

BOOK REVIEWS

II. THEOLOGICAL—HISTORICAL STUDIES

[FAITHFUL TO OUR CALLING, FAITHFUL TO OUR LORD. An AFFIRMATION PART I](#). By the Faculty of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 1973. Paperback. 43 pages. 75¢ ([AFFIRMATIONS II](#), containing individual statements, is available for \$1.25.)

There is a certain definite risk in reviewing a publication like this. Who after all wants to handle the proverbial hot potato? *FAITHFUL TO OUR CALLING* (hereafter designated *AFFIRMATION I*) was pressed forth from its authors because *they* knew that *everybody* knew that *they* (the faculty majority) were at the vortex of the cauldron that caused synod's pot to boil over and was threatening now to blow things sky high. The faculty had a felt need to speak or write a word in its own defense and, if possible, justify its position.

When this is done on the basis of a universally received Confession like the Nicene Creed, it seems self-evident that the last thing any sane protagonist would want to do is to question anybody's theology. (As a matter of fact it is hard for this reviewer to believe that a consensus exists among the subscribers to *AFFIRMATION I*.) With broad, beautiful sweep come the specific affirmations:

We praise and magnify our God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The Affirmations which follow express the faith within us that leads us to glorify our God.

We appeal to all who hear these words to unite with us in a common chorus of adoration.

All that is missing is a loud Amen. That is to be supplied, the faculty hopes, by voices throughout synod who will sound it forth to the doxology which they (the faculty) intoned.

Forever and a day there will be a need for the church, and every believer in it, to sound forth its doxology. But doxology without theology is sounding brass and tinkling cymbal. There is a time for doxology: there is a time for theology. It was the latter which the faculty had need to account for in a responsible way at this serious juncture in synod's history, and that they have failed to do. When meanwhile genuinely Biblical, Confessional, and Lutheran substance is being jettisoned, then the refrains become mere doxologizing with superficial and subtly inadequate theologizing.

Reactionary drivel out of central Illinois' corn and soybean fields? We cannot help feeling personally the inevitable counterblast that will come, in just so many words. And, quite frankly, over the years it seems that an undue amount of one's time and energy has been diverted in what—even to oneself—seems like an unpleasant, reactionary business, the ongoing protest against the undercutting of synod's theology. Much of the old familiar language is still there, but with new, unfamiliar, and unwelcome theology. When things have advanced so far that the threat is already within the walls, then silence is not only questionable but culpable. As the sainted and widely esteemed Dr. [Martin Naumann](#) used to say over against the insidious forces at work for the erosion of our Lutheran church's theology and doctrine, "Are we going to lie there like dumb dogs? Dogs who don't sound the alarm when the intruder is at the door?"

The concern is no longer a narrow one, affecting a few theologians. The whole synod obviously is roused up, whether the issues are fully understood or not. Many people, it is true—probably a good many pastors—are willing to let the dust settle as it may, indifferent to what's going on and how it will come out. That attitude is inexcusable when the Truth of God's Word itself is at stake. At Milwaukee, 1971, the synod instructed the synodical president to deal directly with the cause of the conflagration by appointing a fact-finding committee. One step followed upon another, more and more evidence coming out into the open (also beyond the confines of synod) that the issue was serious, involving a theological viewpoint sharply opposed to our synod and Confessional Lutheran theology.

What issue? According to *AFFIRMATION I* ([Preamble, 3](#)) [p. 3], "at the heart of the discussions in our Synod is the question of whether the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is the sole *source* of our personal faith and the *center* of our public teaching." With this came the strong disavowal of any other authority "to supplement the Gospel so that it is no longer the sole ground of our faith or the governing principle for our theology." (*Ibid.*)

The first ["source"] *is not, and has not been, the issue!* It is a clever dodge designed to throw off the scent and discourage any would-be pursuers from going any further. *The second* ["center"] *touches the neuralgic point exactly.* A person would have to be totally blind and theologically uninformed or misinformed, not to see that *AFFIRMATION I*, with its vaunted "freedom in the Gospel" is scuttling and throwing overboard the only principle which Lutheran theology has ever recognized as authoritative and final in establishing all articles of faith, the Scriptural Word of God.

