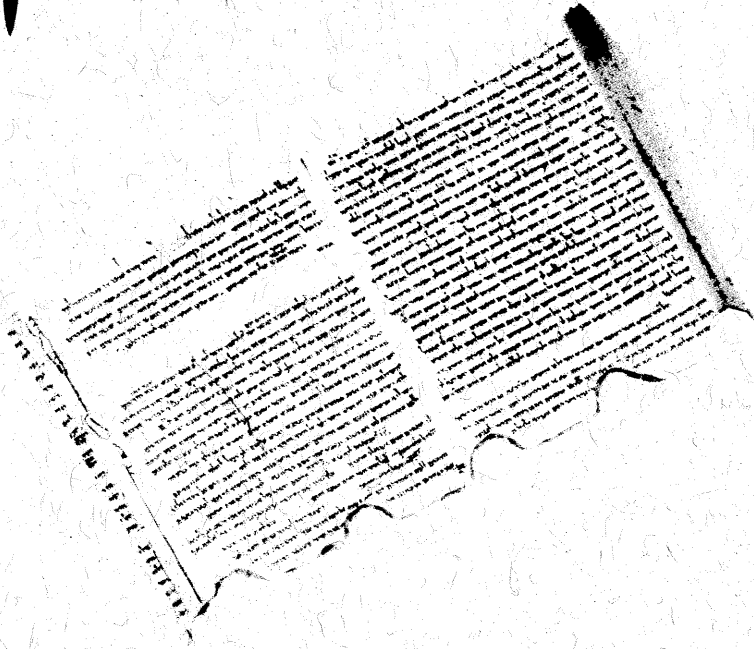




Volume XIII, No. 3

Spring

1973



The  
**Lutheran**  
**Synod**  
**Quarterly**

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LUTHERAN SYNOD QUARTERLY

Theological Journal of the  
Evangelical Lutheran Synod

Edited by the Theological Faculty of  
Bethany Lutheran Seminary  
Mankato, Minnesota

Editor: J.B. Madson

Managing Editor: M.H. Otto

Book Review Editor: G.E. Reichwald

Subscription Price: 1 year \$3.00  
2 years 5.55  
3 years 8.40

Address all subscriptions and all correspondence to:

LUTHERAN SYNOD QUARTERLY  
Bethany Lutheran Seminary  
734 Marsh Street  
Mankato, Minnesota 56001

# THE AGONY OF THE CONFESSOR - HISTORICALLY CONSIDERED

by

N.S. Tjernagel, PH.D.

Part I. The Agony: 1517-1546

## *Introduction*

Men of God have long known the agonies that Christians must endure for the sake of the truth. John the Baptist, preacher of repentance, was beheaded. Stephen was stoned to death. There is little reason to doubt that all the apostles, except St. John, were honored wearers of the martyr's crown. From these beginnings the number of Christian martyrs in the era of the New Testament is legion. They made a choice between life and death, -life everlasting or eternal death.

One of them, Dr. Robert Barnes, was burned at the stake at Smithfield, London, on July 30, 1540. His confession of faith, made at the stake, was published in Germany with a preface by Martin Luther in which Barnes was referred to by the Reformer as his English friend, "This holy martyr, St. Robert." Luther added: "This Doctor, I say, we knew very well and it is an especial joy to us to hear, that our good pious table companion and guest of our home, has been so graciously

\* Free Conference, Bethel Lutheran Church  
Westmont, Illinois, May 15,16, 1973

called upon by God to shed his blood, for His Son's sake, and to become a holy martyr. Thanks, praise and glory be to the Father of our dear Lord Jesus Christ, that He has permitted us to see again, as in the beginning, the times wherein Christians who have eaten and drunk with us are taken before our eyes, and from our eyes and sides, to become martyrs, that is, to go to heaven and become saints."

A Christian who could speak thus of the death of one of his friends could scarcely have been overwhelmed and desolated by the prospect of his own martyrdom. When Martin Luther made his courageous affirmation at the Diet of Worms in 1521 he was sure that his own martyrdom was at hand. It didn't matter. He had his faith and he had his calling. No personal danger could persuade him to be unfaithful to His God or to his vocation.

But it was one thing for his enemies to consider him a heretic. How did he respond to the heresies of others? The answer to that question is to review his entire career as a reformer. But how did he react to the false teachings of his fellow teachers at the University of Wittenberg? How did he deal with his friends when they erred? We take his activity as the Reformer of the Medieval Church for granted. How did he react to faithlessness to the Word of God when it occurred within the Church reformed, within the circle of his friends and colleagues at the University, with the Saxon court? We who find ourselves in the turmoil of the deteriorating orthodoxy of a Lutheranism that is losing its footing on the paths of revealed truth may well look to Martin Luther for instruction and assistance. He and his spiritual followers who remained steadfast and rebuilt the temple of truth in the Formula of Concord may well assist us as we face the same kinds of error that then threatened the very future of the Lutheran

Church. We are still the possessors of the Book of Concord, the enduring monument to their integrity, their adherence to the truths of Holy Scripture, and their determination to pass the truths of the apostolic faith on to succeeding generations.

It has often been said that no religious structure, decayed and degenerating, has ever returned to its pristine health and vigor. But surely the collapse and the regeneration of Lutheran orthodoxy between the years 1546 and 1580 is an exception to that rule. What happened in those years is one of the unique wonders of the history of the Christian Church. If we, today, find our own Lutheran Church deteriorating in the same miasma that infected it in the generation after Luther's death we should by no means be disconsolate. We have in hand the same remedies as they. We are certain that the means employed by honest theologians to restore the Lutheran faith in the 16th century are available and effective for us today. We may not be able to bring all of 20th century Lutheranism to its original purity and strength. We can assure that a remnant of Christians will contend effectively for the faith, and we can make certain that the old foundations remain firm and strong. God has given us His Holy Word. The Holy Spirit will continue to enlighten us in our effort to find and to keep the truths revealed to mankind in the Bible. We stand on the shoulders of giants, the heroic men who produced the enormously valuable documents that comprise the Lutheran Confessions.

We shall deal first with the agonies of the confessors in Luther's lifetime from 1517-1546, then with the agonies of the confessors from 1546-1580, the generation after Luther's death, and finally apply the lessons learned to the agonies of the confessors in the Lutheran Church in the 20th century.

Since our present conflict is not in the context of Christianity as a whole, or with enemies outside the church, but rather with our own brothers in the Lutheran Church, we shall look first at occasions for conflict within the most intimate circle of Lutherans, the members of the faculty of the University of Wittenberg itself. Staupitz, Carlstadt, Agricola, and Melanchthon will serve as case studies in this inquiry.

*John Staupitz ( -1524)*

Among the intimate friends and academic colleagues of Martin Luther at the University of Wittenberg surely the first place, if not the highest rank, must be accorded to John Staupitz, to whom Luther customarily referred as "My dearest Father". Staupitz received his Doctorate in Biblical Theology from the University of Tübingen in 1500, was elected Vicar General of the German Congregation of Reformed Augustinians in 1503 and soon thereafter assisted Frederick the Wise in organizing and securing faculty for the University of Wittenberg, serving both as Academic Dean and Professor of Biblical Theology. He was a deeply religious and sincerely pious man, thoroughly steeped in the finest strains of Medieval mysticism. We should remember Staupitz with gratitude if for no other reason than that he brought Luther to Wittenberg, first as a visiting lecturer, and later turned over to the future Reformer his own chair in Biblical Theology.

In the first years of Luther's theological development Staupitz was both academic superior and father confessor. He comforted Luther when a deep consciousness of sin and guilt assailed him. He assured the young teacher and monk of God's forgiveness and pointed him constantly toward the cross of Christ saying that "You must look to the wounds of Christ, and nowhere else, to find the solution of your anxieties." Luther

was later to say that "if it had not been for Staupitz I should have sunk in hell."

In the final analysis it was the love and spiritual concern which Staupitz gave Luther, not instruction in theology, that was the primary contribution which Staupitz rendered to Luther's life and development. Staupitz, for all of his doctoral degree, was never more than a simple and pious mystic who could not understand the depth of Luther's concern over sin any more than he could understand the theological synthesis that was developing from Luther's study of the Word. At length Staupitz threw up his hands in despair over the religious conflict and accepted appointment to the quiet life as abbot of the Benedictine monastery of St. Peter at Salzburg. He could not understand the meaning or the purpose of the strife that had been engendered by Martin Luther's theology. He died a lonesome and dejected man in 1524.

But Luther never forgot the kindness, the love, and the compassionate pastoral care he had received from Staupitz. Saddened by Staupitz' return to monastic life under the old theology Luther wrote in 1521: "Truly your submission has saddened me not a little, and has shown me that you are different from that Staupitz who was the herald of grace and the cross." (Smith 108-Preserved Smith, The Life and Letters of Martin Luther, New York, Barnes and Noble, 1911, reprinted 1968). Two years later Luther wrote to Staupitz again rebuking him for not writing and said: "Even if I have lost your favor and good will, it would not be right for me to forget you or be ungrateful to you, for it was through you that the light of the gospel first began to shine out of darkness into my heart." (L.W. 49,48- Luther's Works, Philadelphia and St. Louis, Fortress Press and Concordia, 1955-). What we should note here is that Luther did not turn against his old friends in anger or hatred. Luther only expressed his regret over Staupitz'

decision to turn back to the church as it had been and said: "It will be a miracle if you do not fall into the danger of denying Christ." (L.W. 49,49) The letter closed in the spirit of love that Staupitz had once shown to Luther. "I shall certainly not cease wishing and praying that you will be turned away from your cardinal and the papacy as I am, and as certainly you yourself once were. May the Lord hear me and take you to himself, together with us." (L.W. 49,50).

