

TRIAL AND TRIUMPH: The Victory of The Believer

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“Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints. For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.” (Jude 3-4). So began the letter of Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James, and so I greet you brothers and sisters in Christ.

Nearly two thousand years have passed since Jude, the brother of our Lord, penned these words to the young churches of the first century. The saints have indeed “contended for the faith” these two millennia, and many “godless men... whose condemnation was written about long ago...” (Jude 4) have indeed slipped in among the faithful.

The Church awaits the consummation of the age. The souls of the slain cry out tirelessly from beneath the altar of God, “How long, O Lord..?” (Rev. 6:10).

Apostasy and Death, The Signs of our Time

“In these last times of which the Scriptures prophesy, the world is growing worse and men are growing weaker and more infirm” (AC, XXIII, 14). Philip Melanchthon who according to Luther, had a penchant for stating things too mildly, wrote these words in the 16th century: What would he say of these present “last times?”

A parishioner came to her pastor with the disturbing announcement that her sixteen year-old daughter was pregnant. The pastor met that afternoon with the girl’s parents. The pastor counseled them in a manner consistent with his recent seminary training, encouraging them to express their concerns and feelings.

The girl was bright and talented; the boy was immature and rather irresponsible. The girl’s plans for college had been in mind for some time. The year was 1973, a time when the pregnancy of a high school junior was still a social embarrassment. It was also the same year in which Justice Blackmun found a *right to privacy* in the constitution and led the highest court of this land to declare a death penalty for the unborn.

Although the decree had been made in the spring, Indiana had not yet changed its law. However, the family had a friend, a doctor, who had a friend in Illinois. The arrangements were made with the pastor’s willing complicity. The trip to Illinois was made, and this child, this grandchild, this unborn innocent for whose soul the pastor was accountable, was put to death one bright summer afternoon, among the first of thousands so to die in the holocaust which has ravaged this nation for twenty-one sad years.

I will always know the age that unnamed, unborn child would have been, a child whose conception and death coincide with the yearly reminders of Roe vs. Wade. I will ever remember that child, because this writer was that pastor.

In January of that year I had graduated from Hamma School of Theology (LCA) where, for four years, I had learned apostasy. During the Lenten season of 1975, by God’s grace and through His Word, this writer was converted from that sin and death and its desolate spiritual emptiness. As one who has persecuted the Church and participated in apostasy, the contrast in

my life between a wretched, hell-bound past and this life of blessed hope through faith, and victory through grace and forgiveness, is especially acute. That contrast enables some insight into the matter presently considered as we look forward to Jesus' second coming: the certain hope and victory of the forgiven sinner, the Christian.

Our *hope* is the certainty of final rescue from this dark world. Our *victory* is the certainty of our ultimate triumph over sin, death and the devil. This triumph is rooted in grace and is ours through the finished work of Christ. This grace is received by faith and lived out in the face of much tribulation. To lift up this hope and clearly portray that victory shall be the chief purpose of this essay.

This effort, however, must take its perspective and scope, not isolated within the tumult of our present day, but from within the viewpoint of a panorama of history. It is difficult to gain perspective from our own place in time and history. Where are we in the progression of history in light of Biblical prophecy? What have been the great epochs of conflict and apostasy of the past? How do they differ from the trials of the present day? Finally, what is the hope and the victory of the Christian?

At the present time the use of the destructive historical-critical method of Biblical interpretation¹ holds almost universal sway throughout Christendom. It would be difficult to find a confessional Lutheran today who would not concede that this most recent assault upon Christendom has led to the greatest apostasy ever to come upon the Church. Although we ought to hold our appraisal of things relating to the end times tentatively, it would nevertheless seem undeniable that the upsurge of this worst of heresies, with its renunciation of faith and falling away from within the Church itself (2 Thes. 2:1-4), is the clearest harbinger of the coming of the end of the age. At the same time, it is certainly not the *beginning* of apostasy in the church.

History is Punctuated by Three Great Epochs of Apostasy

One can discern within the history of the Church a pattern of continual and progressive controversy and apostasy from the time of Christ. Consistent with Jesus' prediction, the revolt or apostasy got under way early in the apostolic age and has continued unabated to the present day. In one of the "little apocalypses" Jesus foretold:

Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other (Matt. 24:10).

Apostasy, or falling away, would happen within the very week in which Jesus' uttered these words. Though later restored (except Judas), Peter and the other brethren deserted their Lord when He was arrested and tried. Following Pentecost, Stephen was the first of a host of bloodied martyrs, and false teachers swiftly invaded the pale of the fledgling Church.

In subsequent centuries, all within the bounds of the providential plan of our Lord, the Church passed through at least three great epochs of controversy and apostasy, three great trials of her faith. We will briefly examine the nature of each of these eras, especially emphasizing the present testing of Christ's Church, the epoch which would seem to be the final chapter of history.

Dr. John Stephenson, professor of theology at Concordia Seminary, St. Catherines, Ontario, is the author of *Eschatology*, the thirteenth volume of *Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics*.² With keen insight Stephenson skillfully tests events, past and present, against the framework of Biblical prophecy.

The first chapter of Stephenson's book is entitled: "General Apostasy: The Sign of Our Time." While acknowledging general apostasy of a "generic" nature, i.e., false teachers and enemies of Christ's Church from the beginning, Stephenson cites a recent writer in the field of end-times studies observing "a marked 'intensification' of the signs in our own day." Stephenson continues:

This phenomenon can be discerned most readily in the swelling apostasy within Christendom itself from "the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). We live in the throes of a tragic intra-ecclesial [within the church] defection from Christ which currently poses a massive threat to the integrity of His church as she subsists in a multiplicity of confessions and denominations.³

Stephenson recognizes the pattern observed above, that controversy and apostasy have markedly intensified in the present great epoch in ways far more deadly and irreversible than any in the past. Along with most confessional Lutheran scholars, Stephenson would identify the ravaging of today's Church by the historical-critical method of Biblical interpretation as being "the *great* apostasy" and sees it as a powerful sign of Christ's imminent return to rescue His Church.

