

1475

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WHAT IS TROUBLING THE CHURCH?

Is it possible for a person to put his finger on the things which are troubling the church and in particular, the Synodical Conference? Certainly it has come to such a pass that the average person has neither the time nor the material at hand to plow through all the resolutions and counter-resolutions which have been passed in the last twenty years and more. If a person were to make a court case out of it, this would be necessary, but we believe that the whole problem can be reduced to such simple terms that Haensel and Gretel in the pew may know what the issues are and may make their decisions. Since the matter affects them and concerns the welfare of their souls they cannot shift the responsibility to other shoulders.

Reduced then to the simplest terms: what is it that is troubling and dividing the Synodical Conference? One of the fathers of our synod said that the final controversy would center upon the doctrine of Scripture, while one of the fathers of the Missouri Synod said that it would center upon the doctrine of the Church. They were both right; for under each of these headings not only one doctrine is affected, but all. If the clearness of Scripture is called into question at any point, then the way is open for toleration of differences at other points. In the matter of the doctrine of the Church, it is specifically the doctrine of church fellowship that has occupied the center of the stage. And here it is the same: if tolerance is permitted for one difference then the way is opened for tolerance of another. Not only one doctrine is affected but in the final analysis all are affected, and so at last a man's certainty of salvation is undermined and removed. The issue is that serious and that important and it

is therefore most vital that each individual makes it his personal responsibility to judge the voices he hears and from the midst of the confusion of Babel give ear only to the voice of the Shepherd.

The opening in the dike was made in 1938 at St. Louis, Missouri when the Missouri Synod declared that certain differences between her and the American Lutheran Church "need not be divisive of church fellowship." Through this hole in the wall, the rushing flood waters of unionism and toleration of error have made their way. And the multitude of memorials, overtures, articles and meetings have not been able to stop it. Through this hole in the wall have come joint unionistic prayers; a joint communion agreement with erring church bodies, joint armed services work, joint Lutheran scouting programs, a "Chicago Statement" signed by forty-four who even quoted from the 1938 resolutions to show that church fellowship is possible without agreement in all points of doctrine. As a result of the breakdown of doctrinal discipline in the face of these flood waters, further errors have raised their heads dealing with such matters as objective justification, Christ's descent into hell, the resurrection of the flesh, the question of whether or not Mary was conceived without sin, celibacy, and a whole string of Romani- zing tendencies. Some of these errors have appeared at the Seminary in St. Louis where young men are being prepared for the holy ministry. Through the hole in the dike has come a flood of propa- ganda from prominent Missouri Synod leaders pressing for membership in the liberal and union- istic National Lutheran Council and in the Lutheran World Federa- tion. Differences have more or less been avoided in documents produced and accepted in the last

1475

two decades (for instance, the St. Louis articles of Union, the Common Confession). The so-called positive approach has taken the place of pointed rejections of the specific errors which have come in to trouble the church. Documents which contain false doctrine have been withdrawn but not retracted. We have seen the fulfillment of that Scriptural word which says, "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump." Gal.5:9.

These things are going on within the framework of the Synodical Conference and we are involved since we are still in the Synodical Conference fellowship, doing joint mission work with the Missouri Synod as a part of the Conference. Our committees and our delegates to the convention of the Synodical Conference are involved in joint devotional services and prayers. What does the Word of God call upon us to do in such a situation? The question is not "what is most expedient?"

"what seems most advisable in order to maintain our position and prestige?" but the question is "What does the Word of God say?" Each member must search the Scriptures on this and all of us must remember that we are not immune to the working of the leaven. If we do not do what the Word of God tells us to do then we are not only guilty of disobedience but we will have no right to comfort ourselves with the superior power of the Word which alone can protect us from error and preserve us in the truth. We need to go back to such fundamental Bible passages as Psalm 119:105 "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." And to that much-scoffed-at passage in Romans, "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses 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." Rom.16:17-18.

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(To fill out this page, we offer a statement of Johann Baier, a noted theologian of the 17th century.)

"For (such) toleration of error militates, in the first place, against all those passages in the Bible which command us to keep the whole Christian doctrine free from falsification: 'Hold the traditions,' 2 Thess.2:15; 'That good thing that was committed unto thee, keep,' that is, whole, undiminished and unadulterated, 2 Tim.1:14; 'continue thou in the things which thou hast learned,' 2 Tim.3:14. Doctrine, however, is not retained in its purity when opposing falsifications are tolerated at the same time or when men permit them to be mingled with pure doctrine. Such toleration militates, in the second place, against the office of 'rebuking' whereby false doctrines are reprov'd and condemned, a duty which God has imposed upon all faithful teachers, Titus 1:9, 13 2 Tim.4:2; 3:16. Christ in Mt.5:12 and following; 16:6, and Paul in Gal.1:6 are outstanding examples in rebuking false doctrine.

In the third place, (such) toleration is very dangerous, because when such errors and falsifications are left unchecked, unchallenged and uncondemned, they spread farther and farther, make true doctrine appear doubtful and suspicious or give it the stamp of an indifferent opinion, strengthen the erring in their errors, and open the way for deceivers to deceive still more men.

The toleration of erring persons, on the other hand, since it includes not only more simpleminded individuals but likewise whole organizations, and hence the public ministry and heterodox teachers, militates against the words of Scripture which command us to rebuke false teachers and champions of error and to avoid them, Rom.16:17; 2 Cor.6:14,17; Gal.1:8; 5:12; 2 Thess.3:6; 1 Tim.6:3; Titus 3:10."

(These words of Baier are quoted by Dr.Walther in his foreword to the 1868 issue of "Lehre und Wehre".)