

Brief Review

of the Pamphlet *God's Message to Us in Galatians:*

The Just Shall Live by Faith.

When the essay to be reviewed first began to be circulated in our midst, the faculty of the theological seminary at Wauwatosa was asked to write an opinion on it. The faculty complied, every member signing his name to the document. This "Gutachten", for which infallibility is not claimed, still stands in the two charges it raises against the essay; and so stands every signature thereto. However, the demand for this document exceeded by far what could reasonably be anticipated, and the limited supply printed has long since been completely exhausted. Moreover, the essay: "God's Message" has now been published in pamphlet form and is being distributed gratis among the laity of our churches; and many anxious souls are asking for light on the subject. To meet the situation, the president of Joint Synod approached the undersigned to write a brief English review. This review is not to be a translation of the German "Gutachten", nor a mere excerpt; it is to present in plain language the merits or demerits of the pamphlet: "God's Message".

In general it may be said that an author who twists and tortures a precious word on justification: The just shall live by faith, into a preachment of sanctification and tries to palm this off on the reader as "God's Message to Us in Galatians", can hardly be expected to be clear in all other matters, so as to present them in accordance with God's Word. Nor, indeed, is the author of "God's Message". The essay contains many things which are highly commendable. The author tries to stem the inroads of a dead formalism, which is threatening the churches in our day; he aims to deepen the inwardness of faith and to strengthen spirituality among us. The truth is sometimes set forth in beautiful and gripping language. On the other hand, however, we find statements that are misleading and will give

rise to dangerous misunderstanding; there are others that convey false impressions, some that actually contain false doctrine.

NOTE. The fact that the pamphlet has no page numbers makes quoting somewhat difficult. In this review the pages and paragraphs will be given by actual count. There are altogether 60 paragraphs, and the text fills six lines over 46 pages. In the quotations, the first figure indicates the page, the second the paragraph.

I.

We heartily agree with the author when he reminds us of the dangers surrounding us, nay, lurking in the innermost recesses of our hearts. "Our old chronic disease as Christians is to attempt to walk partly by faith and partly by reason, by law; to get into empty formalism — losing the Spirit and holding to the forms. By nature we are all legalists, banking on the law" (2, 2). "When we speak of adding the law to the Gospel, our mind naturally thinks of the 'other fellow', perhaps the sects. *But 'judgment must begin on the house of God', upon ourselves*" (3, 3). "Our danger ever is to lose the Spirit and then to boil down our Christianity, Christian life, to the observance of certain things; works; an intellectual assenting to a certain number of things" (4, 6).

In the face of such dangers, the author not only admonishes us: "Let us examine ourselves ere it is too late" (8, 10), he practically forces us to engage in a thorough self-inspection: "Isn't it rather true, 'Ichabod' is written over the portals of our houses, our churches, our synods, our schools, our hearts?" (8, 10). And the very strong language he then indulges in, being still governed by the introductory question: "Let us examine ourselves . . . Isn't it rather true?" might be construed as serving the same purpose. The following sentence may be open to criticism grammatically, but the content will be endorsed by every Christian: "True repentance is merciful because his Father in heaven is merciful. By that touchstone we can test ourselves whether our repentance is sincere" (15, 20), in the sense that absence of mercy on our part is proof conclusive of the absence of repentance.

We preachers of the Gospel thank the author for the admonition that our preaching must be true witnessship. "Christ wants

those to tell that have heard. Those to witness that have 'seen and heard'. . . Those to impart the 'Power of God unto salvation' that have experienced that power upon their own hearts and lives" (28 f., 36). He warns us not to resort to a substitute, adding: "How we public preachers of the Word are prone to drift into this!" (29, 37).

The author has some very true words to say about teaching and school work in general. "All knowledge taught without the Source of LIFE, and that is the center of FAITH — CHRIST, is a burden, a dead weight, death, a lie, in the last analysis. . . . Whether we teach Arithmetic, Geography, Reading, the Sciences, the Bible, etc., all is only to make known the name of Him who is the Source and Object of ALL THINGS. All only to glorify Him. That is life indeed. That is true teaching" (32 f., 42). "So the primary requisite in the teaching profession; in the preaching profession; and every other line and profession, is: to be a Christian, a believer, a child of God" (36, 47).

We are in sympathy with the author's zeal in attempting to raise our teaching and preaching to this level, and might be willing to condone the harsh words of the following sentences as a lapse probably caused and sufficiently accounted for by disappointed impatience, when he says: "Due to our lack of FAITH, Spirit, we have built up forms, and under the mass of forms the remaining Spirit has been quenched, and now our aim is by all means to keep up appearances; usually by heaping up still more forms. Finally in our extremity we copy from the world. . . . We look for recognition from the unbelievers' schools. We are proud to be put on their accredited list." Etc. (36 f., 47).

One more beautiful word on the great truth that salvation is free, not conditioned on anything we may do, independent of any merit or worthiness in us: "He who brings life out of death, and salvation out of damnation, bids us come. He says, Come unto Me, all ye that labor . . . and are heavy laden . . . *Come! Just as you are.* The Great Emancipator (John 8, 36) . . . says to you, I WILL GIVE YOU REST" (40, 52).

Many similar passages, that delight a Christian's heart, might easily be gleaned from "God's Message". Unfortunately, however, they do not represent the key-note struck by the essay.

II.

The essay is marred by grievous faults. There runs throughout an annoying undertone of nagging criticism and a judging of hearts, which cannot but poison the minds of the readers.

The author not only tells us about the dangers surrounding us, he also tries to tell us to what degree we have already succumbed to these dangers. This would be perfectly legitimate if the author limited himself in his diagnosis to the examining of symptoms. The Lord himself directs us to observe, and to read, and to judge the signs of the time. It is an indication of spiritual decadence when Christians cease to exercise the gift of the Spirit enabling them to discern the signs of the time, and when they neglect to perform this part of watchfulness. But in all this we are restricted to outward symptoms, because as human beings we are so constituted by our Creator that we must "look on the outward appearance" (1 Sam. 16, 7). "The Lord looketh on the heart", and we are trespassing on forbidden ground, we are usurping the Lord's prerogatives, if we presume to judge the hearts of our fellow-men. But that is exactly what the author of "God's Message" has become guilty of — whether consciously or without deliberation, I do not wish to investigate now; there will be something to say on this point in the conclusion.