The End May Be Almost Over

In his booklet, *He Shall Come Again*, Stephen Gaulke begins with the heading: "The End Is Mostly Over!"⁴ Gaulke makes the point that the "end times" began with Christ's defeat of Satan, announced from the cross with the words, "It is finished" (John 19:30). Christ died, was buried, rose from the dead, ascended into heaven and with His work finished, sat down at the right hand of God the Father from where He rules the universe, and "from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead." Gaulke cites Anthony A. Hoekema in this regard:

The greatest eschatological event in history is not in the future but in the past. Since Christ has won a decisive victory over Satan, sin and death in the past, future eschatological events must be seen as the completion of a redemptive process which has already begun. What will happen on the last day, in other words, will be but the culmination of what has been happening in these last days.⁵

Although the unbroken chain of apostasy extends from the time of the New Testament to the present day, there is also an unbroken blessed counterpoint to apostasy; namely, the victory in the lives of all who through faith in Christ overcome the world. This victory was achieved by Christ our Lord at the cross and is vouchsafed to all believers by faith in His blood. In his first epistle St. John writes:

...everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God (1 John 5:4-5).

Although the warfare of the Church militant never ceases and controversy and its resultant apostasy has always been and will always be present within her walls, confessional Lutherans discern three distinct concentrations of the enemy's attacks, three eras of apostasy

which punctuate the history of the Church from the time of Christ to the present. In each of these epochs, a particular heresy predominated in the troubling of the church.

The First Epoch of Apostasy: *The Christological Controversy*

The first of these great epochs of controversy resulting in apostasy was “Christological” in nature and occurred within the first centuries of the Church. The enemy’s attack centered on the nature of Christ, His true deity and true humanity, and on His relationship to the Father and the Holy Spirit.

A heresy known as Gnosticism was the primary root of this controversy. Essentially, the gnostics held the idea that salvation came through a secret knowledge (*gnosis* in Greek). Valentinus, Basilides and Marcion were its chief proponents.

The gnostics believed in a version of dualism⁶ which probably had its roots in the Persian religion of Zoroastrianism. The gnostics believed that the creation, including the substance of man, was created by a Demiurge or evil god, and that man must be “saved” by receiving a spark of good through special knowledge.⁷

Another heresy which plagued the early church was Arianism, thus named for its author and proponent, Arius. It was the principal heresy which denied the true deity of Christ. The council of Nicea met in 325 where Athanasius successfully opposed this deadly foe of the Gospel.

Through these controversies, the teachings framed by the Church regarding the distinctions between the three persons of the Trinity became the ground for the formulation of the three ecumenical creeds of the Church; namely, the Apostles,’ the Nicene and the Athanasian. All were born out of the Church’s diligent contention over several centuries against the detractors of God’s Word.

Although not arising from the same philosophical grounds, the denial of Christ’s true deity by today’s liberal scholars deserves the same condemnation. The three ecumenical creeds are sufficient to condemn all the heresies of our day.

The Second Epoch of Apostasy: *The Soteriological Crisis*

Toward the end of the first great epoch of controversy, the seeds of the second were sown. Another troubler of the church, a British lay monk named Pelagius, came to Rome around A.D. 400, a mere 75 years after the council of Nicea had settled the Christological/Trinitarian controversy. Pelagius eventually exercised considerable influence upon the Church. The heart of his error was the belief that a man took the initial and fundamental steps towards salvation by his own efforts apart from the working of divine grace.

Although the church finally condemned and excommunicated Pelagius, the resurrected Pelagian heresy of the Roman Catholic Church would come to be seen as the second great epoch of controversy and crisis in the Church.

Satan’s first attack was aimed directly at Christ. Failing that, he attacked Christ’s saving message, the Gospel, the means of grace. Thus this controversy is called “the *soteriological* controversy.” *Soteria* is the Greek word for “salvation.” This controversy concerned how man is *saved*; i.e., is salvation by grace through faith, or by grace plus good works?

The Lord raised up Martin Luther, and through the Lutheran Reformation restored to a segment of the Church the pure teaching of the Apostolic faith. In turn, the Reformation proved to be a catalyst for some measure of reform (though with mixed blessings) within the Roman Catholic Church itself in the form of the Catholic Counter Reformation.⁸

The great achievement wrought by the Lord through His servant Luther was nothing less than the rediscovery of the Gospel of Christ. The central teachings of the Reformation are

framed in the three *solas*: man is saved by *grace alone (sola gratia)*, through *faith alone (sola fide)*, and this faith and all doctrine is established by *Scripture alone (sola Scriptura)*.

As the spirit of Pelagius came back to haunt the Church of the Reformation, so other spirits would return to stir the pot and make it boil.

There is Nothing New Under the Sun

The Preacher said:

What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun. Is there anything of which one can say, "Look! This is something new"? It was here already, long ago; it was here before our time (Eccl. 1:9-10).

What the Preacher said has held true throughout the history of Christ's Church and will continue to be the pattern until His second coming. The Preacher speaks not of a cyclical view of history but of the fact that there is no *new* evil, only fresh manifestations and variations of man's indulgence and participation in the ancient temptations. That there are no new heresies should give us a certain confidence: the old errors, battled and dispatched, are simply resurrected with new faces and names. Understanding the nature of the heresies of the past can assist us in identifying the roots of each new manifestation of error. The same Word is and will continue to be all-sufficient to oppose and resist them all.

The Christological heresy would resurface with John Calvin's and Ulrich Zwingli's denial of the real presence in the Lord's Supper. Their error had its roots in their faulty Christology, their unbiblical conception of Christ's two natures.

The soteriological heresy, thoroughly refuted by the Lutherans at the time of the Reformation, took a more subtle form among some Protestants. Luther understood that conversion was worked by the Holy Spirit through the Word and Sacraments as the means of grace.⁹ John Calvin believed the Holy Spirit worked *immediately* (without *means*) in bringing men to conversion. Calvin's failure to acknowledge the necessity of the means of grace led him to formulate the doctrine of double predestination. Another reformer, Jacob Arminius (1560-1609), reacting against Calvin's doctrine, but falling into the ancient Pelagian error, held that man had free will and consequently was capable of choosing to come to Christ. John Wesley, the father of Methodism, adopted the "Arminian" view. Today most Protestants (reformed) follow in his footsteps so that "decision theology" is the common doctrine among most of the evangelicals.

