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## CAN THE AMERICAN LUTHERAN CHURCH BE UNITED?

The issue involved in this question has been launched in a publication which has recently left the Concordia Press at St. Louis.<sup>1)</sup> The unification aimed at is one in doctrine. It does not advocate organic union, but a confessional consensus of all American Lutherans. This is a distinct merit of the book. Efforts to amalgamate, or federate, organized church-bodies must necessarily recognize other interests besides the one in which all Lutherans are agreed *a priori*, viz., that the confessional standards of the Church be maintained as a common norm of doctrine and practice by all who have adopted the denominational designation of Lutherans. It would not be easy to conceive a Lutheranism which would reject, in principle, the normative authority of the confessional writings of the Lutheran Church, and still claim recognition as a Lutheran society. Lutheranism, in such a case, would be a term of different import from the one which the term has in the common acceptation. Accordingly, the book starts with a fair prospect of having an easy sailing in Lutheran waters. The only pertinent question that could be raised in the premises is,

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1) *Zur Einigung der amerikanisch-lutherischen Kirche in der Lehre von der Bekehrung und Gnadewahl.* Im Anschluss an die norwegischen Vereinigungssactze und deren Kritiken. Von Dr. F. Pieper. St. Louis, Mo. Concordia Publishing House. 1913. 100 pages; bound in cloth; 40 cts. Carriage prepaid.

## THE PROOF TEXTS OF THE CATECHISM WITH A PRACTICAL COMMENTARY.

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### THE THIRD ARTICLE.

(Continued.)

In the words, "But the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith," we confess that sanctification is solely the work of the Holy Ghost. This truth we considered in a recent article.

Four distinct acts are ascribed to the Holy Spirit: 1. The call; 2. enlightening; 3. sanctification in the narrower sense; 4. preservation. — The phrase "by the Gospel" qualifies the verbs *called, enlightened, sanctified, and kept*. And when we confess, "The Holy Ghost has called me *by the Gospel*, etc., we give utterance to the distinctive Lutheran, *i. e.*, Biblical, doctrine, that the Holy Ghost never works without means, the means of grace, and thereby we reject the doctrine of the sects, that the grace of God and His Spirit are communicated by an *immediate* and *secret* operation, by an *inner light*, etc. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God," Rom. 10, 17. The Gospel is the word of the *grace of God*, Acts 20, 24. 32; it *ministereth the Spirit*, Gal. 3, 5. This Gospel, since it is the Word of God, is "quick and powerful," Hebr. 4, 12; it is the *power of God* unto salvation," Rom. 1, 16. Paul explicitly writes to the Thessalonians: "He *called you by our Gospel*," 2 Thess. 2, 14. Christians are born again *by the Word of God*, 1 Pet. 1, 23; they *grow thereby*, 1 Pet. 2, 2; this Word is the seed and the nourishment of the new life.

"We must, therefore, constantly maintain that God will confer with us in no other way than through His external Word and sacraments. And all that is boasted of independent of such Word and sacraments as being the Spirit, is the very devil himself." (*Smalcald Articles*, Art. VIII, p. 322.)

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Luke 14, 17: *Come; for all things are now ready.*

The process of *calling* is beautifully illustrated in the parable of the Great Supper. God has prepared salvation for all, "*all things are now ready*"; and He earnestly and urgently calls, "*Come!*" This is the Gospel call.

2 Tim. 1, 9: *God hath saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.*

Paul exhorts Timothy: "Be not ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me, His prisoner; but suffer hardships with the Gospel according to the power of God; who saved us," etc. Paul speaks of himself and Timothy, and what applies to them applies to all Christians. "Be not ashamed," Timothy, "suffer hardships with the Gospel"; for remember what great things God has done by you and me: He "*saved us and called us.*" The statement "*God saved us*" is followed by the manner in which He saved us: "*He called us.*" We were called, and thus we were saved. God called us, and thus we came to Him. He called us with "*a holy calling.*" The call proceeded from the *holy* God, and it was a call to *holiness*. Our salvation *in toto* we owe to God. *Expressis verbis* the apostle *denies* that there was a ground or cause in us that impelled Him to "save and call us," when he says: "*not according to our works.*" Next, he positively asserts the only reason for His act: "*but according to His own purpose and grace*"; the reason was *His own purpose* which was founded on His *grace*, *i. e.*, upon His gracious purpose. The two words, "purpose and grace," emphatically say: it was a *gracious purpose*. Paul proceeds: "*which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.*" So the call is referred back to eternity; we did not then exist, hence could not impel God in any way. It was *given us*; hence it is pure grace. It was given us *in Christ*; hence it is a grace not without Christ, but in Christ.—"*Not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace.*" Works and grace are opposed to each other; the one

excludes the other. Studiously the passage inculcates the blessed truth: nothing in us, not our good works, good conduct, or anything else in us, caused God to call us. It was a call of pure grace.