Without question the first and chief article of the Christian faith is, our Confessions repeat over and over again, justification *sola gratia/fide*, and no Lutheran Christian will dispute this. That is the dogmatic foundation of *Christian* faith, the material principle, on which everything hangs as far as the sinner's salvation is concerned.

But the "governing principle for our theology," ever since Luther pointed the church of his day back to the "external Word," as he called it, has been the "pure fountain," the "only standard, according to which, as the only test-stone, all dogmas

shall and must be discerned and judged, as to whether they are good or evil, right or wrong.” ([FC, Epit., Intr.](#)) the Scriptural Word of God. “The rule is,” wrote Luther of Scripture, “that the Word of God shall establish articles of faith, and no one else, not even an angel,” ([SA II, II, 15](#)) This includes also the article on the Gospel as

distinguished from other “gospels” peddled by men. Nothing preempts this from Holy Scriptures. It is the God-given formal principle in theology. Nothing preempts it, that is, except a theology which subtly undermines it by substituting “the freedom of the Gospel,” or simply, the Gospel, as the “governing principle.” Luther asked: “What Gospel?” I know no other Gospel, he said, than that of Scriptures!

AFFIRMATION I asks that this switch in authority be accepted, on the stated grounds that it is more nearly Lutheran, but actually—and this is the hidden agenda—because it comports better with the higher critical methodology on Scriptures. Bellwether Richard E. Koenig has his finger precisely on this point in his review of *AFFIRMATION I* (*Forum*, March 1973, 6), when he asks and then gives the answer: “Is the faculty position different from what Missouri taught previously? Of course it is.” Soft sell has now become brazen boast with the more outspoken supporters of *AFFIRMATION I*.

Outsiders divide over Missouri’s plight; for some it’s glee, for others grief to see “solid Missourianism” (Jordahl’s term in *Dialog*, Autumn 1972, 319f.) with its head on the block. Our brethren of the past are deeply concerned. Their voices are a haunting call back to “solid Missourian” stance. From Germany (out of the wider association of Confessional Lutheran churches, *Kirchliche Sammlung um Bibel und Bekenntnis*) comes the incisive analysis that the problem is, of course, not one of personality clash (Pres. Preus v. Tietjen), but simply this: “The issue turns on this question, whether the Missouri Synod will remain what she was till now, a Confessional evangelical Lutheran church!” From down under in Australia [who? Sasse?] rises the charge that “the Seminary document has jettisoned the organic foundation (i.e., the Scriptural Word and formal principle) and, as a result, the Gospel itself is in principle de-natured.” From the French brethren, who likewise once depended on Missouri for spiritual nurture and support as the bulwark of Confessional Lutheran theology in the 20th century, the plaintive wail goes up: “*Un Seminaire en peril!*” and then spelled out are the ingredients of this peril.

There is something terribly sad that runs through the whole effort, *AFFIRMATION I*. In striving to state and ground its theology upon the principle of relevancy, upon that which is presumably in tune with the day (like higher criticism), there is the fateful forgetting of what all of church history makes painfully plain, viz., that such “relevant” new theologizing is destined, before the century is out, to be irrelevant and die an early death. We shall try to point out some of these weaknesses, brief though critique will have to be.

The format of the nine discussions or chapters follows the pattern of the three articles of the Nicene Creed, as the Preamble of *AFFIRMATION I* already states. The announced purpose is to treat all issues according to principles that “are Gospel-oriented and therefore Lutheran.” (p. 12) As already indicated, the disavowal of Lutheran theology’s formal principle cancels out any possibility of this happening, except, as Pieper says, by happy inconsistency.

Discussion One. God's Creation and the Beginnings.

Here at the outset *AFFIRMATION I* makes it very plain that it is going a new way, no longer bound by the Bible text as such, but “straining with the freedom of the Gospel” to give the meaning and import of

God's creation without being bound by Scripture's teaching of fiat creation according to Genesis 1 and 2. With right we ask, is it the evolutionary theories which dictate the conclusion that "these passages reflect the language of belief, not of scientific discourse," or "biblical pictures," and not fact? No call for a doxology "of praise and wonder" can hide the spirit of agnosticism which hides behind the veiled language.

Discussion Two. God's Creation and Human Beings.