The Roots of the Last (?) Skirmish

Perhaps the most deadly flaw in John Calvin's theological system was his notion concerning the relationship between Scripture and reason. His method of Biblical interpretation allowed him to impose reason over Scripture whenever the words of Scripture seemed to oppose his own notion of *reasonableness*. Calvin believed that "the Lord has instituted nothing that is at variance with reason,"¹⁰ a dictum that has plagued Reformed (and Catholic) theology to this day. According to Calvin:

"Reason and faith are not opposed to each other. Hence we must not admit anything, even in religious matters, which is contrary to right reason."¹¹ Calvin's dictum merely adds a veneer of sensibility to Satan's words spoken to our first parents in the garden: "Did God really say...?" (Gen. 3:1).

Calvin's guiding rule led him to deny that Christ's human nature shared the attributes (characteristics) of His divine nature. Consequently, Calvin did not believe that it was possible for Christ to be omnipresent physically. Calvin therefore concluded the impossibility of the presence of Christ's real body and blood in, with and under the bread and wine in the Lord's Supper.

Calvin erred in matters vital to the life of the Church and to the integrity of the faith. He denied the true nature and efficacy of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Even worse, ultimately he denied the true nature of Christ. Finally, the error which would prove to be the trojan horse within Protestantism, the dictum which colored all his thinking, was his insistence upon the imposition of reason over Scripture.¹² This would open the door of the Church to the ravages of the historical-critical method.

Calvin's reformation would be one increasingly fragmented by the tyranny of human reason over the plain words of Scripture. Webber wrote regarding Calvin's view of the interpretation of Scripture:

Calvin may have looked to the Scriptures as a source of Christian doctrine, but he assumed beforehand that they would not teach him anything which did not agree with his preconceived standard of "reasonableness." Calvin used his own reason and experience as a "screen" through which he filtered the statements of Holy Scripture. Whenever the literal sense of a passage ran contrary to his "reason," Calvin would automatically impose a figurative interpretation on that portion of God's Word or otherwise twist the meaning of the text until it became "reasonable."¹³

This fundamental flaw in Calvin's method of Biblical interpretation set the stage for the splintering of the reformation into the (now) hundreds of "Protestant" sects which dot the ecclesial landscape, each going their own way of reason, each man his own final authority in interpreting Scripture.

This same idolatry of reason would be the root, trunk and branches of the third great epoch of controversy. Calvin's dictum is the direct antecedent of the historical-critical method, the scourge of the Church in our time. It is a deadly blight which, to date, has overtaken virtually all the mainline religious institutions, colleges and seminaries in the world.

The consequence is a great apostasy which dwarfs that of ages and epochs past.¹⁴ The present heresy within the walls of Christendom is unyielding and intransigent. The very weapon with which every heresy of the past has been contested, God's Word, has effectively been "neutralized"¹⁵ among our opponents and excluded from the arena of discourse.

The Enlightenment: The Darkness Deepens

Another strand of influence which would lead to the next (third) great epoch of apostasy, one from outside the Church, was that of the European Enlightenment. The "enlightenment" was little more than the paganism of the natural man dressed in new finery. The elevation of reason above Scripture, which had been firmly planted and born its fruit in the thinking of Calvin and Zwingli among the Protestants and in the thought of Erasmus among the Catholics, was certainly one of the roots of Enlightenment thinking. Like a wayward daughter leaving home, Calvin's and Zwingli's comparatively restrained misuse of reason spilled over into the secular realm. There it joined forces with native strains of humanistic thought, and free from all restraint, it became an utterly wanton woman and finally, unrepentant, the erring daughter came home to stay... and to raise her children.

In the years after the Reformation, the Enlightenment's radical elevation of reason to the position of supreme authority in all matters, secular or sacred, led to the disintegration of Biblical authority in the sacred realm and of Biblical influence in the secular realm. In "the kingdom of the left," this abdication of all divine authority led to the French Revolution and opened the way to the twentieth-century Russian Revolution. Within the Church, "the kingdom of the right," the foundation was laid for the emergence of the historical-critical method and modern liberalism on the one hand, and an emotional pietism on the other,¹⁶ both representing flight from the Word of truth.

Contributing to the slippage within the Church, Reformed thought certainly prevailed over Lutheranism in Europe over the years. Along with Renaissance thought, which had swept through the fertile ground of the Roman Catholic lands, Reformed thought proved to be a willing handmaiden for the wholesale abandonment of the historic faith which has been the tragic legacy of our generation.

Stephenson says of Enlightenment man:

In his haughty assumption of autonomy from all external restraints grounded in divine revelation, Enlightenment man, both inside and outside the bounds of Christendom, disdainfully dismissed the sovereignty of God in His Word, setting the stage for the savage destruction of Christian civilization among whose sorry ruins we live today.¹⁷

The German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) took up the tenets of the Enlightenment with a vengeance. The existence of God, the soul, and the future life had all, before Kant, been held to be compatible with reason. Calvin and Zwingli had held onto these most indispensable elements of the faith. Kant, at least a more *consistent* philosopher, let them all go, rejecting all three as being "intrinsically unknowable."¹⁸

The Third Great Epoch of Apostasy: *The Epistemological Crisis*

In exposing Calvin's and Zwingli's elevation of reason above Scripture and the fruit it bore in Kant's "*intrinsically unknowable*" we have revealed the root of the third great crisis in Christianity: the *epistemological* crisis. The Greek word *epistamai* means "to know" or "to understand." Kant and others who followed him had come to believe that many things taught in Scripture are simply *intrinsically* unknowable and therefore cannot be "true."¹⁹

The present crisis in the Church *is* an epistemological crisis. Those who have succumbed to the seduction of its heresy believe that man simply cannot know anything, even things of the faith, with certainty. Therefore, one dare not assert anything as absolute truth. Everything is relative and must be weighed in the context of the given situation. All claims of "truth" must be considered to be ever tentative and open to change in the context of dialogue with other equally tentative claims.

An unavoidable question arises for every theologian: What is to be the authority for asserting claims of truth? An excerpt from the chapter on "The New Morality" in *What's Going on Among the Lutherans*, shows that what applies to determining authority in ethics applies to all areas of doctrine, faith and practice.

