

The Principles of Augsburg

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The religious task of our people in this country is great and difficult. It marks the transition from a State Church to a free church. This transition has been prepared among our people at home in the old country through the century which is just passing. Since 1796 when the Lord raised up His chosen instrument, Hans Nielsen Hauge, and sent him out with the cry of awakening through the whole people and country of Norway, from valley to valley, from settlement to settlement, and until this very moment the gentle Zephyr of the Spirit has blown through our people with a yearning for spiritual liberty. The awakening by Hauge raised the people and woke them up from their sleep. In those days it happened according to the Word of the Lord: "He raiseth up the poor and bringeth low the great and the proud." The strength of the movement became apparent in the fruit which it bore in the foreign mission activity. For the movement which was created by God through His Spirit and power could not cease before it had reached to the uttermost part of the earth.

And again there came a new awakening, the one by Lammers and Johnson. It gripped many theologians and pastors and brought them nearer to the people. It looked bright and hopeful in Norway; the people had a time of visitation from the Lord. Those who observed the stirring events there from 1850 to 1860 must even yet rejoice over the

beautiful memories of the powerful life which at that time was evident in city and countryside. It seemed as a springtime of liberty, with promise of a rich harvest.

But the movement did not reach its goal; it did not result in a free congregation. The pastors preferred to be royal officials rather than servants of the congregation. They proceeded a little way on the road of freedom, but stopped, bethought themselves and renounced the freedom for the dignity of the royal official. They did not fully and wholly know the time of their visitation.

Then came the punishment. For to hear the call and not to heed it, to see the way and not to walk it does not pass by unpunished. And in Norway deplorable things have happened on that account. The awakening had caused strife and had egged many worldly people on to defiance and unbelief, and when those who had been awakened failed to be true to the call of the revival, and did not dare to go all the way to the goal—a free congregation—unbelief took a mighty hold of the heart of the people of Norway and is still holding its grip because they did not know the time of their visitation.

It is the mission of the emigration to our free country to give energy to the spiritual movement towards freedom, and to open a way for it. So many Christian men and women are gathered here in a land where barriers are broken down and room is opened, that one has a right to expect and demand that here shall the spiritual life of Norway bear its ripe fruit in a free congregation. For this cause was Augsburg built that the awakening in Norway should have its course and its room to work in the new country, and that the freedom movement might reach its goal, the free congregation. And this sacred task makes it a serious duty to hold fast with unflinching fidelity to the principles of Augsburg. For to these principles belongs all that can serve the cause of spiritual liberty

in the congregation of God on earth. To fail on this point would be to betray the most precious and sacred interests of our people and hinder the work of the Spirit for its spiritual transformation.

THE WORD BECAME FLESH

Of all the powers among men, that of religion is the strongest. Even among the heathen whose gods are not Gods, but idols, fictions in order to hide, even as "the trees of the garden", the guilt-burdened human beings from the living God, even there 'is the fear of the gods the strongest power-stronger than pleasure-seeking, so that the heathen often subjects himself to unbelievable privations and pains for the sake of his gods-stronger than avarice, so that the heathen often sacrifices all his possessions for the sake of his gods-stronger even than mother-love, so that the heathen woman sacrifices her own children for fear and terror of the wrath of the gods.

No wonder, therefore, that in the heathen religions the priests always sought their own advantage and made the people slaves under their authority. And what was, as a consequence, the history of the heathen religions? Precisely this, that the priests who used the fear of men and the power of the gods over their minds for their own benefit and aggrandizement, undermined thereby the power and influence of religion. It awakened an opposition among many thinking men who pointed to the benefit that the priests had from religion, and said with apparent good reason: Religion is only a deception, invented and conjured up by the priests for their own gain. And the heathen religions went down to ruin and became objects of the contempt of the people, because the very servants of religion had used the power of religion to plunder.

But stronger than all heathenism is Christianity. It takes hold of the hearts and grips the souls with an even greater power. No wonder, therefore, if also in the realm of Christianity similar inclinations have revealed themselves as in heathenism. The terrible fall of the Roman Church consists just in this that it has yielded to the great temptation to use the power of the true religion in the service of selfishness, and to employ it to the benefit of the Church or the clergy, and to the bondage of the people.

