

# THE DOCTRINAL POSITION OF THE NORWEGIAN SYNOD<sup>1</sup>

## A Brief Survey of the Position in Doctrine and Practice Held by the Old Norwegian Synod Prior to the Merger of 1917

*Rev. Chr. Anderson*

“Stand ye in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls.” Jer. 6, 16.

The Lord had spoken thus to Israel; but Israel did not give heed to His words. The Lord therefore complains bitterly: “For from the least of them even unto the greatest of them every one is given to covetousness; and from the prophet even unto the priest every one dealt falsely. They have healed also the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace.”

Do not thoughts such as these crowd upon us, as we gather for the annual meeting of our Synod once more in this memorable place? Nine years ago a few of us were gathered here to consider how we might save some of the remnants that were left after the great calamity which had befallen our church. Our pious fathers asked faithfully and zealously for the old paths to walk therein. They had tried earnestly to heal the hurt of our Lutheran Zion with the true means which God has given for that purpose. It appeared to many, however, that they had made too little progress in their endeavors. These, therefore, took matters into their own hands, and framed a treaty of peace, which was carried into effect by means of force and treachery. Their achievement was praised and celebrated throughout the length and breadth of the land. The cry was raised: “The great Thirty Years' war of the Lutheran church in this country is ended at last, and the peace for which thousands have longed and prayed has now been established.” Yet there was no peace. The little band whom God in grace had given the courage to defy the threats of an overwhelming majority without considering their own temporal advantages, in order that they might continue faithfully to ask for the old paths, gathered in this church nine years ago for the purpose of considering plans for their work in the future. Their deliberations resulted in the following resolution: “We, members present,... join together for the purpose of continuing the work of the Synod on the old basis and according to the old principles.” A name for the reorganized synod was chosen, the fundamental principles to be followed in doctrine and practice agreed upon, temporary officers elected, and a committee was chosen to prepare a draft for a constitution.

Thus our work was begun anew in the name of the triune God. Much has tended to make our work difficult during these years. Many hindrances have been thrown in our way. We have been accused of being schismatics, Pharisees and the like. Yet God has abundantly blessed us during these nine years. He has granted us courage to testify unflinchingly to the old truths, and it has been our privilege to see evidences of the fact that, in spite of our own shortcomings, our testimony has not been borne in vain. We have been permitted to rejoice over the

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<sup>1</sup> Extracts from the Synodical Address Submitted to the Annual Convention of the Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church at Lime Creek, Iowa, 1927. Translated from the Norwegian.

preservation of the old, time-honored principles for which our sainted fathers labored and contended, while a many of our former brethren, who parted from us, have sighed amid the great confusion which the new condition of affairs in the church has brought about. And the unity of spirit in all essentials, which has bound us together in our work for building the church of God, has not been the least cause for rejoicing.

If we reckon the restoration of the Norwegian Synod from the above mentioned resolution of the meeting in Lime Creek in 1918,<sup>2</sup> we may celebrate next year, not only the tenth anniversary of the reorganized Synod, but also the seventy-fifth anniversary of the old Norwegian Synod. We ought to have this in mind when detailed arrangements for our meeting in 1928 are worked out.

It is true that objection has been raised from various sources to our using the name, the Norwegian Synod, and to our claim to be the logical heirs and successors to the old Norwegian Synod. It is maintained that the Norwegian Synod has been officially merged with other Lutheran bodies in "The Norwegian Lutheran Church in America." Consequently, the Norwegian Lutheran Church is the rightful successor to the Norwegian Synod, as is evident especially from the fact that this church body has taken over and is now actually in possession of all the property formerly owned by the Norwegian Synod.

But the essential feature of a church body is surely not its outward organization, its educational and charitable institutions and buildings of stone and wood. It must rather consist in its confession of faith, the dominating principles governing doctrine and practice, and the spirit in which all its work is carried on. It is in this latter sense that we claim to be the logical successors to the old Norwegian Synod. Though a tree may be shattered and broken by the raging storm, yet the tender sprouts that shoot forth from the ruined trunk are a continuation of the old tree, because they are nourished and grow from the old roots. If the outward organization were a deciding factor, we could not as Lutherans speak at all of the continuity of the church. Luther was forced to secede from the outward organization of the church of his time. This was the only way in which he could restore the connection with the true apostolic church.

Very little can be accomplished by arguing in a general way about whether "The Norwegian Lutheran Church in America" or we, who now adorn ourselves with the time honored name of the Norwegian Synod, are the logical successors to this venerable church body. Only by considering in detail the things which in course of time have come to be generally considered as the distinguishing marks of the old Synod can we decide who are its rightful heirs. This is what I propose to do in the following paragraphs.

