

A Symposium on the 95 Theses: A
Proclamation of the Gospel of Forgiveness

EF993

A SYMPOSIUM ON THE 95 THESES; A PROCLAMATION OF THE
GOSPEL OF FORGIVENESS

Elmer C. Kiessling, Theodore J. Hartwig, Henry F. Koch, Siegbert Becker,
Martin W. Lutz, Edward G. Zell

Michigan Lutheran Seminary
Saginaw, Michigan

August 9-16, 1967

The Relevancy of the 95 Theses to 1967

by Pastor Edward Zell

There are a number of documents written at the hand of man that have marked distinct turning points in the course of human events and human history. One could call to mind a number of them, such as, the Magna Charta, or our own American Declaration of Independence. And certainly many more could be cataloged. This is not our purpose.

However, I wonder whether one could point to any single document that came from the pen of man, with the exception certainly of the Holy Scripture itself, that has affected the lives of as many people in the course of the centuries as have the 95 Theses.

From that moment when the Augustinian hammer thudded against the castle church door at Wittenberg, the impact of the falling blows echoed and re-echoed until they became a thundering cacophony that could not be ignored throughout the entire religious or so-called Christian world. They not only stirred up the cesspool of Roman Catholicism and let fresh air and daylight from God's reopened dayspring of truth penetrate its murky and smelly depths, but - by reason of the re-affirmation of the concern of our Heavenly Father for each individual's personal salvation and freedom in Christ; by the divine reiteration of the individual's need for sincere repentance and dependence on Christ's merit for peace of conscience; by the resultant emphasis on the preaching to and the teaching of the individual; - they were the kick-off that ultimately affected for good even the government of human affairs by those in civil authority. And there are those who declare with justification, that our whole modern educative system has its roots in God's reformation of His Body, the church, through His servant.

Now the theology and content of these Theses has been carded with a fine tooth comb for the past few days. To be the last speaker in a series of essays on the same basic subject, essays which have demonstrated erudition and understanding makes me feel like Mother Hubbard going to the cupboard. Since the research involved in the first five presentations has obviously been so exhaustive and so thorough that to attempt to establish some further theological discovery or startling innovation would be not only repetitious, but almost certainly vain; and since the theme of this presentation brings it to a great extent within the sphere of personal observation, we shall try to convey to you for your stimulation our own feelings regarding these statements of our spiritual father as he lit a torch in 1517 that still burns, giving off light, and still plenty of heat, 450 years later.

The theme of this essay, as given by the praesidium, is

THE RELEVANCY OF THE 95 THESES TO 1967

In attempting to determine whether a given statement, an article, or a proclamation is relevant to a particular time, one must first of all pick the thing up, turn it about and examine it from all sides. Then one finds that it begins to act like a prism. And as one keeps turning it the flashes of light from the different facets of the prism strike one in the eye, holding the attention of the viewer. This we have attempted to do in our own limited way with these Theses. This has indeed been done by the previous speakers. We begin the discussion points with the statement that "The 95 Theses are indeed relevant to our time in a number of ways."

First of all, as has been demonstrated, they are certainly relevant to our time with respect to the theology that they flash to the reader. I shall mention briefly just four points which certainly demand our spiritual attention to this day.

We have heard an essay on the Doctrine of Repentance. One need not, therefore, go into any detail on this matter other than to say that Luther's definition of the Greek word "metanoieite" is indeed valid and that we understand the word the same way today. In his Explanations of His 95 Theses, he says that the word means "assume another mind and feeling, have a change of spirit"...Quoting the Apostle to "be transformed by the renewal of your mind" he goes on to say that it means "the sinner has a change of heart and hates his sin". He emphasizes that Christ teaches a repentance which is done in spirit and in truth and which can be done in every walk of life. Continuing in the same vein, he says, "The teaching of Christ must apply to all men, that is, to men in every walk of life. We pray throughout our whole life, and we must pray 'forgive us our debts'; therefore we repent through our whole life." This further treatment of the word demonstrates the full meaning of the word to include, not just a repentance of fear, that is fear of punishment or solely the remorse of the guilty conscience, like the repentance of Judas, but that it includes also faith. Thus we have the definition of repentance today in Mueller's Christian Dogmatics, namely, contrition and faith, or the entire conversion of man, (Luke 13,5). In this sense, and as Luther also came to use the word, repentance is a synonym of conversion which presupposes the operation of the Holy Spirit in human hearts through the preaching of the Gospel. Or, in his own words, "Man cannot have his guilt forgiven or the desire to seek remission without first of all having the grace of God."