In the first part of this review I referred to some of the warning cries uttered by the essayist. They were taken from § 2 (p. 2) and § 6 (p. 4). Issuing such warnings is entirely in place. But it becomes an intolerable judgment of hearts, when the author continues: "*We have advanced so far on this road of spiritless Christianity that to the average professed Christian Christianity is a set of rules, laws, ceremonies to follow. If he pays his 'dues', has gone through a Confirmation course, is married by a Lutheran pastor, has a Bible gathering dust on the front-room table, goes to church occasionally, attends a chicken supper, a bazaar, and a few ice cream socials during the year: he is a member in good standing, and 'will flee the wrath to come'. He believes that God will 'pass' him 'over' when He comes for judgment. To the greater share of our own Lutheran church members Christianity is summarized in the words, Be good and you'll be saved*" (5, 7). If these statements had been modified in any

way by words like: "Let us examine ourselves. Isn't it rather true?" (8, 10), we might consider the picture overdrawn, but could allow the substance matter as pertinent for self-examination. But instead of any remark that might lead us to search our hearts, we find the verdict pronounced over our church: "We have advanced so far". Then a classification of our fellow-Christians is undertaken, lines are drawn, and judgment is passed on one class of "our own Lutheran church members" (which happens to be the "greater share") that to them "*Christianity is summarized in the words, Be good and you'll be saved*".

Now that is the religion of natural man, and by this sweeping judgment the majority of our church members are declared to be heathens at heart. This is a flagrant violation of Jesus' warning: "Judge not, condemn not" (Luc. 6, 37); this is a usurpation of God's prerogative, who "looketh on the heart" (1 Sam. 16, 7) and "will bring to light the hidden things of darkness and will make manifest the counsels of the heart" (1 Cor. 4, 5); it is slandering of the Holy Spirit who is still carrying on His work among us, combating the legalistic religion of natural man and preserving the hearers of the Word in the true faith.

The author of "God's Message", however, proceeds to inform us that: "Christianity has become to most church members driving a sharp bargain with the Lord: a barter. Getting by with as little as possible. As one man has aptly expressed it: Ein ganz ordinaerer Kuhhandel (An ordinary horse trade)" (6, 8).

We look in vain for similar language in all the epistles of Paul. He was very careful to avoid it, although the provocation at times must have been great. It is clear that there were many shortcomings on the part of the Christians in the various congregations, which he had to censure, yet he always sought and found occasion to thank God for His spiritual blessings with which the congregations were endowed. The author of "God's Message", however, seems to be blind to God's rich gifts among us, and instead draws the lurid picture of the spiritual status of our "average church members" as briefly outlined above.

When speaking of Christians, as the author does, we must always bear in mind, and clearly express, that a Christian's is a dual nature. There is in the Christian, nay the Christian as such

is, a new creature, a new man, a spiritual man. But in the Christian there is left also the old man, the flesh, the Old Adam. It is quite proper to speak of Christians as new creatures without mentioning expressly that they have not as yet attained perfection but are always being hampered by their Old Adam, because the controlling element in them is their new spiritual nature. But to designate Christians in terms of Old Adam is improper, it is a lie. "For whosoever is born of God overcometh the world" (1 John 5, 4).

Now the author of "God's Message" is speaking of the "average professed Christian" (5, 7), "the greater share of our own Lutheran church members" (5, 7), "most church members" (6, 8). It will not do to assume that he is referring to their Old Adam, because Christians, as was remarked, are new creatures who through the vivification of the Spirit have overcome their Old Adam, are no longer dominated by him, but are meeting every attempt of his to regain his lost supremacy in their hearts with stern resistance, "crucifying the flesh with the affections and lusts" (Gal. 5, 24). It is simply a lie to identify a Christian with his Old Adam. Paul was very careful to avoid this mistake. He does not hesitate to put the colors on heavy when he paints the corruptions of Old Adam (cf. Gal. 5, 19—21), but he does not allow himself to confuse the Christian with him, he knows that the Holy Ghost has made something entirely different out of a Christian. Even when exposing to public view the wickedness of his own Old Adam he is very careful to distinguish himself from his Old Adam. "I know that *in me, that is, in my flesh*, dwelleth no good thing" (Rom. 7, 18). — Moreover, if the author's words were to be understood of the Old Adam in our Christians, why then speak of only "the greater share of our church members"? Is there a minority among our church members, is there a single soul on earth, that has succeeded in getting rid of Old Adam? Are we not all infected with the germs of "our old chronic disease"? Do we not all without exception groan under this form of cross with which we are burdened? But the author's remarks are limited to a part of our church members only; and if understood of Old Adam, they cannot but convey the idea that this group has experienced a relapse under his absolute and undisputed domination.

And who is to blame for this situation as the author views it with alarm? When pastors, preachers or teachers, notice from discernible symptoms that some spiritual evil is infecting the hearts of the people committed to their care, they will first of all seek for the cause in themselves; and if the author of "God's Message" had directed us to practice sincere self-criticism, we would be under obligation to him. But what he does instead is of an entirely different nature. He not only commits the sin of judging the hearts of our church members, he adds to this the further offence of determining that we, the spiritual leaders, must be guilty of a spiritless way of conducting our office, so that the lifelessness of our parishioners is simply the inevitable result of our own lifelessness.

He says: "*We must have emptied the Gospel of its LIFE-giving power or our appeal would bring more response*" (8, 10). He speaks of the "*usual advice given at sick-beds . . . : 'Du musst glauben'*" (6, 7); of "*our Catechism, as usually taught*" (18, 25); and "*our preparatory and college courses are usually only a rehashing of the husks of the Catechism course*" (5, 6).