Our sainted fathers, who were instrumental in organizing the Norwegian Synod, were fully determined to found a true Lutheran — i. e. a true Biblical, Christian church among the Norwegian immigrants in this country. In the middle of the last century there were in the Church of Norway various types of Lutherans, liberal and fanatic, as well as orthodox, who

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<sup>2</sup> During the meeting in 1917 at which the merger of the Norwegian Lutheran churches was consummated, the pastors and delegates who were fully convinced that they could not join the merger met at Aberdeen Hotel in St. Paul, Minn., and resolved to continue the work of the Norwegian Synod, as far as this was possible. Officers were elected, and it was decided to publish "Luthersk Tidende" as official organ. It can therefore be said truthfully that the Norwegian Synod has continued its work without interruption since 1853.

desired to be guided wholly by the Lutheran Confessions. The first ordained pastors who came to this country were chiefly confessional Lutherans, who, before leaving the mother country, had learned to be governed solely by the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions. They were further guided and encouraged in this respect, when God providentially led them into contact with brethren here who, after having passed through many tribulations, had learned thoroughly to seek after the truth, and who had already written upon their banner; "Back to the fathers, back to Luther and the Confessions, back to the Holy Scriptures." In 1877 Rev. V. Koren writes: "Though formerly unclear in many respects in spite of its confessional and churchly conservatism, the Norwegian Synod had received, through its connection with the Missouri Synod, an earnest awakening and had arrived at a definite Lutheran firmness. And the new view of the glory emanating from the two chief principles of the Lutheran Reformation, which they had acquired, was borne out enthusiastically in all their productions, both written and oral." (*The Various Parties in the Norwegian Church in America*, p. 17.)

In his essay on the position of the Norwegian Synod, the sainted Rev. Koren writes; "We brought with us from the mother church the unadulterated gospel, but a really clear view of its glory in opposition to all error is something which we have acquired after our arrival here, since the condition of a free church wholly separated from the state, as well as the controversies which we have lived through, by divine guidance, have confirmed us in the old truth. We would be ungrateful not to acknowledge how mightily we have been strengthened by our German brethren in faith, especially by the testimony of that faithful disciple of Luther, the sainted Dr. Walther. No one can justly accuse us, however, of being mere repeaters of Dr. Walther or of anyone else." (*Complete works*, Vol. III, Page 437.)

With reference to the question of church government and church polity, the fathers of our Synod were at the beginning somewhat unclear, but with the aid of more experienced brethren and with the encouragement which these brethren gave them to study the Lutheran church fathers and the Confessions, they very soon attained a clear view also of this question. The Rev. M. A. Preus speaks of the question as follows in his "Seven Lectures, etc.," 1867; "When the constitution was drafted, we all, pastors as well as laymen, had lately arrived from the old fatherland; we were unacquainted with the organization of congregations and church bodies entirely independent of the state. It was only natural, then, that we should have a number of erroneous and confused ideas, e. g. about the relation of the local congregation to the church body, and about church government and discipline. Because of the intermixture of church and state to which we were accustomed, it was only to be expected that our ideas would be confused, so that we ascribed power and authority to church government which could only be defended when exercised by the civil authorities. While we were governed in our practice by more correct principles than those embodied in our constitution, yet we desired to make the necessary revision of our constitution as soon as this could be done."

### **Stand against Unionism**

When the first ordained pastors from Norway began their work here, they found that the immigrants in many places had come in touch with, and had been influenced to some extent by, various sects. Our pastors did not make the mistake which had repeatedly been made before by those who attempted to found Lutheran church bodies, of fraternizing with these sects at the expense of the truth. These pioneer pastors realized very keenly that it was the will of God, that they should carefully avoid and shun all false doctrine, and not enter into any fraternal relations

with those of other faiths. This same care was exercised over against so called Lutherans who were unfaithful to the truth in greater or lesser degree. This principle of avoiding all unionism in the church was definitively established from the very beginning and consistently maintained and championed in the Norwegian Synod up to the union of 1917. By consistently following out this principle our fathers made many enemies. They were accused of being exclusive and of lacking in true brotherly love. They chose, however, to suffer this calumny, knowing that they were doing the will of God, rather than compromise the truth in order to gain the friendship of the world. And God has abundantly blessed their faithfulness to the truth.

### **Attitude toward Other Lutheran Synods**

The Norwegian Synod began very early in its history to assume a decidedly definite attitude toward the other Lutheran bodies in this country. In 1855, two years after the organization of the Synod, when the question of training future pastors and teachers was discussed, two of the pastors, Ottesen and Brandt, were delegated to acquaint themselves with the various Lutheran synods for the purpose of finding an educational institution to which our Synod might send its young men, who wished to be trained for work in the church. The report submitted by these delegates is most clear and enlightening. They found in the older synods much that was not in harmony with true Lutheran doctrine and practice. They would not recommend to our Synod to affiliate with the Ohio, or the Iowa Synods. The Missouri Synod, on the other hand, was found to be thoroughly faithful to the Lutheran Confessions; they therefore urged the Norwegian Synod to seek affiliation with that Synod. In accordance with their recommendation, the educational institutions of the Missouri Synod were used for many years for the training of our workers. And the most cordial relations existed between this Synod and the Norwegian Synod up to the merger of 1917.

In this connection it may be of interest to note the opinion of the various Lutheran synods voiced by President H. A. Preus in his "Seven Lectures" on conditions in the Lutheran Church in America, delivered in Norway in 1866. He says: "The Lutheran General Synod in America is composed of more than twenty component synods, among them there are such that do not even pretend to accept the Lutheran Confessions. In recent years, however, a more genuinely Lutheran stand has been taken by some among them. This position has been championed chiefly by the old Pennsylvania Synod. ... However, the greater portion of the General Synod still represents the so-called 'American Lutheranism' in contrast to the old German orthodoxy which they consider obsolete."

