not engage in self-pity nor did he seek after the praise of his brethren. Rather he considered it an honor to be included among those of whom Jesus said: "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, the servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying they will keep yours also. But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me." John 15:18-21. The spirit in which Paul bore all these things is reflected in his words to the Philippians: "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith; that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead." Phil. 3:7-11. Dollars and cents had little meaning for this man of faith. If he had been asked to give up all his earthly possessions to keep his confession straight, he would have been ready without a question. He would not have been one to maintain connections with a unionistic association in order to spare himself some material loss. Loyalty to the Gospel of Jesus Christ meant too much to him for that. He knew as we all know, that the Lord Jesus who was able to save all men by the shedding of His blood is

certainly fully able to sustain his children even if they should suffer the loss of all things that the world provides. If we can't believe this then our entire faith is a farce and a sham.

X Paul's Christianity was far from being an act in which he was the star performer awaiting the plaudits and cheers of the spectators. His was not a self-seeking role. To be committed to the Gospel of Jesus Christ meant the very opposite of this. To say "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Jesus Christ" meant for him that he would confess the Lord Christ before men not as a display of his great devotion but as an outflow of his faith and with the purpose of bringing others to the soul-saving faith. His faith was not just lying there as a dead and inert thing, lifeless and inactive. He was eager to save souls remembering so well how he himself had been snatched as a brand from the burning. Here are his own words, given by inspiration: "For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; to them that are without law, as without law (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ) that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak; I am made all things to all men that I might by all means save some. And this I do for the Gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you." I Cor. 9:19-23. Paul's zeal for the Gospel surpassed the Pharisaic zeal of his former way of life. His desire for the salvation of his brethren was so great that he was moved to say: "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved." Rom. 10:1. In the forepart of his letter to the Romans he wrote: "For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established; that is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me. Now I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that oftentimes I purposed to come unto you (but I was let hitherto) that I might have some fruit among you also even as among other Gentiles. I am debtor both to the Greeks and to the Barbarians; both to the wise and to the unwise. So as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the Gospel to you that are at Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." Rom. 1:11-16. In all of this we see Paul's great zeal for the spreading of the Gospel. All of this is tied in with his not being ashamed of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. The spirit which thus motivated Paul is typical of the spirit that prevailed among the servants of God in the apostolic era. There was no thought of hiding the light under a bushel in a secret place as a thing of which one is ashamed. Rather it is outstandingly true that the confessors of this era showed great zeal in diffusing the light of the Gospel in ever-expanding arcs. There was an urgency evident in the lives of these early Christians who labored to make every day count; for in those days of persecution they were poignantly aware of the fact that their lives might at any moment be brought to an end. Should not we who live in the latter days feel the same urgency for the spreading of the Gospel at home and abroad? We need to make use of all the manpower we have and pray for more. We need to redeem the time, that is, make use of every opportunity; for the days are evil and the day is far spent. We find much inspirational material in the example of Paul and of the apostles and of the dedicated people who lived and labored for the Lord in that age known as the apostolic era. As we read the record we are spurred on to ever greater efforts in the work of the Kingdom.

Not to be ashamed of the Gospel of Christ meant for Paul that he would labor faithfully for the preservation of the eternal truth and would take an uncompromising stand against false teachers. As in the beginning of his letter to the

Romans he had said, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ," so now at the end he shows what this involves when one is confronted with false teachers: "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple. For your obedience is come abroad unto all men. I am glad therefore on your behalf; but yet I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil." Rom. 16:17-19. Paul did not mince words or operate with synodical resolutions or constitutional provisions when it came to dealing with false prophets. He did not declare them eligible for a call in other places when they had shown themselves to be enemies of Christ in their present positions. He did not call them brethren in the faith or members in good standing, but he called them belly-servers and deceivers. He did not maintain any bonds of fellowship with errorist groups for the sake of extricating those who ignorantly were tied to them, but he admonished them by separating from them according to God's word and thus gave them the Christian example they needed so that they might be strengthened to go and do likewise. He had a wholesome fear of the leaven of false doctrine and of what this would do to the mission of the Church and therefore he called for a purging out of every speck of false teaching. He did not hedge by saying that certain false teachings are not divisive of church fellowship, but he simply said "avoid." Thus there was no room for argument in the church fellowship questions, but all was kept clear and plain for all to know and act upon. ✕