While some (apparently unreconstructed old fogies), we are told, think of Adam and Eve as "two specific individuals," there are others (ostensibly the more sophisticated elite) who refuse "to press the details of this narrative" beyond their purported intent of "proclaiming the truth about Everyman (ha'adam, "the man") and every woman (Eve, "mother of all that live")." Scripture, Old and New Testament, leaves absolutely no doubt in any reader's mind that Adam and Eve were real, historical persons, with whom the human race began, that they fell into sin, and that through them original sin has been imputed upon all men as result. Is it *really* true, therefore, that "the message remains the same whether we consider the text of Genesis 2-3 a literal historical account," (p. 17) or not, as *AFFIRMATION I* maintains? Neither Scripture (Genesis 1-3; Rom. 5, 11 ff.), nor the Confessions (*SA III, I* and *VIII, 5-9*; *FC. SD, I, 38*) provide this luxury or option! Higher critical methodology, on the other hand, operates with a different set of historical canons, in line with the faculty stance, one that allows for the mythological treatment of large parts of so-called Old Testament "history."

Discussion Three. God's Creation and His Wonders.

Precisely what is intended when the faculty opinion raises doubts about the "absolute acceptance of each detail of the miracle" and offers the advice instead that "to edify the Church, we ought to focus on this central meaning of the miracle accounts for us instead of dwelling on the authenticity of isolated miraculous details?" (p. 19) The across-the-board attack on the supernatural has usually begun with this kind of whittling away at "isolated miraculous details." Moreover, what finally is *detail* and what *central*, in any of the miracles which Scripture reports? Can there be ultimate safeguarding of a key miracle like Christ's resurrection, if this pecking away at the supernatural is countenanced at any point?

Discussion Four. The Promise and the Scriptures.

(Discussions four to six are intended as expositions of the 2nd article.)

Immediately one comes face to face, once again, with the arbitrary polarizing of the Gospel over against Holy Scriptures. There can be no quibble that "all of their (Scriptures') parts must be understood in relationship to that (Gospel) center of Jesus Christ." (p. 21) But completely without foundation either in Scripture or the Confessions is the assertion that "the Gospel gives the Scriptures their normative character." (*Ibid.*) One can only wonder, therefore, what motivates a blast like the following, that "any tendency to make the doctrine of the inspiration or the inerrancy of the Scriptures a prior truth which guarantees the truth of the Gospel" is "sectarian"? [p. 21] I must, confess (and I believe every Lutheran must concur) that I have never met that Lutheran, nor read

any Lutheran text on dogmatics, seen any Lutheran hymns, etc., which because of their adherence to the doctrine of Holy Scriptures' inspiration *ever* set the Gospel in any but its rightful position as the first and chief article of the Christian faith.

But I have met and read any number of theologians who along with their denial of Scripture's inspiration (and inerrancy), also denied not only some of Scripture's miracles as reported, etc., but *also* the first, and chief article of the Christian faith as well! That's the way the thing works, as everyone really knows!

The point is: whose side is *AFFIRMATION I* really on? To which side of the grandstand is it playing? The language by and large is still Scripturally Lutheran, but the dialectics are clearly in the direction of higher criticism which has established itself as the chief eroder of both Scripture *and* the Gospel!

A specific case in point is worth mentioning. Only a Bultmannian existentialist exegesis would be content to say that "the fact that a given biblical episode is historical is not important in and of itself." (p. 23) Precisely this is what those who espouse the "Easter faith" like to say as they then go on to deny the Easter fact of the resurrection, with all the terrible implications of this anti-Biblical theology.

Discussion Five. The Promise and Jesus Christ.

The same sort of bifurcation of event from meaning carries over into this section as *AFFIRMATION I* fiddles with the historicalness of events and details in the life of Jesus as recorded by the evangelists, and then questions whether "doubt is cast on the historicity of Jesus' resurrection" when doubt is cast on other events reported by the evangelists. (p. 25) But why doubt, we ask? Is doubt somehow sanctified in the name of the so-called scientific results of the historical-critical method of dealing with Scripture's text? Is Scripture to be relegated to the same category as other ancient literature? Do [John 10, 35](#), [2 Tim. 3, 16](#), [John 20, 31](#), etc., mean nothing at all? Is a statement like, "proof of the resurrection will not b ad us to believe the Gospel or trust God," really what a Christian would want to say? Especially when Scripture attests so plainly that there was no fact which turned the disciples around from doubt to faith as did the *fact* (and proof!) of the resurrection in the person of the physically risen Lord!