In the matter of forgiveness, Luther already at this writing had a correct, if not yet definitively stated, view of the Office of the Keys. Though he refers to the Pope as yet being possessor of the Keys, he also indicates in Thesis #7 that the pastor or priest exercises the Christ-bestowed authority to forgive or retain sins.

For instance Thesis #7 affirms, "God remits guilt to no one unless at the same time he humbles him in all things and makes him submissive to his vicar, the priest." Explaining this Thesis he says, "God does not remit guilt unless there is a prior remission by the priest, at least by desire". And he adduces Matthew 16, 19 as evidence "And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven". Giving a number of other passages, "first go and be reconciled to your brother and then come and offer your gift".... "forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors"....he goes on to say that in all these passages remission is indicated as taking place on earth before it takes place in heaven." Here's how he continues this thought.

"When God begins to justify a man, He first of all condemns him; He does this when He humbles and terrifies him into the knowledge of himself and his sin, that the wretched sinner may say, 'There is no health in my bones because of my sins; there is no soundness in my flesh because of Thy indignation'."

"The person who is to be absolved must guard himself very carefully from any doubt that God has remitted his sins that he may find peace of heart....this peace is that power for which from the depth of our heart we ought to give the greatest thanks to God, who has given such power to men - that power which is the only consolation for sins and for wretched consciences if only men will believe that which Christ has promised is true."

Speaking of the importance of the pronouncement of absolution by the pastor or priest, he goes on to say that "As long as we are uncertain, there is no remission, since there is not yet remission for us. Indeed, one would perish woefully unless it should become certain, for he would not believe that remission had taken place

for him." Hence the blessed Office of the Keys.

He proves his point by mentioning that Christ spoke to Simon concerning Mary Magdalene and said, "Her sins...are forgiven" by which He certainly indicated she had already received such forgiveness. She did not recognize this until He turned to her and said "your sins are forgiven". The sins of the adulteress had already been forgiven before Christ raised her. But she did not recognize this, since there were so many accusers around her, until she heard the voice of the Bridegroom who said, "Woman, hath no one condemned you?...neither do I condemn you".

My concluding observation on this point is also a quote from Luther's explanations which I offer you as evidence that the matter of a personal absolution both in private confession and in the general absolution in the church service by the called minister of Christ is as vital today as it was when Luther spoke these words. He said, "God's remission effects grace, but the priest's remission brings peace, which is both the grace and gift of God, since it is faith in actual remission and grace".

Turning the document over, another flash comes from Thesis #37, "Any true Christian, whether living or dead, participates in all the blessings of Christ and the Church; and this is granted to him by God, even without indulgence letters".

Explaining this he says, "It is impossible for one to be a Christian unless he possesses Christ. If he possesses Christ, he possesses at the same time all the benefits of Christ". I submit that in reading his explanation, just this paragraph alone, you will find an excellent view of his conception of the atonement and justification by faith. Here are some of the words:

"Therefore, since the Spirit of Christ dwells within Christians, by means of which brothers become co-heirs, one body, and citizens of Christ, how is it possible for us not to be participants in all the benefits of Christ? Christ Himself has all that belongs to Him from the same Spirit. So it happens through the inestimable riches of the mercies of God the Father, that a Christian can be glorified with Christ and can with confidence claim all things in Christ. Righteousness, strength, patience, humility, even all the merits of Christ are His through the unity of the Spirit by faith in Him. All his sins are no longer his; but through the same unity with Christ everything is swallowed up in Him. And this is the confidence that Christians have and a real joy of conscience, that by means of faith our sins become no longer ours but Christ's, upon whom God placed the sins of all of us. He took upon Himself our sins (c.f. Isaiah 53,12)...all the righteousness of Christ becomes ours. He places His hand upon us and all is well with us. He spreads His cloak and covers us, blessed Savior throughout all ages, Amen". I don't want to challenge the relevancy of that declaration, do you?