Later on President Preus says: "The Ohio Synod, which is partly German and partly English, has subscribed unreservedly to the Lutheran Confessions, it is true, yet it has proved to be very lax in doctrine and practice. It has, among other things, experienced severe internal conflicts because of the fact that many of its pastors belong to the Masonic and other secret orders.' "

"The German Iowa Synod, whose first pastors without exception were followers of Wilhelm Loehe of Bavaria, champions his Romanizing and Chiliastic errors, a fact which has been the cause of many withdrawals." About the Buffalo Synod the Rev. H. A. Preus has this to say: "Their doctrine and practice touching the office of the ministry and church government were Romanizing to such a degree that not only their congregations were subjected to the tyrannical yoke of the clergy, but the majority of their pastors were likewise held under the yoke of 'Seniors' who ruled like popes."

“Against these more or less un-Lutheran synods, as well as against the German Reformed and Catholic church bodies, the Missouri Synod has continually contended with as much courage and efficiency as with faithfulness to the Confessions. Before all these it has unfurled the banner of true Lutheranism clearly, gloriously, and brilliantly. Though every hand has been directed against it on that account, though it has been subjected to scorn, ridicule and persecution on all sides, the Missouri Synod has nevertheless continued to cling unflinchingly to ‘God's word and Luther's doctrine.’ And God has not withheld His blessing from this conflict. After controversy extending over a period of more than twenty years, the Buffalo Synod last year admitted that the Missouri Synod was right in its contentions, and has now sought to affiliate with it. ... The withdrawal from the General Synod which, as already stated, occurred a year ago was no doubt brought about as a result of the clear testimony borne by the Missouri Synod.”

Having withdrawn from the General Synod, the Pennsylvania Synod began to negotiate with a number of other synods for the purpose of forming a conservative Lutheran federation. These negotiations resulted in the founding of the General Council. However, neither the Missouri Synod nor the Norwegian Synod deemed it advisable to join with these heterogeneous elements, which moreover gave very little promise of firmness in doctrine and practice for the future. By reading the comments on the work of the General Council printed in “Kirkelig Maanedstidende” during the first years of its history, we need not be in doubt about the attitude of the Norwegian Synod toward this federation.

On the other hand, negotiations were begun by the Missouri Synod, the Norwegian Synod and a few other bodies, among them the Ohio Synod, for the purpose of forming a federation of really faithful Lutherans. This led to the formation of the Lutheran Synodical Conference, in 1872. True, the Norwegian Synod withdrew from the Synodical Conference in 1883. This, however, was not done because of any disagreement in doctrine, but simply because many thereby hoped to avoid a schism in the Norwegian Synod during the controversy on Election. The Norwegian Synod continued, in spite of its formal withdrawal, to enjoy the most intimate fraternal relations with the Synodical Conference until the merger of 1917. It continued to work in perfect harmony with the synods of the Synodical Conference, while it did not fraternize with any Lutheran synod outside of this body. We need but call to mind that a number of our pastors and professors during the last part of this period received the degree of Doctor of Theology from the faculties at St. Louis and Wauwatosa, and that leading men of the Missouri and Wisconsin Synods were created Doctors of Theology by our faculty. The relation to all other Lutheran synods was always more or less strained because of disagreement in doctrine and practice. We see, then, how conscientiously the Norwegian Synod always sought to avoid all unionism and affiliated only with those Lutherans with whom it was in perfect agreement in doctrine and practice.

### **Lay Preaching**

It will be necessary to consider briefly the doctrines for which the Norwegian Synod contended during these years. The first conflict arose among the Norwegian immigrants concerning lay preaching. Before the arrival of the first regularly ordained pastors from Norway, Elling Eielsen and other lay preachers had conducted religious meetings in various settlements. This fact in itself is not to be censured. On the contrary, it was very desirable that the word of God might be preached among the scattered pioneers, who, in some instances for a long time, lacked the

established office of the ministry. But these lay preachers had not from the homeland acquired a clear conception of the truth of the Gospel, and they became still more confused by coming in contact with the Reformed churches in this country. These lay preachers assumed a hostile attitude toward the ordained pastors when these attempted to bring about order in the church work. They wished to continue their activity throughout the settlements even after regularly organized congregations had been established.

There arose a bitter conflict in many localities. The organizers of the Norwegian Synod endeavored to inculcate the true Scriptural doctrines of the Church and of the office of the ministry. They held that everything is to be done “decently and in order” in the church of God. The local church is a divine institution. God has entrusted to it the office of the keys, which functions through the preaching of the Word and the administering of the sacraments. The local church alone has the right and the duty to appoint pastors and teachers. Only such teachers are to be appointed who have been tried and found competent according to the requirements that are very clearly defined in the word of God. No individual has the right to usurp the authority which rests with the local congregation alone, on the plea that he has received a direct call from the Lord. Only in cases of special need are others than properly tried and appointed teachers warranted in preaching the word of God publicly; and even in such instances those who are ministered to should extend a call to these workers, if they are at all capable of doing it. This position of the Synod does not militate against the Scriptural doctrine of the spiritual priesthood of all believers. This spiritual priesthood may and ought to function to its fullest extent without conflicting with the divinely instituted office of the ministry.