In speaking of his student days the author confesses: "We studied the Bible from the various angles of study at the seminary, but we often failed to realize that God was speaking to us through our teachers and professors"; and then he adds: "That may have been the teacher's fault. **We shall prove their spirits before we have done with this paper**" (20, 27). And a little farther on, after describing what he considers the "rut" of "assuming a Kanzelton (plaintive pulpit whine), putting on a gown and dilating in generality-dealing, dogmatical, formal phraseology and treatise" (29, 37), he pronounces his verdict: "It beats all; and our faculties are not a little to blame for our being in such shackles. Instead of making us free by making us see Jesus, the Great Emancipator — 'for if the Son shall make you free then are ye free indeed' — we are chained for time, if not eternity" (30, 38).

After telling us in the paragraphs 42 and 43 (p. 32 ff.) in a beautifully clear way what teaching is (compare a few quotations in the first part of this review), he continues: "*Proved by that Spirit how few real teachers we have that are worthy of the name 'teachers', even at our seminaries*" (34, 44).

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Setting aside for a moment the sin of judging committed in the above statements, we ask, Is the author's major premise warranted by Scripture, viz.: that a deficiency in the spiritual life of a congregation is always traceable to a deficiency in the teacher's spiritual life? Paul emphatically declined responsibility in such a case. He censures the Corinthians for their attempt to judge him, and he appeals against them to his own clear conscience and to the judgment of the Lord. "It is a very small thing that I should be judged of you; . . . I know nothing by myself; . . . He that judgeth me is the Lord. . . . Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come" (1 Cor. 4, 3. 4. 5.). The Corinthian congregation was guilty of flagrant abuses, but not in consequence of any spiritless testimony on the part of Paul. — When Stephen faced the Council at Jerusalem, gnashing on him with their teeth, he appears to have felt no compunctions, at least we do not hear him accusing himself: "I must have emptied the Gospel of its LIFE-giving power, or my appeal would bring more response"; rather, his words as recorded in the Acts (7, 51) were: "Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost; as your fathers did, so do ye."

It would be blasphemous to entertain but for a moment the thought of holding Jesus accountable for the spiritual death of one of His disciples, or the serious lapse of another. The "response" to the perfect testimony of Jesus, whose words "are spirit" and "are life", is painfully illustrated in His weeping over Jerusalem (Luc. 19, 41—44) and in His complaint: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them which are sent unto thee: how often would I have gathered thy children together even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not" (Matth. 23, 37).

The low ebb of spiritual life in any congregation is no infallible criterion by which to gauge the spiritual life of the pastor, or the spirit and life of his official activity, and furnishes no ground on which to condemn him. And the inference: "We must have emptied the Gospel of its LIFE-giving power, or our appeal would bring more response" (8, 10), and all the charges resting on it, must be considered as slanderous judgment.

Moreover, this condemnation of the greater share of our public ministers of the Word was committed by the author in their absence. Jesus occasionally uses very harsh words toward His disciples; He calls them men "of little faith" (Matth. 6, 30; 8, 26; 16, 8), and addresses them as a "faithless and perverse generation" (Matth. 17, 17); but He never wrote an essay about it to be read in any of the Jews' synagogues behind their back. His love prompted Him to warn them to their face whenever He detected any shortcomings in their spiritual life, so that they might petition Him: "Increase our faith" (Luc. 17, 5), and He could help them. — Besides, when Jesus called His disciples a faithless generation, He did not thereby deny their saving faith, He did not charge them that their religion was "summarized in the words: Be good and you'll be saved" (6, 7). Over and above, however grounded in, the promise of free justification which they received in faith, they had been given the promise of miraculous powers, which likewise they were to receive in faith. These had failed them in their attempt to cure the maniac, and Jesus ascribes their failure to their lack of miracle faith. Their saving faith He does not question, as does the author of "God's Message" that of his fellow-Christians.

These unwarranted judgments of our fellow-Christians and fellow-ministers indicate the spirit that dictated the paper and they even make unpalatable some of the timely warnings and beautifully instructive paragraphs otherwise contained in it.

III.

The author of "God's Message" sets out to combat dead formalism in our midst. He complains: "Not having the Spirit, the LIFE BY FAITH, we have an imitation of it — we add and substitute forms, rituals, laws, constitutions, organization, ceremony, institutions, rules, regulations, systems, outlines, programs, externals, observance of certain things, dogmas, etc., etc. Not having the Power of Godliness we stress the forms" (4, 4).

What about forms? The nature and proper use of forms is stated very briefly by Paul in 1 Cor. 7, 31: "They that use this world, as not abusing it; for the fashion of this world passeth away." Forms are a part of the constitution of the present

world. As this world is a creation of God, so are the forms we meet with in the world. The great variety of forms may be reduced to a few basic ones, viz.: time, space, causality. No life on earth is conceivable except as molded by these forms. And the new spiritual life which Christ restored through His death, while it remains on this earth, is also bound up with these forms so that it cannot find expression without them. It can hardly be said that the Gospel instituted any new forms, but it filled the old forms with a new content, and adapted them to its special purpose. Thus the great number of forms which the author enumerates are not specifically Christian in themselves, but they easily lend themselves to Christian purposes, offering convenient avenues for performing Christian work.

Also the inner life of the human soul requires certain forms for manifesting itself, the experiences of the soul being usually divided into the three spheres of thinking (intellect), feeling (emotion), and striving (volition). These three forms of experience, neither individually nor collectively, constitute our real soul-life, but they are the avenues through which soul-life is nourished, maintained and manifested. In a healthy soul-life these three faculties will function in harmony; which, however, does not exclude that the one may be more pronounced than the others in certain individuals. The creational gifts of God vary; and likewise there is a diversity of spiritual gifts among Christians.