Closely connected with the doctrine of "atonement" and "justification by faith" is what Luther has to say about good works, specifically the treasury of good works which Roman Catholicism yet to this day ascribes to the meritorious efforts of the so-called saints. Here is what Luther said about that, "They say that the saints during this life have contributed many more good works than were required for salvation, which have not yet been rewarded but have been deposited in the treasury of the church...thus they are of the opinion that the saints have done enough for us. I argue against this"... "No saint has adequately fulfilled God's Commandments in this life. Consequently the saints have done absolutely nothing which is superabundant". And finally this quotation, "I conclude that the saints have no superabundant merits which would help those of us who are lazy. Speaking boldly, I declare that I have no doubt about those things I have just now said...and I maintain that everyone who holds the contrary is a heretic".

Certainly we are aware of the fact that the Theses were written by Luther in an effort to correct a specific abuse, the selling of, or proffering, or the trade in an indulgence - which offered certain spiritual or heavenly blessings in exchange for some earthly consideration, something that man does, something that a human can offer in the place of true repentance and faith and still hope thereby to secure some spiritual benefits. In the case of the indulgences of Luther's time, it was money.

Let no one think that the Roman Catholic hydra-headed monster has changed her spots in this matter. She has no room or use for the doctrine of justification by faith alone. She still is busily at work promoting and disseminating the same satanic doctrines of human merit that she always has. The best we can say for her is that she is an ingenious witch insofar as she has been busy putting a new coat of white-wash over the same old mud fence.

You can still get an anniversary mass, or a wedding mass, or a mass for the dead said in the Roman church in exchange for a fee. They still hold out to old and young alike the idea of the treasury of good works which Luther already condemned in his time. They still offer spiritual and eternal blessings and benefits to people in exchange for material considerations or human efforts.

As a matter of fact, I have in my possession a small pamphlet printed by a well-known Roman Catholic Publishing Co. in Indiana, (the Ave Maria Press from Notre Dame), dated as recently as October 1962, which contains two separate prayers for the Pope. At the bottom of each prayer the promise is made to the Roman Catholic who prays this prayer that he will receive "an indulgence of three years." It further states that the church will grant the petitioner for the Pope a "plenary indulgence on the usual conditions, if this prayer is devoutly said every day for a month."

In fact, Roman Catholicism still openly advertises and extends spiritual benefits and blessings to people in exchange for a purchase price of money. Let me quote the salient features of a number of advertisements that appear regularly in the Catholic Sunday Visitor.

Here is one from the Investment-Grant Program, Society of the Divine Savior, Salvatorian Center, Wisconsin, which has as its only message these words, "Your contract with the Society of the Divine Savior today will do Christ's work tomorrow and give you security for life and eternity".

The National Director of the S.V.D. Catholic University in Chicago, advertises that you should "make your money work for you". "Invested wisely and securely through our Life Income Mission Contract (a gift annuity)...you will receive...a remembrance in the prayers and masses of our S.V.D. missionaries throughout the world". Another ad from the same man says, "A gift annuity called Mission Contract because it pays me high returns every month as long as I live...and also...many spiritual benefits now and later".

Here is one from the National Shrine of St. Odilia in Minnesota. It says, "Solemn Novena in honor of St. Odilia, July 10-18. Each year more people through the nation turn to St. Odilia. Why not you? Your petitions will be placed at her shrine altar during the solemn novena." Then there is a coupon to tear off and it says "St. Odilia, please help me:" and you have the choice of squares to check as to what you want her to give you, such as: Afflictions of the eyes, special intention, other intentions, please send St. Odilia holy water, please send 8 inch Statue (Imported) (\$6 offering enclosed). Underneath this it says: "I enclose X number of dollars for the Shrine Building Fund".