For many years this position of the Norwegian Synod was assailed not only by these pioneer lay preachers themselves, but also by all the other Lutheran bodies that were later established in opposition to it. These synods have continued to defend lay preaching, more or less, up to the union of 1917.

### **Relation of the Local Congregation to Synod**

In the course of these controversies concerning the Church and the Ministry, the view held by the Norwegian Synod regarding the true relation between the local congregation and the synod, as such, gradually became well defined. God has instituted the local congregation. He has entrusted to it the Office of the Keys. No individual, or any group of individuals, has the right to exercise authority over the local congregation. God has not instituted the synods as such. We find in the Scriptures no trace of such an organization. Synods have come into existence because the congregations have voluntarily agreed to enter into such mutual relation. The congregations are thereby enabled more easily to work together for the training of pastors and teachers, for carrying on missionary activity at home and abroad, for Christian benevolences, etc. The synod thereby becomes only a medium which makes it possible for congregations of the same faith to function more energetically and efficiently in matters of common interest.

That this was the position of the Norwegian Synod is brought out very clearly in the revised constitution of 1866, which stipulates that the Synod may only exercise advisory authority with respect to the individual congregations; Synod has no right to dictate policies or rule over the congregations. The following quotation from President Preus' synodical address for the year 1865 shows how carefully our fathers sought to protect the rights of the local congregations: “The congregations joining to form a church body, and adopting a constitution, should be very

guarding indeed, in freely relinquishing, in part, their liberty and independence, doing so out of kindly solicitude for their own and the common welfare, lest they delegate to the Synod or general body any rights and powers which the Lord solely has entrusted to the congregations themselves, and which, when exercised by them, offer the best guarantee as to the preservation of the true faith. To such rights and powers belong, for instance, the appointment and dismissal of teachers, exercise of church discipline, the adoption of hymnals and text books for the schools. Much less ought the congregations assign to the general church body or its officers any power and authority by virtue of which their resolutions – even when not in conflict with God's word – could be construed as laws binding upon the congregations by virtue of divine authority, vested in them as superiors according to the fourth commandment. Such concession on the part of the congregations would make of the synod a papacy which might become just as anti-Christian as that of Rome. It would subject the congregations to human authority and place a yoke upon them much more intolerable and more difficult to remove than that which state churches impose on their congregations." Among the Norwegian Lutheran church bodies, the Synod alone held this position. The Lutheran Free Church has, in spite of much talk about the independence of the congregations, by the absence of order in its organization, given the authority into the hands of influential individuals and groups instead of guarding the liberty of the congregations.

### **Absolution**

I observed that the lay preachers, who had labored among the first immigrants, did not have a clear conception of the truth of the gospel. This gave rise to heated controversies between them and the Norwegian Synod involving a number of doctrines.

The first controversy centered about the doctrine of Absolution. Eielsen and his followers took offense at the practice of the Norwegian pastors of announcing the forgiveness of sin to the individual with the laying on of hands. They thought it presumptuous for human beings to undertake to judge the hearts of the individuals, as it is generally acknowledged that only the true believer can have forgiveness of sin. They contended, that absolution is to be pronounced only on the condition that the one receiving it is really a believer. They wanted a conditioned absolution. And they took offense at the practice of laying on of hands, because this gave the impression that the pastor presumed to possess authority which belongs to God alone.

The pastors of the Norwegian Synod were certainly in perfect agreement with the view that only true believers can enjoy the forgiveness of sin, as well as all other salutary gifts, and that no human being can search the heart, to determine who are true believers. But they did not claim that the pastor acts as judge when he pronounces absolution. In absolution, the confessor does not pass judgment as to the faith of those who come before him. He only preaches the gospel to the individual, just as he proclaims the forgiveness of sins to all who hear him when he preaches the gospel from the pulpit. There are no conditions attached to the promises of the gospel. The gospel proclaims the salvation which is prepared through Jesus Christ for all sinners. When our Savior spoke from the cross these wonderful words, "It is finished," the sins of the whole world were atoned for, whether the individual sinner believes it or not. When a poor sinner, therefore, in Absolution asks to be absolved, I have the right, even as it is my duty, to assure him, by virtue of the gospel, that the Lord grants him the forgiveness which through Jesus Christ has already been prepared. If I were to say: "If thou believest, thy sins are forgiven," I would only confuse the anxious sinner and suggest that his faith is to perfect the

salvation which is already complete in itself. No, it is my duty, unconditionally, to assure the one who makes confession, that God has forgiven all his sins. If through unbelief he rejects the gift thus granted him, he is not in position to enjoy the forgiveness. This, however, does not make my words untrue, when I assure him that God actually grants him the forgiveness of sin. And it only serves to bring this truth closer to him, when my assurance is accompanied by the laying on of hands.