The form is never identical with spiritual life, it may even be entirely void of spiritual life; but on the other hand, spiritual life on earth cannot express itself without forms: remove the form and you take away the only point of contact between the spiritual life and this world. As a result of this condition we are constantly threatened by a twofold danger. The one is that forms which have been developed in the course of time and have become established are easily confused with the spiritual content they were devised to convey; thus when e. g. in sectarian churches the form of the sermon is retained but this form is used for the purpose of discussing the topics of the day, to convey political, scientific, etc., information — and yet is still called a sermon. And the like. And the attitude of the mind which is satisfied so long as the customary form is preserved intact, yes, insists that the form must not be violated, but pays little or no regard to the integrity

of the content: this may be called formalism. — The other danger is the opposite extreme, to which the author of "God's Message" goes.

When he set out to combat formalism, it was imperative that he clearly define the nature and proper use of forms. It was a grave mistake that he neglected to do so; for now his essay gives the impression as though forms are objectionable in themselves. True, occasionally we meet with a sentence like the following: "In Christ Jesus neither circumcision (legalism, *forms*, works) avails anything, nor uncircumcision (*lack of forms*), but a new creature that LIVES BY FAITH" (45, 57); or: Christ Jesus "is able to make these *dry rattling bones of empty forms* in the valley of the shadow of death here below *live* with newness of LIFE" (11 f., 16): but they are almost entirely lost in the huge mass of invectives hurled against forms of every description, invectives which cannot but give the impression that they were aimed against the forms as such.

To illustrate the author's attack on forms, we assemble a few sentences, taken at random from his paper, that are directed against the formalistic treatment of the Catechism and of dogmatics. "Our Catechism, as usually taught; our dogmatics, so stressed in our schools, has done much to bring about a state of affairs that we must admit exists today. All because we have listened to man's ideas rather than God's" (18 f., 25). "Our preparatory and college courses are usually only a rehashing of the husks of the Catechism course. Our dogmatical stress at our seminaries only serves that same purpose. It is only the advanced Catechism course and bleeds the life of Faith in Christ of the life-giving Blood, till we finally have the skeleton, the forms, the dogmas, the doctrines, the shells, the husks, left; but the Spirit is departed" (5, 6). "It goes to show where our FORMAL study of our courses, dogmatics, has gotten us to. It cuts up for the intellect, but just such vivisection of the Body of Life makes for death; so that dissecting the Word of Life, the Body of Christ, in that way makes for a dead Savior, a corpse" (19 f., 26). "Or let us approach the Bible from the angle of dogmatics and we are at once pressing a form upon that life-giving word. We come with pre-conceived ideas, either our own or those of others. 'Wir trauen dem Evangelium nicht zu, dass es die Dinge macht'"

(22, 30). "The old dogmatical formula: 1. Law, 2. Gospel, 3. Evangelische Ermahnung (evangelical admonition), as preached has worked untold havoc in our church. It has done much to bring about this (c)old Christianity. It is an appeal to the head, and leaves the heart cold; and we kid ourselves to believe that we have confessed our sins" (18, 24).

As was remarked before, the author neglected to define forms and formalism, nor do the above quotations give us a clear view of his ideas and aims. In one of the sentences from § 26 the word FORMAL is printed in capitals; and when the author read his paper before the synod meeting in Watertown (Nov. 17, 1927), he called special attention to the emphasis he placed on the word. One might get the impression as though he denounced us for being satisfied with *mere forms*, and would urge us to give more attention to the *subject matter* as such; but the remedy he suggests in the same paragraph from which the first sentences were reproduced above, is presented in the following words: "The only method, if you wish to call it such, that does not do this (i. e. make for a dead Savior) is the historical, the exegetical, the expository. It is the God-given way. It is the way that appeals to the heart" (20, 26), as though the historical, the exegetical, the expository method were in itself immune to the dangers of formalism, and its use an absolute guaranty of life and spirit. As a remedy against the dangers of the FORMAL study of our courses, dogmatics, he suggests a different method. In other words, it is not the spirit that is here opposed to the empty form, but form is opposed to form; one form is condemned, the other is recommended — as the only God-given way. And it is hard to escape the conviction that the author considers dogmatics as such as a damnable form for studying theology, especially so in view of that other sentence, also quoted above, from § 30, that whenever we "approach the Bible from the angle of dogmatics, we are at once (I understand this to mean: by that very fact) pressing a form upon that life-giving word". And thereby we show that: "We seem to doubt the ability of God to do things right through the means He has wisely chosen. We seem to think, or at least act, as though 'wir muessen dem lieben Gott unter die Arme greifen, sonst wird das Wort nicht recht aufgefasst'. We

are 'improving' upon God's way. Let us not kid ourselves, the Spirit is well able to do that without our tampering" (22, 30).

The great life-destroying element in dogmatics, as the author sees it, seems to lie in the fact that dogmatics "cuts up for the intellect" (20, 26), as though the intellect in itself constituted a damnable form of our inner life. He frequently opposes head and heart to one another. "All appeal in all studies must be to the heart, not head" (35, 46). There is about as much wisdom contained in these words as if some one would insist: "All food is for the stomach, not for the mouth". Our souls are so constituted that the intellect is the channel through which all truths, under normal conditions, enter the heart. Notice how St. Paul emphasizes the importance of the intellect. "He that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men . . . *for no man understandeth him*. . . . But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort. . . . I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all; yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue. Brethren, be not children in understanding. . . . If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that *ye are mad?*" (1. Cor. 14, 2. 3. 18. 19. 20. 23. Read the whole chapter.) Paul does indeed think very highly of the head as an important avenue of approach to the heart.

The author, furthermore, labors under the misconception that dogmatics operates with "pre-conceived ideas", thus forcing the "life-giving word" into a pre-arranged form, "pressing a form upon" it.

Lutheran dogmatics does nothing of the kind, it is not a bed of Procrustes, to which the Scripture truths are, by arbitrary stretching or mutilation, made to conform. Dogmatics merely arranges the Scripture truths systematically. It faithfully collects all statements regarding any one doctrine as they are found scattered throughout the Scriptures. It clearly limits the articles of faith over against one another, showing how the Scriptures present certain truths as elements of this article or of that. Dogmatics defines the relation of the articles of faith to one another as dis-

covered in the Scriptures. Dogmatics also groups the articles of faith together according to certain view points presented by the Scriptures, and points out their proximity to, or remoteness from, the great central truth: Salvation through faith in the redemptive work of Christ. — Dogmatics nowhere goes beyond Scripture. It does not press a form upon the Scripture truths, but receives its form from Scripture itself. It does not approach Scripture with pre-conceived ideas, but faithfully assembles and reproduces the ideas of Scripture.