1 Pet. 2, 9: *Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people, that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.*

Who are they of whom Peter speaks in such eulogistic terms? They are they who have been begotten again unto a lively hope according to the abundant mercy of God, chap. 1, 3; they who are born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth forever, 1, 23; they who are admonished: "Desire the sincere milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby," 2, 2; they who are built up a spiritual house on the living stone, Christ, 2, 5; the believers, 2, 7. These same people, in contradistinction to the unbelievers, are now addressed: "*But ye are a chosen generation,*" chosen out of the *massa perditionis*; "*a royal priesthood.*" Priests they are who through Christ have access to God, and they are *royal* priests, kings, who rule over their spiritual enemies. "*An holy nation,*" a nation whose king is Christ; a *holy* nation because of faith in Christ, and who from faith lead a holy life. "*A peculiar people,*" literally, "*a people for a possession,*" for God's possession, who will not allow them to be plucked out of His hand. What purpose has the apostle in view in thus enumerating the high prerogatives of the Christians? "*That ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you.*" So we have an exhortation to sanctification. Here, by the way, is a valuable lesson for theological students, future ministers, as well as for ministers in active service. When exhorting our Christian people to do good works, let us learn from the apostle to build a solid substructure, to exhort them "by the mercies of God"; let us not hammer down upon them with the Law, "Thou shalt!" "Thou shalt not!" Let us remember that truly good works flow out

of gratitude to God; furthermore, good works, as we may see from a close inspection of this text, do not and cannot flow out of our natural powers, but from the spiritual powers given us in conversion. —

When the apostle admonishes the Christians to show forth the praises of God, he adds: "*who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.*" The call obligates them to a life in sanctification, and through the call they have received power to live such a life.

As Paul, in the preceding passage, spoke of the call, so does Peter in the present. By reminding the Christians of the *call*, he reminds them of their entrance into Christianity. Let us observe what he says: He "hath called you out of *darkness.*" *Darkness, σκότος*, is the total absence of light. Clearly, *before* the call they were in *darkness*. What state does that designate? Peter in the context answers: "In time past ye were *not a people*"; "*which had not obtained mercy.*" What state is designated by "*light*" into which they were translated by the call? Again the context answers: "*but are now a people of God,*" "*but now have obtained mercy.*" And now observe the prepositions ἐξ—εἰς = *out of—into*. *Out of darkness—terminus a quo; into light—terminus ad quem*. How was this entrance *into* light effected? By any act of theirs? No. If left to themselves, they would have remained in darkness. How did the blessed change come about? God *called* them *out of—into*. By and through the call they were transferred from *darkness* to *light*. It was an *efficacious* call. God called. Through the *call* they became what they now are—Christians. The call included the effect; it was an *effective call*. At the same time it was a *gracious call*. They were in darkness and loved darkness. Nothing *a parte hominis* impelled God to extend the call. God called them *into light*. The spiritual darkness vanished, their dark minds became illumined.—The sinner who is thus called is at that same moment illumined; he sees Jesus as His Savior, trusts, believes, rejoices, and takes comfort in Him.

2 Cor. 4, 6: *For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*

This brilliant passage is the standard text for the doctrine of illumination. In his defense over against the accusations of certain detractors of his apostleship, Paul had spoken of people "in whom the god of this world," the devil, "hath blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that the light," the illumination, "of the Gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should not shine unto them," v. 4. Speaking for himself and the other preachers of the Gospel, the apostle says their blindness is not the fault of the Gospel, for that is a powerful light, v. 4, nor is it their fault, "for we preach not ourselves," we have no self-seeking aims, "but" we preach "Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake," v. 5. Continuing his argument, he avers that it was God Himself who bestowed such knowledge upon them which qualified them to preach Christ Jesus by enlightening them, and that for the purpose of enlightening others. "*God it is who shined in our hearts;*" thus our hearts, dark in themselves by nature, became illumined. God "shined in our hearts" by manifesting unto us Christ Jesus as Lord, our Savior. Thus we received this light, this illumination. And why did God do this? "*To give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*" This we do; "we preach Christ Jesus the Lord," v. 5. This is the sum and substance of the Gospel; and this Gospel is a light that shines, v. 4. Stating the purpose for which they had been illumined, the apostle writes: *πρὸς φωτισμὸν τῆς γνώσεως*, etc. We may translate: God shined in our hearts "*for the enlightening of the knowledge of the glory of God,*" or: God shined in our hearts "*to give the light,*" the illumination, "*of the knowledge of the glory of God.*" In either case "*the knowledge of the glory of God*" is "the light," the illumination, which God Himself has kindled through the Gospel, v. 4. None but God could do this. This truth is impressively set forth by the comparison of the creation of light on the first day of creation and the