Thus we have spoken of the Gospel for man with the influence and power which moved the hearts and minds of those who were converted to the faith in the apostolic era. We have centered our attention mainly on the apostle Paul who said, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ." However what was true of him was also true of those who shared that saving faith and labored in that same spirit which activated and motivated that great missionary to the Gentiles. It was a difficult time, a time of testing, a time of transition from the Old Covenant provisions to the New Testament freedom from ceremonial rites which had served their purpose but were no longer in force. Strong was the temptation to be ashamed of Jesus with whose coming the centuries-old practices of blood offerings, animal offerings, Sabbath days, prohibition of certain meats, etc. were done away with. The masses refused to believe that in Jesus all had been fulfilled. They insisted on hanging on to the old sacrifices as if the Messiah had not come, and in so doing they lived under the law and sought their justification by works of the law. Religion to them had become strictly a physical, material, secular, political, national, civic way of life without spiritual content or meaning. Thus we can understand why those people who were caught up in this philosophy of legalistic provisions were antagonistic to the Christian religion and its teaching of justification by faith without the deeds of the law. The life, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus did not at all find any place in their thinking and therefore, in the very name of their false religion of works, they were antagonistic to Jesus, to the Gospel and to all those who bore witness to the Gospel.

We face the same kind of enmity today but often in more subtle forms. However, let us make no mistake about it, the "Gospel" proclaimed by the masses even in the name of Jesus is no Gospel at all but is in the final analysis a religion of works. Professing themselves to be followers of Jesus they are in reality ashamed of Him and His words and of His followers. That which is taught as a "Christian" religion is a religion pointing not to the world to come but centers upon this world which shall not stand but shall pass away. It remains for us to hold fast to the Gospel of Jesus Christ as the power of God unto salvation and say with Paul: "Though we or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which

we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. For do I now persuade men or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ. But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." Gal. 1:8-12.

Ashamed of Jesus? Yes, I may
When I've no guilt to wash away,
No tear to wipe, no good to crave,
No fear to quell, no soul to save.

Till then--nor is my boasting vain--
Till then I boast a Savior slain;
And oh, may this my glory be,
That Christ is not ashamed of me!

Lutheran Hymnal 346, 5&6

Professor C. M. Gullerud

REFORMATION ERA: THE CLOUD OF WITNESSES

"I" (Paul) "am not ashamed of the Gospel." Paul's reasons for not being ashamed have been laid out in the previous paper presented by President C. M. Gullerud. The Gospel reveals the only righteousness that avails before God. It also works the faith by which man appropriates that righteousness of Christ to himself. That God-worked and God-given righteousness will never put man to shame--will never leave him wanting--in time or for eternity. As a result Paul by the power of God boldly and gladly declares that he, Paul, is not ashamed of that which will not put him to shame, of that which God Himself is not ashamed.

In Romans 1:16 we hear Paul speaking. This is a personal testimony that he is giving. "I" (Paul) "am not ashamed of the Gospel." It is a testimony that is honest and reliable for it is God who inspired the statement in the heart of Paul, and it is God who recorded it through the pen of Paul as a reliable record for us to read and to hear. But, my brethren, Paul's voice is not a lone voice; it is not the only voice that proclaims confidence in and rejoices over the Gospel. He is but one of a great cloud of witnesses who in various ways and at sundry times have repeated this message for us to hear and ponder.

The cloud of witnesses proclaiming with Paul, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel," is what this paper is all about. There is a restricting clause, however, to be added to THE CLOUD OF WITNESSES, namely, OF THE REFORMATION ERA. We want to spend a few minutes this morning hearing the voices from the 16th century joining the Apostle Paul in declaring "I am not ashamed of the Gospel."

I. X

The expression cloud of witnesses is a quote from the 12th chapter of the Letter to the Hebrews. In the first verse of that chapter we read, "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great cloud of witnesses ..." The cloud of witnesses referred to in this verse has been presented in chapter 11. There such familiar names as Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Moses, and many more are presented. In that 11th chapter we are given opportunity to hear how these people in advance of Paul's day proclaimed in various ways that they were not ashamed of the Gospel.