I also have a solicitation from the Holy Family League of Holyoke, Mass., inviting me to enroll in the Holy Family League in its "Heaven Society" for the departed, a Society which blatantly

advertises that the souls in purgatory need our help to get out sooner and finally enter heaven. I have my choice of three kinds of enrollment:

- #1. A yearly enrollment, in which a brown bordered card enrolls a departed soul for one or a few years. Offering is \$1 a year for each departed.
- #2. A Novena enrollment. This enrolls a departed person for 9 years. The offering is \$5 for each departed.
- #3 A perpetual enrollment, in which a colored glossy card enrolls the deceased for all time. The offering is \$10 for each departed. The enrollment form has also this word of "Caution"; "The deceased start sharing in our spiritual benefits only when this form is received at our Holy Family League office and the name is entered in our departed membership file."

There are, according to this propaganda, three divisions of H.F.L. members, namely:

1. We, the living here on earth
2. Our enrolled members who are detained in purgatory. They need our help. Pray for them.
3. Our H.F.L. members who have already reached heaven, we need their help. Pray to them.

By the way, a special feature of this is that only H.F.L. has pop-out cards. The perforated section on both the annual and perpetual cards can be removed along the broken lines and placed in your Missal or prayer-book. According to the benefits that you can buy from this organization, Tetzl was a piker. Here is what you can buy for your spiritual benefit for one buck for a whole year. 487 masses and novenas; the daily prayers of priests, nuns, homeless children and other League members; an outside vigillight shining on Holy family group all night, every night on Bright Side grounds where children live; vigil lights burning within children's home on Friday; and flowers on the altar of the nun's chapel for monthly recollection date; and chapels where Holy family novenas are conducted. It certainly sounds like a real bargain or fire sale. Oh, well, I have no quarrel with their price. They must know what their product is worth. But, truly, I don't think one has to spend a lot of time itemizing the different abuses which are still known to be extant in Roman Catholicism in this matter. She still hoodwinks her members into believing they can "Buy some pie in the sky when they die".

Are these Theses, and the subsequent Lutheran Confessions still alive, still applicable? In an installment of the article, "An Evaluation of The Lutheran Confessions," by Pastor H. Wicke, in the Quartalschrift of January, 1967, he makes the statement, with which I heartily agree, "Despite statements to the effect that the counter-Reformation has come to an end, Vatican II (the much and highly touted change council of the Roman Catholic church) is still a reaction over against the Lutheran Confessions, though they are never mentioned by name." A little further on Pastor Wicke says, "In the documents of Vatican II the unbiblical theory of merit is still reacting to the core of the Gospel proclamation, justification by faith in Jesus Christ." High on the list of these reactions is, in my mind, the much time that was spent in re-affirming - without equivocation - the primacy of the Pope. Here are a couple of excerpts from the main resolution of that council. Chapter III reads, in part: "Now, therefore, if anyone say that the Roman Pontiff has only the function and office of inspection or direction, but not the full and supreme power of jurisdiction over the church universal...let him be anathema." Perhaps it can be summed up very quickly with a quotation from the "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church," which says, "...in virtue of his office, that is, as Vicar of Christ and Pastor of the whole Church, the Roman Pontiff has full, supreme, and universal power over the church. And he can

always exercise this power freely."

Now, in the light of this present day re-affirmation of the supreme authority of the papacy, which authority still presumes to include the Keys of the Kingdom, should not the 95 Theses of Dr. Luther currently bring to bear the same accusation that he voiced in 1517 in Thesis 82? Remembering what has already been said, and that which we know about the work-righteous and money-righteous doctrines of Roman Catholicism, the query of this Thesis is not only pungent but also appropriate: "Why does not the Pope empty purgatory for the sake of holy love and the dire need of the souls that are there. If he redeems an infinite number of souls for the sake of miserable money....?" If this is not relevant, neither was the guillotine for Marie Antoinette.

This document also has relevance in the light of its effect upon Rome in 1517, as compared with the effects that any real thinking or reform efforts still have. Rome has not changed, always guarding jealously her satanic dogmas by which men's spirits as well as souls are still stultified, stagnated and subjugated.

Luther, like a dentist, drilled to the nerve. And the patient jumped in startled pain. Then she began to gnash viciously at the drill, trying to destroy it first and then also the driller. That happens all the time in today's Roman Catholicism. Despite the many voices among our religious contemporaries which cry that the papacy has changed and is earnestly seeking to be known as evangelical and even scriptural, the fact remains that individual thinking and personal initiative in true reform efforts have always been and still are dangerous activities for the priests within her.