And alas, the danger and the temptation is not limited to the Catholics alone. We are also subject to the same danger and many are they' that yield to it. And it is here we have to seek one of the reasons for the strongly developed unbelief. It is true that this has as its root the indomitable defiance of the human heart against the Lord, when it declares in its pride: "We will not that this man shall rule over us"; but it also finds rich nourishment just in the idea that the clergy both in Catholicism and in the State Church has used Christianity for its own benefit in such a way that it has become easy to make both oneself and others believe that Christianity is only a deception by the clergy, invented in order to help it gain benefit and power.

Shall Christianity fall in the same manner and by the same means as the heathen religions fell? Shall the misuse of the power of religion by the Church annihilate religion itself and rob poor human hearts of its blessed grace and welcome help? God forbid! Again and again shall the light of the gospel break through the shadows which are cast over it by the misuse of the Church. And the glad tidings shall again break the bonds of the hearts and set at liberty them that are bruised. What is needed is only that the whole, unadulterated gospel of Christ is allowed to exert its liberating power.

In the great struggle between Christian faith and unbelief, one of the principles of Augsburg is to hold forth that Christianity - the gospel of Jesus Christ - is a power for freedom, not for bondage. The spirit of Christianity, the spirit of the gospel, the Spirit of God is not a spirit of bondage again unto fear either for God or for men; for Christ gives to those who receive Him the right to the highest of all freedoms, the right to become children of God. And He gives to them that believe in Him, the Spirit of adoption which drives out fear and sets love in its place.

For this reason have the words recorded in John I :4, "The Word Became Flesh," been placed in the seal of Augsburg. This means that the mediator between God and man is not a priestly caste, ascending above the people unto God in temples built with hands, and with ceremonies which men have devised by human cunning. The Mediator is the Divine Word and Gospel which have become flesh in the man Jesus Christ. And He has become a propitiation through the faith in His blood, equally accessible for every sinful man and woman who flees to Him and His cross with a broken and contrite heart. There are no hierarchical stepping stones of priests, saints, and angels through whom men can draw near unto God; but God Himself has come down among us and has in Christ reconciled the world to Himself. And if the gospel of Christ becomes a power unto freedom for poor souls, bound by sin and the bondage of law, a power of believing men to become' the free children of God, then also out of the mouths of these babes and sucklings will be established a strength for the Lord which the enemy and infidel cannot withstand. If the gospel of Christ is given an opportunity to do its own liberating work, then Christianity lives its own unique life in spite of all opposition and all bitterness. But if the power of Christianity is to be utilized for an alien purpose, to build up the worldly greatness of the

hierarchy, then the worm of unbelief will gnaw at its roots in the hearts of the people, and while the gospel will not die, its saving light will shine for new nations that will better understand and appreciate its worth.

THE FREE CONGREGATION

"Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." Christianity produces the freest of all that is free, a child of God. It also produces the free fellowship, the congregation. Christ did not organize any congregation; He gathered a congregation of disciples (end of page 256) by His Word, His work, His life. On the whole, the congregation has not come into being by law and constitution. It was born by the outpouring of the Spirit; it was created to be the living body of Jesus Christ by His own Spirit who made His abode in the hearts of those who believed in Him. For this reason the congregation is not a group of people who by worldly power or superstitious fear are forced and coerced into supporting a hated priestly caste. Nor is the congregation a flock of ignorant and perhaps immoral people among whom the pastors are to be teachers and taskmasters to hold them in check and to strengthen the social order and the power of the princes. No, the Christian congregation is a fellowship of volunteers, brought together and united by the Spirit of the Lord and through His Word and sacraments, one body with the Lord who lives in them and they in Him, God's household and His habitation in the Spirit.