### **The Gospel**

In connection with this controversy concerning Absolution it is only natural that there should be divergences as to the doctrine of the gospel. The opponents of the Norwegian Synod maintained that the gospel, like Absolution, grants remission of sins only to believers, and not to unbelievers. They taught that the gospel is contingent upon our faith. We find an excellent presentation of the position held by our Synod in this controversy in an essay written by the Rev. V. Koren in the early sixties. Referring to the discussion at the Pastoral Conference at Jefferson Prairie, Rev. Koren says: "When they began the discussion of the doctrine that absolution or the gospel is a powerful impartation of the forgiveness of sin, objections were raised on the part of the pastors of the Augustana Synod, who contended that the gospel imparts forgiveness only to the believers. The pastors of our Synod, on the contrary, taught that the gospel is and remains the same whether men accept it or not; it is, therefore, a powerful impartation of the forgiveness of sin unto all who hear it, whether they are believers or unbelievers. Here the issue was drawn, and this is the issue as we find it today.

"The question before us is whether the gospel is now one thing, now another; whether it says one thing when it sounds to a believer, and something else when it sounds to an unbeliever, or if it is ever the same, an eternal, definite, unchangeable word, which brings the same message from God whithersoever it may be sent, to every nation, kindred and tongue, and brings the same gift to all, to those who let their hearts be opened unto the gift of God's love as well as to those who harden their hearts and despise the gift.

"From God's word we know that God out of love has delivered up His Son for all men. The Son, sent by the Father, has out of love given Himself as a sacrifice for all men, and has thereby purchased for all forgiveness of sin with a great price. All this is done out of love, in accordance with the eternal councils of God. Man's conduct or merits have nothing to do with it; man's righteousness or unrighteousness, his deeds or omissions, his belief or unbelief, do not come into consideration, have neither cooperated with or hindered it; it is based altogether upon God's own eternal, free, independent and unmerited love to fallen mankind. It is based wholly on God's love, not to His friends, but to His enemies (Rom. 5, 10). Hence it is called grace alone and a free gift.

"As God will have all men to be saved, and no one can be saved except through Christ, God's gift to men, it follows that it is God's will that the gift contained in the gospel is to be brought to all men (1 Tim. 2, 4; Mar. 16, 15; Tit. 2, 1 1; 1 Tim. 1, 10).

"Wherever the gospel is proclaimed, therefore, the triune God sends His gift, i. e. Christ, and with Him forgiveness of sin, life, and salvation to all who hear it. We repeat it, that wherever the gospel is proclaimed – howsoever those act who hear it, whether they let themselves be convinced and accept it, or reject and despise it – God's will always is and remains the same

(Jas. 1, 173 , and the Word, in which God's will is revealed, always remains the same (1 Peter 1, 25) , and therefore the gift conveyed by this Word always remains the same (Rom. 3, 3; 9, 6; 2 Tim. 2, 13).

“Christ is the same, yesterday, and today, and forever; the gospel of Christ is therefore also the same, yesterday, and today, and forever. It was the same when proclaimed to Adam as when proclaimed to those who live at the sound of the last trump. There is only one gospel (Gal. 1, 6-8), and it is the same when it sounds to the dullest child as to the most profound thinker, the same to the most defiant denier of God's truth, the most bitter scoffer, as to the most pious bearer of the cross — the same eternal, powerful, heavenly message, which makes the heavenly hosts rejoice; in which the Holy Ghost reveals the unsearchable depths of God's love, and proclaims to everyone who hears the message: `God loves thee, poor lost soul! God's love hath paid thy whole debt of sin! Fear not, arise, shake the dust and the chains from thee, go out from thy prison, thou art free! Rejoice exceedingly, it is God's will that thou shalt be saved! Be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee!' ” Works III, 47-51.

The full, unconditional gospel, so beautifully described in these passages, has always been preached in the Norwegian Synod.

### **Justification**

In connection with these controversies, it is furthermore only natural that the doctrine of justification would be considered. Here, as well as in the doctrine of Absolution and that of the Gospel, the opponents were inclined to emphasize man's faith to such an extent that many might be led to attach importance to it beyond that of a mere organ with which we receive the gift of grace already fully prepared for us. As to the doctrine of Justification, the Norwegian Synod has testified with clearness to the great work of God for our salvation and to the fact that God makes us partakers of this salvation by grace alone. By His perfect obedience and by His sufferings and death, Christ has fully atoned for the sins of the whole world. He assumed our whole debt of sin, and paid it for us. He thereby procured a righteousness for all sinners which satisfies all of God's demands. He “was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification.” Rom. 4, 25. All sinners have been justified through Christ. The gospel brings this righteousness as an unmerited gift to all sinners. Those who accept the gift by faith, have it; they are justified. By a forensic act of God the righteousness of Christ is imputed to the believer. God acquits him of the guilt and punishment of sin and regards him in Christ as though he had never sinned.

### **Election**

I am convinced that it was the same confused conception of the gospel which led the opponents to direct their attacks on the Norwegian Synod in the controversy of Election. They began by attacking the Missourian presentation of this doctrine, when this synod in accordance with Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions taught that God from eternity not only has determined through His Son to prepare salvation for all sinners, but that He also has determined to call, justify and glorify those who are finally saved. As God by grace alone prepared salvation for all, so He likewise by grace alone makes us partakers of this salvation.

