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Up-to-Date Theology at Concordia Seminary.

At the opening of the St. Louis Seminary, on September 8, the President addressed the students on a most timely subject. In our time — these were the thoughts he elaborated — there is one qualification of theology that is stressed with unusual emphasis, *viz.*, that it must meet the demands of the times, and be up to date. At the same time we Missourians, so called, are charged with failing to meet this requirement of theology. The theology of the Missouri Synod has fallen under censure as being out of date. This charge lacks foundation. You, students of Concordia, will study with us a theology that is up to date, really up to date, both as regards form and contents.

As regards the form, a theology that is up to date requires principally efficiency in the various *languages* in which we have an opportunity and are called upon to proclaim the Gospel of Christ. That an adaptation to languages is necessary to an up-to-date church was foreshadowed by the events of the first Pentecost. Since there were gathered at Jerusalem on that day "men out of every nation under heaven," the Galilean orators on that festival day were impelled by the Holy Spirit not to speak Hebrew only, but to employ the various mother-tongues of their hearers — Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, etc. This method of adaptation we follow in our own work. In our country and under the conditions under which we have to do our work, two living languages in particular, the *German* and the *English*, are necessary — besides other languages — for our Gospel ministry. Accordingly, we are up to date in imparting

The Proof-Texts of the Catechism with a Practical Commentary.

THE LORD'S PRAYER.

THE SECOND PETITION:

Thy Kingdom Come.

John 3, 5: *Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.*

John 3 is the celebrated Nicodemus chapter. Nicodemus was "a ruler of the Jews," *i. e.*, a member of the Sanhedrin, the highest church council at Jerusalem. This Pharisee, a rationalist of the first water, had been profoundly impressed by the activity of Jesus. He came to Jesus with an important question on his mind. From the answer of Jesus, the Searcher of hearts, rather than from the polite address of Nicodemus, v. 2, we infer what he was in quest of. Was Jesus about to establish a kingdom of God on earth, that kingdom which was so anxiously expected by the Jews?

"Verily, verily, I say unto thee," — these are the words of Jesus to Nicodemus, — "Except a man *be born again*, he cannot *see the kingdom of God*," v. 3. The "ruler of the Jews" knows nothing about a new birth: "*How can a man be born when he is old?*" V. 4. It cannot be done, so Nicodemus imagines. Now Jesus not only repeats His assertion of v. 3, but develops that truth by adducing the manner in which this new birth is ordinarily effected. He says: "*Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit*" (= *lit.*: of water and Spirit), "*he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.*"

Now, of which *kingdom* does Jesus here speak? The text is plain. In order to *see* this kingdom, v. 3, to *enter* this kingdom, v. 5, it is absolutely necessary that a man *be born again*, vv. 3, 5, be born a second time. A man born into this world is thereby not born into this kingdom. Being born into this world,

man is a child of wrath; he is born into the kingdom of Satan. So by nature none are in this *kingdom of God*. To belong to this kingdom man must be born *again*; and when he is born again, he is in this kingdom of God. Only the *new-born*, the believers, the Christians, belong to this kingdom; only they belong to this kingdom who can pray: "Our *Father*—Thy *kingdom come*." In this peculiar *kingdom* the King—God—is known, honored, and adored as *Father* by His subjects. And wherever in this wide world hands are folded and the prayer goes heavenward: "Our *Father*—Thy *kingdom come*," there are the subjects, the citizens, in this kingdom. And in *this* kingdom the Ruler, God, deals with His subjects as their *Father*, rules them with His love and His *grace*. So this kingdom—God's kingdom and Christ's—is "not of this world," "not from hence," John 18, 36, it is the kingdom of "truth," John 18, 37, of the Gospel, and "every one that is of the truth heareth My (Christ's) voice," the Gospel, and is a citizen of this *Kingdom of Grace*.

How is the entrance to this kingdom effected? The text says: "*Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit*, he cannot," etc. The second birth is a *spiritual* birth, effected by God the Holy Spirit, and hence this kingdom of grace is a *spiritual* kingdom, not, as Nicodemus thought, an earthly one. But this Spirit does not work without means to bring about the new birth. And the ordinary means ordained by God Himself is water, the water of Baptism. Cf. 1, 33; Titus 3, 4 ff.; 1 Pet. 1, 23.

The *blessings* we enjoy in this Kingdom of Grace are beautifully and tersely stated in Rom. 14, 17: "The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but *righteousness*" before God through faith in Christ, "*and peace*" of conscience with God, "*and joy in the Holy Ghost*."

By the new birth, by faith in Christ, one becomes and remains a citizen in this kingdom of God, for which we pray in the Second Petition, and by living the spiritual life generated by the Spirit one proves himself a member thereof. In answer

to the question, "How does this kingdom come?" Luther therefore says: "When our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word, and lead a godly life, here in time, and hereafter in eternity." — "Thy kingdom come," we pray, that is: "God graciously grant us true faith and godly life." (Luther.)