What "gospel" does *AFFIRMATION I* have in mind when it states that, because of Christ's life, death and resurrection, God "now promises to free us from any force that enslaves us" and helps ns "look to the future with confidence"? (p. 26 f.) Heaven, too, in that future⁹ Or is this merely the empty theology of hope, like Moltmann's, which proclaims infinite progress into the future for mankind? It has all those earmarks, particularly because of what is *not* said and yet *ought* to be said in line with Scripture's straightforward promises.

Discussion Six. The Promise and the Old Testament.

In this day and age when predictive prophecy is largely discredited for the Old Testament, we find objectionable the caution "not to leap prematurely into the New Testament to find the meaning of Old Testament passages" and the reminder that the "Old Testament deserves to be thoroughly studied on its own terms." (p. 28) Biblically controlled exegesis, where human reason has always been kept in its ministerial place, has always had this latter concern; hut at the same time it has also recognized that the New Testament, on its own merits and authority, is the best interpreter of the Old

Testament. Therefore, it objects strenuously to higher criticism's refusal to give first place to what the New Testament writers have to say concerning prophetic promises in the Old Testament.

We puzzle, too, over the strange omission, or reticence to speak, of the definitely *Messianic* content in the promises to Adam, the patriarchs, David, etc. The best *AFFIRMATION I* is able to muster for these old worthies of faith are *nebulous formulations* like “new lease of life” (to Adam), “promise of God’s concern for all men” (to Noah), “land of his own, national greatness, numerous seed, and the privilege of mediating God’s blessing to other nations” (to Abraham), “Redeemer of oppressed people” (to Israel), etc., but nary a word directly about the Messiah. What ought to be a clear, grand attestation on the basis of Old and New Testament shows rather throughout the heavy pedal of higher criticism’s avoiding predictive *Messianic* promises.

Discussion Seven. The Holy Spirit and the Mission of Christ.

(Discussions seven to nine are supposed to highlight the 3rd Article.)

Is the Gospel *ever* properly and fully stated, at least for Lutheran theology, when it is described in conditional terms of the “possibility of forgiveness” rather than in categorical proclamation of the accomplished fact of God’s grace through Christ? (p. 32 & p. 22) Hermann Sasse says quite correctly of Luther: “For him the Gospel was not a teaching concerning the *possibility* of the forgiveness of sins, but God’s proclamation to the sinner, His bestowal of forgiveness of sins.” (*In Statu Confessionis*, p. 47) This is an important point, if the Gospel’s *efficacy* is not to be made contingent upon, or constituted by, the recipient’s faith. *AFFIRMATION I* seems to miss this entirely, and thus comes off sounding more Reformed than Lutheran at this point.

Then, too, the reader may rightly wonder about the “Gospel” being- presented according to the “thought patterns of every culture.” It was one thing for St. Paul to become all things to all men that he might by all means save some, but this section of *AFFIRMATION I* teems with questionable theologizing which clouds the absolutely unique character and content of the Gospel, a Gospel which in no way comports with or learns from the so-called “living faiths” of mankind. This concern is heightened by the further diluting of the Gospel into a lateral program for the improvement of socio-economic-political conditions in the ailing body of mankind. True, the avenues of mercy lead in these directions, but what kind of “gospel” is it that brings about “the liberation of human beings from all evils” in this present wicked world? (p. 33)

Discussion Eight. The Holy Spirit and the Community of God.

While Scripture highlights the uniqueness of the miracle of inspiration (2 Tim. 3, 16 & 2 Pet. 1, 21, e.g.), *AFFIRMATION I* flattens it out by dealing “the same dynamic power of God” broadly to “His spokesmen (who) fulfill His redemptive purposes for His community.” (p. 35) No wonder, then, that when attention finally rivets on 2 Tim. 3, 16, the reader is carefully prepared, step for step, to be in doubt about its evident meaning that “*all* Scripture is given by *inspiration* of God.” His confidence in this text is methodically broken down by *AFFIRMATION I* telling him that . . .

- 1) it “has become,” not *is*, a classic text for the doctrine of inspiration; (p. 36)
- 2) it “is the only biblical reference which actually applies the term ‘inspired’ to the Sacred Scriptures as such.” (*Ibid.*)

So what?! Lutheran theology has always held it to be an inviolable

principle that articles of faith are established by clear verses (or verse!) of Holy Scripture.