#### *Andrew Carlstadt (1477-1541)*

The history of the Lutheran Reformation knows no figure so strange, so unpredictable, so tragically inconsistent as Andrew Carlstadt. Gordon Rupp describes him as "Restless, blending unusual rashness with strange timidity, always, and wherever he went a troublemaker, he was a kind of poltergeist, and it is no accident that the most reliable ghost stories of the Reformation center around him. He recalls the Scriptural verdict on Reuben, 'unstable as water, he shall not excell', but it was not for want of trying." (In *Luther Today*, Decorah, Iowa. The Luther College Press, 1957, p.110. The citation is from the lecture "Luther and Carlstadt" pages 107-129. Prof. Rupp's interest in Carlstadt is brilliantly presented in more extensive form in another biographical sketch, pages 49-153, in Patterns of Reformation, Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1969). Here Prof. Rupp describes Carlstadt as "that not unknown phenomenon, the 'coming man' who somehow fails to emerge, the enfant terrible who refuses to grow up and in whom originality turns to eccentricity." (p.11).

Carlstadt had joined the Wittenberg faculty at the age of twenty-eight, three years after the founding of the university in 1502. In 1510 he became professor of



theology and archdeacon of the Castle Church. In 1512 he was dean of the faculty and presided over the ceremonies in which Martin Luther was awarded a doctorate in theology. Ambitious for the office of Provost, a position requiring a degree in law, he hustled off to a diploma mill in Italy where he added a doctorate in civil law to the doctorate in theology which he already had earned at Cologne.

Carlstadt's interest in St. Augustine endeared him to Luther, who delighted in his exposition of Augustine and said that here was not "the paradoxes of Cicero, but our own Carlstadt, nay rather Augustine . . . . Blessed be God who once again bids light to shine out of darkness." (Patterns, Rupp, p.57) Carlstadt's lectures On the Spirit and the Letter of St. Augustine, published in 1518, was also warmly commended by Luther. Carlstadt and Luther were agreed on the danger of permitting the intrusion of scholastic logic into biblical theology.

It appears that, despite his seniority on the faculty, Carlstadt accepted the position Luther had earned as the accepted leader of the theological faculty. Yet it was taken for granted that, when the Leipzig debate of 1519 was projected, Carlstadt would take the leading role in the debate. The story of Carlstadt's bumbling performance and Luther's effective participation at the end of the debate is well known. So also is the fact that Luther emerged the stronger of the two proponents of Lutheran theology. Luther felt sorry for his friend and dedicated his commentary on Galatians to him. He wrote to the Saxon Court saying of Carlstadt: "Treat him gently, he has had a rough handling from Eck." (Patterns, Rupp, 75)

Carlstadt's continued preaching of Luther's theology of the cross and his emphasis on the authority of Holy Scripture, "the majesty of Holy Writ", as he called it, resulted in the addition of his name to the papal bull

Exsurge Domini of June 15, 1520, which excommunicated Luther. Not long later the university provost died and Carlstadt was not appointed to the position. He took it with reasonable grace, because, after the Diet of Worms and Luther's hasty exile, Carlstadt stepped into the role of university leadership with great enthusiasm.

"Luther has started the Reformation," he thought "now let us get on with it." He married a sixteen-year old girl, celebrated the Lord's Supper in both kinds against the elector's positive prohibition, called the presence of images and pictures in the churches a sin, and initiated the bedlam of destruction and violence in Wittenberg that resulted in Luther's precipitate return to the city. Order was restored as a result of a series of eight sermons preached by Luther on successive days. In all this Carlstadt's name was not once mentioned. But it must have been a terrible humiliation for him. The Court suspended his privilege of preaching in the parish church and confiscated some of his writings. At the university he was demoted, by his account, to the giving of lectures on Zechariah. He bought a farm, though still retaining his university post and its stipend, dressed like a peasant and answered to the name "neighbor Andrew". He attached himself to the town church at Orlamunde and filled the pastoral office vacated in his favor by Konrad Glitzsch.

Very popular as a pastor, he continued his writing and achieved a considerable following. A continuing embarrassment to Luther and his colleagues at Wittenberg, he lashed out at the pretensions of academic degrees and made the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers apply to an equality of faculty and students. But worse was to come as he urged the development of a lay-ministry and a worker-priesthood.

Luther was becoming more and more troubled by the "monstrosities" that were flowing from Carlstadt's pen. But the most Luther would do about it, apart from rejecting the errors that were being broadcast, was to say that, if worst came to worst, he would have to "pray against Carlstadt". (L.W. 49, 73) Duke John chose to compel Carlstadt to return to his university colleagues. When Carlstadt refused the summons, Luther was sent on a preaching tour which included Orlamunde, where he found enthusiastic loyalty to Carlstadt and aberrations worse than anyone had imagined. The Saxon court had had enough and Carlstadt was summarily banished and arrangements were made to permit his pregnant wife to follow later. Carlstadt went to Switzerland where the Swiss, much to their later regret, welcomed Martin Luther's thorn in the flesh.

Back in Germany later and flirting with Thomas Muenzer and the revolutionaries in the days preceding the Peasants' Revolt, Luther saved his former friend from the fate of his executed associates in the revolution by taking Carlstadt and his family into his own home and securing permission for the exiled professor to remain in Saxony on condition that he remain quiet.

But Andrew Carlstadt could no more keep quiet than the wind and the wave. He returned to Switzerland in time for the Marburg Colloquy in 1529, to which he was summarily denied admission. His response was a support of Swiss theology and a rejection of Luther's doctrine of the real presence. This won him a chair in theology at the University of Basle. It was a restless tenure and the authorities were not desolate when he died of the plague in 1541.

The Lutheran Reformation suffered much from the intransigent and irresponsible conduct of Carlstadt. He was an embarrassment to Luther, yet the reformer hoped against hope that he would come to his senses. He said,

in 1527, "We have thus far been holding Carlstadt in our bosom with sufficient kindness with the reasonable hope that he might return to the true way; but day by day this poor man becomes more hardened." (L.W. 49, 179)

*John Agricola (1494-1566)*

Another reformer illustrative of the internal problems of the Lutheran Reformation before 1546 was John Agricola of Eisleben. A student of Martin Luther, he was awarded the Master of Arts degree at Wittenberg in 1518 and soon distinguished himself by publishing some of Luther's lectures from his own student notes. He accompanied Luther to the Leipzig Disputation in 1519 and later worked as a reformer at Eisleben. In 1536 he was appointed to the faculty at Wittenberg.

Agricola was one of the very few personal friends to whom Luther wrote while he was at the Wartburg in 1521. Luther's letter included warm greetings and best wishes to Agricola's wife whose first childbirth was imminent. Other letters reflect the Reformer's high regard for Agricola. The first hint of difficulty in Agricola's theology is found in a letter from Luther dated Sept. 11, 1528. The letter is here reproduced in its entirety because it illustrates so well Luther's spirit in dealing with heresy and heretics. (L.W. 49, 212f)

To my brother, venerable in Christ, Master John Agricola, faithful Instructor of young people at Eisleben.

Grace and peace! Someone has recently told me a story concerning you Agricola. He was so sure about it that he would not stop affirming the story until I said I would write to you and investigate the matter. The story goes that you are starting to affirm

and fight for a new doctrine, namely, that faith can exist without good works. He said you presented this idea and tried to sell it with great rhetoric and ingenuity, and even by using Greek words. I, who have been taught by the harassing of Satan to be fearful even in safe matters, am writing now not only because of my promise to that man, but also to admonish you in all seriousness to watch Satan and your own flesh. For you know that no protection, no defense, is sufficient against the snares of Satan unless we are under the constant and eternal protection of heaven. There is such poison and danger in these snares that a great fire can arise from a spark, or, as Paul used to say, a little yeast leavens the whole lump. Therefore we should not play around or experiment with such an important thing, no matter how slightly, since this enemy usually penetrates the smallest cracks, and then will do no less damage than if he had broken in where all doors stand open.

Please accept this warning with good will, since you know from what kind of heart it comes. And further please report to me on the status of this matter. For what was further from my mind than that Oecolampadius, Rhegius, and the others would fall? And what don't I now fear, even from my most intimate friends here? So it is not strange at all that I fear for you, with whom I should least want to disagree.

Farewell in the Lord, and greet your Else with her cluster of grapes (Psalm 128, 3). The Lord has taken my little Elizabeth that she may not see any evil.

September 11, 1528

Yours, Martin Luther.

Apparently Luther received the assurance he desired because a friendly correspondence ensued between the two men. In 1537 Luther nominated Agricola for a position on the University faculty. When Agricola and his

family moved to Wittenberg, Luther was absent at Smalkalden. The new professor and his family lived in Luther's home for six weeks while housing was secured for them. Agricola discharged some of Luther's university and preaching duties during this time.