The recent publicity about the departure from the Roman Catholic Church of Charles Davis, a prominent theologian in England, has caused a dismay among the clerical and lay reformers inside the Roman fold. Not many of these reformers are known to the public because of censorship, a censorship that is especially severe for priests - those who usually have the most to say.

At Vatican II the Archbishop Pellegrini of Turin, referred to this suppression in a speech advocating greater freedom of research for the clergy. This speech was little reported and may have been bypassed deliberately. Pellegrini surprised his audience by stating that many clerics had suffered unjustly: "Who would dare to assert that...the rights and dignity of clerics, whether priests, or bishops, or even cardinals, were always respected?"

The speech caused much discussion in the corridors and coffee bars of St. Peter's. Nobody seemed to know what bishops or cardinals were involved. Many had heard of George Tyrell, the Jesuit Theologian, who had died in loneliness and excommunication; some knew of Loisy, the rebel French critic of the Gospels, who had defied the Vatican on the basis of his convictions as a historian; others knew of Msgr. Louis Duchesne, who had seen his History of the Primitive Church placed on the list of prohibited books; Msgr. Pierre Batiffol was remembered as having lost his university presidency;...etc., etc.

During the Modernist crisis in the early years of this century, a powerful underground movement for repressing "heresy" was organized, called the Sodalitium Pianum (fraternity of Pius, after Pius X), with the code name LaSapiniere (the pine wood). It was a very secret, international society with a group of members working independently and in the dark. The main object was to keep Roman agencies informed of any suspicious utterances or activities by members of the clergy, principally those in teaching positions.

After World War II, several prominent theologians were removed from office. Some were banned from publishing. In certain religious orders, there was a purge in which nearly all superiors were removed from office. Some priests were summoned to Rome, where they were asked to give an explanation of their opinions before the tribunal of the Holy Office. Some were menaced with public condemnation. Some were sent into exile and isolation.

(The above statements are paraphrasings of material from an article written by Charles Bolden in the July 7, 1967 Christianity Today).

III

Actually, the outright and forthright statements in the 95 Theses over against the abuse of indulgences in the church of his time by Dr. Luther, may also be carried over in principle, to the church of our time, including what is generally called the Protestant religious world. Again calling to mind the fact that in its broader sense, the word "indulgence" can mean the attempt to secure any spiritual benefit before God by reason of something that man does, rather than only through the merits of Jesus Christ received in true repentance and spirit-given faith, we can find any number of types of indulgence situations. For instance, in a Look Magazine "spread", speaking of the suburban minister as the "apostle to the affluent", we find various Protestant denominations decrying the attitude that their people have over against God and the church, little realizing that the leaders of the churches are themselves culpable. An Episcopalian from Pennsylvania complains of his people that, "When a real problem comes up, they forget the church and say, 'What's the quickest way to buy myself out of this?'" A Presbyterian from Connecticut says, "You don't try to moralize any more because these people would just walk out on you." Testifying to the fact that all manner of things are being offered to people in the name of religion, in place of repentance and faith as the only road toward peace with God, another Presbyterian believes that counseling is probably the most important point of contact and communication between the people and their minister. The implication here is that a pastor is to be much more concerned with ironing out the domestic, social and financial problems, to say nothing of the nervous disorders and tensions of his people, than with the preaching of sin and grace.

And certainly, many, many of you will agree that the word "ecumenical" has become in our time a more sacred and holy word to vast numbers in Protestantism than the words "justification by faith alone." The thought of union among divergent confessions has become the sacred cow of Protestantism at whose holy hocks otherwise intelligent men grovel and do obeisance. For instance, in an article written by the general secretary of the USA National Committee of The Lutheran World Federation, he let slip how far even Lutheranism is prepared to go for the sake of a good image in the world. Here is a quote from his article, under the date line of July 6, 1967: "The Second Vatican Council, which undoubtedly will be recorded as one of the great milestones of the Christian faith, has made necessary a revision of Protestant attitudes...when Lutherans and Roman Catholics first came together to plan theological dialogs in the U.S., neither "justification by faith," nor "authority of Scripture" were chosen as subjects for early consideration, not because there is complete agreement on these issues, but rather because of a degree of convergence has taken place such as to give these topics a lower priority on the list". To me that sounds like a doctor telling his patient, "Mr., even though you have cancer of the liver, first we had better take care of the pimple on your left lobe so that we can show how much progress is being made in your cure."