The opponents would not accept this presentation. They wanted to make room for man's faith also in the doctrine of Election, so as to be able to explain why some have been chosen in preference to others. They contended for this definition of Election, to-wit: That God from eternity has chosen those unto salvation of whom he foreknew that they would believe and remain faithful unto the end. Our faith, then, accounts for the fact that some have been chosen in preference to others.

While they would not admit that they considered man's faith as the cause of Election, yet, when, as a natural sequence, the doctrine of Conversion became involved in the controversy, it was evident that such importance was attached to faith, or as they chose to call it, "man's good conduct."

In the controversies regarding Absolution, The Gospel, Justification, and Election the fathers of the Norwegian Synod considered it a matter of paramount importance to testify with clearness to the second great principle of the Reformation, Justification by faith alone. The confused conception of this fundamental Christian doctrine, which was so prevalent among the Norwegian immigrants, goes to prove that this was not useless strife and a mere conflict of words. It was an important testimony, sorely needed, in order to establish an orthodox Lutheran church among our countrymen.

But our sainted fathers also testified with clearness and force to the first fundamental principle of the Reformation, or that the Bible is the only sure and perfect rule of our faith and life. In addition to the testimony to this important truth, continually borne in the course of the controversies hitherto reviewed, there were especially two questions at issue in the early history of our church in which our fathers stressed the authority of Scripture in opposition to human doctrines that had become quite generally accepted in the church. The first was the so-called Sunday question.

### **The Third Commandment**

Besides coming in contact with various Reformed sects, which, to say the least, have a very vague conception of the third Commandment, our people were in many places also influenced by missionaries sent out by the Adventists. These missionaries found very fertile soil for their propaganda among the Norwegian immigrants, whose conception of the Sabbath was quite confused because of conditions prevailing in the state church from which they came. When our pastors began to instruct their members as to what the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions teach concerning the Sunday question, they were vigorously assailed, not only by the Adventists, but also by Eielsen's adherents and the Augustana Synod. This controversy was later taken up by the Norwegian-Danish Conference, and was continued until the eighties.

During this whole controversy the fathers of the Norwegian Synod stressed the doctrine of the Scriptures and the Confessions in opposition to the traditions which in course of time had commonly been accepted even in parts of the Lutheran Church. They maintained that the third Commandment does not require of us the observance of any certain day as was the case in the Old Covenant. To the Christian every day throughout his life is a sabbath unto the Lord. To keep the Sabbath holy, one must use the word of God rightly and diligently. The word of God nowhere stipulates that Sunday is to take the place of the seventh day, which was the sabbath fixed by law in the Old Covenant. Exercising its Christian liberty, the church of the New

Covenant, for the sake of order and for other practical reasons, chose Sunday as the day on which to gather for public worship and for special use of the word of God, and not because of any direct command of God.

This controversy brought home to our people a very valuable lesson, inasmuch as the authority of Scripture and the Confessions was strongly stressed in opposition to all sorts of traditions and products of human reasoning.

### **Slavery**

The same is true also as regards the controversy which arose during the Civil War on the question of Slavery. Our pastors were accused of defending slavery, despite the fact that they declared explicitly at the annual meeting of the Synod in 1861, that "Slavery in itself is an evil and a punishment from God, and we condemn all the abuses and sins which are connected with it, just as we, when our official duties demand it, will work for its abolition." But they were not willing to deny a number of clear passages of the New Testament which speak of the keeping of slaves, and therefore they would not declare that it is a sin in itself to have slaves. They chose rather to endure the stigma of being called defenders of slavery than to accommodate the word of God to human reasoning. In "Festskrift," a volume published on the occasion of the Synod's fiftieth anniversary, Rev. H. Halvorsen points out the significance of the position held by the Synod on this question in the following words: "So far as the pastors of the Synod were concerned, the question of slavery was in itself a peripheric question, one of only secondary or remote importance, but since it involved the assertion of the absolute authority of Scripture in opposition to human sentiments and preconceived opinions, it became a matter of paramount importance. Another objectionable feature was the fact that Clausen, as well as many of those who sided with him, did not distinguish rightly between external, bodily liberty and the internal, spiritual liberty, which Christ had procured for us.

### **Millennium**

The Norwegian Synod took a very definite stand on the doctrine of the Millennium. It is true that there was no actual controversy concerning this doctrine in the early history of our church. However, because of the fact that leading men of the Augustana Synod as well as of other Lutheran synods held this doctrine, the Norwegian Synod passed resolutions condemning all Chiliastic errors.

### **Christian Day Schools**

Among questions of church practice may be mentioned in this connection the attitude of the Norwegian Synod toward the Christian day school and the lodge. From the very start, our fathers were very much concerned about giving the rising generation a thorough training in the Christian truths. They very soon realized that this training would not be cared for in the public schools, as had been done in the country from which they emigrated. The Rev. J. W. C. Dietrichson arranged to have some religious school in his congregations. The parishes later established followed his example. They soon realized, however, that this arrangement was very imperfect. In the beginning of the sixties considerable time was set aside at the meetings for considering the Christian training of the young, and resolutions were passed urgently recommending the establishment of Christian day schools, owned and conducted by the

congregations, in which the common secular branches as well as Christian fundamentals might be taught.