Installation into his professorship apparently gave Agricola illusions of grandeur, because he lost no time taking his antinomian views out of moth balls and elaborating them publicly. A paragraph from the Table Talks (L.W. 54, 233) reflects Luther's chagrin over the fact that Agricola had been saying that "the law should not be preached in church because it does not justify." Later in the same year Luther said of Agricola: "My best friends want to drive me under foot and throw the gospel in confusion . . . . How painful it is to lose a good friend, one who is cherished with a great love: I have had him at my table, he has laughed with me, and yet he opposes me behind my back . . . . To reject law, without which neither church nor civil authority nor any individual can exist, is to kick the bottom out of the barrel." (L.W. 54, 248)

Luther was forced to preach publicly against the antinomianism of Agricola and he issued a series of propositions for debate. In the meantime the Elector, Duke John Frederick, closed the pulpits of Wittenberg to Agricola. Agricola quickly gave assurances of his orthodoxy and the ban against his preaching was lifted. He immediately returned to a defense of his views, this time buttressed by some of Luther's own statements on the law. Luther saw Agricola's statements early in 1539 and the whole of the Reformer's character is revealed in his plea to his friend: "O Agricola, are you such a man? May God forgive you for being so bitter and thinking that I am your enemy. God is witness that I loved you and yet do. Why don't you come out openly and not fight me so treacherously?" (Smith 283)

All this while the antinomian heresies were spreading, though there was yet no open breach between Luther and Agricola. Several attempts toward reconciliation were made. In early 1540 Luther invited Agricola and other theologians to a banquet at his home. It was a show of friendship that failed to move the intransigent Agricola. He soon brought a formal complaint against Luther to the Elector of Saxony charging Luther with making false representations about what he, Agricola, had taught. Before the theologians commissioned to investigate the case could come to a conclusion, Agricola flew the coop and moved to another ecclesiastical and political jurisdiction, Brandenburg. Luther was dismayed at Agricola's cop-out.

Agricola's subsequent career justifies Luther's characterization of the man as a chameleon. He had sincerely believed that the Word would have triumphed and that in the end Agricola would have been brought to the light of truth.

*Philip Melanchthon (1497-1560)*

The creative partnership of Philip Melanchthon and Martin Luther reached its highest level of productivity in the period of the Diet of Augsburg in 1530. Philip had joined the Wittenberg faculty in 1518 at the age of 21. A brilliant humanistic scholar in the best traditions of the Renaissance, his special field of competence was Greek. He was to mature into outstanding competence in the field of education, where his talent in curriculum development and revision earned him the designation Preceptor of Germany. His linguistic skills and his other scholarly gifts were to support the reformatory activities of Martin Luther and to enhance the reputation of Wittenberg University. Luther and Melanchthon were to be more than faculty colleagues; they became close personal friends.

The religious issue at the Diet of Augsburg was the reconciliation of Lutheran and Roman Catholic theology. The Marburg Colloquy of the previous year had appeared to close the door to reconciliation between the Lutherans and the sacramentaries of Switzerland and south Germany. The Lutherans delegated to Melanchthon the task of writing a position paper for presentation to the Diet that would make the most acceptable appeal possible to the Roman Catholics while being explicit in its rejection of the Swiss theology. For this reason Melanchthon tread as lightly as possible in differences that separated Lutherans from Roman Catholics and made as much as possible of the errors of Zwingli and his followers.

As things turned out, of course, the Diet of Augsburg did not result in reconciliation. It did give the Lutherans an enduringly significant symbol of unity. For a long time thereafter the Wittenberg Lutherans were to be known as "they of the Augsburg Confession."

The Confession itself was, from beginning to end, the product of Melanchthon's mind and pen. It revealed the depth of Melanchthon's competence as a theologian. But it also revealed him as a true son of the Renaissance. The irenic spirit of the Augsburg Confession was an admirable example of Renaissance intellectualism in its peacemaking role, a character seen so conspicuously in the writings of Erasmus, the darling of the Renaissance humanists. (We may anticipate, parenthetically, at this point, that this passion for peacemaking was the ultimate doom of a movement that took no concrete and effective position on issues. Its paralysis of action led to the ultimate collapse of Renaissance Humanism. We recall the characteristic cynicism of Erasmus who said: "I haven't a drop of martyr's blood in my veins." Compare these words with Martin Luther's comment: "Erasmus tries to walk on eggs without breaking them" and you have the whole profound distinction



between Luther's program of reform and the sterile intellectualism of the humanists.)

Irenic or no (if we may emerge from our long parenthesis) Luther accepted the Augsburg Confession as representing his own theological position. He acknowledged that Melanchthon had written from the authority of Holy Scripture and not as a mere disciple of Luther. He was content that Melanchthon had embodied the truth in his confession. Luther might say of the Augsburg Confession that he could not tread so lightly, but it didn't matter. The Reformer accepted Melanchthon's words as his own confession.

He had some reservations later because when he saw the document after its official reading, Luther wrote to Melanchthon, June 29, 1530: "I have received your Apology (the Augs. Conf.) and cannot understand what you mean when you ask what and how much should be yielded beyond what has been done, unless I see the proofs they proffer, and clearer Bible passages than I have hitherto seen . . . As I have always written, I am prepared to yield everything to them if we are but given liberty to teach the gospel. I cannot yield anything that militates against the Gospel." (H.I. 19. F. Bente, Historical Introductions to the Book of Concord, St. Louis, Concordia, first published in Concordia Triglotta, 1921, reprint of Historical Introductions, 1965.)

Luther's personal reservation about the Augsburg Confession surfaced even more sharply a month later in a letter to his friend and colleague, Justus Jonas: "Now I see the purpose of those questions (on the part of the papists) whether you had any further articles to present. The devil still lives, and he has noticed very well that your Apology (Augs. Conf.) steps softly, and that it has veiled the Articles of Purgatory, the Adoration of Saints, and especially that of the Anti-Christ, the pope." (H.I. 20) These matters would be

dealt with later in Melanchthon's Apology of the Augsburg Confession and Luther's Smalkald Articles.

Martin Luther's qualms about the Augsburg Confession itself might better have been directed toward the author of the confession. No sooner had the confession been officially accepted by the princes than Melanchthon, considering the document his own, began the process of revising it, all oblivious of the fact that it was now the property of those who had accepted it. It may be said that revisions were often made for the sake of greater clarity, but all too often Melanchthon was sensitive to the winds of theological change and his revisions often were substantive and changed the original meaning and intention of the confession. Before long Calvinists, and even Roman Catholics were ridiculing the Lutherans with the charge that there were as many versions of the Augsburg Confession as there were theologians, and that the Lutherans were thoroughly confused about their own doctrine.

The Elector of Saxony remonstrated with Melanchthon for arrogating to himself the right to tamper with the confession and Luther said: "Philip, Philip, you are not doing right in changing the Augsburg Confession so often; for it is not your book, but the church's book." Luther's affection for Melanchthon remained so strong, however, that the changes made in the confession did not precipitate a break between the relations of the two. The conclusions of F. Bente, the author of the Historical Introductions, with respect to Melanchthon's changes are stated thus:

True, in making all these changes, Melanchthon did not introduce any direct heresy into the Variata. He did, however, in the interest of his irenic and unionistic policy and dogmatic vacillations, render ambiguous the clear sense of the Augustana. By his changes he opened the door and cleared the way, as it were, for his deviations in the direction of

Synergism, Calvinism (Lord's Supper) and Romanism (good works are necessary to salvation). Nor was Melanchthon a man who did not know what he was doing when he made alterations. Whenever he weakened and trimmed the doctrines he had once confessed, he did so to satisfy definite interests of his own, interests self-evidently not subservient to, but conflicting with, the clear expression and bold confession of the old Lutheran truth. (H.I. 26)

Luther did have a premonition of things to come. In a sermon preached in his last year he warned:

Up to this time you have heard the real, true word; now beware of your own thoughts and wisdom. The devil will kindle the light of reason and lead you away from the faith, as he did the Anabaptists and the Sacramentarians . . . I see clearly that, if God does not give us faithful preachers and ministers, the devil will tear our church to pieces by the fanatics, and will not cease until he has finished. Such is plainly his object. If he cannot accomplish it through the pope and the emperor, he will do it through those who are now in doctrinal agreement with us. Therefore pray earnestly that God may preserve the Word to you, for things will come to a dreadful pass. (H.I. 93)

### *Luther and His Heretics*

We have called attention to Staupitz, Carlstadt, Agricola, and Melanchthon as case histories in Luther's relations with his erring friends and colleagues. What must impress us is Luther's infinite patience with them and the depth of his affection for them even when they were misled by others or by their own defective knowledge and understanding of Holy Scripture. Luther grasped fully the meaning of the Church Militant. But the enemy

was Satan, not his erring brothers. Luther did not take pleasure in the discovery of false doctrine, but where he found it he resorted to prayer, to entreaty, and to instruction so that, at the very least, he might be instrumental in preserving the truth in his friends.

Luther's great spirit of patience is reflected in a letter written to one of his friends in 1522. He said: "Everything has to be exposed to the Word, but hearts must be driven slowly like Jacob's flock, so that they take up the Word of God voluntarily, and when they have finally become strong, do everything. Perhaps it is unnecessary to tell you this because you know this already; but it was the solicitude of love that prompted it." (L.W. 48, 402) No one truly knows Luther who does not know his patience and his "solicitude of love." His tender letters to Staupitz and many expressions of love toward Melancthon, both men in many respects a disappointment to Luther, are the measure of his capacity for patience and love toward his friends.