Interestingly enough, it begins with Cain and Abel at formal worship. It is in the act of worship that one can frequently detect whether the worshiper on the surface at least is or is not ashamed of the Gospel. In the worship service of Cain and Abel the ever-continuing (since the fall into sin) difference in man's approach to God is revealed. Cain offers his works and expects that God accept what he offers and be happy with it. Abel comes into the presence of God in formal worship preaching the death of another in his behalf, proclaiming by means of a type, "a more excellent sacrifice," the news of the vicarious atonement for his heart to hear. In this very act of worship Abel by the grace of God is proclaiming, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel."

The Cains at worship are numberless. They can be seen in the massive temples of ancient Babylon and Assyria offering endless amounts of produce, victims of war, sons and daughters, etc. They are evident in the ancient Egyptian's approach to his gods. Listen as he offers not the fruit of the earth but the fruit of his life.

"Hail to Thee, Great God, Lord of Truth and Justice! I have come before

Thee my Master; I have been brought to see thy beauties. . . . I bring you truth. . . . I have not committed iniquity against men. I have not oppressed the poor. . . . I have not laid labor upon any free man beyond that which he wrought for himself. . . . I have not defaulted, I have not committed that which is an abomination to the gods. . . . I have not spoiled the show-bread of the gods. . . . I have not blasphemed. . . . I have not falsified the balance. I have not taken away milk from the mouths of sucklings. I have not taken with nets the birds of the gods . . . I am pure. I am pure. I am pure." Durant Vol. I, pages 203 and 204.

But sad to say, it is not only in the heathen nations of ancient days that the Cains are to be seen at worship. In the very temple of God, in the very worship forms that He ordained for His chosen people by means of which the "I am not ashamed of the Gospel" was to be preached, even there the Gospel was buried beneath man's acclaim of himself. The words of the Egyptian quoted above, taken from The Book of the Dead, are echoed in the temple of God at Jerusalem by the Pharisee. The Lord finds it necessary in the days of Isaiah to turn His back on the sacrifices He Himself had commanded because man boasted of himself therein rather than glorying in the Gospel.

A host of Cains there were but there was also a cloud of witnesses during the ancient days called by God to proclaim not man's works but the good news of the Messiah's work to come. The Abels, Abrahams, Samuels, etc. called upon the name of the Lord, bearing witness in their formal worship services that they were not ashamed of the Gospel.

You might well ask what does this have to do with the cloud of witnesses of the Reformation Era? Much in every way. The gospel proclaimed by the Old Testament cloud of witnesses; brought to light by the life and death of the Savior; preached by the apostles and evangelists; proclaimed in the formal services of the early church was once again lost sight of not only in the so-called pagan world but within that external body known as the Christian Church. The very body which called itself the body of Christ, the very congregation which boasted of being founded by Peter and gloried in the work of Paul, that congregation and that organization no longer shouted to the world in its formal worship services, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel." Instead it grew ever more bold in its proclamation that, it was not ashamed of its works for therein is the righteousness of God obtained.

The Roman Catholic Church developed its own version of the series of questions which the Old Testament doers of works for salvation had asked so many centuries before. They had come in Micah's day and asked,

"Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"

Under Rome's influence that had become, shall I come before the most high God with the bloodless sacrifice of the Mass? Will the Lord be pleased with the act of church attendance? Shall I bow myself before Him with many Pater Nosters and Ave Marias? The voice of Cain was heard once again. However, over against this age-old message of man, which dominated the organized church of the Middle Ages, came a cloud of witnesses like to that of old, a cloud of witnesses sounding forth once again in their formal worship services the God-given and God-pleasing message, "I am not

ashamed of the Gospel."

Certainly, it was Luther who played a major role in letting the Gospel shine forth again in the services. He it was who reworked the liturgies to put out the false ideas of righteousness by works and to underscore the righteousness of Christ. Paul Strodach in his introduction to Luther's Liturgical Writings puts it this way:

"With the denunciation of the abuses and superstitions connected with the sacrifice of the Mass and met at every turn in the worship system of the Church, the Reformation Movement could not long remain confined to doctrinal matters to the exclusion of practical issues. Naturally an attack would be launched against the externals in which these superstitions were garbed. It was one thing to denounce the sacrifice and to assert the evangelical doctrine, but this assertion demanded ultimately the consideration of a harmonious dress and a practice as evangelic as the doctrine. Then, too, if the common people who had been deprived of the blessed privileges of the Gospel were to receive them, these would have to be brought to them in a form which they could comprehend ..."