It is not necessary at this time to enter into a discussion of the value and desirability of establishing such schools. Parish schools were actually started in a number of places, and were in operation for a shorter or longer period. They were a great blessing to those who had access to them. However, it proved very difficult to create general interest among our people in these schools. The traditional view, that the public schools were sufficient, was very firmly rooted in the minds of our people. besides, it was a great deal easier for the old Adam to rest satisfied with a few weeks of religious instruction during the vacation period in addition to the Sunday School, than to establish real parish schools. Many of our pastors no doubt also lacked a full understanding of the need of such schools, as well as the moral courage to testify effectively among the members of their churches. At the Synod's jubilee in 1903 the fact that so little had been accomplished in the matter of Christian day schools was termed as a "dark chapter in the history of the Synod."

But no one needs be in doubt as to the official attitude of the Synod in the matter of Christian day schools. Strong resolutions were repeatedly passed, both by the general and by the district meetings, urging our people to establish such schools. Well written essays were read and published, and strong testimony to the urgent need of these schools was borne in the discussions. This testimony was continually heard in the Synod up to the union of 1917. It was even used with effect as an argument in favor of the merger, that the union would give new impetus to the establishing of Christian day schools.

Several Christian day schools were started during the period between 1903 and 1917. They appeared for a time to have a promising future. Instead of being strengthened by the Union, however, these schools have all been discontinued.

### **Lodges**

The Norwegian Synod took a very definite stand in the matter of dealing with secret societies. The annual meetings passed strong resolutions against lodgery, and the constitutions of most of the congregations contained a paragraph, stating that members of secret orders were not to be accepted as members of the congregation. No doubt, there was great laxity in many places in conforming with the official stand of the Synod in this matter. The Synod, however, never tired of testifying against lodgery at its regular meetings and in its official organs. This testimony surely has not been without effect.

On the preceding pages I have endeavored to give a brief survey of the most essential matters to be considered in determining the position of the Norwegian Synod as to doctrine and practice, from its organization until the Union of 1917. We are forcibly impressed by the earnestness and fearlessness with which our fathers testified in these important matters. What bitter struggles they endured in their earnest endeavors to establish a true Lutheran church among our countrymen! God did signally bless their testimony. He supported them in their struggles, and they really attained the goal for which they labored and suffered. A true Lutheran church body was an accomplished fact – an orthodox Lutheran synod, in which the two fundamental principles of the Reformation were firmly established. And the church body which they founded was well equipped with the outward institutions and with the man power needed to

work successfully in the future for the true spiritual uplift of our people and of the land of our adoption.

But what about the fruits of this glorious work of our fathers? Does the present generation stand in the ways and ask for the old paths, to walk therein? Does the present generation testify and contend seriously to maintain the stand formerly taken by the Norwegian Synod in these important matters?

Some may ask: Is it necessary to continue this testimony and strife indefinitely. Are not our people so well educated at the present time and so firmly established in Lutheran doctrines and practices, that from now on we are justified in the laying down of arms, and should unite all efforts in the internal and external upbuilding of the church? Ought not the Lutheran church of our land finally cease wasting her energy in internal strife, and rather use her strength to exert influence along broader lines than formerly? Many take this view of the situation, and among them are many who formerly faithfully stood in the ways and asked for the old paths.

This contention, however, is by no means new. In his synodical address for the year 1864 President H. A. Preus says: "When our zeal in contending for the true doctrine is met in the same way (as by the Pietists), while they repeatedly stress the importance of Christian living, giving as a reason, that in the Lutheran Church of our day the true doctrine is so well developed and so generally known and accepted that there can be no danger on that score, and that our zeal is therefore uncalled for – in the face of this contention, I maintain that the very fact that such sentiments are so generally expressed is in itself an evidence which goes to show that the pure doctrine is not so well established in the Lutheran Church as many seem to think. A glance at the various church bodies that bear the Lutheran name will readily convince us that conditions are by no means ideal in this respect, and that the decadence, so far as pure doctrine is concerned, ought to urge us on, as a branch of this Church, to plunge into an earnest and zealous study of the true doctrine, and to endeavor by the grace of God to gain a clear and full knowledge of the truth. I believe that the circumstances in which the Lord has placed our little Synod here ought to urge us to consider it a special task to seek first of all to become well established in the true doctrine, in order that we, by preserving and accepting God's pure word, may save ourselves and our own kin, that we furthermore may learn to truly lead a sound Christian life, and finally, as God gives us grace and occasion, that we by means of the pure word of God, which we have preserved, may set others aright, and teach those who have fallen into error the true way unto salvation."

If it was necessary at that time to seek anxiously to become firmly established in the knowledge of the truth, both for our own benefit, and for the purpose of setting others right, it is by no means less important today. Departure from divine truth is just as common today, and these errors are often proclaimed more boldly and defiantly than of yore. The need of clear and forceful testimony to the truth is, without doubt, as urgent today as it has ever been.