It was a capacity that was part and parcel of his great ability as a teacher. He knew better, either as teacher or as theologian, than to assume the role of a magisterial God and warned against attempting "to become like God, but to fight that innate ambition to be like God, which was planted in us in paradise by the devil. This doesn't do us any good. It drove Adam from paradise, and it alone drives us away, and drives peace away from us. In summary: we are to be men and not God; it will not be otherwise, or eternal anxiety and affliction will be our reward." (L.W. 49, 337)

I know of no instance in which he demanded agreement simply on the ground that he had spoken. He never wished to be considered anyone's authority or to be accepted because he, a theologian, had expressed an opinion. He did not personally exercise doctrinal

discipline. It was the Elector who banished Carlstadt and forbade the preaching of Agricola. He even advised the Princes that, so long as the revolutionary Thomas Muenzer did not cause civil disturbances, he should be free to preach whatever he pleased. He did not use force to convince others of biblical truth. He believed that civil government ought to take action against disruptive blasphemies but said: "No one is to be compelled to accept the faith and the gospel." (L.W. 49, 233)

Luther's patience as well as his eagerness to resolve doctrinal disputes is often manifest in his willingness to make acceptable concessions to opponents in debate. He discussed possible concessions on many occasions. Sometimes, when his generosity was taken advantage of, he would have occasion to regret concessions previously made. His guiding principle, however, was clear: "I am willing to concede all things (to the opponents) if only the gospel alone is permitted to remain free with us." (L.W. 49, 333)

Luther had been trained in the atmosphere of Medieval scholastic debates in which a chivalrous give and take was the common order of things. He was not, as many think, a hard-nosed and dogmatic theologian who made up his own mind and refused to listen to others. He warned against acting and speaking "as if our reason or ability could accomplish anything without God's power and aid . . . . Nothing is improved by much judging and back-biting, but only by humble prayer and a humble unanimity." (L.W. 49, 209) In a letter to Erasmus in 1524 Luther admitted that he had been "prod-  
ded into writing sharply . . . against those who are obstinate and without restraint." Despite these lapses, he added, "I think that my mildness and gentleness with sinners and ungodly people, however insane and wicked they may be, is sufficiently attested to not only by the witness of my conscience, but also by the experience of many people." (L.W. 49, 79)

Luther's magnanimous love for his erring friends and his patience in instructing them, however, never permitted him to indulge in any lapse in his own determination to learn and teach the Word in its total and uncompromising truth. There might be occasion for debate and even concession in the manner in which the truth was stated. Limited objectives might be tolerated in the practical applications of truth to worship and Christian life. Time, and yet more time, might be allowed for growth in knowledge and the development of a true confessional grasp of Christian knowledge. But when all that is allowed, in the end Luther permitted no one to forget that God's Word is God's Word and that no human right existed for either adding to it or subtracting from it. That did not mean that his understanding of every passage of Scripture was totally correct and subject to no challenge. His commentaries are full of references to the opinions of others and the admission that they might be right and he wrong.

But of the clear and essential message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ the Scriptures were crystal clear and subject to no challenge. There could be no room for debate on the issue of God's plan of salvation and the collateral truth that no merit of man avails for salvation even in the slightest degree.

While Luther watched and waited at the Coburg during the Diet of Augsburg he wrote, in a letter to John Agricola words that we may well apply to our own situation today:

May the Lord Jesus who has sent you all to Augsburg as his confessors and servants, and for whom you offer even your necks, be with you all. May he, through his Spirit, grant you the testimony of the certainty of faith to know and not to doubt that you are his confessors. Thus faith will quicken and comfort you, because you are ambassadors of a great king. These are trustworthy words. Amen.

June 30, 1530

Yours, Martin Luther (L.W. 49, 342)

*Introduction*

Martin Luther, the kind, generous, and stout-hearted reformer was laid to rest in the castle church at Wittenberg on February 22, 1546. He left an example of faithfulness to Holy Scripture and a literary monument that could leave no doubt as to his religious faith. He left an example of total commitment to the proposition that God's Word is the truth and he left a scholarly methodology for coming to know and understand that truth. He left a university and corps of scholars who knew his attitudes and had been trained in the professional atmosphere of pious and learned scholarship. He left wide ranging examples for the practical application of biblical truth to the necessities of daily life. On the surface all might have seemed to be well with the fledgling Lutheran Church.

But all was not well with the Lutherans. Within eight months the leading Lutheran prince, Duke John Frederick of Electoral Saxony, had faced the Emperor Charles V and been forced to surrender his rule and abandon Wittenberg and the university to forces hostile to the Lutheran faith as developed by Martin Luther. Fourteen months after Luther's death the emperor had defeated the Lutheran princes of the Smalkaldic League and placed its most dynamic leaders, Duke John Frederick of Saxony and Philip of Hesse, in chains and under the sentence of death. Martin Luther's wife and children, as well as the university faculty, were forced to leave Wittenberg in precipitate flight. The university ceased to be the haven of Lutheran orthodoxy and the political clout of the Lutheran princes was completely dissipated. Charles appeared to be in complete control of the entire Holy Roman Empire.

That there should have been major political adjustments affecting the Lutheran princes who long had been

a thorn in the emperor's side is understandable. What is incomprehensible is the debacle of Lutheran theology and the Lutheran Church in Germany. We can look ahead to the restoration of true Lutheranism thirty years later; but how can we account for its complete collapse in the intervening years? The Lutherans had in hand all the writings of Luther and fresh memories of his leadership. They had all the confessional documents that were to go into the Book of Concord in 1580 except one, the Formula of Concord of 1577. Why, then, this utter collapse of Lutheran unity?

One thing we know. The leadership and personal influence of Martin Luther was gone. The authority of his comprehensive knowledge of the Bible and his depth of understanding of biblical theology had been a constant factor in the Lutheran Church while he lived. More than one of the theologians of his age had found that Luther's profound knowledge of Holy Scripture was always more than a match for their support of erroneous interpretations. One after the other of them had been compelled to bow before his unsurpassed biblical exegesis and the wisdom of his practical application of God's Word.

Beyond all those things, important as they were, was Martin Luther's magnanimous love for all of his own students, as well as for all other serious students of God's Word. Never authoritarian in debate or in demeanor, his purpose was never more nor less than the honor of guiding his friends toward a maturing understanding of the Bible. When his students differed with him, he was concerned but always patient. Unless deliberate perversity or reckless disregard of the Word moved his fellows, he had all the patience that was necessary to see a problem through to its solution.

Now, in 1546, that leadership, so wonderfully framed in love, that paternal patience, that greatness of spirit was gone. Now the humanism of the Renaissance



could to its way in biblical interpretation; and theology once more could come under the blight of philosophical rationalization. And, alas, another danger was now at hand, danger from the right. Now the church was also to be faced by the menace of theologians who would try to outdo Luther in orthodoxy, men whose exaggeration of Lutheran principles would lead theology to the extremities of irrationality and futility.

*The Augsburg and Leipzig Interims of 1548*

When Charles V defeated the Lutherans in 1547 he believed that he had within his grasp the realization of his fondest dream, the restoration of religious unity to Germany. The political power of the Lutheran princes was shattered and Martin Luther was dead. When the emperor came to Wittenberg after his victory, he paid his respects to Luther at the castle church. He had been asked to disinter and burn the bones of the reformer. He responded, tacitly recognizing that he had not been able to put Luther down, "I fight the living, not the dead."

The instrument for the restoration of religion that was supported by Charles, not by the pope, was the Augsburg Interim, proclaimed under imperial authority at Augsburg on May 15, 1548. One of the authors of this curious document was John Agricola, who styled himself the reformer of all Germany and said, after the manner of the Lutheran Forum, that he had "flung the windows wide open for the gospel; that he had reformed the pope and made the emperor a Lutheran; that a golden time had now arrived, for the gospel would be preached in all Europe." Giddy with delight, he boasted of the thousand crowns he had received from the emperor and his brother Ferdinand for his great achievement. (H.I. 95)

The document was called an interim because it was to be binding only until the Council of Trent, then in

session, would make a final and binding religious settlement. The Augsburg Interim made minor concessions to the Lutherans; priests might marry and communion be celebrated in both kinds, but fundamentally it was a Roman Catholic statement. The doctrine of justification by faith was clearly rejected.

Charles was to find that it was one thing to win a battle against the disorganized armies of a Smalkald League in disarray. It was quite another thing to ram the Augsburg Interim down the throats of German Lutherans. The decree soon became a dead letter, and efforts toward enforcement sputtered out in futility. The emperor was helpless to do anything but increase the severity of the prison life of his captives, the Saxon Elector, Duke John, and Philip of Hesse.

Melanchthon disapproved of the Augsburg Interim, but he, the man who should have been leading the Lutherans in their peril, refused to speak against the Interim in spite of the pleas of many faithful Lutherans. He was, however, willing to assume responsibility for the writing of a compromise document published on December 22, 1548, and known as the Leipzig Interim. In this document an effort was made to salvage the doctrine of justification in exchange for the acceptance of Roman Catholic ceremony and ritual. The man who had been the closest to Martin Luther had sold out to the enemy in a manner no less infamous than the treachery of the Lutheran Prince Maurice, who sold his service to Charles for the ill-gotten right to rule Electoral Saxony. True Lutherans now knew who the real enemy was, and they girded for a war to the finish. For many of them it was to mean flight and exile, personal hardships and suffering for themselves and their families.

Antonius Corvinus, martyr, who died in prison for refusing to accept the Interim pleaded with Melanchthon to "return to his pristine candor, his pristine

sincerity, and his pristine constancy to think, write, and do what is becoming to Philip the Christian teacher, not the court philosopher." (H.I. 101) John Brenz, exiled by the Interim, chided the cowardice of Melanchthon who sought peace through compromise with truth saying: "If the church and pious ministers cannot be saved any other way than by dishonoring the pious doctrine, let us commend them to Christ, the Son of God. He will take care of them." (H.I. 101) Even John Calvin found fault with Melanchthon's conduct. He said: "The hesitation of a general or leader is more disgraceful than the flight of an entire regiment of common soldiers . . . By yielding but a little you alone have caused more lamentations than a hundred men by open apostacy . . . I would die with you a hundred times rather than see you survive the doctrine surrendered by you." (H.I. 101)

In the end the Interims and the concessions of Agricola and Melanchthon were rendered fruitless by a turn of political events that brought about the abdication of Charles V and the adoption of the Imperial Peace of Augsburg of 1555. This agreement granted religious liberty to both Catholics and Lutherans in the Holy Roman Empire. The way was now open for the return of the Lutherans to the orthodoxy of the halcyon days of Luther's leadership at Wittenberg. No political controls remained to influence preaching and doctrine or drive loyal Lutherans into exile or prison. But the Peace of Augsburg came too late. The Lutheran theologians who had sold their souls for political advantage were now left to the pitiful task of saving face by defending the tattered remains of their shabby heterodoxies. Germany's period of theological madness had twenty-two more years to run.