This Luther did. He it was who emphasized the preaching of the Word as the heart and core of the Worship service. X Again we quote from Strodach:

"Of course, all of Luther's activities in this field were bound and colored by the doctrine he espoused. The centralization of the Word and the constant and great emphasis, -almost amounting to over-emphasis, (Strodach's opinion) -which he placed upon it quite naturally forced him to break with the practices of the Roman Church which centralized and constantly emphasized the sacrificial ..."

Luther's sermons rang with the riches of the Gospel of grace. Luther it was who wrote many hymns in which the people were given opportunity to give voice to their joy and confidence in a Savior sent by God. He it was who brought again a proper understanding of and use of the Sacrament of the Altar. The service from beginning to end became again what it had been under Abel, with Paul and a host of others, a glorious declaration in word, response, song, and sacrament of "I am not ashamed of the Gospel." And Luther it was who guarded carefully this proclamation when Carlstadt and others threatened to cover it once again.

But Luther does not stand alone. He is but one of a cloud of witnesses to the Gospel in the formal worship services of the time. Between 1523 and 1555 no fewer than 135 church orders appeared. They came forth in opposition to the Roman Mass. Many of them, following the example of Luther's liturgical works, were Gospel orientated. They were drawn up at the request of civil and religious leaders. The heads of German states, territories, cities, etc. requested aid in preparing forms of services that would reflect the spirit of the Gospel. Men such as Melanchthon, Bugenhagen, Jonas, etc. assisted Luther in providing such forms for those who needed and desired help.

Thousands of witnesses unknown by name, the peasants, the students, the merchants, the housewives, the children, eagerly participated in the hymns, the responses, the sacraments, the sermons. Here they had opportunity to give voice to the fact that they were not ashamed of the Gospel!

X

II.

The formal worship service represents but a few hours of the many hours in

a week. It is usually observed together with those who are one with us in the confession of faith. As a result of these two factors, it might appear as though the proclamation, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel," is a rather safe, uncontested, and occasional declaration. One can shout boldly within the walls of his own house to an admiring and agreeing family whatsoever he desires, but to come forth into the arena of the opposing public is quite another matter.

This comparison does leave something to be desired for our public worship service by its very separation from the services of others and by its being open to the public to observe is not something done in a "safe" corner.

However, the declaration, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel," reaches far beyond the public worship service. When the Lord called Paul, He made it clear that Paul was to confess the Lord Jesus

"before Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel." "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed." Romans 10:10-11.

Where Paul found a confession re Jesus like to that of his, he rejoiced and identified with it--recall the Synod at Jerusalem, his letter to the congregation at Rome, etc. Where he found individuals or groups ashamed of the Gospel and opposing it in one way or another, he confessed a difference, making known the truth and condemning the error--recall his letter to the Galatians and specifically the words, "If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed." Gal. 1:9.

Echoes of Hebrews 11--of the cloud of witnesses of Old Testament times!
Abel

"being dead yet speaketh." Noah "prepared an ark to the saving of his house: by the which he condemned the world." Moses, "when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt."

There you have examples of men taking their declaration of "not being ashamed of the Gospel," out of the formal service into the market place of life so to speak, and confronting friend and foe with formal and informal confessions of their faith where it was called for regardless of the consequences.

X
This Old Testament cloud of witnesses has its counterpart in the time of the Reformation. The Abels, Noahs, Moses, Samuels, Davids and others come on the scene again in other dress, with different tongues, in other countries, and with different names. (We are not suggesting reincarnation by any stretch of the imagination.) The Gospel which caused the Old Testament saints to confess their faith boldly before the public, that same Gospel brought about and brings about a similar confession in New Testament times.

What do you hear coming from the city of Worms in the year 1521, from the halls where the most influential and powerful assembly of the time was gathered to hear the reply of Luther to questions addressed to him, questions that had to do with the Gospel? You hear Luther by the grace of God refusing to be called a son of the pope; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God. You hear

Luther confessing that he was not ashamed of that Gospel which had brought peace to his tormented soul. You hear him condemning "the other gospel" out of Rome that had left him afflicted in soul and body for so many years.