And when the clergy themselves show the way for this type of "good works before God merit-earning philosophy", what can be expected of the people? I think now of the popular idea that it is a meritorious thing in God's sight if you spend your time joining protest marches or demonstrations for, not just the race issue, but also for the legalization of homosexuality, the right to enjoy psychedelic experiences even though it involves breaking the law of the land in using forbidden narcotics, defying civil authority, in

matters of housing. One gets the feeling that we are to believe that God will forgive us all our sins if we offer Him as the purchase price not the blood of Christ, but the act of helping a little old lady across the street. It reminds me of the quote from the Scout handbook, "It is something to be good, but it is far better to do good."

Now, Mr. Chairman, I realize that we have perhaps taken in a wider meaning of the word "indulgence" than that which brought Luther to the church door that morning. But the "Relevancy of the 95 Theses" came to mean more to me than just the specific statement against a specific abuse. As I worked my way along the meandering mental paths from which this writing ultimately evolved, I found myself thinking of the 95 Theses and their impact upon the religious world less and less as a tiny dot in a specific point in history, than as a kind of testimony to God's willingness and readiness to bless the efforts of Spirit-driven men, men who are compelled in conscience to combat the assaults of Satan in his attempts to poison the sweet wellspring of Christ's Gospel truths. We all know the passage from Isaiah in which God promises "My Word shall not return unto Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please and prosper in the thing where I sent it". This He has done time and again in the history of His church, whenever the embattled truth of the Scripture was placed under siege by the intellect of sinful men. Our time grows short this morning, but let me make just one or two personal observations in this connection, observations which I think may be subject to some discussion later on.

We all know that document called The Brief Statement. The authors of The Brief Statement were instructed to "formulate theses, which, beginning with the status controversiae, present the doctrine of Scripture and the Lutheran Confession in the shortest and simplest manner". This they did. And the result is one that is also well known to us. Being soundly Scripturally grounded, it took on a significance far greater than the writers ever dreamed it would. In the words of Dr. Carl Myer in the Concordia Theological Monthly of April, 1962, it "acquired a status almost equal to that of the Great Confessions of the Lutheran Church in the course of the next 15 years, culminating in a reaffirmation in 1947 and a demand in 1959 that it be used as a basis for determining orthodoxy. It played a significant role in union negotiations between the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church, and an even more significant role in the writings of the opponents of the union move". That's the end of the quote, but how many of us here do not feel that this sound Christian presentation does not today stand clearly limned in condemnatory castigation of the doctrinal vagaries of that very body which claims its parenthood?

Edmund Schlink points out in his *Theologie Der Lutherischen Bekenntnisschriften* that the church has the duty to "continue in the act of confession..." He goes on to say that "that dogmatics, which would fix its gaze only upon these errors through which the devil once, centuries ago, tempted the church but would fail to recognize with watchful eye the constantly changing disguises of his destructive intention, in the invention of ever new errors, (such as dogmatics) would imperceptibly and irreparably fall prey to the opinions and attacks of this world." Thus, Luther's Theses in his time did have a continuing impact, the Brief Statement, which we have chosen as one example, still has a continuing impact, and more recently, I would like to believe that the current statement of our own Wisconsin Synod in the publishing of a statement of belief entitled, "This We Believe" may also have its God-pleasing explosive impact in much the same way as did Luther's Theses. In this treatise, our Wisconsin Synod has not formulated any new doctrines. It has merely presented again a statement of belief which is both modern and certainly orthodox and, may it please God,

soundly Scriptural.

It should, therefore, stand like a "Mighty Fortress" against the slings and arrows of Luciferian liberalism and miasmic modernism. And there is as much desperate need today for such ringing, positive statements of truth, which in themselves are denunciations of error, as when Luther sounded his soul-searching call to sincere repentance.