### *Continuing Controversy*

Three parties may be distinguished in the theological conflict after the death of Martin Luther. The first

was named after Melanchthon. These men were called the Philipists. They included the synergists, the intermists, and the crypto-Calvinists. They were in control of the universities at Wittenberg and Leipzig.

The second party was known as the gnesio-Lutherans (genuine Lutherans). They were strongest in Ducal Saxony once ruled by Luther's arch-foe Duke George. The university of Jena, founded by the sons of Duke John Frederick, had its origin in a determination to preserve Lutheran orthodoxy. The universities of Jena and Magdeburg were the strongholds of the gnesio-Lutherans. Among this group of men so strongly committed to the theology of Martin Luther were Amsdorf and Flacius and others.

The third group or center party were little involved in the early controversies. They came to the fore as pacificators between the two extremes and eventually provided the leadership that resulted the the promulgation of the Formula of Concord in 1577.

Almost every thread in the tangled skein of debate that ensued may, in one way or another, be traced back to Melanchthon. It will not do to excuse Melanchthon by saying that he was a sound theologian while Luther was around, but that he was not able to stand on his own feet after the Reformer died. The fact is that Melanchthon was a rationalizing humanist, more interested in moral philosophy than theology from the beginning. While Luther lived, he suppressed his heretical ideas (a "shameful servitude", he later called it) because he was no match for Luther the theologian. After Luther's death he kept silence with respect to the infamous Augsburg Interim, and then helped to formulate and defend a document that was really no better, the Leipzig Interim. Until his death in 1560 he believed that his compromises and pacification had served the best interests of Lutheranism. He had, on the contrary

opened a whole Pandora's box of unscriptural doctrines. There is no need to elaborate on these errors in this place. We are agreed on the falsity of the indifferentism, the unionism, the synergism, the antinomianism, and the crypto-Calvinism that the Philipists supported and defended.

We ought, I think, to take a closer look at the activities of Illyricus Flacius (1520-1575) and the gnesio-Lutherans because, as if the problems created by the Philipists were not serious enough in themselves, the gnesio-Lutherans were often guilty of compounding the disagreements of the time by taking untenably extreme positions.

The first of the debates to which we should give attention was called the Adiaphoristic controversy. For Melancthon and his party the issue was essentially a matter of defending concessions they had made to Rome in the Leipzig Interim. Flacius held that those concessions to the papacy constituted an entering wedge to eventual surrender to Rome. To obey the Interim, Flacius held, was tantamount to obeying the government rather than God. He said Christians might sacrifice everything to a tyrannical prince, but not "the truth, not the consolation of divine grace, not the hope of eternal life." (H.I. 111) The views of the Flacianists were eventually incorporated in the Formula of Concord of 1577.

The gnesio-Lutherans did not come off so well in the Majoristic controversy. In this instance George Major was contending that, since good works follow faith, they are necessary to salvation. This was a view that Melancthon had secretly held before Luther's death. However, when the matter came into open debate between 1551 and 1562 almost all Lutherans, even the Philipists, rejected George Major's views. Only one serious theologian, Justus Menius, came to Major's defense. The pity is that one of the gnesio-Lutherans, once a trusted disciple of Martin Luther, Nicholas Amsdorf, became guilty of such misguided zeal for orthodoxy that he proclaimed that

good works are detrimental to salvation. Flacius refused to be drawn into this kind of unscriptural extremism. But the damage was done. Lutheran orthodoxy was equated with an irrational and irresponsible extremism. Serious minded Christians began to have second thoughts about the people who considered themselves the true heirs of Martin Luther and his theology.

As the Majoristic conflict was ending, the related, and even more dangerous, heresy of synergism grew into a debate of major proportions. The idea that sinful man may cooperate, however minimally, in his own salvation was really a product of the philosophical theologizing of Melanchthon. He had taken up the thought of Erasmus but he kept it to himself during Luther's lifetime and then pressed his views with great vigor after 1548. The issue continued to be debated after Melanchthon's death in 1560. Flacius maintained that no doctrine may be established by rationalizing philosophy, only by a clear word of Scripture. He and others of similar persuasion were imprisoned for their rejection of a synergism that seemed so logical and self-evident to the human mind. Flacius and the gnesio-Lutherans rendered true orthodoxy their greatest service in their adamant unwillingness to retreat a single step from the doctrine of salvation by grace alone. These men were unwilling to permit Luther's theology to be supplanted by that of Melanchthon. Flacius has given us all a valid principle of biblical interpretation in his challenge to the Philipists. "You take your arguments from philosophy which ought not to be given a place in matters of religion." (H.I. 136) In this point also the Formula of Concord was to vindicate the views of Flacius in this manner.

F. Bente has called Flacius "one of the most learned and capable theologians of his day, and the most faithful, devoted, staunch, zealous, and able exponent and defender of Lutheranism." (H.I. 144) Certainly few of

the defenders suffered more for the sake of their principles than Flacius. Appointed a professor at Wittenberg in 1544, he was forced to leave the city in 1547 from whence he went to an appointment at Jena. He was banished from Jena in 1561, and deserted, even by his former friends, he moved from place to place with his family of eight children. He died in his last asylum, Frankfort-on-the-Main, in 1575.

His personal misfortune, and the great misfortune for true Lutheranism, was the fact that in his zeal to put down synergistic doctrine he permitted himself to be caught in a trap which led him to take an irrevocable and extreme position that was neither Lutheran nor Scriptural. Chemnitz reproached him by saying: "It is enough if we are able to retain what Luther has won; let us abandon all desire to go beyond and improve upon him." (H.I. 149) By his theological error Flacius had brought reproach and ridicule on the name and the idea of gnesio-Lutheranism. He had given the synergists cause to rejoice and had made the epithet "Flacianist" a denigrating appellation applicable to conservative Lutherans who were zealous of defending the pure doctrine of Luther.

The Flacian error was the result of a determination to permit the synergists no peg on which to hang their doctrine of human cooperation in the working of the salvation of the sinner. One of the ablest of the synergists had pushed Flacius into a dilemma which he resolved by affirming that sin is of the essence and substance of man. The truth is that sin is an accident of history. Adam and Eve were not by nature or in substance and essence sinners before the fall. Neither was Jesus Christ, the son of the Virgin Mary, sinful in essence and substance. Luther had written about the total depravity of corrupted man. In making sinfulness the essence of human nature Flacius had taken an untenable position which could only bring on the ridicule of his enemies and the forfeiture of the confidence of his friends. It was a pity that once the fatal phrase had fallen from his lips he

defended it with the same zeal that he had formerly dedicated to the defense of the truth.

We can refer only briefly to other disputes that vitiated the truths held forth by Martin Luther. One of the villains who really should have known better was Andreas Osiander, the author of the preface to the great scientific work of Copernicus. He had been with Luther at the Marburg Colloquy of 1529, had attended the Diet of Augsburg in 1520, had been at Smalkald in 1547 and at Hagenau and Worms in 1540. He was among those who obscured the doctrine of justification, the keystone of Lutheran theology. His error was the view that Christ is our righteousness only after His divine nature. His opposite number, Francesco Stancaro, an Italian turned Protestant, said that Christ is our Righteousness only after His human nature. John Agricola was chiefly responsible for the error of Antinomianism, another hotly debated issue. The error that was to bring the Philipists to their nemesis was the crypto-Calvinism that was permeating their theology to the point of bringing them toward fellowship and close association with the expanding Calvinist movement.

### *The Restoration of Lutheran Orthodoxy*

The initial step in the process that eventually brought Lutheran Germany back to the theology of Martin Luther was taken in 1553, fifteen years before the adoption of the Formula of Concord. It is gratifying to be able to recall that the initial proposal was made by Flacius, the most dogged and persistent of the Lutherans attempting to preserve the theology of Luther. His suggestion was that ten or twenty theologians who had not been participants in the public controversy since 1548 be appointed to lay the groundwork for agreement between the contending parties.



By 1553 the debates had settled down to a conflict between the Philipists at Wittenberg and the gnesio-Lutherans at Jena. Melanchthon quickly let it be known that he would have no part in consultations involving Flacius. The Wittenbergers were circulating a caricature in which Flacius was represented as a braying ass which was being crowned with a soiled crown by other braying asses. Melanchthon maintained, in a fashion that is familiar to all of us, that Flacius had consistently slandered him by misinterpreting his words. Flacius' simple response was that Melanchthon must retract his errors. Their differences were irreconcilable and it was true, as one of their contemporaries said, that: "As long as Flacius and Melanchthon are alive, unity will not be restored." (H.I. 236) In the final eventuality a reconciliation was to await the demise of both. Melanchthon died in 1560. Flacius was exiled from the University of Jena in 1561 and died in 1574.

Melanchthon continued to block measures toward unification in whatever form they were made. He even opposed a General Council proposed for 1559 to be composed of all Lutherans who accepted the Augsburg Confession, the Apology, and the Smalkald Articles. The meeting was never convened. In January 1561 there was a futile effort made by the princes at Naumburg. The conference they convened failed because of inability to agree on a proper version of the Augsburg Confession. The gnesio-Lutherans refused to recognize the corrupted text of Melanchthon's 1540 version.