- 3) "the writings referred to are clearly the writings of the Old Testament, probably in the Greek translation (Septuagint)." (*Ibid.*)

The latter is an entirely irrelevant matter. And as to the former, that Paul's point of reference is the Old Testament, it might be well to point out what Chemnitz does, that, this is the apostle's last letter and that, therefore, it ought not. be said so quickly that he has only the Old Testament in mind but "the whole divinely inspired Scripture." (*Examination of Trent I*, 136)

- 4) the term "*theopneustos* occurs only here." (*Ibid.*)

This is neither here nor there, for the meaning is beyond cavil or doubt from Greek usage in Scriptural and secular realm. Beyond doubt, that is, except for *AFFIRMATION I*, for, horror of horrors, it opts for the grammatically unacceptable meaning that "the breath of God working in and through the Scriptures expresses the same idea," in other words, that "inspired" means the same as "inspiringness." This is a totally un-Lutheran bowing in the direction of higher criticism's denial of Scripture's inspiration.

Little wonder after all this that the historicity and accuracy of the Scriptural writings are cast into the now customary mold or way of looking on things, that they are held to get the Truth of God, "the Gospel," across unfailingly in spite of the errors, historical and otherwise, which they contain.

[Discussion Nine](#). The Holy Spirit and the Teaching Activity of the Church.

We wonder where the theology of *AFFIRMATION I* can possibly lead when it posits the principle that "the Sacred Scriptures lay down no rules for interpretation and prescribe no method for communicating the message of the Scriptures to successive generations." (p. 39) Holy Scripture, as Luther reminds us, with its inherent clarity invites careful reading and investigation, and needs to lay down no rules for interpretation. In fact, do you know any other book, ancient or modern, that does? But *AFFIRMATION I* wants the reader to believe, however, that methods of interpretation differ from age to age and that "the church stagnates and loses its effectiveness" if it fails to move with new methods. (p. 40) So, in spite of the fact that the history of language has pretty well established that the art of communication, as employed also by God through chosen spokesmen or penmen, embraces within it certain self-evident, and basic rules of hermeneutics, *AFFIRMATION I* assures us that there may be a variety of ways for interpreting, particularly Scripture. Luther's answer against Erasmus, who tried the same trick or ploy 450 years ago, was: "This is the very devil!" And he was right in labeling it as he did; for notice how in the next breath comes *AFFIRMATION I*'s assurance that the so-called "historical-critical methodology is neutral." Nothing was ever farther from the truth, and the sorry, broken trail left by this methodology in the hands of its dedicated practitioners is a matter of record. The tombstones of liberalism are everywhere, bearing record to the stifling of the Gospel in church after church,

seminary after seminary, pulpit after pulpit, in ail centuries past, but especially the last two. The assertion that "basically all the techniques associated with ‘historical-critical’ methodology, such

as source analysis, form history, and redaction history, are legitimated by the fact that God chose to use as His written Word human documents written by human beings in human language,” (p. 41) is unmitigated, unsubstantiated nonsense. If Missouri buys *AFFIRMATION I*’s “legitimated” on the word of the faculty majority’s assurance, it deserves what it has bargained for—to be swindled of the Word of God itself. Pious palaver can never cover the scarred and eroded condition of Christian theology as a result of such “legitimated” and deceptive destruction of the Sacred Word of God.

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AFFIRMATION I falls far short of addressing itself to and, above all, of resolving the issues confronting Missouri. What each of its authors and subscribers, as well as every reader, must finally face up to is this: “The issue turns on this question, whether the Missouri Synod will remain what she was till now, a *Confessional evangelical Lutheran church!*”

Here, then, we rest the case ... If we destroy the historical life of our Church, and abandon her Confession, whither shall we go? What system can we accept which will meet so fully our wants? If we destroy or rend the Lutheran Church, or allow as normal and final just as much deviation as the individual may wish from all to which she has been pledged in her history, from all that is involved in her very name, from all that gave her distinctive being, what may we hope to establish in her place to justify so fearful an experiment, and to indemnify the world for so great a loss? (Chas. Porterfield Krauth, [*Conservative Reformation and Its Theology*, 574.](#))

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