creation of this spiritual light in the heart. "God, *who commanded the light to shine out of darkness*, shined in our hearts." In the beginning, darkness covered the earth. God said, "Let there be light!" and there was light. Through this creative word it sprang into existence. No power inferior to the omnipotence of God could produce it. The same power, God's Word, is necessary to dispel spiritual darkness in natural man. Cf. 1 Cor. 2, 14; Eph. 2, 1. Where and how does God to-day say, "Let there be light!"? In the Word, by the preaching of the Gospel, v. 5. This is God's voice. "The light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ," v. 4, is put on the candlestick, and through its illuminating power the darkness of the heart is dispelled; it becomes enlightened. And whosoever is enlightened sees "*the glory of God.*" The glory, *δόξα*, of God is the sum total of all divine attributes whereby God manifests Himself as God. Such attributes are His holiness, love, mercy, justice, grace, omniscience, omnipotence, etc. — Where do we see "the glory of God"? The text answers: "*in the face of Jesus Christ.*" What does that say? "The light of the Gospel," says v. 4, reveals "the glory of Christ," and Christ "*is the image of God.*" The "*glory of Christ,*" v. 4, and "*the glory of God,*" v. 6, are identically the same, John 1, 14. Now, who sees Christ, "the image of God," sees the Father, John 14, 9. So by beholding the glory of Christ in the Gospel, we have a knowledge of the glory of God. Which of the various attributes constituting the "glory" of God are meant in a given passage, the context reveals. Now since the context speaks of the Gospel, v. 3, of "the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ," v. 4, of preaching "Christ Jesus the Lord," v. 5, the grace, mercy, and love of God, which He manifested by sending His Son as the Redeemer of the world, Tit. 3, 4, *et al.*, are primarily to be thought of.

Jer. 31, 18: *Turn Thou me, and I shall be turned; for Thou art the Lord, my God.*

In the Scriptures the bestowal of faith is denoted by various terms such as call, enlightenment, regeneration, con-

version, etc. The same event is looked at from a different view-point. The sinner who is effectually called is at the same moment enlightened, regenerated, converted, etc. — Our Catechism mentions *conversion* and *regeneration*. The sinner who is called is said to be *converted* because he is turned from sin to God; he is said to be *regenerated* because he is placed in a new life.

Jer. 31, 18 speaks of conversion. Ephraim prays: "*Turn Thou me, and I shall be turned.*" The English word *turn* gives rise to a striking and truthful picture. Natural man is going in the wrong direction, away from God. Of himself he cannot turn and come to God. "*Turn Thou me,*" Thou alone canst do it, "*and I shall be turned.*" The reason follows: "*for Thou art the Lord, my God.*" God manifests His divine power by turning man, who flees from Him into destruction, and changing his mind so that he bids farewell to sin, the world, and Satan, and turns to God. — God is *subjectum convertens*, and man is simply *subjectum convertendum*.

But is this not a prayer of the converted Ephraim? Who-soever can and does pray, "*Turn Thou me,*" is already converted. True. Far from subverting the point made, this objection simply strengthens the position taken. Ephraim, who is already turned, prays to be turned. What does this prove? That conversion here is to be understood in the wider sense, of the daily turning to God, the daily conversion, that conversion which is to last through life. Now, since even this daily conversion is a work of God, how much more is not the first conversion, conversion in its narrower sense, a work of God! And Ephraim expressly says, "*After I was turned, I repented,*" v. 19.