The possibility of some basis, some authority upon which to found our beliefs, morals, and ethics, could conceivably come from only one of two possible sources. One source is what man thinks. The only other possibility is what God thinks.

Therein lies the heart of the historical critic's problem as far as determining right from wrong or, for that matter, determining belief in any other area of the faith. The critic has decided for himself that God did not inspire the Scriptures to be written, let alone preserve them for us down through history in the church. The only other authority the critic can turn to is himself or other men. Ultimately, since even the notions of other men are acceptable to him only if they fit within his own scheme of things [Calvin's "preconceived standard of reasonableness"]. The critic himself is ultimately his *own* final authority in all matters. That means that ultimately he is his own *god*.²⁰

For the liberal scholar, there are no eternal truths simply because Kant's dictum of the "intrinsically unknowable" has been accepted. Nothing can be asserted or held with certainty. All claims must be tentative. Nothing is absolute. All things are relative and must be decided in the light of each situation. In this view man is really cut off from the possibility of knowing *anything* with certainty.

The cardinal sin, according to this view of the world, would be to claim *anything* as being absolute unalterable truth. Another (even worse) sin would be to assume to impose such a view on anyone else. The only absolute of relativism is that there are no absolutes.

This, then, is the foundation for the radical rampant pluralism which *is* the mark of our times.²¹

Stephenson points out:

Kant accelerated the steady triumph of relativism in western thought, which has much to do with the indifferentist and even syncretistic mentality pervading external Christendom, and which has produced a vacuum in contemporary spiritual life that is apt to be filled with [frenzied] consumerism, rampant immorality, or New Age occultism and oftentimes by a mixture of the three.²²

Consider the radical changes which have taken place in the last 70 or 80 years. Yet Stephenson reminds us that:

"[Francis] Pieper was fully aware of the deep apostasy afflicting Christendom, being moved by the increasingly virulent denial of the vicarious atonement to assert that history had in fact entered upon the 'little season' predicted in Rev. 20:3."²³

Before the turn of the century C.F.W. Walther (1811-1887) saw the devastating effects resulting from the embracing of liberal philosophies by the Church. In one sermon Walther assails the modernists of his day and points out the aberrations resulting from their infidelity as a mark of the last days.

Yet not only has the papacy filled the Christian church with its abominations. Where have things got to among those who call themselves Protestants? The pure Gospel has fled from well-nigh all churches and schools. Almost all teachers of Christendom are now protesting against God's Word rather than the word of man.

We find that either the most insolent infidelity is taught so that Christians are led to mistrust the Bible, Christ's Godhead and atonement are denied and

everything holy is mocked, indeed, that there is oftentimes such a complete lack of shame and awe that men make no bones about expressing their disdain about the Most High God in heaven and pronouncing God's Law and the voice of conscience to be vain phantoms-- or on the other side, where the Holy Bible is still the object of lofty praise, there are those who fashion for themselves a new "enthusiastic" religion in accordance with the perverted ideas of their own hearts. And this wretched self-made mess they call Christianity!

In these miserable last times, Christianity is just as decayed as was Judaism at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem; indeed, as surely as God's Word is true so surely does the abomination of desolation now stand in and at most pulpits and altars of the Christian church.²⁴

What a powerful indictment of the present day Church. Though dated in style, Walther's words could be preached without amendment today.

Note that not only Pieper (1917) but Walther (1880's) saw even their times as being on the brink of the *parousia* (the second coming of Christ). What would they say if they were here today? The moderate tendencies toward apostasy in Walther's and Pieper's day have reeled forward with appalling speed. The "modernist" aberration which Pieper and Walther saw rising in its infancy now thoroughly dominates the Church, a fact well-documented and glaringly apparent.²⁵ The unbridled use of the historical-critical method has more than decimated the Church.

Commenting on the daring and presumption of the heretics of the past, Marcion, Arius, Pelagius and Zwingli, Stephenson contrasts them with the false teachers of our day:

And yet all these heresiarchs [chief heretics] of old were but timid forerunners of apostates who today have wrested control of most of the pulpits and teaching podia of Christendom. The insidious and subtle form of classical heresies resulted from the fact that heretics of former generations did at least feel obliged to don sheep's clothing. While such false teachers are still with us, the decisive feature of the present-day ecclesiastical landscape is that heterodoxy [false teaching] has by and large burst forth into blatant, naked, shapeless apostasy, under whose auspices the wolves are bold to parade publicly in lupine [wolf's] apparel. The virus of the historical-critical method has so poisoned many who hold valid and regular calls within the church that they cheerfully deny the Lord who bought them and trample the inspired Scripture and its message underfoot. Throughout Christendom apostasy is presently being promoted in shapes of feminist, liberation, and process "theologies." In comparison with the devastation currently being wrought through these demonic movements, the struggles of the fourth and sixteenth centuries seem but [tempests] in a teacup.²⁶

While apostasy, the appearance of antichrists and the appearance of *the* Antichrist mark the whole period of the "last days," intensification of apostasy and the culmination of the mystery of the Antichrist signal the coming of the end. The apostle John has shown: "Many deceivers... antichrists... have gone out into the world" (2 John 7). Luther clearly identifies the Pope of Rome (specifically Pope Paul III) as "the real Antichrist" (Smalcald Articles II.iv). The Scriptural basis for the confessional teaching that the mystery of the Antichrist has found fulfillment in the papacy is in the second chapter of second Thessalonians:

Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion [Greek: *apostasia*] occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction (vss. 2-3).

Stephenson indicates Luther's justification in so specifying the papacy:

Luther lays his finger on the sacrilegious expression of the papal claims set forth in Boniface VIII's *Unam Sanctum* of 1302:

Furthermore, we declare, say, define and proclaim to every human creature that they by necessity of salvation are subject to the Roman Pontiff.²⁷

Speaking of the "man of lawlessness" (the Antichrist), St. Paul said: "He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God" (2 Thes. 2:4). If a man makes all men subject to himself in order to be saved, he is setting "himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God." Such a man is Antichrist, and the institution of the papacy which holds to that dictum as canon law, is *the very* Antichrist. Such a man denies both the Father and the Son. St. John warns us: "Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist-- he denies the Father and the Son" (1 John 2:22).

