

# CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY

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# Editorial ✠

## *The Task Ahead*

September marks the beginning of a new academic year at Concordia Seminary and provides a natural stimulus to look at the task ahead of us. It promises to be an exciting year: a major task force is subjecting the total curriculum to analysis. We may not recognize the place after they are through. This would be good in the eyes of many pastors, students, and faculty. The students set another ball of curricular revision in motion last year. Unfortunately, only one-third of that group will be on campus this year. In the judgment of some, the Denver convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod also indicates some possible changes in the task ahead.

We rejoice in many things as the new school year begins, not least of which is the unity we have in Jesus Christ. It is present on our campus and is far more solid than the tensions and frictions which are also here. This unity is present in the Synod. That will sound strange to some, but it is there, and we need to recognize and to rejoice in this great gift of God. To our knowledge (check the records, please) no one within the Synod has suggested that our doctrinal divisions, deep as they may be, divide us in our common understanding of and devotion to the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is the positive note which every leader in the Synod will repeatedly sound. This claim of unity in the Gospel is not that straw which the drowning man grabs in deluded desperation. It is present; it is our most valuable unnatural resource; it makes the way ahead hope-filled.

In this journal we intend to concentrate on the theological issues which trouble the Synod. It seems to us that the Denver convention underlined at least three key issues: the doctrine of the Word, the nature of the mission of the people of God, and the quest for fellowship.

1. One group apparently believes that the inerrancy of Scripture must be defined to mean that no discrepancy or contradiction can be found in Scripture. Or, they maintain that it must be defined in terms of the concept of "propositional truth," which seems to mean that every statement in Scripture must conform to reality (geographical, historical, scientific), unless there is clear indication to the contrary in the passage itself.

Another group feels that this double-barreled definition adds a test of truthfulness to Scripture which Scripture nowhere applies to itself. They prefer to define inerrancy to mean that Scripture infallibly accomplishes God's purposes and is, in this sense, wholly reliable, true, and trustworthy. (See this journal, October 1960, pp. 626—27, for this faculty's statement on Scripture; also Arthur Carl Piepkorn, "What Does Inerrancy Mean?" Vol. 36, pp. 577—93, Robert D. Preus, "Notes on the Inerrancy of Scripture," Vol. 38, pp. 363—75, and Kent S. Knutson, "The Authority of Scripture," Vol. 40, pp. 156—65.)

2. Two views also prevail in the Synod on the question of the church's mission. The Synod adopted several affirmations at its 1965 convention in Detroit on its

understanding of God's mission. These affirmations state that the mission is the Lord's; that the church is Christ's mission to the whole world, to the church, to the whole society, to the whole man, and that, finally, the whole church is Christ's mission. One group apparently understands these affirmations to be primarily a call to increase our efforts to preach the Gospel to every creature, while the other group understands them as a call to engage in a vigorous ministry of Gospel preaching *and* social action.

3. One group in the Synod views fellowship as a gift whose value is to be preserved by a strict and limited approach to the question of who our brothers are. This approach is often marked by defining "Gospel" in Augustana VII to include secondary articles, church practice and discipline. The other group seeks every permissible opportunity to rejoice in our fellowship with all who confess Jesus Christ as Lord so that Christians can strengthen each other and so that more men may know that God has sent His Son into the world. (John 17)

If this analysis is valid, then one truth emerges: these views do not reach down to our understanding of the Gospel. To insist that they do and that they justify breaking fellowship is a schismatic act. Furthermore, we must learn to stop listening to those who insist that these divisions are fatal and that the Synod has become a heterodox body.

Inevitably tensions will arise between those who want to see the Synod surge forward in an adventuresome and risky program of mission to the whole man and those men who insist that priority must now be given to the ministry of reconciliation within the Synod itself. It would be tragic if these two groups, often united on other issues, fall to quarreling among themselves.

A four-point program suggests itself for working at the task ahead: (1) A concerted fraternal endeavor to discover anew and rejoice in our oneness in the Gospel; (2) A willingness to recognize greater variety in theological statements and positions; (3) A rededication to the task as spelled out in the Mission Affirmations; (4) An eagerness to rejoice in the great things which God has done for us in the past, including fellowship with The American Lutheran Church.

This journal has not and will not engage in politics or the persecution of personalities. It will not ask whether a man is conservative or liberal. It will only ask whether he is honest, competent in his claimed area of responsibility, and obviously dedicated to the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

HERBERT T. MAYER