1 Thess. 4, 3: *This is the will of God, your sanctification.*

When Paul came to Thessalonica, he preached the Gospel of Christ first and foremost. He "*reasoned with them out of the Scriptures, opening and alleging that Christ must needs have suffered and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you is Christ,*" Acts 17, 3. Through



this Gospel the Thessalonians came to faith. But Paul did not only preach redemption and justification, but also “*how they ought to walk and to please God,*” 1 Thess. 4, 1; in other words, he also preached sanctification. He showed them not only the necessity (*δεῖ*) of walking in the newness of life, but also the “*how*” (*πῶς*), the manner of this walk, to please God. He exhorted them to “*walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto His kingdom and glory,*” 1 Thess. 2, 12. The call obligated them thereto, and gave them power so to walk. And in the present chapter he tells the “*brethren,*” v. 1, why he so earnestly beseeches and exhorts them to “*abound more and more*” in sanctification: “*This—your sanctification—is the will of God.*” God’s good and gracious will is, first of all, their salvation by faith in Christ Jesus. But this is also His will that Christians, being called out of darkness into His marvelous light, should show forth the praises of Him that called them, 1 Pet. 2, 9; that, being “*light in the Lord,*” they should “*walk as children of light,*” Eph. 5, 8; that, to quote St. Peter again, “*as He which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation,*” 1 Pet. 1, 15.

“*This,*” namely, “*your sanctification,*” “*is the will, θέλημα, of God.*” The apostle does not use the article before *θέλημα*; he does not say: τὸ θέλημα, but simply *θέλημα*, which indicates that he does not mean to say: this—your sanctification—is the whole will of God, this exhausts His will concerning you, but the construction says: this also belongs to the will of God—your sanctification. And the word for “*sanctification*” is *ἀγιασμός*, not *ἀγιασθήνη*. *Ἀγιασμός* has an *active* sense, *Heiligung*; whilst *ἀγιασθήνη* has a *passive* meaning, *Heiligkeit*. Hence the exhortation is: sanctify yourselves, flee sin, get rid of sin more and more; cf. v. 1. This is God’s will, just as much His divine commandment as, “*Thou shalt not steal;*” “*thou shalt not kill,*” etc. And “*brethren,*” v. 1, who are besought and exhorted “*by the Lord Jesus,*” v. 1, will willingly give heed to such exhortations, will gladly run the way of God’s commandments.—From the Law, though it cannot give

spiritual life, they learn God's holy will, and the power to put off the old man daily they obtain from the Gospel, Rom. 12, 1. 2.

Eph. 2, 10: *For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.*

The peculiar emphasis on the first words of our text: *Ἀποῦ γάρ ἐσμεν ποιήματα* = "for *His* workmanship we are," finds its explanation in the preceding context. By nature we were dead in trespasses and sins, v. 1; but God, who is rich in mercy, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us, made us alive, together with Christ, vv. 4. 5. So it is plain: "by grace ye are saved," v. 5. This thought is resumed in v. 8 and amplified by the phrase: "through faith" — "by grace are ye saved through faith." God's grace impelled Him to kindle faith in our spiritually dead hearts, faith in Christ Jesus, and thus we are saved by grace. Grace excludes all merit on our part. To make this thought outstanding, the apostle continues: "*and that not of yourselves.*" Spiritual vivification, quickening from spiritual death, vv. 2. 5, is a *gift*, and it is a "*gift of God,*" v. 8. It is "*not of yourselves,*" hence "*not of works,*" v. 9. — Our conversion is in no way a work of our own, else man might boast, v. 9. But it is "by grace," "through faith," that no man should boast. Conversion is God's work *in toto*; to Him belongs all glory. — All boasting on the part of man is excluded; "*for,*" as shown in the foregoing verses, "*His workmanship we are.*" We, we as Christians, our Christianity — all is "a thing of His making," *ποιήματα*. This is further explained and emphasized: We are "*created in Christ Jesus,*" we are new-created. "Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature," 2 Cor. 5, 17. Thus "*His workmanship we are.*" And now the apostle says: We are created in Christ Jesus *unto good works, which God hath before ordained, prepared, that we should walk in them.* Good works cannot be performed until we are new-created *unto* them. In other words: Christians only *can* do good works; but, on the other hand, Christians

must know that they "*should* walk in them." Good works do not save, do not justify, but the justified, the saved Christian should be zealous of good works. Tit. 2, 14; Gal. 5, 22—25. —But what does the apostle mean when he says: We are created unto *good works, which God hath before ordained, prepared?* The words yield no other sense than this, that God has made ready, prepared, beforehand those good works in which the Christians should walk. And when we ask where we are to find them, the context answers: in Christ Jesus, in whom we have been created. "Our walk in Him (Christ) is a walk in them (the good works)." Our being and life in Christ includes the walk in good works, so that we walk as He has walked. — Thus all self-glorification is barred. A true Christian does not boast of his truly good works that flow from faith. All glory and honor for what we Christians are and do as Christians belongs to God. (Cf. Stoeckhardt, *Epheserbrief.*)

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(To be continued.)