Christians who still have difficulty accepting the hard truth that the papacy is the very Antichrist should consider the twelfth canon of the Council of Trent, the Roman Catholic document written to refute the teachings of the Lutheran Reformation.

If anyone says that justifying faith is nothing else than trust in divine mercy, which remits sins for Christ's sake, or that it is this trust alone by which we are justified, let him be anathema [God damned].²⁸

Herein the Roman Catholic Church condemns to hell all who believe the pure gospel.

Very importantly, Stephenson indicates that Confessional Lutheran theology makes certain qualifications with respect to its identification of the papacy with the Antichrist. First, the papacy does not exhaust the mystery of the Antichrist, but involves the most intense manifestation of the mystery thus far in the history of the Church. Further,

Ap. XV.18 associates the 'kingdom of Mohammed' along with the papacy as part of the 'kingdom of Antichrist,' and Luther saw the prediction made in 2 Thes.2:7 being realized in Zwingli's war against Christ in His Sacrament of the Altar."²⁹

Herman Sasse states:

The Lutheran Church teaches nothing in its Confessions as to how God may let the prophecy of the Antichrist come to fulfillment in the hidden future, that is, what form the Antichrist may take in the final terrors of the end time.³⁰

Since Vatican II, in the early 1960s, Rome has made peace with virtually every form of spirituality. In their frenzy to join the ecumenical movement, the Pope has taken the lead in calling conferences of prayer and other gatherings at which leaders of world churches as well as such blatantly anti-Christian figures as the Dalai Lama, native American Indian shamans and

other non-Christian figures are present to pray and worship together. The Antichrist is gathering his forces. The scene seems to be set for some kind of gathering together of large segments of Protestantism under some form of the papacy in opposition to the Gospel of Christ.

The mile-markers of this present epoch of history are rushing by. Consider the radical changes that have taken place within the lifetime of people within this room. The world would nominate the automobile, the airplane, great advances in medicine and men landing on the moon as the marks of this epochal age of change.

We in the Church recognize the real marks of the age in the radical falling away, the *great* apostasy, which has taken place within the walls of the Church itself. We recognize that inevitably such apostasy is accompanied by a host of particular companions. Consider this limited catalogue:

- A radical shift within society away from a consensus on moral absolutes to a thorough-going moral relativism
- The dissolution of the nuclear family; the explosion of crime and violence in a society whose people have lost both the internal constraint of moral conscience and the external restraints of just law and its order, both anchored in moral certitude
- Unbelievable corruption in the highest places, inevitable within a society which is no longer *able* to find virtue in moral character
- The pagan hedonism of the drug scene and the sexual revolution with its due punishment in more than one deadly epidemic plague and harvest of death
- The unspeakable holocaust slaughter of the unborn innocents which we conveniently round-off to the nearest five or ten million
- Above all, the ascendancy of a new multi-faceted paganism in the form of radical humanism and New Age and occultic religions

All of these things contribute to the final frightening mark of this age,

- The disintegration of the very fabric of western civilization.

Mark well that not one of the above is the *cause* of that final disintegration. Rather, they are all symptoms of the *one* thing which alone is sufficient to explain the radical metamorphosis which is taking place before our eyes. All of these symptoms find their cause in what we have called the third great epoch of controversy, the epistemological crisis, and together comprise the symptoms of its great apostasy. Sin itself is, of course, the *very* root of all heresy and apostasy.

In the face of all this, there is a paradox in which the Christian may take comfort. All that we see taking place as the consequences of the last great apostasy, all which seems to the Church to be loss, is in reality the foreshadowing of victory. Jesus might well say to us on the great day of his return: "Did I not tell you that all these things must take place?"

There is a kind of eager and growing anticipation which the Christian can have with every gain the enemy may *appear* to make because everything he is permitted to do must fit the pattern of the sovereign Lord's unfolding prophetic history. In all this we are, more than ever, conquerors through Him who continues to love us (Rom. 8:37). And what are we to do in the midst of rejoicing in our trials? The answer is found in a passage which contains the clearest *temporal* hint of the "time" of Christ's return. Jesus says in Matthew 24:

Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come (vss. 12-14).

“The Gospel will be preached to the whole world.... then the end will come.” The words of St. Paul come to mind: “What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Rom. 8:31). What confidence the Christian can have in even the darkest days! The Lord is in the process of bringing this present world to the end (and the new beginning) which He ordained from the start. Confidently and joyfully we can carry out the work which is the privilege of every Christian; namely, witnessing about our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

How Do We Witness As: “The Love of Most People Grows Cold?”

The Lord’s great commission, which continues in force until the end, is the Church’s marching order and His plan of battle.

What is the Christian witness, who seeks to be faithful to the Gospel, to do in the face of this last great falling away? How do we share the Good News in the face of the present age of skepticism?

The Preacher tells us there is a time to speak and a time to love (Eccl. 3:7-8). There has hardly been a time more primed to hear of a Savior from the misery of materialistic excess and the idolatry of self-indulgence (which are the marks of our age). This is a time when most of society around us, cut loose from any mooring in the certainty of God’s Word, is floundering in unbelief and skepticism rooted in uncertainty.

At such a time we have a message of the certainty of salvation through the virgin-born Son of God who came, lived, died and rose again to save us from the inevitable penalty for our sins. We have a message which is the very power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes (Rom. 1:16). We have Sacraments which are not memorials and spiritual snacks, but an *actual* washing of regeneration and a *real* sanctifying meal of the very body and blood of Christ. What great blessings confessional Lutherans have to offer the lost and the lame, the sheep without shepherds, all the casualties of this last great deception. Jesus had compassion for sheep without a shepherd. We need to emulate Jesus’ compassion described by St. Mark: “When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a Shepherd. So he began teaching them many things” (Mark 6:34).

Both of the great epochs of heresy and apostasy of the past were successfully repelled by the power of God’s Word, at least within large segments of the Church. But in this last great controversy, the certainty of everything has been questioned and even denied, and a great cloud of doubt has set the minds of most people against any claims of truth for anything, most especially the claims of the Bible. As a consequence, the very means of grace, the very means by which the other attacks were thwarted, have been assailed.