The scene changes to the city of Augsburg, the year to 1530. Again an assembly of the mighty of the empire. No Luther present this time, but his spirit is in evidence as a host of men,

John, Duke of Saxony, Elector
George, Margrave of Brandenburg
Ernest, Duke of Lueneburg
Philip, Landgrave of Hesse
John Frederick, Duke of Saxony
Francis, Duke of Lueneburg
Wolfgang, Prince of Anhalt
Senate and Magistracy of Nuremburg
Senate of Reutlingen,

truly a cloud of witnesses present a confession of faith which clearly proclaimed that they were not ashamed of the Gospel and clearly refuted error.

We might easily add a host of other places, dates, and many more names of clergy and laity alike from the 16th century, all of which give evidence of that willingness to bring before a hostile or friendly public the Gospel. From Luther's nailing of the Ninety-Five Theses to the acceptance of the Book of Concord, there is a steady stream of public confessions, which join with Paul and the Old Testament cloud of witnesses in proclaiming, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel."

Even the threat of abuse to the point of death did not silence that confession in the Reformation days. That which Hebrews 11 records concerning the Old Testament cloud of witnesses is true also of the witnesses of the 16th century, viz.,

"others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins: being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth." Hebrews 11:36-38.

Luther at Worms certainly stood face to face with death because of his confession. His days at the Wartburg gave evidence of a fear for his life on the part of his followers and friends. He was joined in his fearless stand by Margrave George of Brandenburg, who, in 1530 in the face of the emperor's demands that the Lutherans cease preaching, declared, "Rather than deny my God and suffer the Word of God to be taken from me, I will kneel down and have my head struck off." In this confession he was joined by John, Duke of Saxony, the Elector, for he declared, "he would confess his Lord, whose cross he prized higher than all the power of the world." These men together with Luther and others were spared the sword but there were those who "did give the last full measure of devotion."

Two young Augustinian monks of Antwerp, Henry Voes and John Esch, were put to death at the stake in 1523 because of their confessing the Gospel. Luther speaks of them in Hymn No. 259:

Flung to the heedless winds
Or on the waters cast,

The martyrs' ashes, watched,
Shall gathered be at last.
And from that scattered dust,
Around us and abroad,
Shall spring a plenteous seed
Of witnesses for God.

The Father hath received
Their latest living breath,
And vain is Satan's boast
Of victory in their death.
Still, still, tho' dead, they speak,
And, trumpet-tongued, proclaim
To many a wak'ning land
The one availing Name.

To the names given above, the Lord could add a host of others who during the 16th century in the face of concerted opposition did not remain silent concerning their trust in the Gospel. As a result, they were made to feel man's displeasure in one way or another. Truly, the declaration "I am not ashamed of the Gospel," was not only heard within the sphere of 'safe, formal worship' but sounded forth by the grace of God boldly by means of formal and informal confession in the 'market places of the world' during the Reformation era.

III.

One more brief look at the period under consideration is in place in order to hear the words of Paul sounding forth in yet another way. The Gospel sounded forth in all of its sweetness in the reworked formal worship services; the Gospel sounded forth boldly on occasion in public confession before friend and foe regardless of consequences; but there was also in the days of the Reformation a quiet continual declaration of, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel," for all who would hear it in the sanctified, daily lives of God's children.

When one looks at the housewife in her daily routine; at the smith at home and at his forge; at the peasant in his fields, before his master, at play with his children; at the professor busy with classes, instructing his children, speaking with his colleagues or his wife; at the elector, or dukes, or princes, or mayors, etc. busy with civil, domestic, or ecclesiastical affairs; when one looks at any or all of these people who had been touched by the power of the Gospel, you see in their daily routine a constant confession, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel."

One of the distinctive features of the Middle Ages is the despising of the 'common life,' of every work and profession but that of the organized church. To be a priest, a bishop, a cardinal that was something! If one could not enter the ranks of the clergy, then to take the vows of some religious order was considered the next best thing. The dedicating of one's life to rigorous prayer, daily masses, to silence, to works of charity of one kind or another, all these things were emphasized to the point of downgrading the work of the mother in the home, the peasant in the field, the smith at the forge, even the ruler in the castle.

Certainly, it all ties in with the idea of work righteousness. The idea so prevalent in man's history of doing the spectacular last great thing that will force God's attention and assure recognition and acceptance. The rich young ruler expressed it when he said to Jesus, "All these things have I kept from my youth up:

what lack I yet?"

There is no spirit of the Gospel to be found in this approach to life. In reality it proclaims quite clearly, I am ashamed of the Gospel. Christ has not done enough. It declares that the life of sanctification that the Gospel would call forth is second rate and of no great consequence.