A critical incident in the movement toward Lutheran unity occurred in 1574 when August, the Elector of Saxony became aware of the essential fraudulence of the faculty at the University of Wittenberg. Ever since the end of the Smalkaldic war the university had harbored and defended the Philipists. Now the Elector, reading their essay, Exegesis Perspicua, and especially the portion dealing with the Lord's Supper, recognized

that his theologians were Calvinists, and not Lutherans at all. In unmasking their dishonesty and deceit he realized, as F. Bente puts it, that "for years he had been surrounded by a clique of dishonest theologians and unscrupulous schemers, who, through claiming to be Lutherans, were secret adherents of Calvinism." (H.I. 245)

The house of cards of the Philipists had collapsed. Exposed with reference to the doctrine of the Lord's Supper, the rest of their erroneous contentions became suspect, and the entire movement which had fattened on a support of the Leipzig Interim came to an ignoble end. Prince August took immediate steps toward the restoration of orthodox Lutheranism in his lands. The last serious roadblock to the restoration of Luther's doctrine had been removed.

The final process leading to agreement had begun ten years earlier when Jacob Andreae wrote five articles dealing with theological questions then at issue. This young man had been eighteen years of age when Luther died. His first call, received at the age of eighteen was to the pastorate of the church at Stuttgart, where he was deposed in 1548 for rejecting the Interim. In 1549 he became pastor at Tuebingen, where he later served as superintendent, and then professor and chancellor at the university.

Andreae's efforts were to be seconded by, and success largely realized through the efforts of a greater theologian, Martin Chemnitz. This man, six years Andreae's senior, had attended Wittenberg for a short time, where he had come to know Martin Luther. After attending other schools he returned to Wittenberg in 1545 for graduate studies that were directed by Melanchthon. In 1554 Chemnitz returned to Wittenberg for a third short stay, this time as lecturer on Melanchthon's Loci. In the same year, he accepted a pastorate in Brunswick, where he remained until his death. Bente refers to Chemnitz as "the prince of Lutheran divines of his age, and next to Luther, the greatest theologian of our church." (H.I. 242)

Andreae's first efforts toward pacification had failed, largely because they antedated the collapse of Philipism in Saxony. His five articles written in 1567, previously referred to, had no positive effect. Therefore in 1572 he wrote and disseminated six sermons dealing with the dissensions which had torn the Lutheran Church since 1548. These sermons were written for pastors and lay people rather than for theologians. Chemnitz was delighted with them, considering them a good basis for the beginning of theological peace-making.

It is not necessary for our purpose in this paper to detail the process by which those sermons were revised, recast, and revised again through numerous editions before they appeared in their final form as the Formula of Concord in 1577. We must remember that the sure hand of Chemnitz was active from the beginning to the end of that process of revision. We must know that many, many theologians, at numerous sessions worked carefully and effectively to make it a near perfect statement of Lutheran theology designed to take account of the issues that had racked the Lutheran Church since, and even before, 1548. The gold of Luther's theology was put through the refiners' fire in a manner that has no parallel in Lutheran history.

When the work was done, the existing Ecumenical and Lutheran Confessions were gathered with the Formula of Concord in a single volume and published in 1580 as the Book of Concord. The Lutheran Reformation was finished. Luther had done his work and now the next generation had pulled loose ends together to give the Lutheran Church its confessional identity. The agony of the confessors had not been in vain. By the grace of God they now had an instrument of true Christian unity based on the infallible truths of Holy Scripture. Those who had sought the truth in all sincerity had found it.

### Part III. The Contemporary Agony

#### *We Must Preach and Teach the Truth*

The memories of some confessing Lutherans who still are active in the church will go back as far as 1917 when a few pastors and congregations refused participation in a unionistic church merger that accepted the spirit of Melanchthon's error of an election to salvation intuiti fidei (in view of faith). The pastors and congregations excluded from this realignment of Norwegian Lutheran synods would, as a matter of course, have joined the Missouri Synod but for urgent counsel from leading Missourians which advised them to retain their historical identity. The result was the formation of the "little" Norwegian Synod, now known as the ELS.

Some of us will also recall union negotiations between Missouri and the ALC in the 30's. Again the ghost of Melanchthon was about. This time his spirit emerged in a union document that included the phrase: "God purposes to justify those who have come to faith." This Melanchthonian statement was vigorously rejected by a few voices in Missouri and elsewhere. But it was never repudiated. Relations developing between the ALC and the LCA at that time put a temporary halt to further union discussions between Missouri and the ALC.

All of us are aware of the deterioration of contemporary Lutheran confessionalism that has resulted in the breaking of fellowship between Missouri on the one side and ELS and WELS on the other, the creation of a new Synod, the Church of the Lutheran Confession, and still more recently the Federation for Authentic Lutheranism. A major result of this breakdown of the sturdy Lutheran confessionalism has been the fact that the Synodical Conference, of blessed memory, has ceased to exist.

The rationalizing philosophy of Melanchthon in its various forms of synergism and unionism continues to plague us. At this time we are confronted by humanism in the form of a scientific historicism that is draining the Bible of its credibility and destroying the historical context of the gracious acts of God recorded in the Holy Scriptures. In destroying the historical shell in which the promises of God are nurtured the very Gospel itself is called into question. This is not the place for a careful study of the new forms of humanistic and rationalistic interpretations of Scripture. Our interest lies in recalling what the post-Reformation generation did to overcome the menace that perilled their existence as confessing Lutherans.

We shall have learned nothing from history if we do not now recognize that God still holds us to a responsibility no less than that of a total witness to the whole truth of the Word. If Luther and the confessors of the 16th century had done anything less we would not now have the pure theology of the Lutheran Confessions. We would have, instead, ill conceived and ineffectual statements of faith comparable to the floundering confessions of the rest of Protestantism. We can, and we must be determined, at whatever personal cost to us, to teach God's Word in the wholeness of its truth, in the purity of its apostolic witness. Any deviation from the clear message of the Scripture is treason. Courts of law speak of high treason. In the context of our Christian citizenship in the kingdom of God any betrayal of the Word of God is nothing less than high treason. The penalties of high treason both in courts of law and before the eternal throne of judgment are well known to us.

We must also teach and preach in accordance with the Lutheran Confessions. For nearly four hundred years those documents have withstood every assault and have vindicated themselves in every test of truthful witness

to Scripture. Their value has been demonstrated time and again as a force binding Christians to the truth and shielding them from error. They remain the clearly identifiable marks of true Lutheran theology.

### *We Must Testify Against Error*

We could be very snug and comfortable in our local parishes if we could simply say that we are going to preach the Gospel in its truth and purity and let some one else worry about the false doctrine that is being taught within our own communion. Actually that is exactly what many of us have done. We have sat on our hands, silent, while the cancer of error has been eating away at the fabric of our church. But that simply will not do for faithful shepherds of God's lambs on earth. In the church militant sin and false doctrine is the name of the game. It is because there is sin and false doctrine that shepherds of our flocks are needed. We can no more preach the Gospel without reference to sin and error than we can save a drowning man without getting wet.

Post-Reformation Lutherans had to testify against the false teachings that were spawned in a rationalistic philosophy. Their survival depended on it. We have to testify against a massive body of error that has been conceived and brought to birth in the scientific historicism of our own theologians now.

We have an advantage in our current struggle. We are under no legal or ecclesiastical compulsion to teach false doctrine. In the 16th century the Interims were the law of the land. Preachers disobeyed that law under peril of imprisonment or banishment. The worst that can happen to us today is that we may be ridiculed for our "simplistic biblicism". The shallow ecumenicism of our time protects us from any form of persecution for

holding to and trusting a Bible-centered theology. All that is asked of us is that we respect the beliefs of others and tolerate their errors.

This we cannot do within the fellowship of our own faith. Sin is sin, error is error, and we are soldiers of the cross. But the purpose of our efforts is healing, not destruction. We seek to bring sinners back to the paths of godliness, errorists back to the way of truth. The Master taught his disciples to forgive seven times seventy times and we must be equally patient with errorists. We must be like God who hates sin but loves sinners. We may hate false doctrine, but Martin Luther has shown us the way of patience and love in dealing with those who err. His constant love for all men, and especially for his students and fellow teachers, was the measure of his dealings with them, his passionate desire to show them the word of truth.

Some of you were present at a conference in Chicago a few years ago when Francis Schaeffer pleaded with us not to turn our backs on our erring brothers and friends. Certainly Luther did not. He continued to talk to errorists and to pray for them. He never turned his back on them nor ceased to be concerned about them. I have a vivid memory of my own sainted father, a pious Christian pastor who was not willing to accept the terms of the Norwegian merger of 1917. When the formalities of that union were completed he cut himself off from any further contact with close friends who did go along with the merger. He never spoke or wrote to them again. I think that was a mistake. He, with others, isolated himself personally and spiritually from people who might well have come to a gradual recognition of the compromising doctrinal position in which they had been placed by a unionistic merger.

Luther warns at great length of the conceits of an orthodoxy that wants to play God. We tend to become so sure of ourselves that we lose patience with all who differ

with us and who fail to measure up to our definitions of orthodoxy. We shall have lost the game if we preen ourselves in the glow of our own purest orthodoxy, if we believe that by some special gift of God we have been made the exclusive caretakers of truth. There is no orthodoxy without humility. Luther inspired confidence by making others see him as a teacher who never ceased to be a learner, always searching, for the Scripture's revelation of truth. Sneering, caustic comments, and an overbearing sense of self-righteous omniscience have no place in theological debate. Love heals. Hate can only defeat its own purpose.