This method of dogmatics is not injurious; rather, the lack of thorough dogmatical training impedes a man's teaching ability and exposes him to the attacks of insidious errors. But God demands that a bishop "must be apt to teach" (1 Tim. 3, 2), "able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers" (Tit. 1, 9).

In the quotations given above, the author couples the Catechism with dogmatics, intimating that both are about equally damnable. Indeed, the Catechism presents the divine truths unto our salvation in a certain form; but that is not damnable. Luther, the author of our Catechism, a man whom no one will suspect of dead formalism, used the Catechism for his daily devotions, and yet also stressed the form: "In the first place, let the preacher above all be careful to avoid *many kinds* of or various texts and forms, . . . but choose *one form to which he adheres*, and which he inculcates all the time, year after year. For young and simple people *must be taught by uniform, settled texts and forms*, otherwise they easily become confused when the teacher to-day teaches them thus, and in a year some other way, as if he wished to make improvements, and thus all effort and labor is lost. . . . Hence, choose whatever form you please, and adhere to it forever" (Preface to Small Catechism). — Wise words of an experienced man of God on the importance of the form of the Catechism.

Besides the Catechism and dogmatics, the author condemns very vehemently the habit of our ministers to prepare their sermons according to homiletical rules. Homiletics are the rules of rhetoric applied to sermon making. Homiletics aims to train preachers of the Word so that they may speak about spiritual matters in an adequate and becoming manner: to choose a suitable

text, to study the text with prayerful meditation, to formulate a theme, to organize the material properly, to arrange the thoughts logically, to present the divine truth clearly, fully, coherently, in order to edify the hearers that they may be advanced in Christian knowledge, nourished in faith, strengthened in the new life.

Now it is true that all the homiletical rules in the world will by themselves not produce a single sermon. Something more, and something of incomparably superior importance, is required. The author is right when he says: "Christ wants those to tell that have heard" (28, 36. See the first part of this review.). Preaching is to be "personal witnessship, experiential testimony, . . . LIFE BY FAITH expressing itself" (31, 39). The Word of God is "first and above all a personal message from God to ME, and my one object should be to get that Savior, Ezra-like, into my own heart" (21, 28). However, although the homiletical rules can never be a substitute for "Life by Faith", yet while we remain on earth the "Life by Faith" cannot properly and effectively express itself in a sermon that disregards these rules. The author of "God's Message" condemns God's order established by creation when he condemns homiletics in the following*): "Don't sit down on Monday morning, or perhaps as late as Saturday night with the object of having a sermon. What shall I preach? I'll take a portion of the Word and work it up into a sermon for the congregation. How wrong!" (24, 32). "Shame on us! . . . We study our Bible for sermonizing instead of building ourselves up in Christ. Is it any wonder our sermons are cold, lifeless forms, bolstered up with all sorts of man-made gusto, 'und man lockt keinen Hund damit vom Ofen' (We accomplish nothing)" (26, 33).

It is true, we preachers must study the Bible first of all for our own edification. If we neglect to do so, if we permit our per-

*) The author in this connection introduces a lengthy quotation from Luther's Table Talk, which I here omit, as also all further reference to the arguments taken from it. I have not been able to find the quotation as a whole in the St. Louis edition of Luther's works, nor have I succeeded in tracing every sentence to its source. — On the value of Luther's Table Talk, and on the authenticity of many of the sayings attributed to Luther in the Table Talk, compare the introductory remarks to Vol. XXII of the St. Louis edition by Prof. Hoppe, who for a number of years carried on a special investigation in this field.

sonal faith to starve, if we limit our Bible study to our professional sermon preparation, then our preaching, as far as we are concerned, will become a lie, because every sermon is to be a testimony of faith. Yet, it would involve gross infidelity to our calling, having been appointed by our Lord to feed His flock, should we restrict ourselves to personal edification in our studies. We pastors, like Timothy, have a special gift of God committed to us "by the putting on of hands", and we are expected to "stir up" *that gift* (2 Tim. 1, 6), and not to "neglect it" (1 Tim. 4, 14). "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a *workman* (not only a personal Christian) *that needeth not to be ashamed*, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2, 15). "Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them: that thy profiting may appear to all. Take heed unto thyself and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee" (1 Tim. 4, 15, 16). A steward is simply expected to be "faithful", no more, no less (1 Cor. 4, 2). And our Lord Jesus, who called us to our office, admonishes us: "Who then is a *faithful and wise servant*, whom his lord hath made *ruler over his household to give them meat in due season?* Blessed is that servant whom his lord when he cometh shall find *so doing*" (Matth. 24, 45, 46).—Let us pastors, then, study the Scriptures diligently for our own edification, and not neglect to study them professionally for sermon making.

Space does not permit to discuss in detail all the dangers involved in a condemnation of forms as such. What has been said may suffice to show: that forms have been arranged by the Creator for the present world; that the church, operating in the present world, must employ the existing forms to preach the Gospel; that, then, rejecting the forms as such constitutes a grave error.

It is a peculiar anomaly, noticeable also in the author of "God's Message", that those who oppose forms, oppose only certain forms, while they with fanatical zeal stress others. Luther observed about the Enthusiasts of his own day: "Our enthusiasts condemn the outward Word, and nevertheless they themselves are not silent, but they fill the world with their pratings and writings, as though, indeed, the Spirit could not come through the writings

and spoken word of the apostles, but through their writings and words He must come. Why do not they also omit their own sermons and writings, until the Spirit Himself come to men, without their writings and before them, as they boast that He has come into them without the preaching of the Scriptures?" (Smalcald Articles III, VIII, 5. 6. Trgl. p. 495).