In every place where the Word of God and the sacraments gather people in prayer and supplication, in faith and hope and love, there is the congregation of God, hidden and obscured in many ways by the weakness of the flesh, visible and radiant by the power of the witness of the Spirit. Daily it needs the forgiveness of sin for itself, daily it is cleansed

by the blood of Jesus so that it is without spot and wrinkle, daily it receives grace so that it can be a city set on a hill that cannot be hid.

It is the calling of this fellowship of people that they all shall be laborers in the vineyard of the Lord, that they all shall show forth the excellencies of Him who called them out of darkness into His marvelous light, that they all shall be priests and kings before God, that they all shall be brethren, and no one shall be called "benefactor." And yet, the congregation of God is not an orderless mass, but a well-trained company of soldiers, where every man and woman has his or her place and work. For these who all have the same Spirit, have nevertheless different spiritual gifts. In the free fellowship everyone has received his gifts for that which is useful. There is room for all; but not all have the same service. He who is a chosen vessel to lead many souls to Christ and to cause a great awakening and stir among the people shall not despise those who in the moment of battle are not able to do anything else than to hold up the arms of Moses, even as Aaron and Hur on the day when the Lord gave Israel victory by the prayer of Moses. The one who has to do a simple task, unnoticed by men, she who only in the sincerity of her heart can kneel down by the bed of her little children and teach them to fold their little hands in a childlike prayer, shall not envy the one to whom was given a greater task according to human measure. Much rather shall he or she praise their service; for whosoever would become great among you shall be the servant of all, and whosoever would be first among you shall be your bondservant.

MISSIONS

“Ye shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the uttermost part of the earth.” If the congregation of God is thus His work on earth, does then this free fellowship have enough in itself? No, the Spirit of God is a spirit that urges on to ever greater goals. The congregation of God is the Kingdom of God on earth with a world-wide task. The task of the congregation reaches as far as the human family, as far as sin, as far as death, as far as bondage and suffering, as far as are found poor, miserable human hearts in whom there is room for Jesus and for whom there is room with Jesus. As far as the love of God reaches, so far shall the gospel of God be preached. Over a sinful fettered, suffering mankind shall the word of reconciliation and the message of freedom and the saving gospel sound. And for this the free congregation shall be the means and the instrument. This is its calling. The Kingdom of God is to gather all nations around the cross of Christ and the throne of the Lamb. That is the aim of the free congregation. To conquer the world for Christ by the word of the gospel and the power of love, this is the task; this is also the burning desire of the heart, wrought by the Holy Spirit. It is not the concern of a caste; it is not the work of a single class. It is the great world-wide task of God’s free people, in which every true member of the congregation has his share. The children of God are to pray the Lord of the harvest that He send forth laborers into His harvest. --The great, great harvest field where the wheat is to be gathered is in the hearts of men bought with a price. The congregation of God is to send forth the missionaries for the work whereunto God has called them. All are to have a part, all are to pray, all are to work for the holy cause. For this reason it is one of the principles of Augsburg that missions is a branch of the congregation’s life, just as important, just as obvious, just as

necessary as preaching and divine service, as prayer meetings and family devotions, in order that it shall have its true form among us.

THE TRAINING OF PASTORS

In all this life and all this work the pastors are to be the heart and soul. We do not despise the pastors as some falsely claim; how else could the Seminary be one of the main points in the program, of "The New Trend." The pastors should, if it were possible, be the leaders in work, leaders in suffering, wisest in counsel, quickest in action-when it concerns the cause of the Kingdom of God, examples of the flock, and servants of the souls for their eternal salvation. Their training must be in accordance therewith. Their calling is to proclaim the gospel of Christ to the souls and to urge, lead and strengthen the congregation of God in its work and its struggle. Therefore it is the main point in their education that they become such "scribes" as Jesus speaks about when He says: "A scribe who has been made a disciple of the Kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is a householder who brings forth out of his treasure things new and old." The true theological student drinks from the deep and pure well of the Scripture and receives from it the inspiration that sustains his life-work, so that it always, through all the many small and great changes points to the true goal: saved souls in fellowship with Jesus, and the spread of the Kingdom over all the earth. Jesus made His disciples such scribes through the three years that He had them with Him. He spoke His words and performed His deeds in their presence in order that they might become His witnesses; He opened to them the Scriptures, so that their hearts became burning and their spirits enlightened and clear, and

they learned to love more, the more it was given to them to look into the delightful ways of the love of God.