Among many things we may learn from the experiences of the post-Reformation struggles is that we must flee, as from the plague, any tendency toward the development of a kind of super-orthodoxy. Amsdorf and Flacius were so intent on maintaining their orthodoxy that they sought to outdo Luther in his biblical orthodoxy. The result was worse than denial of revealed truth. Their views brought conservative Lutheran theology into disrepute and the withering ridicule of their enemies. They had given true orthodoxy a terrible burden to bear. They had compounded the problems of those who sincerely wished to restore a unity of faith. Our generation has seen all too much of Flacius' super-orthodoxy and too many unwholesome examples of the sin of schism.

If we would be like Luther we shall avoid both an exaggerated orthodoxy and narrow parochial schisms. Early in his career he said: "If unfortunately there are such things in Rome as might be improved, there neither is, nor can there be any reason that one should tear oneself away from the church in schism. Rather, the worse they become, the more a man should help and cling to her, for by schism nothing can be mended." (W.A. 2, 72, quoted in Gordon Rupp, Luther's Progress to the Diet of Worms, London, SCM Press Ltd., 1951)



Our attitudes toward errorists must be characterized by love, not by hate. We should seek, in Luther's words, to mend, not to tear ourselves away. An evangelical and love-filled desire to mend what is amiss should motivate our efforts to store unity of faith. Cutting the bonds of love through schism must be the act of last resort.

### *We Must Be Faithful To Our Calling*

Those of us who are pastors have only one call. It is the call tendered us by our congregations. We have taken our ordination and installation vows to preach and teach God's Word to our people. We have made our commitment to the canonical books of the Bible and to the Lutheran Confessions. We have agreed to be shepherds of our flocks and have promised to bring them the Gospel and the Sacraments. We have agreed to preach the law of God and to admonish the erring in accordance with God's Word.

This is our call; the only divine call we have. That means that in the tensions that develop when error goes undisciplined in our Synods we still have only this one divine call. Personal decisions must be based on considerations of the welfare of our flocks. One may not abandon a congregation to find a personal haven in another Synod. God Himself has placed us in our pastorates.

This by no means justifies us in concealing from our people the doctrinal aberrations within our communion. We have a responsibility to sister congregations and we may not attempt to live in a secluded isolation from our brothers and sisters in the Synod at large. It is easy to think, as so many have done, "Let's keep things quiet in our own congregation. Let's not bother our people with the errors of theological professors and a few far-out liberal pastors." That, as all of us must know, is to try to create a fool's paradise. The truth must sooner or later appear as to

errors in our churches, and ill-informed laymen will readily be led astray by the blandishments of those who compromise truth for whatever unworthy reason.

We have, as we have observed, a primary obligation to the people of our congregations. We do also owe much to our respective Synods which, in most cases, have made possible our professional education. They have provided for the God-pleasing mission and educational activity of the congregations. They provide a cohesive framework for the mutual love and unity of people separated by distance. Long-standing loyalties and sincere affection bind Christians to their Synods.

When, therefore, the Synod fails to keep its commitment to the Word and to the Lutheran Confessions severe strains inevitably develop. The relationship between the Synod and the congregation are contractual in nature. The Synod agrees to provide educational facilities for the training of pastors and teachers and to organize and conduct missionary endeavors and other activities of mutual interest and value to the Synod and its member congregations. They, in turn, pledge their prayers and their financial support for the undertakings mutually agreed on.

A congregation which finds that false doctrine is tolerated in the faculties of its seminaries and colleges will be reluctant to send their sons and daughters to such schools nor will they wish to receive the services of candidates from them. Other problems develop. Eventually the congregation will be compelled to dissociate itself from such a synod even though their own pastor is beyond reproach in fulfilling the duties of his calling in accordance with God's Word and the Lutheran Confessions.

Congregations may place themselves in a state of protest against aberrations which are being tolerated within the synod. Until adjustments are made some have

suggested withholding contributions from the synod. It seems to me that this is a reprehensible procedure because it violates contractual agreements with the synod and may bring suffering and inconvenience to innocent members of the synod such as missionaries, teachers, and other workers whose livelihood is dependent on the contributions of congregations. But if one can not in good conscience keep one's financial commitment to a synod, how can he remain in fellowship with it? To hold membership, not yet terminated, in a synod and then give synodical contributions to another agency appears to me to be an ignoble use of the power of the purse to compel the synod to comply with the congregation's requests. When an intolerable state of affairs has developed between a synod and a congregation the only long-term and legitimate solution must be the termination of relations between the two. No one, outside the congregation itself, may stipulate when such termination must occur. Inevitably the difficulties encountered by a faithful congregation in its relationship with an erring synod must reach a breaking point.

The pastor himself will face numerous painful questions in making his own decision relative to membership in a heretical body. Old loyalties, family relationships, and most difficult of all, the question of a personal livelihood must be considered. But there it is. Sixteenth century confessors faced martyrdom, imprisonment and exile. Men must face their own consciences, their own ordination vows, their confidence in the Lord's inexhaustible love for those who serve him as pastors and as the faithful custodians of the eternal truths.

### *We Must Maintain a High Level of Christian Scholarship*

One of the great dangers that has faced the church since apostolic times has been the menace of learned men whose philosophical blandishments have deceived believers into subtle and, eventually, gross misinterpretations and misapplications of Scripture. The only

effective defense against this danger is the creation of a corps of Christian scholars who, like Martin Luther, will be able to recognize their deceptions and their mishandling of Scripture. It appears to me that one of the tragedies of the history of the Missouri Synod has been the fact that between the presidencies of Franz Pieper and J.A.O. Preus the highest office in the Synod has been held by godly and venerable men, respected for their piety as well as their handling of conventions, who were incapable of recognizing and dealing with the humanistic intellectualism of highly placed theologians in the church. I have a personal recollection of the Detroit convention and the debate on the question of joining LCUSA. It appeared that the motion to join that body might be lost. Then the venerable Dr. Behnken, retired president, was given extended time and the privilege of speaking last before the vote was taken. He rose at his cue to plead for membership in LCUSA assuring the voters that this organization would deal only in external questions of mutual interest and would in no way jeopardize the doctrinal integrity of the Missouri Synod.

We can find many things to admire about Martin Luther, his faith, his constancy, his abilities as a teacher. But what is important to us now is the fact that he was a great biblical scholar. He could take the Bible and confound the theologies of the scholastics, the mystics, the pietists, the Swiss theologians, the revolutionary spirits of the Zwickau prophets and Thomas Muenzer, and above all the humanistic rationalism of Erasmus and his like. He was able to face all of them in his practical ability to restore an apostolic faith and apply it truthfully and judiciously to his 16th century environment. While exposing the phony intellectualism of his adversaries he was presenting the mysteries of revelation in clear, understandable, and credible terms to the common folk of his generation and every succeeding generation. His Bible translation and his catechisms brought the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the lowliest as well as

to the most learned of his contemporaries. We must stand in awe of the comprehensive depth of the Lutheran Confessions. In their whole essence, in their broad range, they were the distillation of the mind of a man of simple faith, a man of supreme scholarly distinction.

We can not expect to see his like in our generation, but we can be content with nothing less than a determination to keep the church strong by basing our efforts on a never ending determination to know the truth for its own sake, but equally to know it so well as to be able to put down Satan's continuing efforts to diminish God's Word by whatever means the evil one may use.

#### *A Positive Commitment Now*

Our commitment must be firm and positive. We must be determined to teach God's Word for the salvation of souls, and that in a manner that permits no diminution, or enlargement, of the revelation God has graciously entrusted to us. We must not permit a scientific historicism or any other interpretive rationale to diminish the great and comprehensive treasure of truth that we have.

That commitment will make demands on us. We can not hold our peace when error is publicly proclaimed. There can be no craven unwillingness to become involved in the conflict against error for the sake of peace. The heroic figures of the post-Reformation period have shown us both the cost and the glory of being confessors of the truth. Their successful striving brought blessings to their spiritual heirs for nearly four hundred years. Who knows what our faithfulness may mean to generations to come?

We will assuredly need men like Andreae and Chemnitz to help us in the formulation of new confessional affirmations that will take account of the new devices that Satan has introduced into the theologies of our time.

We will need to remember Melanchthon's effort to secure religious peace through compromise and to realize how consciences become dulled by progressive surrenders to little errors. We rationalize one concession today and another tomorrow. And so error becomes easier and easier to rationalize, and soon orthodoxy is gone.

All of us will need to keep faith while we pray for brave and strong men to inspire our confidence and help us in the formulation of the doctrinal statements that we will need to make for our guidance. But while we ask God for competent theologians and leaders we must be sure that we do not give the game away by excess of orthodoxy or by assuming schismatic postures. The post-Reformation generation has reminded us so vividly of the peril and the pain of these excesses.

We must lack nothing in commitment and determination, but both must be clothed in love and nurtured in patience. Hate begets hate. It saves no souls. It turns no errorist back to the truth.

Many must make painful personal decisions, and they must make them in the solitude of their own relationship to God. Let none condemn nor judge harshly those who seem a long time in making their decisions. Pastors must act in the best interests of those whom they serve in their God-given callings. They must act in good conscience. They must act responsibly.