In fine, when we become Christians we are not called to suspend our thinking and to abandon forms, that would be tantamount to "going out of the world" (1 Cor. 5, 10); rather, faith is to control our thinking, as well as our feeling and striving, and the Gospel truths are to fill our formal thinking, and forms in general, with a new content. Moreover, we are not now living in the days of Jesus and John, when the kingdom of God was come nigh and the time of fulfillment was at hand; when the Old Testament dispensation of shadows was to be superseded by the New Testament dispensation of realities (Col. 2, 16. 17). Then, in those days of transition, the parable of the new wine and the old bottles, or of the piece of new cloth and the old garment (Mark 2, 21. 22) was very much to the point. The Old Testament forms had been instituted by God for a certain time only, and when Jesus came, they had outlived their usefulness. Jesus did not come to substitute new forms for the old, or to add new forms to the old, or to fill the old forms with a new content, as the Pharisees supposed: He came to fulfil, to bring the blessings prefigured by the God-appointed forms of the Old Testament. But no general rule may legitimately be deduced from what applies to a special time and occasion only. A man who to-day antagonizes the customary forms of Gospel preaching and church work as objectionable in themselves stands in danger of soul-destroying Enthusiasm.

IV.

A further serious charge that has to be raised against the essay "God's Message" is that it poisons the mind of the reader by inaccurate and false teaching. I shall here present only two instances.

The words: "We must have emptied the Gospel of its LIFE-giving power or our appeal would bring more response" (8, 10), have been referred to in another part of this review as a slanderous

judgment against our ministers. They also convey a false impression of the efficacy of the Gospel, as though the Gospel lost its divine power and became ineffective when preached by a lifeless, spiritless man or in a lifeless, spiritless way.

Now it is true that we may prevent the fruits of the Gospel to appear; we may prevent faith to be generated, or, when already begun, may prevent it from bringing fruit to perfection; but that does not say that we empty the Gospel of its life-giving power: it is done by giving offence. By our un-Christianlike conduct we place a stumblingblock in the way of one who is to come to faith or to walk by faith, so that he falls away. Hence the many warnings in Scripture against giving offence. Paul says: "Giving no offence in anything, that the ministry be not blamed" (2 Cor. 6, 3). We all tremble at the word of Jesus: "Whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in Me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe unto the world because of offences! For it must needs be that offences come, but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh" (Matth. 18, 6.7); and especially at His stern warning to cut off hand or foot, yea to pluck out the eye, rather than to permit them to give offence (Mark 9, 43—48). And Paul makes it very clear what offence means when he says: "Thou that makest thy boast of the Law, through breaking the Law dishonorest thou God? For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you" (Rom. 2, 23.24). Through an offence the Word of God is not emptied of its divine power, but a sinner is hindered or prevented from receiving the benefits of the Word.

But perhaps that is the very idea the author wishes to express (though it must be admitted that that were a rather awkward way of saying it) when he speaks of "emptying" the Gospel of its life-giving power. Let us see. He says in another paragraph: "We can't preach any more of Christ than is in us. We can preach more ABOUT CHRIST, but absolutely no more Christ" (28, 35). "We can hold forth with a long and learned intellectual discourse, dogmatically treated, upon 'the Active and Passive Obedience of Christ' — but that is preaching about Christ, and the one holding forth may be an infidel" (29, 36). These statements as far as

I can see admit of no other interpretation; they clearly indicate that the author had in mind an actual emptying of the Gospel.

Although it is very true when he adds: "That is an empty form. That is, as far as the preacher is concerned, a lie" (29, 36); and: "The Lord does not send out the unbelievers to preach" (28, 36): yet it is highly misleading when in the same connection he says: "Only life can beget life. . . . The contention that God works through the Word irrespective and independent of the person uttering it, is only a half-truth. . . . That (i. e. preaching about Christ) will not impart life. God hasn't arranged it thus" (28 f., 36).

It is true, true in every case, that only life will beget life. It is true what the author adds: "A corpse cannot beget life, no matter how life-like the undertaker may be able to make it look" (28, 36). *But the life-begetting life in Gospel work is not the personal life of the preacher, it is the divine life inherent in the Word.* The author speaks about God's arrangements. How did God arrange it? Paul says: "It pleased God — God saw fit to arrange — by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe" (1 Cor. 1, 21). "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Rom. 10, 17). That is God's arrangement. The Word of God has divine power within itself: it is a "rod" and "staff" of God to "comfort" (Ps. 23, 4); it is like the refreshing rain coming down from heaven (Is. 55, 10); it is like "a fire", and like "a hammer that breaketh the rocks in pieces" (Jer. 23, 29); it is "quick, and powerful, and sharper than a two-edged sword" (Heb. 4, 12); it is "the power of God unto salvation" (Rom. 1, 16); it is the "incorruptible seed" (1 Pet. 1, 23); the words that Jesus speaks, "they are spirit and they are life" (John 6, 63).

This is God's arrangement regarding the spiritual life-begetting life on earth; and He has in no wise made this life-giving property of His Word dependent on man. We can neither fill the Word of God with life-giving power, nor empty it of it. St. Paul says about the "oracles of God": "For what if some did not believe; shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect? God forbid" (Rom. 3, 3.4). For that reason Paul also rejoiced, and rejoiced deliberately, if only Christ is preached, though it be "even of envy and strife" (Phil. 1, 15—18).

And we should thank God for this arrangement of affairs: for how else could we draw any comfort out of the Word when preached to us, seeing it is beyond our power to establish with absolute certainty the faith of the preacher. And how could we poor sinners hope to achieve any spiritual success, were the effective power of the Word dependent on us! On the other hand, how unbearably haughty every little success in church work would make us, were we to accept the author's theory!

The second case of misleading and dangerous teaching contained in the essay, that I wish to call attention to, is the doctrine of repentance. It begins in paragraph 11 (p. 9) and continues to the end of paragraph 26 (p. 20).

The question the author here sets out to answer is this: "I hear the cry of your hearts: What shall I do to be saved — from this judgment? From this wrath to come? From this cold, formal, mechanical, lifeless, apathetic, no-faith life Christianity?" (9, 11).