Such were the first missionaries and pastors who went out and entreated on behalf of Christ: Be ye reconciled with God! And no one doubts that they were well trained and endowed for the work. Why, then, are there now some who rage in bitterness because there are those who believe that as Jesus trained His disciples for the work of apostles, in the same manner must also now the witnesses of the Lord and the servants of the Word be trained? But let those rage who want the pastors elevated by the learning of a caste; the principle of Augsburg is at least this that the thoughts of God are profound enough, and the Word of God is broad and wide enough to fill a few years of study, and the sword of the Spirit is sharp enough so that it does not need help from pagan learning and wisdom.

The principle of Augsburg is this that he who is to be a witness concerning the salvation of the Lord must have experienced it in his own heart. Only through a living experience can one gain the living conviction which gives a true and cordial ring and tone. And we do not fear that such a scribe shall become monotonous and tiresome in his preaching, unable to "entertain" his hearers. Or has anyone heard that the daily bread becomes tiresome for one who is hungry? Indeed, if the congregation of God is to be fed and the souls refreshed, it is not possible in any other way than by the gospel of Jesus Christ, the foolishness of His cross. Hence, all that furnishes help to enter into the Word of God belongs to the education of the pastors, and all is excluded that tends to dull heart and mind to the living truth of the Lord. All is useful that can help to give insight into the Word of the Lord and His plan of salvation; all is hurtful which does not contribute

thereto. For this is the aim of the pastor's service that the souls may be fed and nourished with the Word of God, so that every single believer and the whole congregation may increase in the knowledge of the Son of God and attain unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. To depend on human wisdom in pastoral work is after all only to make flesh one's arm, and God's work is not furthered thereby.

Therefore is he best trained for the ministry whose heart is most thoroughly permeated by the love of God and whose spirit is most completely illumined by the light of the Spirit of God. To this end shall the Divinity school contribute by leading the pupils to the clear, fresh fountain of the Word of God and by teaching them that it is better to draw from the well with the living water than from the turbid cisterns of human wisdom.

VICTORY

Every divine thought drawn from the Word of God, that breaks forth in the preaching and the work of the congregation, is a grain of wheat that cannot die before it bears its fruit. But the way leads through suffering and struggle. This is the way of victory. The farmer who has the precious grain in which there is bread and nourishment for him and his family, does not hide it carefully under protecting glass in his warm cottage. No, daringly he takes his costly seed in his hand and throws it into the black soil, convinced that thus he shall receive a rich harvest from it. So is also God's way with every spiritual seed-grain for His Kingdom. It must get down in the ground. When every divine thought that forces its way is met by terror and bitterness from the old that is on the verge of falling, then must also this unavoidable opposition serve the counsel of the Lord by pressing down the new and forcing it into the ground. Deep is dug the furrow, and high is

piled the earth over the new seed which the Lord wants to grow; but in His hour the green sprout breaks forth from the black soil, and in due time the seed bears manifold fruit. For this reason Augsburg's victory shall not consist in being lifted up to honor and glory among men or by men; but in this shall its victory consist, that it is pressed and forced down into the people and the congregation, that it sends its roots so deep down that it also can be able to carry a mighty crown with far-spreading branches and manifold fruit.

And so now, on the day of the twenty-fifth anniversary of Augsburg Seminary, we have come to a new springtime with its tearing and cutting plowshare of sufferings, with living seed, and with the promise of new blessings. Already we have seen a beautiful harvest; the new springtime which has come, gives promise of nothing less by the mercy of God. If we now shall receive grace to sow, it shall come to pass according to the word of our Lord that one sows and another reaps. If we do not live to see the next harvest of the new sowing in tears--on the new day of the Kingdom of God it shall be clearly revealed that those who sow in tears shall reap with joy. Amen.