Into the midst of this pervading thought came Romans 1:16-17. Luther by the power of the Spirit in the Word had his spiritual eyes opened. The truth that the righteousness that avails before God is Christ's life and death and not man's works brought Luther the peace of soul he so earnestly had sought. It opened his eyes to the fact that true service of God does not lie in seeking the spectacular, the grandiose work of all works, but rather lies in joyful thankfulness for the gift of grace, and in faithfully meeting the daily requirements of one's station in life in appreciation for all that God had done. The Table of Duties and Luther's explanation to the Commandments set this thought forth clearly and simply.

What a different spirit evidenced itself in the many walks of life in the Reformation Era when the Gospel was made known and accepted. A Katie could come forth from behind the cloister walls, enter the parsonage, and find joy and contentment in the life of being a wife and mother. Tradesmen, craftsmen, peasants, rulers, etc. rejoiced in using the God-given talents in their respective fields to the glory of a gracious God. Penetrating their whole approach to life was the confession, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel."

In Hebrews 11 Enoch is referred to as one of the cloud of witnesses of the Old Testament times. Genesis 5:21-24 tells us of him.

"And Enoch lived sixty and five years, and begat Methuselah . . . and begat sons and daughters: and all the days of Enoch were three hundred sixty and five years: And Enoch walked with God: and he was not for God took him."

Enoch walked with God. What else but in simple thankfulness meeting the duties of husband, father, and occupation day by day is meant? No spectacular work is mentioned. He lived a life of thankfulness looking forward to the promised Messiah. This is what we see in the daily life of Luther, Katie, Frederick, etc. in the 16th century. A continuous, quiet, simple, and joyful proclaiming, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel."

The cloud of witnesses of the Reformation Era being dead, yet joins the Old Testament cloud even longer dead in calling to us by means of their formal service, their formal and informal confessions, and their quiet contented lives centered in the Gospel to join them in declaring that "We are not ashamed of the Gospel." Our response is found in Hebrews 12.

"Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith."

Professor Roland Gurgel

MODERN ERA: OUR WITNESS TO OUR AGE

Paul asserted that he was not only ready but "eager to preach the Gospel also to you who are at Rome." The fact that he had not yet come to Rome was not because he was awed by the imperial city of Rome or because he felt ashamed of the message he preached. Paul confessed, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes." The fact that Paul had to make this assertion reveals that the nature of the Gospel is foolishness to natural man. Because of the weakness of the cross, the Gospel of Jesus Christ is a stumbling block to the world. The assertion of Paul that he was not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ is a recognition of the danger of compromising this Gospel to gain the favor and the approval of men. There is always the danger of judging the effectiveness of the Gospel by human standards and thus losing sight of its power. Every age has faced the temptation of "conforming to the pattern of this world."

We have seen that in the apostolic age it would have been very tempting to quiet the voice of God to escape persecution, suffering, and death. The physical persecutions of the Roman empire made it necessary for the child of God to confess with his life that he was not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ. So also in Luther's age. The power of church and empire combined made Luther's chances of succeeding and surviving dim. Yet Luther's life and writings ring with the confession, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ."

At first glance, it may seem that our age faces no problems to compare with the problems of previous ages. We live in a country where for two hundred years we have enjoyed an unparalleled freedom of religion. God's Word truly has not been bound but has had free course. God has richly blessed our country with peace and prosperity. But even in these blessings are the seeds of self-destruction as man twists these blessings for his own self-interests. There are special pressures in our age that may cause the believer to consciously or unconsciously be ashamed of the Gospel of Christ.

X We must realize and admit that the world and society exert a tremendous pressure on the Christian to conform to the world's pattern. We have seen in our generation what has accurately been described as the secularization of the Gospel. To illustrate how society and culture pressure the Christian to conform, consider how the world's changing standards concerning divorce, abortion, and the family have to a large part been adopted by the religious community. We live in a country that has the form of religion but which denies the power of the Gospel. There is always the danger of being ashamed of the Gospel of Christ and/or doubting the power of that Gospel in our age.