In the following paragraphs he then mentions various insufficient means that we might feel tempted to try. "Well, *excusing* ourselves will not help us" (9, 12). "No amount of *keeping up appearances* will help us. No amount of bluff" (10, 13). "No amount of *stressing forms* (e. g. ritual, liturgy, social calls, organization, constitutions, and the like) will remedy our evil" (10, 14). "No amount of *institutionalism* (e. g. choirs, oratory, jubilees, so-called 'Christian Day Schools', indoctrination, gottseliges Geschaetz, synods and the like, "one damned thing after another") will do it" (11, 15). — We have no quarrel with the author on this score, assuming that the rejected remedies are not intended as veiled accusations.

The next paragraph, after briefly summarizing the rejected remedies, points out: "Nothing short of the Spirit through Him that is LIFE will do it (i. e. "bring back joy, peace, life — LIFE BY FAITH"). . . . Born again by the Spirit to LIFE BY FAITH, not forms. Born again through Him that is the only Just One and that lived by PERFECT FAITH midst the greatest temptation and sin of the whole world" (11f., 16).

The following ten paragraphs then (17—26) contain the author's doctrine of repentance. He first tells us what repentance

is like (12, 17—16, 22) and then takes up the question how to "get such consciousness of sin" (16, 23—20, 26).

What is repentance? Our Augsburg Confession, the four-hundredth anniversary of which the Lutheran Church will celebrate two years hence, offers this brief definition in accordance with Scripture: "Now, repentance consists properly of these two parts: One is *contrition*, that is, terrors smiting the conscience through the knowledge of sin; the other is *faith*, which is born of the Gospel, or of absolution, and believes that, for Christ's sake, sins are forgiven, comforts the conscience, and delivers it from terrors" (Art. XII, 2—5. Trgl. p. 49).

In this definition of our Augsburg Confession, permit me to call attention to two things especially. The first is this: of the two parts of repentance, the second, faith, is by far the more important; it is to comfort the heart, to deliver it from the terrors, which constitute the first part of repentance. In other words, the second part, faith, represents a lasting state or condition, while the first is to be transitory; if the first became permanent, it would prevent true repentance. It is an indispensable preliminary, but it is only preparatory in nature. — The second point to which attention must be given is this: man is purely passive in repentance. He does not produce his own faith, it is "born of the Gospel"; nor does he work up in himself contrition, rather, this consists of "terrors *smiting* the conscience". — It is contrary to sound doctrine, then, on the one hand to stress the importance of contrition, and on the other to speak of either faith or contrition as though it were "of him that willeth or of him that runneth" (Rom. 9, 16).

Such repentance, as described in the Augsburg Confession, has place either if a sinner has never before been converted or if after Baptism he has fallen away. There is besides this first repentance, which marks a new beginning of life, in the career of a Christian a second, a daily repentance, which is a part of the process of sanctification, never ending on this side of the grave. Sanctification is carried on under a constant struggle against the flesh and consists, when viewed from this angle, in a mortification of the flesh (Read Gal. 5, 16—25). This part of sanctification is also called repentance, for instance in the letter of John to the

“angel of the church of Ephesus”: “Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, *and repent*, and do the first works” (Rev. 2, 5). This daily repentance of Christians, general or for special sins, must be clearly distinguished from the first repentance of the unregenerate.

Bearing these truths in mind we approach the call to repentance in “God’s Message”. Whom is the author calling to repentance? It was pointed out above that the “Message” contains some very timely warnings, indicating that the author considers us as Christians; but it also contains some unmistakable judgments and condemnations of a greater share of our “church members” charging them with the heathen religion of natural man: “Be good and you’ll be saved” (6, 7). To whom, then, does he address his call for repentance? He compares us to the multitudes coming out to John the Baptist. “John proved the spirits coming to him . . . and *finding them unrepentant* speaks some very hard words to them. And they are written for us. *He says to us: ‘Ye generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee the wrath to come’*” (13, 19). And again: “*Were we not as blind as this multitude coming out to John the Baptist we would know what heart-felt repentance consists of*” (14, 19).

It is clear that under such circumstances the preaching of first repentance only is in place; all exhortation to practice the second repentance, the daily struggle against the lusts of the flesh, and thus to progress in sanctification, would be confusing, to put it mildly, — after making us out “blind”, “unrepentant”, “a generation of vipers”.

But this is exactly what the author of “God’s Message” is guilty of. He explains to that “generation of vipers”: “Now, repentance is not a cold formal thing. It is not merely a dogma assented to intellectually. The true penitent does not speak of sin as a little chronic malady we may be afflicted with. The danger in all old and new-fangled religions is to tone down sin, to treat it lightly. True heartfelt repentance cannot lightly say: ‘I repent every time I have been to such meetings’. I tell you repentance is made of sterner stuff. It is a vital, a very much alive affair” (12, 18). He speaks to us about “fruits meet for repentance”, and tells us: “It means nothing short of what John says

it does (Luc. 3, 10—14). . . . Yes, it means all of that. In essence it means: Love to fellowman. It means dealing honestly henceforth; it means doing violence to no man; it means not exploiting, taking advantage of your fellowman; it means ‘applied psychology’ to help your neighbor;” etc. (14 f., 20). Yes, he even asks us, the blind unrepentant generation of vipers, to have a spiritual understanding of the nature of sin. “Ah, if we realize just a little what we are without Christ, without grace, with sin, separated from God — the source of love and joy and life; if we recognize and are sensible of the awfulness, the depth, the hellishness of sin just a trifle; if, as a result, we would like to be rid of it and have John the Baptist point us to the Lamb of God, which takes away the sin of the world; if we really are homesick for our Father’s home and love; if we really mean to give up that which separates us from that Father — sin —” (15, 21).