How are we to “be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have...” (1 Pet. 3:15)? How does one “give answers” at a time when the very rules and logic of discourse have been changed? In the ears of our hearers, any assertion which claims certainty and truth seems disallowed by Kant’s only absolute, that of the “intrinsically unknowable.”

Consider giving an answer today to a simple question about the difference between what the “Lutherans” believe and what the “Methodists” or “Presbyterians” or “Catholics” believe. One must first launch into the difficult explanation regarding the differences between the traditional, liberal and charismatic wings in each denominational camp and include a

rehearsal of the “alphabet soup” of multi-bodied Lutheranism. Then one must be prepared to defend a faith set forth with the claim of uncompromising absolute truth. Expressing such firm beliefs, especially in the area of moral values, is almost certain to be viewed as narrow-minded and old-fashioned by those who have soaked up today’s relativistic mode of thinking.

Our seminaries must recognize the challenge to the Gospel ministry which exists because of the many shifts in thinking that now pervade our society. Confessional Lutheran pastors must be prepared to help our people understand that the task of communication which lies before them in such encounters is not always as it might appear. A simple rehearsal of the traditional differences between Lutherans and Methodists or Catholics or Baptists may not suffice. The burden may lie in breaking through the barrier of a radically different way of thinking. Unless this difference is recognized and understood, the attempt to communicate our faith may well be met with frustration and, more tragically, with failure.

In contending for the faith today then, one must realize that the real ground of contention may not be merely an encounter between two competing claims for truth. Rather, it may involve a clash between our claim for *absolute* truth with minds that have learned to think of everything in terms of relativism and the “intrinsically unknowable.” Note well, The common rejoinder: “After all, everyone interprets the Bible differently,” really means: “After all, there are no absolutes, no eternal truths.” Echoing in the background are the words from the garden: “Did God really say...?”

Paradoxically, one key to the hearts of those held in the trap of this apostasy is the very meaninglessness, the spiritual vacuum, which results in lives when people have lost or never known spiritual and moral certainty. Someone has spoken of that emptiness as “a God-shaped vacuum which only Christ can fill.” When people have been worn down trying to fill their lives with things that cannot satisfy, when they have wearied of trying to comfort their souls with groundless and empty philosophies, then, maybe then, their hearts can be opened by the Word to hear the account of the hope we have.

The deepest root of this emptiness and alienation in man is due to his inborn awareness of sin and the resulting guilt in the face of the righteous wrath of God. Only the thundering accusation of God’s immutable Law can humble the heart of the secure sinner and prepare it to receive the Gospel. Only the message of Christ’s vicarious atonement, His propitiation of God’s anger, is sufficient to convert and convince the heart of sinful man of the gracious forgiveness and love which alone reconciles man to God.

We have the truth of a real Savior from the helplessness and hopelessness which even the most sophisticated lost sinner knows, a Savior who satisfied God’s rightful wrath against our sin by receiving in Himself the due penalty we deserved, a Savior who reveals Himself to us in the human language of His Word. That inerrant, effective Word is not only a “trustworthy shield and weapon,” but the very implement for the most delicate and vital *heart surgery*. The writer of Hebrews tells us:

For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart (4:12).

The prize to be won is not a winning score for debate but the souls of men and women who, without the only lifeline which can save them, are most certainly sinking in a mire that destroys life, both temporal and eternal.

The End Is Near

Certainty and the core beliefs of the Christian faith have been stripped away in the kingdom of the right (the spiritual realm). The moral base in the kingdom of the left (the secular realm), a base which derived from the values filtered down through the *former* Christian consensus, has been lost. The inevitable result is the unleashing of Satan and all his forms of evil within society.

The entire era from the time of Christ until His second coming is pictured in the vision revealed to St. John.

And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time (Rev. 20:1-3).

The “angel coming down from heaven” is the Lord Jesus Christ, *the* Messenger. The “great chain” in His hand is the message, the Gospel, the Good News of His defeat of our great enemies; sin, death and the devil.

Wherever God’s Word is proclaimed and hearts are secured in the certainty of salvation through the message of the life, death for sins, and the resurrection of the virgin born, only-begotten Son of God, then Satan is restrained. “He can harm us none, he’s judged; the deed is done; One little word can fell him” (TLH 262, v.3).

On the other hand, when that Word is withdrawn, Satan is set free, loosed among those who do not have God’s faith-creating and -sustaining Word. As has been shown, the Word has been “withdrawn” from most of the pulpits in the world and a hideous counterfeit has taken its place. Walther (in his sermon above) recognized this over one hundred years ago. How much more true is this today? Pieper saw us as being in the “little season” in which Satan “must be set free.” What would he say today?

Siegbert Becker says of Satan’s being loosed for a short time (Rev. 20:3):

The Bible speaks of widespread apostasy during the last days of the world’s history. Where the message of the Bible is no longer to be heard or where it is so obscured by false teaching that the light of salvation shines very dimly, the devil is free to continue to deceive men and to lead them astray to the eternal destruction of their souls. The devil is loosed whenever large segments of the visible church become apostate and non-evangelical cults and sects proliferate.

This interpretation is in harmony with the Savior’s own description of the last times. He says (Matt. 24:21-25),

For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now-- and never to be equaled again. If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened. At that time if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or, ‘There he is!’ do not believe it. For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect-- if that were possible.

In those words the Savior speaks of a time that will be shortened. That theme is echoed here in the “short time” spoken of by John. The Lord also speaks of a proliferation of false prophets and false Christs who will deceive man. John’s

words imply that during that short time the devil will once more be able to deceive the nations. The whole tenor of Jesus' words implies that the gospel message, which alone can keep men out of the clutches of the devil, will during these shortened days be obscured.³¹

Surely Becker's words aptly fit the present situation in the visible Church. It is not feasible for this writer to see anything other than that this third great epoch of controversy is the great and perhaps final controversy, and that the resulting apostasy is the great and final apostasy of the Church. How long this falling away must go on before the Lord comes, only He knows.