Matt. 9, 37. 38: *Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest that He will send forth laborers into His harvest.*

"Thy kingdom come" — this means, secondly, that God "would graciously extend His Kingdom of Grace on earth." Cf. Catechism, Qu. 235.

Making a circuit in Galilee, Jesus saw the deplorable spiritual condition of the people. The scribes and Pharisees of His time were blind leaders of the blind, and so the multitudes were without competent spiritual leaders and teachers. His Savior's heart yearned for their salvation. His divine compassion found utterance in the well-known words: "*The harvest truly is plenteous; the laborers few,*" etc.

As then, so now. The harvest-field, this wide world, contains untold multitudes of souls to be garnered in: "*The harvest truly is plenteous.*" What is to be done? Laborers, harvesters, are wanted; preachers, teachers, missionaries, are needed to sow the seed of the Gospel and later on to bring in the sheaves. Where the seed, the Gospel, is sown, there, without fail, will be a harvest — men will come to faith. Is. 55, 11. Thus the kingdom of God is extended. — How are the laborers to be obtained? The disciples must see to that. Jesus addresses His *disciples*, not the multitudes. Disciples, believers, have somewhat of the compassion of their Lord with the spiritually destitute. What are they to do? "*Pray ye the Lord of the harvest,*" etc. Disciples, believers only, can pray. And when do they pray earnestly, fervently? When they feel, realize, their need or that of others. Disciples are to feel the need of the lost multitudes as their own, and with a heart full of compassion for their eternal welfare they are to pray: "Lord, send *laborers!* Send *laborers*, not drones, into Thy harvest-field." The disciples are to "*pray to the Lord of the harvest*" for laborers.

Only He can qualify preachers, missionaries, for this high calling, only He can imbue them with the true spirit to carry out this work, to preach Christ and Him crucified with burning lips to dying souls. — We are Christ's disciples. To us He says: "*Pray ye,*" etc. Doing this, young men forsake all, flock to our seminaries to become preachers, missionaries, teachers. Through their labors God's kingdom is enlarged. But still the laborers are few: we do not pray enough — hence the lack of laborers. "*Pray ye therefore*": "Thy kingdom come! Lord, send laborers into Thy harvest-field." And Jesus, having said this to His disciples, continues the good work of preaching the kingdom of God. And in the very next chapter we read that these selfsame disciples whom Jesus so earnestly exhorted: "*Pray ye,*" etc., are themselves sent out into the field and they go. *Fiat applicatio.*

Luke 12, 32: *Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.*

Briefly stated, the context of this passage is this: The Lord took occasion to warn His disciples against covetousness (v. 13 ff.). To make the folly of this sin stand out all the more, He appended the parable of the Rich Fool (vv. 16—21). Worldly cares are closely connected with covetousness, and so Jesus raises His voice of exhortation against these, too.

Since "man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (v. 15), it is evidently folly to be anxiously concerned about "what ye shall eat, what ye shall put on" (v. 22). "All these things do the nations of the world seek after" (v. 30). His disciples should not be so minded. Why not? "Your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things" (v. 31). But His disciples have flesh and blood and hence they need such warnings; but they also need *consolation*, and so the Lord says encouragingly: "*Fear not, little flock.*" Over against the number of such as center their thoughts in the things of this life, His disciples then and now are but a "*little flock.*" But being a *flock*, His flock, they have a good Shepherd and shall not want; hence they need not fear. Having Jesus

as their Shepherd, God is their *Father*; they are His children. "Fear not; for it is your Father's *good pleasure to give you the kingdom.*" Since the Father "*takes pleasure in giving you the kingdom with all its spiritual blessings*" which you now possess by faith and the fruition whereof you will enjoy in yonder life, surely "these things," your earthly wants and necessities, will be added to you. Hence use your earthly possessions so as to be benefited by them eternally (v. 33; Matt. 19, 21).

"How sublime and touching a contrast between this tender and pitying appellation, 'little flock' and the 'good pleasure' of the Father to give them the kingdom; the one recalling the insignificance and the helplessness of that then literal handful of disciples, the other holding up to their view the eternal love that encircled them, the everlasting arms that were underneath them, and the high inheritance awaiting them! Well might He say, 'Fear not!'" (*J. P. and B. Com.*)

The point of the passage here is: "the little flock" by God's "good pleasure" now possesses "the kingdom." It is in the *Kingdom of Grace* and will enter the *Kingdom of Glory*. And for this kingdom of glory the "little flock" prays: Lord Jesus, come quickly. — "Thy kingdom come" means thirdly that God would "hasten the advent of His Kingdom of Glory." (*Catechism*, Qu. 235.)

Blest river of salvation,
Pursue thy onward way;
Flow thou to every nation,
Nor in thy riches stay;
Stay not till all the lowly
Triumphant reach their home;
Stay not till all the holy
Proclaim, "The Lord is come."

Springfield, Ill.

LOUIS WESSEL.

(To be continued.)