In repentance the principal part, the lasting condition, is faith which “comforts the conscience and delivers it from terrors”. Such faith is “born of the Gospel, or of absolution”. Yet in that part of the “Message” which treats of repentance (12, 17—20, 26) we search in vain for a paragraph, nay, for a single line striking a note like: “Son, be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee” (Matth. 9, 2). The “goodness of the Lord” is mentioned indeed, so is also “Christ on the Cross”; the “mighty God” is referred to as “stooping to us worms to help us out of our misery” (17, 23), but only for getting a suitable background against which “the heinousness” of our sin, “the hell of it” (18, 24), will stand out in bold relief. “When you behold His gentleness, His meekness, His lowliness, His tenderness, His love, over against your haughtiness, your pride, your vain glory, your brutality, your lovelessness, you too will exclaim: Lord, depart from me, for I am a sinful man” (17, 23).

On the other hand, contrition, that preparatory transient part of repentance, is treated as if it were the all-important factor. The question is raised: “Ah, you say, How shall I get such consciousness of sin?” (16, 23), and nearly four pages (16, 23—20, 26) are devoted to giving a — misleading — answer.

Over-stressing contrition is improper even in the case of second repentance. The faith-inciting Gospel of God’s forgiving grace for Christ’s sake alone can furnish the strength and endur-

ance to carry on the battle against sin successfully, victoriously. John's call to repentance addressed to the church at Ephesus is very emphatic indeed; yet note the sweet heart-winning words with which he closes his letter in the name of the Lord: "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God" (Rev. 2, 7).

Moreover, as the question quoted above indicates, contrition is looked upon as something which the sinner himself must "get", or produce within himself. That is the Roman Catholic view of it. They direct you to work up a feeling of remorse, a real contrition; and if you find yourself unable to accomplish it, they tell you that God will also be satisfied with an "attrition", which Luther calls "half a contrition or the beginning of contrition" (Smal. Art. III, III, 16. Trgl. p. 483); and if you cannot even do that, they will tell you, if you only wish or desire to have contrition, your good will may be accepted in lieu of the deed: so long as you only make some effort in the direction of contrition.

Now, contrition is not something that we do anything to "get", that we produce or attempt to produce within ourselves. It is something that we undergo, that we suffer. "This is not 'activa contritio' or manufactured repentance, but 'passiva contritio', torture of conscience, true sorrow of heart, suffering and sensation of death" (Smal. Art. III, III, 2. Trgl. p. 479). And this is not a condition of the heart which a sinner seeks, but one which God inflicts, in order to get the sinner where He wants him, i. e. despairing of himself, giving up all own efforts, and susceptible to the "consolatory promise of grace through the Gospel" (Trgl. p. 481).

And how does God produce contrition? The "Message" says: "You will find repentance at the foot of the Cross. True heartfelt repentance is not obtained from the individual commandments as most of us have learned to know them in our Catechism, or Catechetical course. That may bring about a head repentance, a formal confession, but it will not stand the test of God. . . . *Show me where you find law preached to bring about repentance as we are taught at our schools and seminaries*" (17 ff., 23—25). And all this in the face of such solemn Scripture declarations: "By the law is the knowledge of sin" (Rom. 3, 20), and: "I had not known sin, but by the law" (Rom. 7, 7)!

Lastly, the author, considering contrition as something that we produce by our own efforts, naturally urges that we do a thorough job. He insists on deep degrees of contrition: "If we are of a broken and contrite, smashed spirit — we are in extreme excruciating pain, in sorrow and battle of soul; in agony; we are hopeless, shattered, despising self, in misery, perhaps entertain thoughts of suicide" (16, 22).

Such demand will drive serious-minded people to despair. The more sincere they are, the more will they realize that their bitterest sorrows are far from being commensurate with the heinousness of their sins. Thank God that Scripture nowhere endorses the author's demands. To be sure, Scripture records the penitential psalms of David, and the bitter tears of Peter; but never does it point to these instances as exemplifying a general rule, never is a certain degree of remorse demanded as a prerequisite for forgiveness. In numerous cases Scripture is satisfied to record the joy of the penitent sinner who found forgiveness of his sins. Or, how deep were the compunctions of Zacchaeus (Luc. 19, 1—10)? How excruciating was the agony of the malefactor (Luc. 23, 39—43)? —

Contrition and the sense of contrition, remorse and the feeling of remorse, are two different things; and the degree of intensity with which we suffer mental agony in contrition varies in different persons and under different circumstances. God, indeed, wants a heart-repentance, and not a mere head-repentance; but we shall have gained nothing if in avoiding this Scylla of substituting a head-repentance, we permit ourselves to fall into the Charybdis of confusing the heart with the faculty of emotion.

* * *

In conclusion a few remarks may not be out of place.

First. There was a time when brotherly love demanded that the most charitable construction possible be put on the words of the "Message"; and that was to assume that the misleading statements were due to lapses of some kind or other; to call the author's attention to his unsuitable expressions, and to ask him to make the necessary explanations and corrections. That time is now past. The author has since severed his connection with our synod, and has moreover published his confusing essay without

adding a single note of explanation or correction. This review, then, is not written with the purpose, as was the German "Gutachten" in part, to administer brotherly admonition to the author of the "Message", but to testify against him. May God bless this testimony to the saving of souls, to reassure the doubting, to confirm the wavering.

Secondly. In Watertown, on Feb. 16, I heard the venerable Pastor Brandt plead, on the floor of the synod, that we in our present humiliating crisis adopt the course of David under similar circumstances. When hearing, on his flight before Absalom, the unfounded accusations and curses of Shimei, he humbled himself before God. Although innocent before men, he pleaded guilty before God of those very things which Shimei charged against him: "Let him curse, for the Lord hath bidden him" (2 Sam. 16, 11). David did not approve of the foul deed of Shimei, nor would he burden Israel with this guilt, rather, on his deathbed he charged his son Solomon to avenge the injustice committed (1 Kings 2, 8.9); but so far as his own person was concerned, he humbled himself before his God. It behoves us to do likewise. Although we most emphatically resent the slanderous accusations against the majority of our church members, and professors, and teachers, and pastors, let us not forget to "search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord" (Lam. 3, 40).

JOH. P. MEYER.