The "little season" of Revelation 20 is a short time at the end of "the thousand years" and "the thousand years" is the whole period between the time of Christ's earthly ministry and His second coming (thus far, 2,000 years). In proportion, how long can a "little season" be?

How could a reversal of this world wide apostasy take place? How could that happen when not only the pulpits but all the schools of Christendom, with few exceptions, have long since been taken into captivity by Satan? Lutherans know that God's Word and sacraments are the only "means of grace." It is only through the preaching of God's Word in truth and purity throughout a great segment of Christendom that it could be brought to a resurgence of the faith.

It is certain that Scripture knows of no great reversal of this apostasy. Satan is not "set free" to then be restrained again and then "set free" again. Awful satanic activity, including the burgeoning proliferation of real satanic cults, whose unspeakable practices commonly are reported even in small-town newspapers, is happening all over the country, indeed all over the world. This is the deadly harvest from fields left fallow in the wake of the wholesale abdication of the faith from within the Church itself. This bears frightening testimony in witness of St. John's words:

When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth-- Gog and Magog-- to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore (Rev. 20:7-8).

If the things we observe are indeed the pattern described in the Scriptures, then the "thousand years" appear over and this may well be the "little season." Thus we await the consummation of the age.

It is in the face of this that the people of God need and must have the clearest assurance of the victory of the Christian and the ultimate triumph of the Church. Pastors and teachers of the Church must help believers understand and place in proper perspective the events of our time. And always they must work tirelessly, employing the means of grace to kindle faith in the yet unsaved and strengthen the weak and the weary.

Our Lord is the Lord of All History

Luther wrote his *Bondage of the Will* against Erasmus, the great Catholic scholar of Rotterdam. In this work (which Luther considered to be his most worthy) he argued that nothing happens *contingently*, that is, by chance, but that all things happen of necessity because our good, loving and all powerful God and Father would have it so. Luther wrote these paradoxical but comforting words under the heading: "Of the importance of knowing that God necessitates all things."

It is then, fundamentally necessary and wholesome for Christians to know that God foreknows nothing contingently, but that He foresees, purposes, and does all things according to His own immutable [unchangeable], eternal and infallible [never erring] will... the Christian's chief and only comfort in every adversity lies in knowing that God does not lie, but brings all things to pass immutably, and that His will cannot be resisted, altered or impeded.³²

In this world it always *seems* that everything happens by *chance* (contingently). How comforting to know that *all* things happen because God would have it so and had everything written in His book from of old (Ps. 139:16).

In times of trial and tribulation, times when things seem to be out of control, Christians especially need to understand this difficult but comforting truth. With a right understanding of these things, knowing that his God is the sovereign Lord of history, time and eternity, the embattled Christian can say with the psalmist:

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust." Surely he will save you from the fowler's snare and from the deadly pestilence. He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart (Ps. 91:1-4).

St. Paul sums up the eighth chapter of Romans with these words:

No, in all these things we are *more than conquerors* through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (vss. 37-39, emphasis added).

Perhaps the greatest passage to assure Christian hearts of the hope and victory which is ours in Christ in our day is 1 Peter 1:3-7. Here the Holy Spirit surely speaks to our embattled hearts today.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade-- kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith-- of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire-- may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

St. Paul, having displayed the glorious truths of our salvation by grace through faith, assures all who still sojourn here below:

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by

faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us (Rom. 5:1-5).

It is through the refiner's fire of suffering for Christ's sake that the Christian's faith is tempered to stand in the day of trouble. According to St. Paul, whatever we may have to suffer in the future cannot be compared with the glory which will be revealed to us on the last day (Rom. 8:18).

The victory of the Christian is the victory which Christ Himself has given us in conquering sin, death, and our great enemy, the devil, for us. It is the victory which He will give us in its fullness on the last day. St. Paul tells us:

Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed-- in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:51-57).

Epilogue

Weighing all that we have contemplated in this essay, consider our time and place in the continuum of unfolding history. As one who once persecuted the Church, I stand humbly before you filled with gratitude to be part of this faithful Synod. Together with the other faithful confessional Lutheran bodies which constitute the world fellowship of the fledgling Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference, we continue to build on the foundation of the Apostles, workmanship wrought in gold, and that, built on the foundation which has been long laid, which is Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 3:11-12).

How small we are in the grand scheme of things. Yet, where else would we want to be? The world will not notice what we do here, but then, we are not of the world. The great ecumenical ventures will go forth in the years ahead as Lutherans and Presbyterians, Methodists and Catholics, rush headlong to join together (Babel revisited). Some may leave us, seeking broader paths, but others will come, glad and grateful for this haven of faithful fellowship.

May God preserve us and keep us in this faith and fellowship. May He guard and keep us from all strife and schism as we work out our salvation and await the consummation of the age, the blessed hope, the day of everlasting salvation.

C. F. W. Walther wrote the following poem on the occasion of the death of one of his dear parishioners. It is a poem which has been read at many funeral services in the years since. It is a fitting reminder of the joy which will be ours on the great day of Christ's appearing.

It is a blessed year in which he dies who has a Savior. It is the year of his birth, it is the year of his everlasting salvation, it is the truly acceptable year of the Lord, the eternal year of jubilee when all his lamentations shall sink into everlasting silence. Then at last will he take his harp from the willows of grief, encircle his brow with the never fading flowers of springtime and there, sing and play with angelic choirs, the new song to God and to the Lamb.³³

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus... come soon, Lord Jesus.

+ *Soli Deo Gloria* +

References

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- John R. Stephenson, *Eschatology*, Ft. Wayne: The Luther Academy, 1993.
- David J. Weber, "Luther and Calvin on the Interpretation of Scripture," *Lutheran Synod Quarterly*, Fall, 1988.