In order to be faithful witnesses to our age, it is necessary that we realize what has made us what we are. It is true that there is nothing new under the sun. The basics of man's sin and God's grace are constants in the changing patterns of history. However, we live in an age where unique factors confront us and challenge the power of the Gospel. There are special circumstances that make it difficult to confront our age with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The scorn of the modern world may lead us to be quiet rather than to be caught out of step with the mainstream of modern thought. At other times, like Elijah, we may feel like crawling off and dying. The pessimism of the Christian community is a denial of the power of God in the Gospel. Let us then consider the pressures that may lead us to be ashamed of the Gospel of Christ in our age.

Our age has lost sight of an almighty God who is in control of this world. In both the apostolic and medieval ages it was recognized by society in general that there was a god who controlled the destinies of men. There are several factors that have given rise to the cynicism of our age.

First of all, there are the scientific and technological advances of the last two hundred years. More and more, man is learning how things work. It is no longer enough to know that God makes the sun rise each morning. In the elementary grades, your child has already learned about the rotation of the earth, the equator and poles, and the solar system. It is difficult for a child who watches the news as it happens all over the world on television and who holds an electronic calculator in his hand to accept the simplistic truth that God is in control. When society was chiefly an agricultural community, man was more directly dependent upon God and he knew it. Today it is difficult to show your children that even though dad buys what the family needs with the paycheck he earns on the job, that in the end our daily bread comes from God. It is hard even for us to remember that everything we have comes from the Lord Who opens His hand and satisfies the needs of every living thing. X

Secondly, there is the pitiful condition of modern man who cannot believe that God created this world. There is a tremendous loss of hope among men who cannot believe in a Creator-God. Evolution has created a situation in which there is no hope because we are here by chance and the future is a matter of evolutionary development. There is the loss of that sure hope as echoed time after time in the Psalms, "Our help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth." Even Paul was able to point to God's eternal power and divine nature as being made plain to man from the things which God created.

It is frustrating to witness to an age which no longer seems to be able to think in terms of an all-powerful God. Today it seems to be accepted fact in scientific and educational circles that this world and man came about by evolutionary development. We feel out of place and are silent because hardly anyone today seriously considers the possibility of a six-day creation. This pressure may lead us to be ashamed of the "out-moded" message that has been given us to proclaim. But there is more.

It follows that an age which has lost sight of God has also lost sight of the concept of accountability to God. Paul speaks of the wrath of God that is revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men, and the people of his day knew what he was talking about. Luther in his age did not need to reveal God as a judge who punishes the sinner. The people of his day only knew God as a vengeful judge. Both Paul and Luther revealed the righteousness of God which is by faith.

Today to a degree, it is different. As a series of articles in the "Spokesman" pointed out, people have lost a consciousness of sin. We have been influenced by our age to think of sin but lightly. Today sin is defined in terms of an action that harms another human being. David's confession: "Against thee and thee only have I sinned" is unintelligible to the majority of people today. In our age of situation ethics, nothing is absolutely right or wrong. Granted, people have always had this attitude. The difference today is that it is condoned by society as a whole.

Part of the reason for this is found in Freud who popularized the notion that all of man's problems are due to guilt caused by sexual inhibitions. His answer to

guilt was to conclude that there is no such thing as sin and therefore should be no guilt. This attitude has been adopted by our age with wholehearted enthusiasm. All of this makes it difficult and out of step to present Jesus Christ as God's answer for lost sinners. Even in the current evangelical movement there is little sin and grace presented. The emphasis is not on Jesus as God's sacrifice for sin, but on Jesus as the way to a happy and well-adjusted life.

This loss of a sense of sin has led to our "modern" morality. There is always the danger of concluding that because society has said something is all right that it is all right. The unbelief of man and the rejection of God have always been coupled with sexual immorality. In the Old Testament the worship of false gods went hand in hand with sexual immorality. So Paul tells the Romans that when men did not glorify God as God nor gave thanks to Him that God gave them over. He let them go even to the extreme of sinning against nature. So our modern age will receive the judgment of God against those who not only continue to do these things, but also approve of those who practice them. The point is, there is always the temptation to give in to the world and thus be ashamed of the Gospel of Christ.

X In our age there has been a shift of emphasis away from God to man. The humanism of our time has made fertile ground for a new theology which makes man the center of salvation. The Gospel which reveals God's grace has been replaced with a gospel which glorifies man's work of believing. It is tempting to temper the message of the Gospel to make it acceptable to man and his concept of his needs. The message of salvation by grace alone has always been anathema to man and, if possible, it is even more so today. The religious climate in our country is one where salvation by works is being presented in a new garb. The message that man has a free will to choose Jesus as his Savior is the prevalent one in today's world.