But what has become of those who have received as a heritage the fruits of the testimony and struggles of our fathers? We find the majority of them with the opponents. It cannot be denied that these opponents have learned some lessons from the testimony of our fathers. They do not challenge our preaching of the full, unconditional gospel with such effrontery as they were wont to do at one time; they have learned to some extent to see the untenability of some of their

former contentions. But they are still far from having accepted the position in doctrine and practice formerly held by the Norwegian Synod. Our former brethren who have entered the merger have thereby severed their fraternal relations with their former faithful Lutheran brethren of other synods, and they are now fraternizing with those who formerly were our most bitter opponents, whom our fathers would not recognize as faithful Lutherans.

### **The Norwegian Lutheran Church in America**

The claim which some have made, that the Missouri Synod in recent years has changed position doctrinally, while our former opponents now hold the same position as was originally held by the Missouri Synod, will be considered ridiculous by all except those who try to find some balm for their conscience in this way. "The Norwegian Lutheran Church" apparently stands in the most friendly relations to all Lutherans except those who formerly fraternized with the Norwegian Synod. It is a matter of frequent occurrence that members of this church body fraternize even with the Reformed without being made object of church discipline. This is certainly as far removed from the position held by the old Norwegian Synod as it possible can be.

Lay preaching activity is carried on in the Norwegian Lutheran Church, pretty much in the same way as among the former opponents of the Norwegian Synod. True, a few individuals have voiced their protest against the practice, but there is no indication of any general opposition. Concern for the preservation of the sovereignty of the local church has ceased; they seem to have no more use for a clear proviso, stating that the resolutions of the church body have only advisory significance.

It is true that a series of theses on important doctrines has been adopted, in which the second fundamental principle of the Reformation seems to have been adhered to. But even these theses are sadly defective. A serious fault is the lack of definite anti-theses rejecting the false doctrines which were formerly advocated by the opponents. In the theses on election, the so-called second form, which designates faith and perseverance as the "necessary prerequisite" of election, is correlated with the definition found in Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions; and unreserved acknowledgment to this presentation is required of all the members of the Church. While the expression, "The good conduct of man," which was used by the opponents in the controversy in the eighties, has been rejected, the idea which it was intended to convey is still preserved, in the expression, "man's feeling of responsibility when face to face with the acceptance of grace." Yes, the definition of the doctrine of Election given by the Formula of Concord is beclouded by the misleading reference to the Confessions which is made in paragraph 3 of "Opgjør."

And yet, what would it have availed, even if these theses had been entirely correct, as long as all parties entered the union with the understanding that their former doctrinal position remains intact? They continue to teach and preach as they did before. The view on Absolution formerly held by the Hauge Synod has even been officially recognized. That there is the greatest confusion in their conception of the gospel and of the doctrine of Justification by faith alone, crops out continually at the circuit meetings in all parts of the church body.

Chiliastic errors, which have been definitely rejected by the Norwegian Synod in its early history, are held and advocated by many of the members. In the course of the discussions, Chiliasm has been considered an open question.

The establishing of Christian day schools has found no place on the future program of the "Norwegian Lutheran Church." The schools that were operating when the union was effected have all since then been discontinued. The official organs of the church have repeatedly branded all attempts to establish such schools as futile. The whole matter is now no doubt by all considered a back number.

Testimony against lodgery has almost ceased. Several articles on the subject have been refused publication by the official organs of the church. Congregations having a paragraph against lodge membership in their constitutions have one after another had the paragraphs removed, with the result that not only have persons with lodge connections been accepted, but old members have quite generally joined the lodges.

There is hardly anyone now who dares to make the claim publicly, that the Norwegian Lutheran Church holds the same position in doctrine and practice as the old Norwegian Synod. The great majority of that church body would, no doubt, greatly resent it if such a claim were made.

### **The Reorganized Norwegian Synod**

We, on the contrary, have joined together for the purpose of continuing the work of the Norwegian Synod, on the old foundation and according to the old principles. No one can therefore justly dispute our right to be considered the logical successors to the old Norwegian Synod, as long as we want to stand firmly on the foundation so nobly laid by that venerable church body. We are few in numbers, to be sure, and sadly deficient in many of the gifts that are generally considered essential to success. It is not to be expected, therefore, that we can accomplish as much by our work as might have been accomplished had the old Norwegian Synod continued intact. We do not want to pass harsh judgments on those who have parted from us. They will have to bear their own burdens before God's judgment. We shall have sufficient burdens of our own. It is a wonderful comfort, however, to know that God will not require more than that we faithfully use the gifts which He has entrusted to us. This, however, He does require of us, that we use these gifts faithfully and diligently. We have received a glorious heritage; let us guard it carefully, and labor zealously that as many others as possible may come to profit by it. May the Lord grant us willing hearts to make whatever sacrifices necessary to perform the great task which He in mercy has entrusted to us. Let us humbly, yet faithfully and confidently, continue to testify to the glorious truths for which our fathers contended and suffered; let us willingly endure the hardships that are sure to come when we earnestly and faithfully contend for these truths, and we may be certain that the Lord will bless our efforts.

Soli Deo Gloria.