Endnotes

- ¹ This method is the basic approach to Scripture taken by today's liberal Bible scholars and pastors. Simply put, the method begins with the assumption that the Bible is a book like any other ancient book, that it is not "inspired" in the ordinary sense of that word, but was written by well-intended, pious men of old. The method generally rejects the possibility of the supernatural. Thus, miracles such as the virgin birth of Christ and His physical resurrection, as well as His true Deity, are considered to be "myths" and "stories" developed by the early Church. It is the standard assumption of the method that the Bible contains many errors, changes, omissions and fabrications.
- ² "Eschatology" is the study of the end times which culminate with the parousia, the second coming of Christ. Stephenson comes to Lutheranism from the Church of England. While studying at Oxford he wrote his doctoral dissertation on Luther's position on the true presence in the Lords Supper. In the process, he became convinced of the correctness of Luther's position and was converted to Lutheranism.
- ³ Fort Wayne: The Luther Academy, 1993, p. 3.
- ⁴ St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1991, p. 6.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, p.7; the source of the citation is Hoekema's *The Bible and the Future*.
- ⁶ Dualism: belief in the existence of *two* superior beings or "gods," one good and one evil. In Christianity the devil is not a god but a creature, a fallen angel.

- ⁷ The same pagan influences would later lead to *Theosophy* in the nineteenth century. Theosophy is closely related to Hinduism, which influenced its originator, the Russian adventuress, Helena Petrovna Blavatsky. Today Theosophy is incorporated into the New Age Movement. Christian Science, Scientology and The Way and a host of other cults are closely related.
- ⁸ The Roman Catholic Counter-Reformation, though greatly stimulated by Protestant opposition, began almost simultaneously with the first stirring of conscience which led Luther in his path of reform. Many Roman Catholics were concerned with the abuses which had emerged in the Renaissance age. Although the Counter-Reformation became primarily a reaction against the Protestant Reformation (thus its name), it achieved some reform of the most extreme abuses, though never moving on the quintessential issue of salvation by grace alone through faith alone.
- ⁹ Luther, in his Smalcald Articles, asserted his *solo verbo* (Word alone) principle against the enthusiasts of his day: "Accordingly, we should and must constantly maintain that God will not deal with us except through his external Word and sacrament. Whatever is attributed to the Spirit apart from such Word and sacrament is of the devil" (SA, VIII, 10, Tappert, p. 313).
- ¹⁰ Geneva Catechism, *Calvin: Theological Treatises*, p. 134; cited in David J. Weber, "Luther and Calvin on the Interpretation of Scripture," *Lutheran Synod Quarterly*, Dec. 1988, p. 79.
- ¹¹ *Institutes of Christian Religion*, I, VIII:2, F. E. Meyer, *The Religious Bodies of America* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1954), p. 203; cited in Weber, p. 79.
- ¹² See: Siegbert W. Becker, *The Foolishness of God, The Place of Reason in the Theology of Martin Luther* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1982).
- ¹³ p. 79.
- ¹⁴ The heresy of the Christological Controversy (the first epoch) affected a relatively small segment of the Church and was thoroughly repulsed. At the time of the Reformation (the second epoch) neither the Catholic Church nor the Reformed denied the deity of Christ, the virgin birth, the physical resurrection or the other miracles. Above all, none denied the inspiration of Scripture. All are denied in this present epoch of heresy.
- ¹⁵ God's Word, in itself, cannot be "neutralized." Jesus said: "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away (Matt. 24:35)." However, when men's hearts and ears are stopped because they have rejected the *authority* of God's Word, the effect is nearly the same. The Word which is trampled under foot is the only means by which the Holy Spirit chooses to bring men to repentance and work faith in hearts (as Luther has so clearly and emphatically stated in his Smalcald Articles).
- ¹⁶ Dr. Robert Preus, former president of Concordia Theological Seminary, Ft. Wayne, IN, was fond of saying: "The liberal flees from God's Word in one direction and the charismatic [modern day pietist] flees from the same Word in the other direction." The liberal discounts the Word of Scripture as merely being the product of pious but ill-informed men of old, and the charismatic relies on his feelings and immediate experience of the "Holy Spirit" over against Scripture.
- ¹⁷ p. 4.
- ¹⁸ Stephenson, p. 5.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*
- ²⁰ Patsy Leppien and J. Kincaid Smith, (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1992), p. 155.
- ²¹ When human reason rules over divine authority, there will be as many varying positions as there are men to reason them; thus, "pluralism." Given that, it becomes clear why there is such a proliferation of Protestant/Reformed churches and sects. This in itself causes people to fall away from the church in confusion.
- ²² p. 5. Note: "Indifferentism" arises in external Christendom when the notion that "everything is matter of tentative viewpoints and positions, none are really certain and there are no absolutes," becomes the common consensus. Since in this view, it is considered that there are no *certain* truths, the people become indifferent to the exclusive claims of any particular body of doctrine. One view point is considered as "valid" as another and "syncretism" results. Whichever elements are found pleasing can be selected smorgasbord-style and merged into one's own view; thus, "syncretism." This could involve such things

as the merging together of incompatible religious ideas, as when Hinduism's notion of reincarnation is merged with the Christian belief of the resurrection.

- ²³ p. 6. Note: Francis Pieper (1852-1931), the disciple of C. F. W. Walther, is the author of the three volume *Christian Dogmatics*, the chief dogmatic textbooks used in the Missouri Synod and in the Evangelical Lutheran Synod.
- ²⁴ "Licht des Lebens," *Ein Jargang von Evangelien-Predigten aus dem Nachlass des seligen Dr. Carl Ferdinand Walther*, ed. C. J. Otto Hauser (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1905), p. 660f; translated by Stephenson, p. 6.
- ²⁵ See Leppien and Smith, *What's Going on Among the Lutherans: A Comparison of Beliefs* for a thorough summary of the present-day liberal theological environment.
- ²⁶ p. 75.
- ²⁷ p. 79.
- ²⁸ Martin Chemnitz, *Examination Of The Council Of Trent* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1971), p. 551.
- ²⁹ pp. 80-81. Note: This means, in effect, that all Reformed Protestantism participates in Antichrist by their denial of the true presence in the Lord's Supper.
- ³⁰ "Last Things: Church and Antichrist," *We Confess the Church*, trans. Norman Nagel (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986), 119; cited by Stephenson, p. 81.
- ³¹ *Revelation: The Distant Triumph Song* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1985), pp. 301-302.
- ³² John Dillenberger, *Martin Luther: Selections from his Writings* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1961), pp. 181, 185.
- ³³ This poem was written down for me from memory by Dr. Wilhelm Peterson.