In my opinion the most important layman in the history of the Lutheran Church was the Elector of Saxony, Duke John Frederick, who held that position and supported the Lutheran movement with wisdom and courage from 1532 to the Smalkaldic War. Defeated and captured he sat in prison under sentence of death denuded of his possessions and his honor. When Emperor Charles offered him liberty in return for signing the Interim he responded in a manner that will give comfort to every anguished soul who must make the kind of agonizing

decisions that face us in these days of peril for true Lutheranism. These were Duke John's words of response to the emperor:

I cannot refrain from informing Your Majesty that since the days of my youth I have been instructed and taught by the servants of God's Word, and by diligently searching the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures I have also learned to know, and (this I testify in the sight of God) unswervingly to adhere in my conscience to this, that the articles composing the Augsburg Confession, and whatever is connected therewith, are the correct, true, Christian, pure doctrine, confirmed by, and founded in, the writings of the holy prophets and apostles, and of the teachers who followed in their footsteps, in such manner that no substantial objection can be raised against it . . . . Since now in my conscience I am firmly persuaded of this, I owe this gratefulness and obedience to God, who has shown me such unspeakable grace, that, as I desire to obtain eternal salvation and escape eternal damnation, I do not fall away from the truth of His almighty will which His Word has revealed to me, and which I know to be the truth. For such is the comforting and also terrible Word of God: 'Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I also confess before My Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny Me before men, him will I also deny before My God which is in heaven.' If I should acknowledge and adopt the Interim as Christian and godly, I would have to condemn and deny against my own conscience, knowingly and maliciously, the Augsburg Confession, and whatever I have heretofore held and believed concerning the Gospel of Christ, and approve with my mouth what I regard in my heart and conscience as altogether contrary to the holy and divine Scriptures. This, O my God in heaven, would indeed be misusing and cruelly blaspheming Thy holy name . . . for which I would have to pay all too dearly with my soul. (H.I. 97)

## B O O K   R E V I E W S

The Book of Isaiah. Vol. II    By Edward J. Young.  
Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans. 1969. 604 pp.  
\$9.95

Several years ago Volume I of this three-volume set in The New International Commentary on the Old Testament appeared. The undersigned reviewed it in this publication. (see LUTHERAN SYNOD QUARTERLY, Vol. VII, No. 2, Dec. 1966, pp. 21-29.) Although this second volume has been out now since 1969, various interruptions have prevented this reviewer from submitting this review until now. Hopefully Volume III, which was prepared from Dr. Young's notes after he died, and which was published just this past year, will soon appear in review in this magazine.

Volume II, covering chapters 19-39 of Isaiah, is of the same high quality as its predecessor. Throughout the book the author follows two of his basic assumptions: the verbal inspiration of the Old Testament (as well as the New) and the unity and integrity of the Book of Isaiah. The commentary is the result of the author's intensive study of the Book of Isaiah as well as other sources that shed light on the book, Biblical as well as extra-Biblical. His vast erudition is evident from the thoroughness of his scholarly procedure, and yet the commentary itself reads rather easily, since most of the Hebrew and other foreign-language references are confined to the footnotes. While the translation of the verses resembles the King James Version, it is the author's own, and in some passages it departs from other existing translations.

There are very few passages in which this reviewer finds himself in disagreement with the author. One such passage is Isaiah 21: 8. There Dr. Young aban-



does his usual policy of preferring the Masoretic text to that of the first Dead Sea Scroll. The Masoretic text reads, "And he cried: 'A Zion!'" A number of English versions support that reading, and in his excellent commentary J.A. Alexander defends it. (Vol. I, p. 374) On the other hand, Young adopts the Dead Sea Scroll reading and translates it, "Then the seer would cry," reading hā rō'eh instead of ʾaryeh.(p.71) This appears to be a questionable procedure.

Of the many commendable features of this book we shall mention only a few. He concludes his commentary on the eighth verse of chapter 25, which he interprets Messianically but not millennialistically, with the following touching remark, "Only the revealed religion of the Bible can give true comfort to man and can evoke from him tears of loving joy and gratitude, for only the revealed religion of the Bible presents a God of true love and compassion who paid the price necessary to swallow up death and to wipe away tears. Despite the blindness of some critics and their failure to understand this verse, the Christian heart will ever stand in awe of the unspeakably wondrous truth that is revealed here." (p. 198)

In his comments on Isaiah 26: 19 he asserts that "the prophet clearly introduces the doctrine of the resurrection of the body." A few lines later he adds, "We need not assume that this doctrine would be too advanced for the day of Isaiah, and that it was only received by the Jews from the Persians during the time of the exile or later. The true doctrine of the resurrection of the body is a revelation received from God and not a doctrine to be discovered by unaided human reason." (P. 227) That is also our conviction.

Special mention ought to be made of his explanation of Isaiah 28: 16, another Messianic passage which is quoted in the New Testament. Those remarks are on

pp. 284-288 and will prove rewarding reading.

Although there are many other excellent passages, time and space do not permit mention here. Suffice it to say that he offers comment on every verse in these twenty-one chapters, some brief, others several pages long. Following the commentary proper is a section of three appendices, treating, respectively, the following topics, "The Reign of Hezekiah," "The nature and Authorship of Isaiah 36-39," and "The Invasion of Sennacherib" translated from the Assyrian document "The Annals of Sennacherib." An extensive bibliography, an index of Scripture, an index of persons, and an index of authors complete the book.

This reviewer would highly recommend this volume to both clergymen and lay members. He is also looking forward to studying and reviewing the third and last volume of this set.

-- Rudolph E. Honsey

Jehovah's Witnesses. By Anthony Hoekema. Grand Rapids. Eerdmans. 1972. 147 pp. \$1.95 paperback.

Christian Science. By Anthony Hoekema. Grand Rapids. Eerdmans. 1972. 68 pp. \$1.25 paperback.

Mormonism. By Anthony Hoekema. Grand Rapids. Eerdmans. 1972. 101 pp. \$1.75 paperback.

Seventh-Day Adventists. By Anthony Hoekema. Grand Rapids. Eerdmans. 1972. 103 pp. \$1.75 paperback.

The author of these four paperbacks is professor of systematic theology at Calvin Theological Seminary and writes as a conservative Reformed theologian. Most of the material in these books has appeared in his earlier book, The Four Major Cults, but has been updated.

Each one of the cults is treated thoroughly. Three are obviously non-evangelical: the Mormons, the Christian Scientists, and the Jehovah's Witnesses. The Seventh-Day Adventists claim to be evangelical, but the inherent legalism of their system, particularly on the Sabbath, and the peculiarities of their theological system makes this most difficult. Each group is examined with respect to its principles of authority, of salvation, and other areas of doctrine.

These paperbacks are no ordinary books. Relying largely on the materials produced by these sects, the author probes deeply into their history and theology. He thoroughly understands and presents the novel approaches which have taken these cults beyond the boundaries of historic Christianity. For example, he shows that the arguments of St. Augustine against the Arian Jehovah's Witnesses are most relevant; he shows how the Jehovah's Witnesses make use of "knight's jump" exegesis, beginning with a passage but completely missing the point of the passage and ending with a conclusion that is not even remotely related to the passage.

Anyone interested in the theology of these sects -- and with their doorbell ringing and radio broadcasts, who can avoid them? -- one will find these books indispensable. By reading these books one will find himself acquainted with their theological systems, inconsistencies, and anti-evangelical nature.

-- Glenn E. Peichwald

Holy Spirit Baptism. By Anthony Hoekema. Grand Rapids. Eerdmans. 1972. 101 pp. \$1.95 paperback.

This book will be a helpful introduction to the problem of neo-Pentecostalism. Writing from a conservative Reformed viewpoint, the author rejects the neo-Pentecostal distinction between the work of the

the Holy Spirit at conversion and their so-called "Baptism with the Holy Spirit", contrary to Scripture. He also discusses the passages dealing with speaking in tongues. While one may not always agree with his conclusions on the individual passages, his ultimate conclusion is valid. These passages do not teach a neo-Pentecostalism. In the final portion of his book he also stresses the various gifts of the Holy Spirit, which are neglected in the misemphasis on neo-Pentecostalism.

-- Glenn E. Reichwald

Bibliographie des Sciences Théologiques. Etablie par les enseignants de la Faculté de Théologie protestante de l'Université des Sciences humaines de Strasbourg et publiée par J.G. Heintz - Préface d'E. Jacob. 1972

This work is a manual of bibliographical references covering the principal theological disciplines: Old Testament, New Testament, Church History, History of Religions, Philosophy of Religion, Dogmatics, Ecumenism, Ethics, Practical Theology, and Sociology of Religion. Each major section is further subdivided to facilitate consultation.

The Bibliographie is selective and the single criterion of selection is the scholarly worth and educational value of the items included. Approximately 3,000 titles are listed, most of them recent, but also including older works where no modern counterpart is available. The listings include works in French, German, and English (in that order of frequency), and existing translations are in every case specified.

For each discipline, a brief introduction is provided so as to put the citations in the perspective.

of contemporary scholarship. A General Preface by Edmund Jacob, author of the well-known Theology of the Old Testament, offers an impressionistic panorama of the theological field during the last thirty years.

This Bibliographie, in common with virtually all new reference publications, will doubtless be even more useful in subsequent editions. Its editors will certainly want to enlarge the number of English language titles, and will want to make sure that critics of current modern theological positions are given as full representation as the positions themselves..

The dearth of references in the first edition to the great modern evangelical theologians (Machen, Carnell, C.F.H. Henry, Packer, etc.) is a lacuna which certainly needs to be filled. How strange, for example, to find J.K.S. Reid's The Authority of Scripture included, but no citation of Warfield or other thorough treatments of this question by contemporary scholars maintaining the classical view of Biblical inspiration! Certainly, subsequent editions of the Bibliographie should be provided with an author index, to facilitate reference.

In spite of these -- perhaps inevitable -- difficulties, this Bibliographie is indispensable for every theological library and of unquestionable value to individual scholars. At a price of twelve francs, even in the light of current devaluation of the dollar, the Bibliographie is irresistible.

-- John Warwick Montgomery