Listen to this! A poll of the National Council of Churches delegates in their assembly in Miami Beach last December, 1966, reveals startling evidence of the inroads of liberal theology on the leadership of major protestant denominations. Here are some of the results of that poll. One third of the delegates would not say, "I know that God really exists and I have no doubts about it." Thirty-six per cent rejected this statement, "Jesus is the divine Son of God and I have no doubts about it." Thirty-one per cent rejected the thought of life after death. Seventy-five per cent rejected the statement, "The miracles actually happened just as the Bible says they did." Only 13% of the delegates believed in the doctrine of original sin. What a contrast to the bed rock of "This We Believe!"

I think we will all agree that there is a need for more church door publication in our time. Surely we can see that the hub of the theological whirligig of protestantism today is still the 95 Theses; at least the theology which gave them birth; to wit: Repentance, Forgiveness through the blood of Christ, Justification by faith alone, The authority of Scriptures, etc. These teachings of God still give the lie to all new confessions and pronouncements, movements and commitment projects, dialogs, and what have you, that do not line up with the Holy Spirit's norm of truth revealed in Heaven's Handbook. And these teachings we are committed before God to proclaim, as was Luther.

And while we're at it, let's point out just a couple more similarities in a little different sphere. Luther published his Theses on the local church door. He did not travel to St. Peter's in Rome to make his point. He did his job in his local church. We, too, as pastors and shepherds and lay leaders in our churches should be concerned first about doing the job of witnessing with the Gospel of salvation at home. When we have laid the foundations solidly in the spheres of activity which God has committed to each of us first of all, then the building of the church will grow and will, under God's blessing, effect things of which we have never dreamed, any more than Luther dreamed of what would ultimately happen when he posted his statements.

Further, there is a need for us to speak out in language clear, to take our place in the front line of action, to expose ourselves and that for which we contend, though it may be tough to do. Luther did not hide behind a tree and holler. That's real witnessing! Each of us is to be an individual, staunch and sturdy old hickory tree, standing firm no matter what storms and winds and lightnings may blast at us. As one of our older brethren said to me, "There are too many 'me too' guys already".

And one final observation - Martin Luther posted his 95 Theses on the outside of the Castle Church door. He used the means of spreading the Word which would reach the greatest number of people in his town. Martin Luther was positive and progressive in his time, using every avenue of communication to spread the Gospel truth. He even used, besides language the people could understand, the newest invention of his time, the Gutenberg printing process. We have the same opportunities, only more so. We should use our local newspapers, radio time, television if possible. We can use the printed word, the spoken word, we can be heard. And we will be heard if we have something to say, and so long as we have something to say. Do we have some thing to tell the world?

Well, Luther was convinced that God alone could forgive sin,

that the church, exercising the power of the Keys, could only recognize what God had done, that a treasury of merit, distinct from the power of the Keys, was a mere fiction, that the only and infinite treasury is the treasury of Christ's merit. Luther believed that the blood of Christ cleanseth us from all sin. On the basis of those convictions, he had something to say in his time which was indeed relevant to his time.

Has God changed since then? Did Jesus take back at any time the statement that, "Heaven and earth shall pass away but My Word shall not pass away"? Then the 95 Theses are relevant to 1967, are they not? - richly relevant in the doctrines of God's Word that they still hold before us, in the way they even now condemn Roman Catholicism in her adamant adherence to false doctrine, in the way they condemn increasingly the vagaries and intellectual obesity of the Protestant liberalism of our generation.

Did the Savior rescind His commission that those who would be called by His name must be witnesses unto Him in all nations? Then let us fast grasp truth's rekindled torch in firm fists and with a spring in our step, a glint in our eye and our chin held high, drive it on, and up, 'till we stand under the flaming eyes of the seraphim themselves, unafraid, filled with joy unspeakable at the "Well done....faithful servants....."

or

Must I be carried to the skies On flow'ry beds of ease
While others fought to win the prize And sailed thro' bloody seas?

Are there no foes for me to face? Must I not stem the flood?
Is this vile world a friend to grace To help me on to God?

Sure I must fight if I would reign; Increase my courage, Lord!
I'll bear the toil, endure the pain, Supported by Thy Word.

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library

11851 W. Seminary Road, Mequon, WI 53091

Mequon, Wisconsin