This shift of emphasis from God to man, from grace to works, from theology to humanism is reflected in man's goals. The love of money and the pleasures of this world have always proved to be a false god to man. But this shift in thinking has led to a total concern for this life. In ages past there always was a general acceptance of the fact of life after death and a final judgment before God. Today the majority of people think of hell in the same terms as the tooth fairy, a childhood belief to be discarded as no longer useful when one reaches maturity. Today, as a result, man is "free" to live solely for this life. Freed from a necessity to work to survive, our standard of living has created a new and insatiable generation of pleasure seekers.

X We are faced with the paradoxical situation of an increased material prosperity producing more and more frustration and a sense of loss of meaning in life. People today have the luxury of having everything they need and yet realizing that they have nothing. Years ago people did not seek meaning in their jobs. They worked to survive. The abundance of today has produced the surprising result of increased dissatisfaction and unhappiness. As we examine ourselves, perhaps we give weak evidence that "having food and clothing, we are content." This is seen not only in our giving but in our concern for our personal standard of living. There has been a shift of emphasis among us in the last ten years. The Spartan budgets and travel arrangements, the loss of income for confessional reasons have been replaced by a new prosperity in the CLC. This growth and prosperity carries with it the danger of self-satisfaction and a this-world oriented spirit. We need to give a clear witness to a Gospel that looks beyond the things of this world to a new life to come. This not being ashamed of the Gospel led Paul to the beautiful expression of hope in the eighth chapter of his letter to the Romans. If our Gospel and our lives are tied to this world, we have no "good news" for man.

All of these factors and many more have influenced the religious developments of this last two hundred years in our country. Unfortunately instead of leading, theology has followed the world. The blessed hope of the Gospel has been sold for a mess of lentils. The trends we have traced in society are repeated in religion today. These forces have led to the wholesale denial of the authority of God's Word and the Gospel. This too is a recent development although the problem has been with us ever since the devil asked, "Has God said?"

This is unique in our age only because we find Christian denominations joining in this wholesale attack on the authority and reliability of the Scriptures. Even in Luther's day, the confessions could take for granted the authority and inspiration of the Scriptures. It is frightening to see the inroads this "new" theology has made in Lutheran circles and the dangers it poses to our people. The strange thing is that this is being done in the name of the Gospel. The temptation is always with us to be ashamed of the power of God's Gospel in the face of these great odds.

In the face of these problems and our own personal failures, it is easy to become frustrated and discouraged. We see the slowness of external and internal growth. We see spiritual deadness in our own congregations. We see our members taking for granted the treasure of the Word and being caught up in the excesses of our age. We see our young people deserting the old ways. We see our own weaknesses. We may look with envy on the growth of our fundamentalist neighbor or seek some new program to pump life into our ministry and our congregation. Do we, however, truly believe that the answers are in this simple Gospel of Christ? Do we believe that the Gospel, which is the power of God, will accomplish everything that God has promised? X

The problems we face are great. The tendency is always to come back with the question, "What can we do"? This is precisely what Paul warns against. We can do nothing. We are weak, sinful human beings inadequate to the task which God has given us. On the basis of our strengths and abilities we are helpless. The answer is not to be found in the CLC. And yet there is an answer for the pessimism of our age: "I am not ashamed of the Gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes." The Gospel alone is the power of God. The Gospel, not we, not our church body, not our confessionalism will triumph. The Word of God will not return unto God void, but it will accomplish His purposes. This is why our convention should be filled with faith and hope for the future. In spite of the foes that take counsel together against the Lord and His anointed, the Gospel of our Risen Lord will prevail.

In keeping with the miracle of grace, God in His wisdom "chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things, --and the things that are not--to nullify the things that are, so that no man may boast before Him." (I Cor. 1) It is humbling and yet a relief to know that God's power is made perfect in weakness. We as a church body are the epitome of weakness and yet we have the Gospel which is the power of God for salvation.

We are sent to bear witness to our age. We are "sent to preach the Gospel--not the words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God ..." (I Cor. 1) Let us not be ashamed of the Gospel, but let us proclaim its saving message to a dying world.

Paul ended his letter to the Romans on the same note on which he began:
"Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of
Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages
past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the com-
mand of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him--to the
only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen." (Romans 16)

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